



coracle

celebrating the work of Simon Cutts and Erica Van Horn

12 sept - 24 oct

Coracle at STAC

Coracle is a small press run by Simon Cutts and Erica Van Horn. It is named after a boat that is simple enough to be built by hand and light enough to be carried. Since it was established in 1975 it has been a press, gallery, and bookshop in a range of locations. This exhibition features some of the books, cards, prints, and objects that Coracle has produced over the past thirty years in rural Tipperary.

Coracle ended up here more or less by accident. Erica and Simon had been looking to leave London, and after a second residency at the Irish Museum of Modern Art in 1996, they set off on one of the long walks they were in the habit of taking at the time. The walk brought them to Tipperary, where they were given a lift by a farmer. When he heard that they were interested in buying a house, he turned the car around and brought them to the cottage and derelict buildings that became their home. In 2023

they published *A Table of Books in Ballybeg*, which gives an insight into their thought process at the time: "We told ourselves that if we can publish from here, it can be done anywhere." They were right.

When they were planning this exhibition, Erica described it to me as "essentially a Reading Room" presenting "not all and only things related to Ireland but all things that we have produced down this boreen. So, the bigger world and this small world." Coracle publishes writers and artists from all over the world and is collected internationally. Erica's comment is apt for another reason. In a Coracle work the big world is often contained within a small and simple-seeming thing, like a magic trick. Taking time, doing a double take, this is all part of the Coracle reading experience. Before Simon and Erica left London they had been running a gallery-bookshop called *workfortheeyetodo*. Happy work for the eyes.

Simon founded Coracle with the artist Kay Roberts in 1975. The press began publishing that year, and Coracle Gallery held its first exhibition the following year. Roberts left the press in 1980 to focus on contemporary art, producing maps of exhibitions in London galleries. Roberts later reflected on Simon's decision to name the press after "a one-man boat used to cross a fast flowing river": "Coracle Press cast off against the tide of current artistic trends. Coracle Gallery developed and expanded its scope for adventure. It isn't a straightforward crossing from A to B, in Coracle the journey is all, and the view is always to the future horizon."

Coracle built on Simon's experience in the mid-1960s at Tarasque, a small press and magazine in Nottingham devoted to avant-garde poetry. Poetry is an important compass point for Coracle, but art is so intertwined in all its activities that it makes no sense to try to separate out books from art, bookshop from gallery, publication from exhibition. When they were preparing this exhibition Simon told me that he was excited about displaying some of their concertina cards on shelves so they could be viewed unfolded, because "they are the nearest that paper gets to sculpture."

An invitation, catalogue, or poster for a Coracle exhibition is as important as the art on display. A good example is an invitation Coracle made for Pat Looby's Harvester exhibition, which opened in Dublin's Temple Bar Gallery in May 2001 and moved to STAC that November. The invitation is a folded card with a hole stamped on the cover revealing the interior. Within the card is a paragraph of found text in a grandiose register using harvest as a metaphor for the mystery of life. Facing it is an image of a golden field of wheat, visible through the hole in the cover. So far, so congruous. On second take, you realise that the image is in fact a packet of seeds that has been glued to the card.

Erica and Simon are both artists and plough their own furrows. They come from very different art and book-making traditions. Simon has written poems on many kinds of pages, including walls. He has used vinyl lettering to add poems to walls inside and outside their home, and made neon installations of poems, including a wind-powered line from a John Clare poem

hidden like a message from another world inside a hut in Northumberland. Other poems are more physical again, including a line installed in aluminium letters on slabs of airfield concrete taken from an RAF base in Lincolnshire.

When Erica joined Coracle in 1989 she brought a very different approach to books. In the 1980s she was making elaborately hand-painted long folded books. She spent the decade travelling between France and the US, making the book an appealingly portable medium. Some of her books in this period played with her failure to speak French, turning linguistic and cultural confusion into a game. After a solo exhibition at New York's Franklin Furnace in 1986, she experimented with making editions of her hand-painted books, using colour and stitching to retain some of the handmade intimacy of the originals. Erica met Simon in 1988. They spent the following year in Italy where Erica began *Italian Lessons*, a series that developed her play with linguistic confusion. In a similar spirit, her ongoing *Living Locally* project documents everyday observations and encounters in rural Tipperary. Some of the books and cards from this series are on display in this exhibition.

For the most part, Coracle has operated quietly down the breen, set apart from the currents of art and writing. Erica and Simon have built a life through Coracle that allows them to explore their interests. Recently that might involve observations during walks and encounters with neighbours (Erica) or reflections while cooking lunch about the book as a modernist form (Simon).

This exhibition is part of the STAC at 30 programme, a series of exhibitions and events to mark STAC's 30th anniversary. In a bit of happy serendipity, it is also 30 years since Erica and Simon moved to Tipperary. To mark this shared anniversary, a collection of Coracle books will remain at STAC after this exhibition. It is nice to picture visitors to the gallery reading books that have been made down a boreen not far from Clonmel. Simon has often quoted Mallarmé's dictum that the world is made to be put into a book. It gives me deep pleasure and joy to know that behind a farm in rural Tipperary they are putting this into practice.

Dr. Julie Bates - 2026



Simon Cutts (b. Derbyshire, UK 1944), a writer, artist, designer and founder of Coracle Press and Gallery, is well-known in the field of artist books. As poet, artist and publisher, he has made books since the mid-1960s, firstly with Stuart Mills as Tarasque Press and then as Coracle from 1975, firstly in London, and then from many bases, and eventually in Ireland from 1996. His two critical books *Some Forms of Availability* 2007 and *The Small Press Model* 2025, deal with his theoretical approach to publishing.

Erica Van Horn (b. New Hampshire, USA 1954) is an American artist (and writer, editor, printer, bookmaker, and publisher) long transplanted to Ireland where she runs Coracle Press with her husband Simon Cutts. Her outsider's acumen is trained on the minutiae of daily life, collecting visual and textual details of what is often overlooked or seemingly insignificant. *The Book Remembers Everything: The Work of Erica Van Horn*, was shown at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale in 2010, where there is an archive of her books and papers.

Dr. Julie Bates is an Associate Professor in the School of English at Trinity College, Dublin. She is currently writing a book about Erica Van Horn.

Programme Overview

11 Sept - 24 Oct - Coracle

Celebrating the work of Erica Van Horn and Simon Cutts

18 Sept - River of Words - Culture Night

An immersive exploration of language inspired by written works that have come out of the Word Sparks writing sessions.

26 Sept - Word Sparks #4

With poet and writer, Jenny Cox, offering creatives the opportunity to use varied and thought-provoking works of art as prompts for sparking interesting conversations and fresh writing ideas.

17 Oct - STAC Talks #2

11am - 3.30pm including a conversation with Simon Cutts and Erica Van Horn and a panel discussion around the importance of artists books, publishing as art practice and the book as art object – With Sean Lynch (Artist & Askeaton Contemporary Arts), Gustavo Grandal Montero (Library Collections, TATE, London) and more TBC.

7 Nov – 19 Dec - Eileen Mulrooney

In partnership with KCAT Arts Centre

14 Nov - Word Sparks #5

As above, inspired by the works of Eileen Mulrooney

12 Dec - Sensory Santa

An experience designed to be calm, welcoming, and comfortable for children (and their adults) who might find the busy festive season a little overwhelming.

For more info visit: www.southtipperartscentre.ie