



The Model Strategic Management Plan 2024–2028



Contents

Introduction. 3

The Model 5

Vision, Mission, Values and Personality. 12

Priorities for 2024–2028. 13

Priority 1:
Championing Art and Artists 15

Priority 2:
Engaging Audiences and Communities. 19

Priority 3:
Caring for The Niland Collection. 23

Priority 4:
Delivering our Strategic Aims and Objectives. . . . 27

Introduction

The Model has a rich history that stretches back to the 1990s. Originally established as The Model Arts Centre by an informal collective of local artists in collaboration with Sligo County Council, the building was redeveloped in the late 1990s and opened in 2001 as The Model Arts & Niland Gallery. An ambitious second redevelopment (2008–2010) increased the building size by one third, to create an impressive arts facility occupying over 4500sq metres. Since then, The Model, Home of The Niland Collection has become a space where audience engagement and participation are valued as much as the creation of artwork that is innovative and provocative. The centre has developed dramatically over the last 14 years, and the resonance of its programme has been reflected in the growth of visitor numbers throughout that period – from 36,000 in 2010 to an average of 100,000 visitors per annum between 2015–2019.

At the centre of everything we do, are two core concerns: supporting the work of contemporary artists, living within and beyond the region; and caring for The Niland Collection, which we approach as a living repository of thoughts and ideas. Creating a realm of associations between these two fields underpins our curatorial ethos. Amongst our most dynamic and engaging projects in recent years are those that have connected urgent contemporary

issues with concerns expressed in works held within the collection.

One of our most important exhibitions to date was *The Keeper; to Have and to Hold* in 2019. Presented on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of The Niland Collection, this major show featured over 130 artworks by 74 Irish and international artists. *The Keeper* served as a visual history that allowed audiences to trace the development of The Niland Collection. Posing a series of open-ended questions, the exhibition provided a lens through which one could consider ideas around the act of collecting and, more importantly, how and why we ‘keep’ a collection of artworks and objects.

The story of The Niland Collection is one of tenacity and determination. Founded by former Sligo County Librarian, Nora Niland (1913–1988) in 1959, the collection was actively ‘kept’ by Niland until her retirement in 1979. Her vision was to establish a collection for County Sligo, anchored by the works of Jack Butler Yeats. Through networking, petitioning, fundraising and a driving passion for the visual arts, Niland soon added several substantial works by Yeats and other artists. Since Niland’s retirement, other keepers have added significant works to the collection, and the holding now numbers over 350 pieces.

The strength of the collection coupled with our curatorial approach, has enabled other programmes that address important 20th century global developments. We are committed to engaging the public in socially and culturally relevant artistic programmes that work within and beyond the museum. We reach out to audiences through a range of socially-engaged, inclusive artistic initiatives. Sligo Global Kitchen, Pop-Up Niland Collection, Unforgettable Neighbourhoods, and our Artist-in-Residence programme in front line care settings, are just some of the ways we have brought our work into the hearts of Sligo’s diverse communities.

In 2022, inspired by the changing nature of Sligo’s population, The Model commissioned two of Ireland’s leading artists, Mick O’Dea and Geraldine O’Neill, to create an ambitious series of portraits of young people from the county. The portraits have become part of The Niland Collection, where they will have a meaningful presence alongside portraits of historic public figures, activists, artists and other changemakers into the future. Underpinned by the idea ‘you cannot be what you cannot see’, *The Sunset Belongs to You* sought to challenge the ingrained traditional structures of portraiture to question who is reflected in a public art collection, and who is overlooked. The

intention was that Sligo communities who have been under-represented in the past, would now be made visible within the public collection of their local museum.

The work of Jack Butler Yeats remains an enduring source of inspiration for The Model’s contemporary programme. We have a practice of commissioning new work across disciplines in direct response to Yeats’ concerns and subject matter. The title, *The Sunset Belongs to You*, is inspired by a Yeats’ painting from 1951, which depicts two people silhouetted against a large expanse of sky. Encounters between strangers out on the open road, located within the backdrop of nature, are a recurrent theme in Yeats’ later works. The figures in this painting, like the children in the portraits by O’Dea and O’Neill, are adventurers embarking on life’s grand journey. A journey where seemingly insignificant encounters with others, and with art, can illuminate the mysteries of life.

