

THE
DOCK

The Green Loy
Celebrating Folk Art

The Green Loy is on display at The Dock
between 20 June — 22 August 2026.

Curated by
Vincent Woods
with Katy West
and Edwina Guckian

Contributions by
Miriam de Búrca
Anthony Brennan
Eddie Clarke
Gabby Dowling
Eileen Golden
Helena Golden
Charles Perpoil
Sean Rynn
Dave Sheridan
Maureen Woods



THE DOCK ARTS CENTRE
CARRICK-ON-SHANNON
& AROUND LEITRIM - 2026



THE
GREEN LOY

CELEBRATING
FOLK ART

20.06 — 22.08

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the arts



Comhairle Chontae Liatroma
Leitrim County Council

Poet's Truth

Without ever reading Heaney

One day my father said

The loy was our fountain pen

The land was our story

— Vincent Woods

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Introduction

Loy — In Irish, a narrow spade with a single footrest. C18 from Irish Gaelic láí.

(Collins English Dictionary)

Láighe, a mattock, a spade, a 'loy'
(Dineen's Irish-English Dictionary)

The loy is symbolic of hardship, work, and the transformation of rough fields into food and harvest — the endurance of a people. The green loy image at the heart of this exhibition is a metaphor for creativity, sustainability, the almost intangible link between land, people and the turning of things: the way in which a seemingly everyday object of toil can be the expression of hope, history, and a deeply human instinct towards transformation and the creation of art.

The use of the **loy** (an everyday tool in many Leitrim farms up to the 1960s and 70s) had almost died out when the Loy Association of Ireland was established in the Bush Hotel, Carrick-on-Shannon in 1992. It is a remarkable and beautiful object in itself. It entered the world of literature through the words of John Millington Synge in *The Playboy of the Western World*.

It continues to tell the story of the land in the striking image that farmer and craftsman John Woods (1912–1999) turned into a conversation inspiring the poem *Poet's Truth*.

Just as the loy is presented as more than the sum of its parts, the **cock of hay** in this exhibition represents a way of farming and living that has almost disappeared. Its title *This is a Poem* reflects the spirit of the exhibition: simultaneously questioning how we view and regard objects and how we perceive or understand art and poetry. A cock of hay contains more than dry grass; it holds memory, sustenance, scent, harvest, a promise of milk and plenty. It holds time. A perfectly constructed cock of hay becomes an object of beauty and power. The loy and the cock of hay with hay ropes ask the viewer to consider what we regard as art, and how function and perception change over time.

A reference to Ellen Cutler's dresser in Fermanagh, written about in Henry Glassie's book *The Stars of Ballymenone*, the **still life dresser** in the exhibition is designed by ceramicist Katy West. This semi-abstract representation of the traditional Irish dresser holds the power of time and memory, and displays ceramics chosen to represent styles

and makers whose work would have been displayed on many kitchen dressers over time.

The **Leitrim chair** made by Charles Perpoil, a Leitrim-based French artist, was chosen to represent a particular style of carpentry and making which has been revived by artists and craftspeople in recent years.

Helena Golden's **teeming basket**, based on a traditional design used to drain water from boiled potatoes, is an example of her craft, which includes baskets, babies' willow rattles, and St. Brigid's crosses.

The inter-generational passing down of tradition and making is represented in the **embroidered picture** and **tablecloth** made by Eileen Golden (née McMorrow) from Glenboy, Manorhamilton — Eileen is mother of Helena and Breege Golden, both of whom are notable makers and craft workers.

Gabby Dowling's **animal masks** represent two animals that were at the heart of farming life in this part of the world. The donkey often 'snigged' the cock of hay to the haggard to build the harvest rick or pike for winter fodder; the cow consumed the hay and gave us milk, buttermilk, butter, and cheese.

Edwina Guckian has been central to a revival of oat crops in Leitrim, and has spear-headed a resurgence in mumming and craft work made with its straw. The **mummer's mask**, **hen's nest**, and **súgán chair** are examples of her work. The revival of mumming involves hand-made straw masks and straw leggings made by young people for use in the seasonal ritual and performance.

