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MURALS OF DERRY



GUILDHALL PRESS

# MURALS OF DERRY

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We gratefully acknowledge the use of the CAIN (Conflict Archive on the Internet) website for research. CAIN is a highly-respected website devoted to providing a wide range of information and source material on the Northern Ireland conflict and politics in the region from 1968 to the present. The site also contains some general information on Northern Ireland society. CAIN is based within the University of Ulster, Magee Campus, and can be accessed at [www.cain.ulst.ac.uk](http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk). CAIN Project Manager/Director is Dr Martin Melaugh.

Guildhall Press have endeavoured to attribute the identity of the original artists to their work where possible. But with the passage of time and movement of people we have not been able to do so for all the murals published. We therefore apologise for any omissions or errors that may occur. If anyone has relevant information pertaining to any of the artworks they believe should be noted, feel free to email us at: [info@ghpress.com](mailto:info@ghpress.com). We will then be able to update our records for any further editions.

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# FOREWORD

*You have before you not simply a 'painting', an object of passive aesthetic contemplation, but a real living part of the class struggle.*

So said Leon Trotsky in 1938, referring to the murals of renowned Mexican painter and muralist Diego Rivera. To Trotsky the murals were much improved by the attacks carried out on them by those who opposed what they stood for, their 'wounds' an honourable result of the struggle.

But what would he have said of the murals that have covered the north of Ireland for generations, from the earliest depictions of King William III on his trademark white horse to the paramilitary representations from all sides which proliferated during the years of conflict? Did they play a part in struggle, or were they simply 'passive aesthetic' recordings of it?

When the original edition of this book was published in September 1995, under the title *Seeing Is Believing?*, the Provisional IRA ceasefire was just over a year old, the loyalist ceasefires just less than a year. Therefore most of the murals included came from that period of conflict and were obviously directly influenced by the events of that period. It is also obvious that the majority of murals presented would have been, and still are, those most associated with republicanism. The demographics of the city, rather than any bias in the choice of images, ensure this.

Many of the loyalist murals included followed the long tradition, dating back to the early 1900s, of commemorating the Battle of the Boyne and/or the Siege of Derry. Others declared straightforward support for one or other of the main loyalist paramilitary groups. While the loyalist paramilitary murals may have differed in design, their message throughout the conflict remained basically the same i.e. a demand for support and an expression of opposition to all things republican, or in any way perceived as republican. None of the loyalist murals featured in the original publication strayed from these basic ideas.

The tradition of mural painting in republican areas did not really begin until the 1980s, although there is one included in this edition dating back to 1921. Since then, republican murals have tended to be much more transient and varied than loyalist ones, commemorating past events from the 1916 Rising to Bloody Sunday in 1972, but also reflecting contemporary issues. The

development of republican politics throughout the conflict can easily be traced through the development of their murals.

The prison protests and the hunger strikes of the late 1970s and the early 1980s marked the beginning of the widespread use of murals in republican areas. The earliest republican murals shown in the original edition all relate to this period: the mural on Central Drive, Creggan, showing the various stages of the republican experience of the prison system; Bobby Sands and Che Guevara on the Bookie's Wall in Westland Street in the Bogside (where a new mural commemorating the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the hunger strikes is now displayed); and the images of the individual hunger strikers in Gobnascale in the Waterside.

Other republican murals portrayed events as they happened through the later years of the conflict, including many reflecting the entry into electoral politics.

These murals, some rough and ready, many of them damaged by political foes, were all calls to a cause, whether that cause be unity or union; they were not simply 'passive aesthetic' recordings of it.

The early part of the Peace Process, from the first ceasefires onwards, was also a rich era for the republican mural artist, with calls for demilitarisation, reform of policing, the release of prisoners and an end to contentious loyal order parades or the assumed right to parade, all becoming major themes. As the Peace Process developed, however, and issues became much more complex, the use of murals in support of these issues declined. Maybe it was a result of the movement of politics away from the streets and into Stormont, a reflection of all of our ongoing detachment from politics now that we have elected others to do it for us? Maybe the issues were just too complex to paint.

But what of murals in Derry, fourteen years after the first ceasefires? Are there still causes to be called for, or simply a past to commemorate?