The Model is now at a pivotal moment in its development. As we enter this growth phase with a dynamic and talented staff team, a committed board of directors, core funders who share our vision, and established relationships with private donors, we are excited to set out this ambitious vision for the future.

Emer McGarry

Artistic Director/CEO

The Model, Home of The Niland Collection, Sligo.



**The Model
Home of
The Niland Collection is a
dynamic, ambitious, and inclusive
museum and centre for the
contemporary arts.**

The Model offers urgent global perspectives on art, culture, and identity; and at the same time, embraces the strong local flavour of its unique position on Ireland's Northwestern periphery. The Model engages people and communities in transformative creative experiences that weave ideas across time and space, and are at once local and universal. **Championing Art and Artists; Engaging with Audiences and Communities; and Caring for The Niland Collection**, form the core of our work over the next five years.



This strategy is a living document, underpinned by ambition, innovation and experimentation, and will be adaptive to internal and external changes. It plots out our plans for programmes of contemporary art, music and film, that connect, engage, challenge and entertain key targeted audiences. Ours is a committed vision and this informs all our work. It creates experiences for our audiences that are both leading and responsive, and that fosters a sense of belonging. We are committed to enabling lifelong relationships with the arts and to inspiring new generations of ambitious and innovative artists.



The Model; Home of The Niland Collection

The Arts are rightly recognised as a valuable part of life, socially and economically, and The Model plays a significant role in this regard in Sligo and the North-west. We align our strategic priorities and aims with those of our key stakeholders, particularly the Arts Council's Making Great Art Work (2016–2025), Sligo County Council's Arts Plan (2020–2025), and the County Sligo Local Economic and Community Plan (2023–2030). We look forward to continued partnerships with these and other stakeholders, and to working together to create significant cultural impacts. Aligning our ambitions and resources, we will support artists to make excellent work to be enjoyed and valued by as many people as possible.

Our participation on the Heritage Council's Museum Standards Programme for Ireland (MSPI) underlines our commitment to continue to care for, manage, develop and

promote The Niland Collection in line with the standards of international best practice, and to hold it in trust for the people of Sligo. We will continue to approach the collection as a living repository of thoughts and ideas, and to commissioning cutting edge art in response to the collection on an ongoing basis.

This strategic plan will be delivered by expert staff at The Model, working within a framework of best international practice, led by our Artistic Director/CEO, and overseen by a dynamic and engaged Board of Directors.

We build this new five-year strategy on the foundations laid during the delivery of our previous Strategic Plan, 2019–2023. During this time, the team delivered an innovative, challenging and inspiring programme of art, within and beyond the gallery walls.



Strategic Management Plan 2024–2028

Examples of success included our work with internationally significant artists such as Ciara Phillips, Emma Talbot and Torsten Lauschmann; as well as major thematic exhibitions such as *Portrait Lab* and *The Sea Around Us. The Keeper; To Have and to Hold* commemorated the 60th anniversary of The Niland Collection by bringing together our key programme strands of visual art, music, performance and participation in an integrated, transdisciplinary, large-scale project. *The Sunset Belongs to You* saw us commission two of Ireland's leading artists to paint the portraits of 18 diverse Sligo young people for The Niland Collection. We delivered an ambitious programme of social engagement, anchored by Sligo Global Kitchen, our Pop-Up Niland Collection Schools' Programme, and Ciara Phillips' *Workshop* which engaged the community of Cranmore Housing Estate.

We commissioned new work from diverse artists including Siobhan McDonald, Ciara Phillips, Andy Parsons, and Stephen Brandes in Visual Art; and Karen Power, Nick Roth and the Yurodny Ensemble in Music. We fostered Binder, a collective working across music promotion, film, design and print, as Artists-in-Residence in 2020+2021. We established excellent new relationships with local festivals such as Spilt Milk and the Cairde Sligo Arts Festival, while continuing existing relationships with the Sligo Baroque Music Festival and Sligo International Chamber Music Festival.