The **tin fiddle** made by the late Eddie Clarke is symbolic of the power of music in folk culture and art. It's also a remarkable object in itself, crafted from a biscuit tin in the 1920s. It carries a power of connection, linking generational family stories to music today. John McCartin, who has inherited the fiddle, is one of Leitrim's leading musicians and an inspirational force in music.

The people and landscapes that have given us all this richness are honoured in the **wall painting** by Miriam de Búrca, whose work digs deep as any loy, illuminating all that is held in place and time.

How we see, what we name, what is made with love and deep attention are at the heart of life and art. *The Green Loy* seeks to honour makers who have given us the means to see and remake, and with a green loy to conjure deep sod turned on all that is buried deep.



Events

18 July, 2 — 5pm: *Bring and Tell Day*

Show off something you treasure to The Dock, something you consider to be part of the rich array of folk art.

18 July, 6pm: *Screening of 'Field Work'*

A documentary film by acclaimed director Pat Collins exploring the work and vision of Henry Glassie.

25 July, 8pm: *The Green Loy Concert*

Storytelling, music, song, dance, and spoken word, featuring special guests Alan Woods, Eithne Ní Ghallchobair, Fionnuala Maxwell, John Tuohy, and more.

July and August: *Art at the Mart*

Performances at local marts across Leitrim.

Dave Sheridan has composed a new tune for the exhibition and its associated events.

A striking poster design was created by Jesse Smith.

For details and booking information, please visit **www.thedock.ie**.

Description of Works

1. *Still Life*

Katy West, spruce wood Irish dresser, 2026

The Irish dresser has long served as both a functional object and a curated display within the home, reflecting family histories, migration, taste, and everyday life. In the past centuries, unlike the raw ingredients that came directly from the land dug by the loy, the dresser's contents were not local. In the rural West, it frequently reflected the diaspora — family members who had left to seek opportunities abroad sending objects back — or travellers returning with chattels gathered from elsewhere. In this way, the dresser could represent the widest geographical reach of an extended family, often holding some of the finest examples of delft available. As Henry Glassie writes, *the dresser was a symbol of order, hospitality, and the moral centre of the home*. Its status accrued over time, as the objects it held (and sometimes the dresser itself) were passed down through generations.

For *The Green Loy*, Katy West reimagines this familiar domestic form through a collection of Irish and Scottish crockery alongside her own

ceramic works inspired by vernacular functional-ware and industrial production. Referencing histories of inheritance, diaspora, and domestic ritual, the installation considers the dresser as a living archive: a space where useful, sentimental, and imperfect objects continue to embody memory, identity, and continuity within Irish rural life. Although the fitted kitchen, introduced to Ireland in the 1970s, contributed to the swift decline of the dresser's central position in the home, it remains in use across the country, still holding and displaying objects of personal and familial significance. The dresser in this exhibition is conceived as a tribute to these histories, and to the visually compelling ceramics that are embedded in our daily lives.

Still Life includes the following:

- Spongeware (*18th–19th century*): bowls and mugs in various sizes
- Bell's Pottery Scotland (*1841–1920*): transferware oval, *Syria*, Willow Pattern serving dishes
- Utility ware (*19th century*): tapioca storage jar, tongue plate, milk jug, plain white jug, jelly moulds
- Belleek Pottery (*1857–present*): caneware teapot, cake plates, milk and sugar set, white mug, transfer mug, shell jug

- Wade (1867–2010): shamrock-shaped trinket dish
- Carlton Ware (1890–1992): salt shark, Hovis loaf butter dish
- Carrigaline Pottery (1928–1979): striped, brown egg cups and jug, striped, blue and white cups, *Donegal* mug
- Arklow Pottery (1934–1998): *Cottage*, *Harvest*, and *Erin* plates; *Bistro* teacups; Celtic pattern dish
- Stephen Pearce, Shanagarry Pottery (1953–present): espresso cups and terracotta plate
- Kolkata potter (2016): *chai kulhad* takeaway cup
- Clay pipe (local, date and maker unknown)
- Jonathan Anderson (2025): spongeware mugs produced by Nicholas Mosse
- Katy West (2005–present): *Beauties of Stow* Parian China storage jars, Commonwealth stoneware jelly mould, bone China *Fair Play* storage jars, bone China Josiah Cup, terracotta *Bread n’ Butter* butter dish

2. Home Embroidered Picture

Eileen Golden, embroidered Irish linen, 1949

3. Turn of the Loy

Miriam de Búrca, indian ink wall mural, 2026

Rendered in ink by hand, this wall drawing mimics an engraving that echoes an idealised picturesque landscape of Victorian times. But things are not entirely ideal here. Clouds loom, a storm is brewing. The wind is blowing, stripping leaves off the trees and casting them high into the air. The tree in the foreground looks sickly.