In Derry, as in the rest of the North, the militaristic murals of both communities are going or gone, replaced now by cultural, community or pop-art images, many of them sponsored by the Arts Council under its Re-Imaging Communities Programme. In the Bogside, twelve large permanent murals predominate – snapshots from a troubled past. Standing apart from them are the two murals on the front of the Museum of Free Derry

in Glenfada Park, highlighting ongoing issues in Iraq and Palestine. Also predominant are the Che Guevara mural in Lisfannon Park and the work of groups like Bluebell Arts – managed by one of the most prolific republican muralists of the past, Jim Collins – whose aim now is to highlight social issues and involve the community, particularly the younger members of it, as much as possible in the design and production of murals reflecting these issues.

The best barometer of the changing face of murals in Derry and elsewhere is also the most famous one in the north of Ireland – Free Derry Corner. The back of this wall has for years been an ever-changing notice-board highlighting many different issues, and it is the flexibility of this space, at times changing on an almost weekly basis, that is its greatest asset. Most of the examples that had appeared here until around 1995 reflected typical republican issues – the hunger strikes, Sinn Féin election calls, collusion, troops out etc.

But there were two included even then that were indicative of the type that appear more frequently behind the wall now: the image of Patrick Doherty, who died of AIDS in 1990 and whose death was used as a call for AIDS awareness, and the International Women's Day mural that was featured in 1991.

These days, such social issues are much more likely to be displayed than the conflict-related symbols of just a few years ago, and recent images have included anti-war themes, women's rights, health awareness, gay rights, deprivation and racism. These are the issues that need to be campaigned on now, the issues that were submerged for too long beneath the conflict.

In the original text of this book it was noted that the only paintings on the back of Free Derry Corner ever to be vandalised by members of the local community were the first Gay Pride mural to be placed there and one highlighting domestic violence against women, 'Beyond A Joke'. The fact that the most recent show of support for gay rights at Free Derry Corner, when the wall was painted pink in the summer of 2007, was itself vandalised (once) shows that this is still one of the many

social issues that need to be addressed today, that the symbol of the struggle for civil rights is still seen by a few as not standing for civil rights for all.

If murals are to still have a 'living part' to play in the struggle, then these are the struggles they should be a part of, the issues that are affecting everyone's lives now.

Mural artist and musician Declan McLaughlin – who, as part of Inside Out, was involved in producing many of the murals around the city featured in the original book – echoed Trotsky's sentiments when he said:

*The murals we were painting back then were propaganda. We had a message and we wanted to get it across. Now there are different messages to get across, messages that are relevant to this community now. Murals can still have that role to play. We need to use our walls to address the issues that really affect our community, not just leave them for some marketing company to tell us what they think we need.*

So can this now be the mural artists' new call to arms, or brushes – the many struggles that continue to confront society here as we emerge from decades of conflict and begin to address the problems that existed but were ignored for so long, a new 'living part' for the murals to play? Can the back of Free Derry Corner be a model for muralists across the North? These are still many issues that need to be confronted. Murals should be a part of that confrontation.

#### **Adrian Kerr**

August 2008

Adrian Kerr is manager of the Museum of Free Derry, the Bloody Sunday Trust owned museum in the Bogside set up to tell the story of the civil rights and Free Derry eras from the point of view of those who were most involved in, and affected by, the events of that time. For more information see [www.museumoffreederry.org](http://www.museumoffreederry.org). This article was written in a personal capacity.

# SEEING IS BELIEVING? MURALS IN DERRY



Oona Woods

'Assiduously researched, professionally produced and thoroughly good value...  
a gem of a book.' *Fingerpost*

'A significant contribution to our knowledge of the meaning of murals for a community.'  
*Dr May McCann PhD, Dept of Social Anthropology, Queen's University Belfast*

## PREFACE

*Murals of Derry* is an updated edition of *Seeing Is Believing? – Murals in Derry*, first published by Guildhall Press in September 1995 with accompanying text by Oona Woods. Oona had been studying at the time for her MA in Peace and Conflict Studies at the University of Ulster and this text was part of her thesis.

