

SCIENCE

GALLERY

SCIENCE

GALLERY

STORIES

SG
PEOPLE

CONOR COURTNEY: FROM MEDIATOR TO FREELANCE SCI-ARTIST

Former mediator Conor Courtney traces back his time at Science Gallery Dublin. From his initial beginnings at the Gallery to his current freelancing role, he reflects on how Science Gallery has influenced and progressed his career.



Conor Courtney demonstrates DNA extraction for former An Taoiseach, Enda Kenny TD and former Vice Provost of Trinity College Dublin, Linda Hogan at the Community Biolab in Science Gallery Dublin in 2013.

WHO?

- ▶ Conor Courtney
- ▶ Science Gallery Dublin (SGD)
- ▶ Science Gallery International (SGI)

WHAT?

After completing his undergraduate degree in Microbiology at Trinity College Dublin, Conor Courtney jump-started his career into the world of sci-art by joining the mediator team at Science Gallery Dublin in 2009. With an educational background and personal interests closely linked to the INFECTIOUS exhibition being shown at the time, he naturally fit into the role of mediator and brought a wealth of knowledge to the position. Conor recounted that he wanted to grow and perfect his science communication skills, and felt that working as a mediator would help further his professional development in this area. It soon became apparent that Conor has a particular flare for science communication. He stayed working with Science Gallery for several exhibitions, recalling that his favourite exhibition to mediate was BIORHYTHM - a touring exhibition. The exhibition initially travelled to New York but has since gone all over the world, giving Conor an opportunity to travel and work abroad.

Evolving from his mediator position, Conor's role at Science Gallery transformed into working more on programming, logistics and content creation. Eventually, Conor decided that he would love to create his own art as opposed to just facilitating other people's. Now as a freelance artist / scientist, he creates everything from objects and exhibitions to making installations and festivals happen. Despite leaving his full-time Science Gallery role in 2013, Conor has maintained a close connection with Science Gallery; he has helped develop the mediator model, train staff / volunteers from across the Network, organised Trinity's own research festival PROBE and has worked on the touring programme with SGI.

Science Gallery offered an alternative path to a traditional career in science for Conor. He hopes to see Science Gallery continue to grow and promote its unique art/science collaborations in order to showcase the realms of possibility that exist when science and art collide.

WHAT THEY SAID?

'I guess if I had to pick one main thing from my experiences in Science Gallery it'd be that it showed me a calling that I didn't know existed. I've always been enthusiastic about science and learning new things, and Science Gallery showed me that communicating that enthusiasm to people can be very valuable.'

'Science and Art have been placed at odds with one another, but as I've learned more about the systems involved with both I've come to realise it's a false dichotomy. Art requires ritual/protocol and an understanding and respect for materials. Science requires creativity and patience. Neither of them are as far apart as utilitarian industry would like us to think. I think by exploring the synthesis of what people traditionally see of two opposing forces we're able to discover new ways of seeing things and being in the world. As we stare down the barrel of multiple kinds of apocalypse we can't rely solely on technology to save us, we require a shift in consciousness. For my small part in it, I think that Art/Science collaboration can help.'

- Conor Courtney

WHAT WERE THE BENEFITS AND IMPACTS?

- ▶ Career advancement
- ▶ Connecting people
- ▶ Interdisciplinary collaboration
- ▶ Communication skill development
- ▶ Exposure to new ideas



Conor Courtney speaking at Electric Picnic with Science Gallery Dublin in 2012.

LINKS

BIORHYTHM Touring Exhibition:

<https://www.sciencegallery.org/touring/exhibitions/biorhythm>

PROBE Research Festival:

<https://www.facebook.com/TCDProbe/?fref=ts>

Conor's current work place, Office of Life and Art:

<http://www.lifeandart.io/>

Sources: Interview with SGI and Conor Courtney

Compiled by: Ciara O'Flynn, Science Gallery International in 2019

Activity date: 2009 - present