This is a call for a return to the humble loy. A seemingly simple tool, it symbolises our physical, cultural and spiritual connection to the soil. By finding a way of working with it rather than against it, we just might have a chance to return once again to being part of — not extractors of — this land we depend on for life, art and community.

4. This is a Poem

Sean Rynn, cock of hay with hay ropes, 2026

This cock of hay is made by Sean Rynn with grass from his home townland of Aughamore, Tarmon, Co. Leitrim. The hay ropes tying it down were 'twisted' in the traditional style using a twister made from hollowed-out boortree (elderberry) wood and wire. Woods writes:

Of course this cock of hay is not a poem — but

it aspires to the essence of poetry in its pure simplicity and brilliance of construction. Cocks of hay like this one fired my imagination as a child on a small farm in Tarmon (Sean Rynn's mother, Maggie Anne Rynn, was my godmother) – they helped shape my sense of aesthetics that led me towards a deeper understanding of art and survival. Twisting hay ropes with my father brought me on infinite journeys of mind and imagination.

The cock of hay has been an iconic image in painting: Van Gogh's glorious depictions of haystacks in Provence glow with light and colour; Monet's haystack series from his home country of Giverny could almost be Ireland, but for the trees. Hay has also been imaged in photography and literature. The American photographer Jill Freedman includes a photograph of a 'Paddy McGowan of Creevelea, Co. Leitrim' in a hayfield in *Ireland Ever*, a book of photographs from Ireland in the 1970s.

In John McGahern's *Memoir*, there is reference to how no cock of hay for miles around was safe (from courting couples) with the advent of the Ivy Leaf dancehall in Fenagh in the 1950s. Patrick Kavanagh's *Raglan Road*, the lovelorn poet is *not making hay*, an image taken up by Monaghan writer Frank McNally in his book of that title.

5. The Leitrim Chair

Charles Perpoil, ash wood, 2022

This exquisite example of a traditional Leitrim chair was made by master carpenter, craftsman, and artist, Charles Perpoil. It is made with ash wood rescued from a tree which grew close to Ballinamore and had to be cut down due to ash dieback disease.

6. Child's Súcán Chair

Edwina Guckian, straw and hazel, 2022

The Irish súcán chair reflects a tradition of making furniture from available materials. Its seat was woven from twisted straw rope (súcán), while the frame was usually made from local wood. These chairs were common in rural homes and were often repaired and rewoven instead of replaced. Because they were handmade, each chair developed small differences through use and repair, linking them closely to family life and everyday work.

7. Embroidered Linen Tablecloth

Eileen Golden, embroidered Irish linen, 1970s

Eileen Golden's (née McMorro) work is an example of dedicated craft, a keen eye, and a strong, inherited family tradition.

Eileen is also a superb knitter and crochet maker, and continues to work at her craft at the age of ninety-two.

8. The Leitrim Potato (Teeming) Basket

Helena Golden, woven willow (sally), 2024

This willow basket is based on a traditional design which was used to 'teem' or drain boiled potatoes. It's a fine example of craft and ingenuity overlapping with art to give us a practical, everyday object of enduring beauty. Helena Golden has been at the forefront of a revival in traditional craft, especially basket-making, in Leitrim and the north-west.

9. Mummer's Mask

Edwina Guckian, straw, 2026

10. Hen's Nest

Edwina Guckian, plaited straw, 2023

These are fine examples of traditional art and craft revived and reimagined for a contemporary world. Edwina Guckian has spearheaded a revival in the growing of oats for straw – inspired, in part, by Anne O'Dowd's book *Straw, Hay & Rushes in Irish Folk Tradition*. She is a dedicated maker, as well as teacher and mentor.

11. Best in Field,

Gabby Dowling, cow and donkey masks made from wire, yoga mat, paper, fabric, Fimo, paint, glue, 2017

Artist Gabby Dowling's animal masks capture a spirit of wildness and celebration, reflecting essential spirits of the land. Humans and animals were close, almost co-dependent. Have you seen a donkey laugh? Have you felt the lick of a cow's tongue? Donkeys and cows make us more human.