*Murals of Derry* contains most of the images from the original edition and, for reference purposes, some of the text also (pages 11-17). We have added a substantial number of new images of murals and monuments that have emerged during the current Peace Process

resulting from the 1994/1997 ceasefires. These murals visually reflect and chart the emotions, viewpoints and aspirations of both communities during a time when significant political and social changes were taking place all around – a time when the relationships between Ireland and Britain, nationalist and unionist, republican and loyalist, Catholic and Protestant, were being explored and redefined.

If any reader would like to access all the original text from *Seeing Is Believing? – Murals in Derry*, we have made it available online at [www.muralsofderry.com](http://www.muralsofderry.com).





A call to join the Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP) on a wall in the Brandywell, 2008.



*Tóirsire* Republican Youth mural in the Brandywell, 2007. *Tóirsire* means "Torch carrier" in Irish.



Commemorative painting and plaque on the City Cemetery wall on Southway Road dedicated to Eamon Lafferty, a young IRA volunteer killed on internment day, 9 August 1971.



The ten hunger strikers who died in Long Kesh prison between May and August 1981 are remembered on the Bookie's Wall in Westland Street in 2006. By Kevin Hasson. Photograph © Guildhall Press/Hugh Gallagher

An adaptation (by Robert Ballagh) of a famous Falklands War image, painted in 1994 by Brian Gormley. *Slán Abhaile* is Irish for 'Safe home', an ironic farewell erected to the British army after the 1994 ceasefire.



Che Guevara portrait and Cuban flag merging into Irish Tricolour show solidarity with socialist ideals.



Father Oliver Crossan and Rose Kelly from Foyle Ethical Investment Campaign (FEIC) pictured at the launch of the FEIC mural.



A temporary transformation in 1994 by artist Colin Darke who painted the wall a socialist-related red and yellow to engender dialogue about its origins and current role in the community. Photograph © Guildhall Press/Hugh Gallagher



'Relief of Derry' portrait in the Fountain Estate, 2008, depicts the breaking of the boom by the *Mountjoy* in 1689 to relieve the Great Siege.



Loyalist slogan on Union flags with Red Hands and Londonderry coat of arms. Fountain Youth Club, 1993.



Loyalist imagery of Union and Ulster flags and UDA emblem at Lincoln Courts, Kiltfennan, c.1991.



Traditional King William III depiction at the Boyne, Bond's Street, 1995.

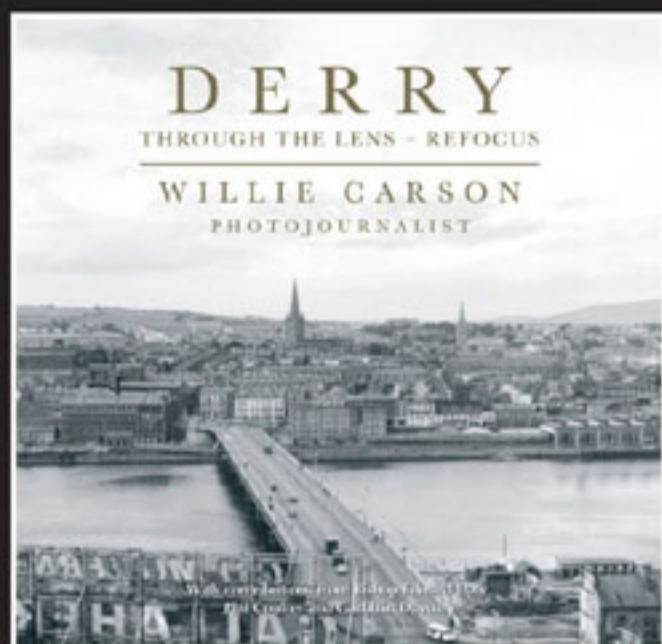


Traditional music tableau on the gable end of *An Clochan Liath* (Irish for 'Dungloe') Bar in Waterloo Street, 2008.



A modern interpretation on the Cathedral Youth Club wall of Derry's famous 'Dopey Dick' incident when a killer whale surprisingly surfaced in the River Foyle in 1977. It was eventually 'persuaded' back into the open sea several days later. Painted by the Fountain Youth Club, Fountain Estate, c.2007.

