

“Lambay Island Relay Swim” June 17th 2014

“As each day passed, Colin had become more and more fixed in his feeling that the mystery surrounding the garden was one of it’s greatest charms” Frances Hodgson Burnett ‘The Secret Garden’ 1911.



I have been swimming at Low Rock, Malahide most weeks since moving to Dublin in 2011. Eight kilometres out from Low Rock, Lambay Island is the largest island off the east coast of Ireland and it sits on the periphery of the swim vista. For a swimmer, an island is a lure.

“The Lambay Swim Trilogy” 2014 - 2016

I’m a visual artist and I started a series of swims as a way to explore and research Lambay island. The first of these Lambay Swims was the “Lambay Island Relay Swim” a journey to Lambay Island from the swimming huts at Low Rock made by myself and the swimmers from Low Rock as part of the Artist in the Community Award.

The relay team were Tatiana Grosso, Fiona McCormack, Catherine Fenton, Yvon McCarthy and myself. We swam in half hour slots, taking it in turns, based on the English Channel relay-team rules. Fergal Somerville was the observer, Eamon McGrattan the support boat pilot, Les and Ken rowed out in a curragh as an extra boat, Teena Gates and Stephen Turner were the safety kayakers; Emma, Joe and Don were crew.





Tatiana set out from Low Rock at 6.44am. I accompanied her so I could film the start of the swim. Stephen and Teena waited on the Low Rock beach with us for the support boat to arrive from Malahide Marina with the rest of the team on board. Ken and Les rowed out from Malahide as well. The day was sunny and the water was very calm.



Photograph by Michael Holly



Next swimming was Fiona McCormack, followed by Catherine Fenton and Yvon McCarthy. Tatiana the went in for her second swim, the cloud had started to gather around Lambay Island. As we neared Lambay the sea became a bit rougher and a river of chop, the tide rushing, seemed to separate the island from us. Lambay became hidden in fog, through the sea mist we could see a cluster of rocks just out from the harbour wall. The rocks were full of seals watching our progress. One by one they slipped into the water and surrounded us. I was the last swimmer and swam in to complete the relay. The whole team and crew jumped in and swam the final few hundred meters together through the wall of inquisitive seals onto a beach full of starfish.

The swim took us just less than three hours to swim.





Lambay Island is a privately owned island and I had to get permission from Lambay to land in the harbour. We stayed in the harbour briefly to take a few photos before heading back through the seals to the support boat and barbecue on board. The team and crew have been swimming at Low Rock for many years, looking at Lambay on the horizon. The swim was a chance to look back at the place where they daily swim from a new perspective.



The following swims in the Lambay Trilogy were the “Lambay Solo Swim Expedition” in 2015, where I swam a solo swim along the same route from the Low Rock swimming huts to Lambay harbour. And the third swim was the “The Lambay Circumnavigational Swim” in 2016 where I became the first known person to swim all the way around Lambay Island.

In response to this Lambay Relay Swim we created a live art event “Uncharted” at Low Rock. On December 6th the swimmers from relay gave a tour of Low Rock through sound work and performed narratives. The event created an aural myth of the “Lambay Relay Swim” which we had undertaken earlier on in the year. There was an installation including a sound piece in one of the swimming huts on the beach. We invited the audience to enter the sea and as the sun rose we ate barbecued Lambay wallaby burgers. “Uncharted” was part of the Artist in the Community Award 2014 funded by the Arts Council and managed by Create.



Image: “Uncharted” live art event December 2014. Emma reading her story to the audience.



Image: “Uncharted” live art event December 2014 -invitation to swim at dawn, with Lambay Island in the background.

Other Links connected to the Lambay Relay Swim

A video of the Lambay Relay Swim: <https://vimeo.com/106095692>

A PDF of a book I created about this Lambay Swim: <http://vanessadaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Lambay-Swim-a-collaborative-Journey.pdf>

Fingal Independent article on my swimming art practice: <http://vanessadaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Fingal-article-2.pdf>



Writer and swimmer Steve Mentz wrote 'Four Poems' from this image taken from the Lambay Relay Swim. These poems and photograph were published in the Glasgow review of Books 2014.

<https://glasgowreviewofbooks.com/2014/09/26/four-swim-poems-and-a-picture/>

This image was taken by myself on the way back home when the support boat dropped us all off a few hundred meters from Low Rock, as it couldn't go too close into shore, we either swam or squashed in the curragh back.