When operations ceased due to the Covid crisis, we pivoted to an online programme which engaged over 20,000 people in 2020. We used the period of closure to survey audiences, and to devise an Audience Development Strategy, which maps out how we engage and expand our stakeholders particularly local people, families, businesses and artists.



Within Sligo and the North-west, there are many opportunities for further engagement. Physically, the iconic Model building is situated at the edge of an actively regenerating Sligo town. The County Sligo Local and Economic Community Plan (LECP) 2023–2030 'targets the development of a cutting edge, innovative and forward-thinking county that is smart and sustainable'. It specifically references The Model in the context of increasing 'participation in culture, heritage and creative and innovative sectors, across all age groups and backgrounds in Sligo'. The LECP aspires to make Sligo 'the cultural capital of the North-west' and a 'jewel on the Wild Atlantic Way'. The 'Sligo – Live Invest Visit' campaign launched in 2019 promotes Sligo 'as a world class place in which to live green, invest smart and visit sustainably'.



To achieve the strategic aims of this plan over the next five years, the Executive Staff, supported by the Board of Directors must:

- Develop meaningful engagement with a broader cross section of local people.
- Develop a larger, more sustainable staff team to effectively deliver our aims and objectives.
- Expand our artistic programme.
- Adhere to sustainable practices and programming with regard to climate and environmental changes.
- Present a dynamic digital presence through an outstanding website, and engaging content on our social channels.
- Achieve full accreditation through the Museum Standards Programme for Ireland.
- Maintain a fully accessible and fit-for-purpose building.



Vision

To be the beating heart of arts and culture in the North-west, with a pulse that resonates locally, nationally and internationally.

Mission

We will enrich and excite communities through artistic encounters, support the work of artists, musicians and visionary thinkers of all backgrounds, and provide the highest standards of care for The Niland Collection. The mission of The Model is to create, curate, present, and promote the contemporary and traditional arts; and to provide education in art, heritage, culture, and music within the communities of Sligo and the North-west.

Our Values

Community-Oriented
Reflective
Inclusive
Entertaining
Inspiring
Connecting
Provocative
Excellent

The Model Personality

An authentic voice at the heart of the Sligo community that delivers on our commitment to artists and audiences in a spirit of passion, experimentation and innovation. We are a welcoming museum where many voices are in dialogue together.

Priorities for 2024–2028

1. Championing Art and Artists

2. Engaging Audiences and Communities

3. Caring for The Niland Collection

4. Delivering our Strategic Aims and Objectives

Priority 1:

Championing Art and Artists

The Model's artistic programme is driven by the energy, ideas and enthusiasm of the creative practitioners with whom we work.

We are proud of the unique engagement that we foster and maintain with artists, which in turn enables the creation and presentation of powerful, inspirational and challenging art in a supported and freethinking environment. The Model is committed to artists at all stages of their development, from emerging and student artists, to established and late-career artists, who work with us through our residential, education and exhibitions programmes. We foster relationships with artists from a broad diversity of backgrounds, and are committed to developing new and dynamic forms of relationship with artists living in the North-west. Through our innovative, long-term, socially engaged schools project Pop-Up Niland Collection, The Model illuminates the vital role played by artists in society for local communities.

Priority 1: Strategic Aims

Curate + deliver a dynamic programme of contemporary visual art that has relevance locally, nationally + internationally.

Present a vibrant and engaging programme of music, film, talks and cultural festivals across contemporary + traditional genres.

Support artists of all disciplines at all stages of their careers, from emerging to established artists.

Be a thriving site of artistic production, through commissioning work that enables artists to test new and experimental ideas, and through providing studios and space for artists to work.

Contribute to the Sligo economy through an expanded programme of events.



Priority 2:

Engaging Audiences and Communities

At the heart of The Model's mission is a commitment to engage the public in socially and culturally relevant artistic processes that work within and beyond the museum.

