

An Introduction to Stoney Road Press

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Ralph Waldo Emerson once described the human lifespan as ‘a self-evolving circle, which, from a ring imperceptibly small, rushes on all sides outwards to new and larger circles, and that without end’. Conversations, he opined, ‘are a game of circles’, exchanges between parts that ultimately amplify the orbit of the whole. Nowhere is this philosophy more evident than in the practice of Stoney Road Press, itself a product of a simple conversation between two individuals, David O’Donoghue and James O’Nolan.

A chance encounter at a gallery opening in 2001 led to a cup of coffee, conversation, and soon afterwards a new business experiment, launched on the premises of a former corner shop on the northside of Dublin. James came to the venture as a 20-year veteran of Graphic Studio Dublin, tutor at the National College of Art & Design and master printmaker; David as trained printmaker, Dublin gallery owner and entrepreneur. Combining expert knowledge of print-making processes with business and marketing acumen, Stoney Road Press has since emerged as one of Ireland’s most innovative producers of limited edition fine artworks, its practice expanding from prints to publications and three-dimensional works. Running a commercially viable print studio demands visual acuity and discernment, a belief in the value of art and its economies, and practical expertise to successfully introduce and promote new work in the marketplace. The fine art multiple is a vital strand of contemporary art production—unique in its accessibility, in its appeal as a distinct form of expression, and as a gateway to the full range of an artist’s practice. It is a rich, living work of art in its own right—another ripple in the history of art and its ever-expanding domain—and yet Stoney Road Press has succeeded in adding another dimension of value to the work, through their creative management of the multiple from conception to collaboration, production to sale. With self-sufficiency comes freedom: the freedom to pursue unusual or unorthodox projects, to account to none but themselves, to prove that art can thrive within the commercial marketplace on its own terms.

David and James’ energy and enthusiasm for their work is infectious: stepping across the threshold of the studio’s current premises on Stoney Road one is struck by their warmth and ease, the gentle yet dexterous back-and-forth flow of ideas between the duo and their talented staff members, Jennifer Ward, Kelvin Mann and John Fitzsimons. They are keenly aware of the cooperative nature of what they do, and unfazed by technical challenges that arise in the course of progressing a work from conception to translation and production. As a consequence the work produced by the studio, divergent though it is, bears a particular creative signature wrought through such synergies: unconventional, and exceptional for its kind. Artists are not constrained by a set menu of techniques from which to pick and choose; rather the work itself dictates the form of its making, from woodblock, carborundum, etch-

ing and photographic processes, to more experimental methods, such as the laser-cutting technology recently employed to create Patrick Scott's new series of prints. Little wonder, then, that artists who've worked with Stoney Road have described their collaborations as stimulating, liberating, a space to breathe—what Samuel Johnson would have termed 'the external ventilation of the mind'. This book is a record of these exhalations. As catalogue it reviews the diverse range of editioned works produced by Stoney Road in its collaborations with Irish visual artists from 2002-2007. As text it engages in conversation with those who have felt resonance with Stoney Road's aims and practice, documenting here the ebb and flow of thoughts and experiences which inform their own art-making.

In recalling five years of creation, Stoney Road Press, grown from the kernel of an idea into a thriving studio and business, remains rooted in its simple originating act: the placing of ink onto paper. The collaborations and conversations presented here are but impressions and fragments, entry points to other associations evoked by the work and the word. They are reflections on process, inspiration and consanguinity, ultimately an avowal of Emerson's belief in our infinite capacity for invention: 'The eye is the first circle; the horizon which it forms is the second; and throughout nature this primary figure is repeated without end.'

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