

## MFA STUDENT, FILM AND MEDIA ARTS, IRELAND

If there is a recurring theme in the news about Ireland that had reached the U.S. over the past decade, it would be this: women's lives are changing. In 1990, Ireland became one of the few countries in the world to elect a woman head-of-state. In 1992, the world watched the story of a 14 year old girl unfold as her attempts to receive an abortion in the U.K. challenged Ireland's tight grip on family planning information. Also in 1992, singer Sinead O'Connor burned a picture of Pope John Paul II on American television and made a statement to *TIME* magazine blaming the Catholic Church for Ireland's high incident of child abuse, the highest in Europe. In 1997, the appointment of three women cabinet members and a woman Tanaiste (deputy Prime Minister) has been matched by a dramatic increase in women's parliamentary representation, surpassing many European countries as well as the United States. *Divorce referendum passed. Single motherhood on the rise.* The headlines keep coming, often changing but sometimes maintaining our ideas about what it means to be a women in Ireland today. The media offers us glimpses of women in office, women in church, women at war, women at home, but we are missing a way to connect these images. We are missing a way of fitting the fragments into full and complex pictures.

In her election address, President Mary Robinson gave special thanks to the women of Ireland, "who instead of rocking the cradle rocked the system, and who came out massively to make their mark on the ballot paper and on a new Ireland." As a media maker and as a woman in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, I am drawn to the situation of women in Ireland as a microcosm of the events around the world affecting and involving women. The combination of liberal and conservative policies and cultural practices affecting women makes Ireland a particularly interesting place. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Irish parliament member Liz McManus points out that, "now women are still going to Mass on Sunday, but they decided they will use contraceptives, too." This project will look at how and why these two seemingly contradictory notions can and do exist in Ireland and will offer insights to women in the U.S. and other countries who are able to live with similar contradictions.

The project will take the form of an hour long documentary based on video-taped interviews I will do in Ireland. Ireland is a particularly appropriate location to the interview-bases work that I do given its story-telling traditions; film/ video is a particularly appropriate medium for this project given the film boom which is currently occurring there. The project will be constructed using archival and contemporary footage and will be woven together with the voices and opinions of the real experts: Irish women of diverse ages, professions, and backgrounds. These women's voices will provide concrete examples of what is changing for women in Ireland and what is staying the same. I will interview women at home, at work, at pubs, at meetings; I will interview women who have chosen politics as a career and women who deal with the inherently political issues of child care, employment, and health care on a more personal basis. The goal is to paint a complex picture of what it means to be a woman in Ireland in the hopes of clarifying as well as broadening the hazy, ill-defined view from here. The project will incorporate non-gender specific issues as well: for example, how women have been involved with the struggle for peace in the North and efforts to preserve the Irish language. I believe it is important to look at what issues Irish women care about in order to more completely understand their involvement in politics at all levels.

I have already established relationships with several women who would like to participate and be interviewed for the project. They are Mary O'Rourke, Minister for Public Enterprise (one of three women recently appointed to the cabinet), Mamo McDonald, founder of the Irish Country Women's Association and The Older Women's network, and Liz McManus, novelist, architect and Parliament member. I have been in correspondence with the National Women's Council of Ireland and various women's organizations and will continue networking over the next year to make contact with other women . I have also identified and contacted the major facilities I will need to work with: the Women's Education, Research, and Resource Centre (W.E.R.R.C.) at University College Dublin where I will be able to take graduate level classes such as Women and the State in Modern/ Contemporary Ireland and Gender, the Law and the Legal System in Ireland; Film Base, located in the Irish Film Centre, which offers networking resources and equipment rental to independent film/ video makers; the national television station's archives and newly created Ireland Film Archives (also located in the Irish Film Centre), which both house libraries of archival and contemporary film and video footage.

The amount of time it will take to complete production will be one academic year. I will need to depart from the U.S. in late September in order to enroll as a part-time student at University College Dublin. This project will serve as my thesis for my M.F.A from Temple University's Department of Film and Media Arts. My previous films and

videos have focused on women's stories and women's works; I feel that the subject, structure, and approach of this project is an appropriate culmination of my M.F.A. degree.