We reach our audiences through a range of socially-engaged art initiatives, exhibitions and interdisciplinary processes. Our programme offers fresh and diverse opportunities for public encounters with art, combining traditional models of engagement such as gallery tours, social groups, talks, with more experimental methodologies in order to stimulate discussion. The Model is committed to enabling personal exploration of sometimes challenging art work, and creating an informal and responsive environment for people to access, engage with, and participate in thought-provoking, inspirational, enriching and transformative cultural experiences.



Priority 2: Strategic Aims

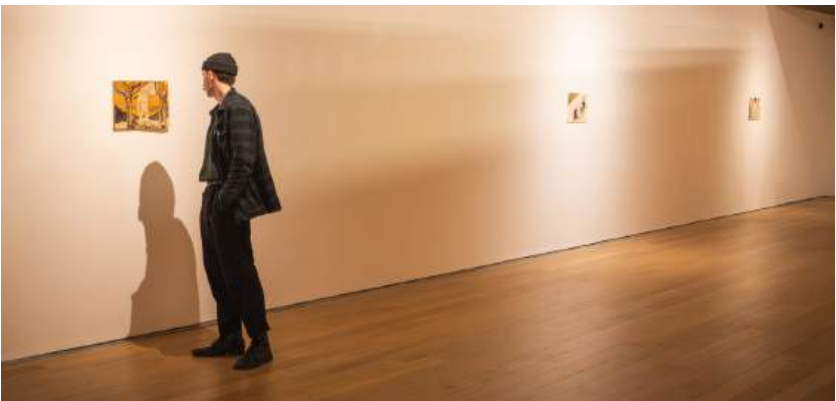
Identify key audience cohorts, and develop targeted engagement opportunities to expand access to all of The Model's programmes.

Retain existing visitors and attract new audiences to The Model.

Develop a programme of public engagement to promote social inclusion and celebrate diversity.

Enable children to establish lifelong relationships with the arts through an exciting offering of creative engagement for Early Years, Families and Children.

Ensure the best possible visitor experience.



Priority 3:

Caring for The Niland Collection

At the heart of The Model is The Niland Collection – Sligo’s municipal art collection – which we approach as a living repository of ideas.

We animate and activate the collection through commissioning cutting edge contemporary art that responds to its core ideas on an ongoing basis. Through our participation in the Heritage Council’s Museum Standards Programme for Ireland, we ensure that the collection is managed in line with the international standards of best practice in museology. Over the next five years, we will continue to care for, manage, develop and promote the collection, presenting it to the public in rotating, curated exhibitions, with a particular focus on the work of Jack Butler Yeats.

Priority 3: Strategic Aims

Develop The Niland Collection to be one of the leading national art collections in Ireland.

Activate scholarship around The Niland Collection and illuminate new connections between the collection and contemporary art forms, including music, performance, and visual art.

Achieve Museum Accreditation from the Heritage Council of Ireland.

Preserve The Niland Collection for future generations.

Expand access to the collection through touring initiatives, digitisation and large-scale exhibitions.



Priority 4:

Delivering our
Strategic Aims and
Objectives

The Model will maximise its existing sources of professional and artistic skills, capital and finance, to support this plan, and to raise further funding for its full realisation.

Priority 4: Strategic Aims

- Embed The Model in the hearts and minds of the people of Sligo and the North-west.
- Practice good governance in the arts by ensuring we have a committed and engaged, competency-based Board of Directors.
- Implement artistic + financial planning that is prudent, adventurous and considered.
- Secure increased revenues to resource and develop The Model to achieve the strategic aims + objectives of this plan.
- Ensure The Model is a happy and healthy place of work, with well-equipped and resourced staff.



- Develop new collaborations and build on those already in existence locally, nationally + internationally.
- Present a dynamic digital presence through an outstanding website, and engaging content on our social channels.
- Adhere to sustainable practices and programming with regard to climate and environmental changes.
- Maximise our unique location on Europe's northwestern periphery.
- Maintain a fully accessible and fit-for-purpose building.



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The Model



funding
the arts