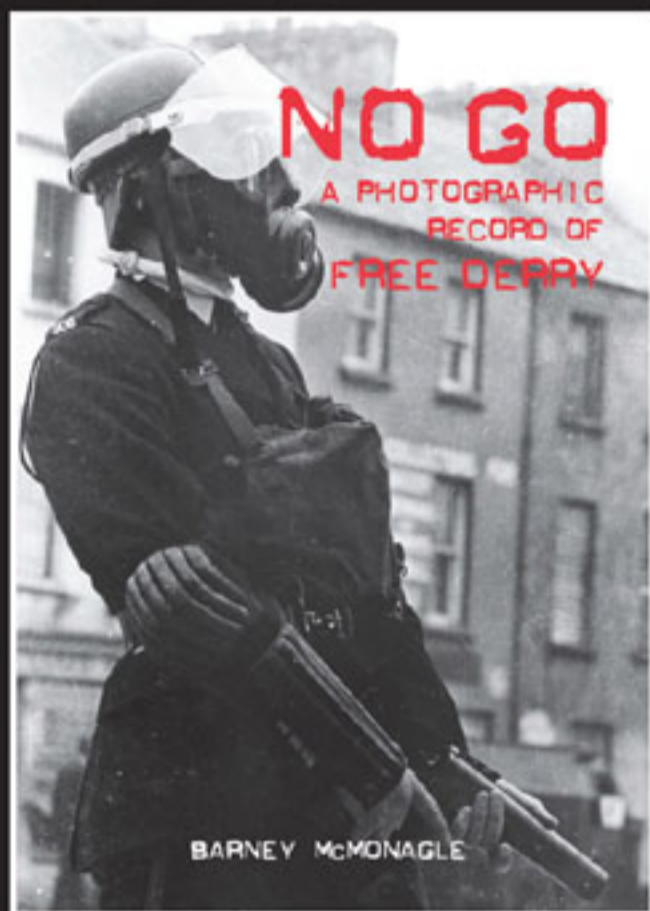
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by Willie Carson

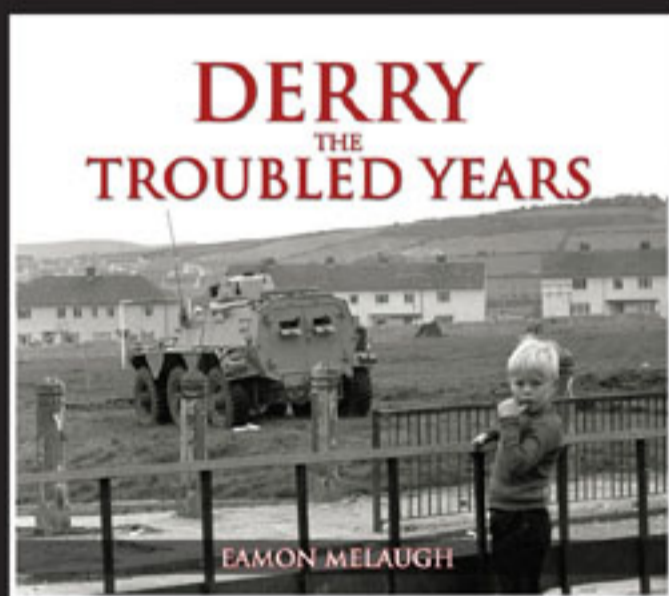
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# MURALS OF DERRY

This definitive collection of unique photographs of Derry murals past and present mirrors the cultural diversity of both main traditions in the north of Ireland over four decades. The range of wall art from across the city captures the ongoing experiences of its people, whether it is celebrating historical events, protesting against social injustices, or commemorating lost lives.

*Murals of Derry* records the evolving viewpoints and aspirations of both communities during a time when the relationships between Ireland and Britain, nationalist and unionist, republican and loyalist, Catholic and Protestant, are being explored and redefined.

Many imaginative examples of the muralists' work have faded or been painted over down the years; their documentation here will ensure that these messages and their historical significance are preserved for others to review and reflect upon.

*Murals of Derry* is an updated edition of *Seeing Is Believing?*  
- *Murals in Derry* by Cona Woods, published in 1995.



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