

STATEMENT BY:

Cathy Burke, Mike Byrne, Stuart Cairns, Mary Conroy, Róisín de Buitléar, Jack Doherty, Jennifer Hickey, Alison Kay, John Lee, Antonio Lopez, Deirdre McLoughlin, Alan Meredith, Cara Murphy, Mary Nagle, Susan O'Byrne, Nuala O'Donovan, Angela O Kelly, Helen O'Shea, Mandy Parslow, Sasha Sykes, Grainne Watts.

The above named 21 Irish master craftspeople exhibited at *Collect 2024*, by invitation of the Design and Crafts Council of Ireland (DCCI). *Collect* is the leading international art fair for contemporary craft and design held in London annually in February-March. *Collect 2024* was DCCI's 20th year of participation and to mark this the Irish exhibitors at *Collect 24* were specially selected as previous *Collect* exhibitors.

DCCI is a national government agency with a role in “*championing and supporting*” the development of design and craft in Ireland. DCCI is also a membership organisation with individual members and Guilds Associations Networks & Societies (GANS) membership for craft, design and educational groups in the creative sector in Ireland. DCCI is funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment through Enterprise Ireland. Feedback is an integral part of all publicly funded projects.

Following the event, **we collaboratively co-authored** a Feedback Report, titled ‘**Report and Feedback on Collect 2024**’ (the Report). The collective authorship of all 21 of the co-authors was transparently noted at the end of the Report.

We drew on **our extensive collective experience** exhibiting at *Collect* over the past 20 years, and at other international exhibitions and fairs. The Report included **constructive criticism and suggestions intended to assist DCCI** in the planning and execution of future international exhibitions. We fully expected the Report to be welcomed and had no reason to anticipate anything other than collaborative engagement and discussion with DCCI, to the benefit of all Irish makers and exhibitors into the future.

On **22nd March 2024**, the Report was emailed to the Board of DCCI. All 21 co-authors were included as c.c. recipients. On **23rd March 2024**, Mr Peter Hynes, Chair of the Board, acknowledged receipt of the Report, and noting the contents stated that he had **referred the matter to the CEO for review**. On **25th March 2024**, we responded with thanks stating “*we await your response in due course. As noted we are open to meeting with you and your team at any point to discuss any of the issues listed*”.

DCCI did not communicate further until 22nd May 2024, when DCCI solicitors, **Beauchamp LLP**, sent a **formal legal letter** addressed to **only one** of the exhibitors - the person whose email address was used to send the Report. The letter stated that DCCI was “*currently considering all legal options available to it up to and including the commencement of High Court proceedings against you for defamation*”.

We were shocked and in disbelief that this was the response to a well-intentioned, constructive Report. We were immensely disappointed that DCCI did not engage in the positive and constructive way we expected.

Despite our multiple efforts to resolve the issue including writing to the Board of DCCI and to Minister Peter Burke, in the end, reluctantly solicitors were engaged to assist us in bringing this matter to a close.

We are relieved that DCCI finally withdrew their legal threat on 18th March 2025.

It is disappointing that this matter was not resolved sooner. The legal threat has taken its toll on all of us and on our reputations and dreadfully impacted our creative flow and work. The matter also impacted negatively on the wider Irish craft and creative sector.

We welcome DCCI's commitment to engage in a collaborative way and in productive discussion for the benefit of the entire sector and its representatives.

We express our gratitude to the Irish and international creative community for their support during this difficult time. We particularly thank Joe Hogan, our fellow master craftsman, for his courage in standing up for the essential right to give feedback to a representative organisation without fear of reprisal.

END OF STATEMENT