12. A loy is a loy is a fountain pen

Anthony Brennan, loy maker and founding member, The Loy Association of Ireland

Láí (Right Foot Loy), ash wood staff, blacksmith iron blade, 1920s

Citóg (Left Foot Loy), ash wood staff, repurposed blacksmith iron blade, 2026

Vincent Woods, 'Poet's Truth' from 'Lives and Miracles', 2002

The loy is a tool that functions as both spade and plough, and was at the heart of farming

on small drumlin holdings long after the introduction of the factory spade in 1750. It was an essential tool of farming and survival on most poor farms in Leitrim and other parts of Ireland, in use up to the 1980s. The loy was revived thanks to the work of The Loy Association of Ireland which was founded in Carrick-on-Shannon in 1992. In *The Green Loy* exhibition, it is a symbol of a connection to nature and sustainability, presented as an object of inherent beauty and a potent image of labour and transformation.

Many people will know of the loy through literature. In Synge's play, *The Playboy of the Western World* (1907), Christy Mahon claims to have killed his father with the blow of a loy. Lovers of good detective fiction will have spotted Declan Hughes's sly Irish homage to Sam Spade, fictional hero of Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon* (1941) in the form of his detective Ed Loy.

13. Ceol Binn

Eddie Clarke, repurposed Mackintosh's Toffee Tin and violin string, 1925

This fiddle is about a century old and was made from a biscuit tin.

It was made by Eddie Clarke, the maternal grand-uncle of guitarist and guitar maker John McCartin. Eddie lived at Marahill near Crossdoney, Co. Cavan and later emigrated to the United States. John says that the Clarkes were not a poor family and believes that Eddie made the fiddle as a novelty or experiment rather than out of necessity. Coincidentally, John's grandmother's brother, John O'Reilly from Killagoan near Killeshandra also made a fiddle, likely as his main playing instrument. It is not known what became of it.

The tin fiddle is often associated with travelling, musical families like the Dohertys and the McConnells from Donegal, and tin box type fiddles have been found across Ireland. Home-made musical instruments are a small but significant part of Irish musical history and tradition. Poor families couldn't always afford new instruments so many people took to crafting fiddles and whistles out of the materials to hand. The bodhrán is a story to itself, as are the horse skulls placed under flag floors for percussion in dancing. The instruments that emerged from individual need and ingenuity sometimes became iconic objects in their own right, works of art that appeal to the eye as well the ear, alongside dancing feet.

14. Quilt out of Time

Maureen Woods, cotton quilt, 1985

Donegal poet Moya Cannon writes about the significance of needlework in the life of many Irish women, who often traded knitted, crocheted and embroidered clothes and quilts to supplement their modest household income. Others made for their home and family, shaping patchwork quilts, embroidered sheets and tablecloths, jumpers, caps, babies' clothes. The patchwork quilt here made by Maureen (Mary Bridget Woods) 1946–2011 — whose mother and grandmother also made quilts — is an example of tradition and craft passing down a family line, down three generations of women. All were born and grew up in Tarmon, Co. Leitrim.

To read more about the contributors, please visit **www.thedock.ie**.

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Acknowledgements

Thanks to Mary Conlon and all the team at the Dock; to Pat Collins, Henry Glassie, Pravina Shukla, John McCartin, John Reynolds, Breege Golden, Jesse Smith, Nick Evans, Rhian Nicholas, Reeves & Bond, Theresa Woods, Anthony Brennan, James Reynolds and The Loy Association of Ireland; to Darragh Heraghty, Daragh Barden, Helen Kells, Eoin Keane, Terry McGovern and Sarah Moffitt; to Regan Hutchins, Paul Kelly, Helen O'Leary, Michael Early, and Tony Mulvey of Mulveys Hardware Drumshanbo; and most especially to all the artists and makers, known and unknown, who sank the loy into the soil, raised a pitchfork of hay, hollowed boortree wood for rope twister or whistle, brightened the darkness with the light of delph and dresser, and wielded needles to change the shape of things.



Leitrim
County Council
Comhairle Chontae Liatroma

