

# Michael Dowling

## *“Well House”*

September - October 2016

Site specific temporary public art

Michael Dowling's *“Well House”*, is inspired by *“the Emly Shrine”*, an early Irish 8th century bronze, wood and enamel reliquary found in the permanent collection of Boston's Museum of Fine Arts. The surface pattern of this reliquary has informed many of his works that have tiles and/or patterns as elements. Dowling's creations act as an inviting threshold for the viewer to find a quiet place for a moment of reflection. *“Well House”* is a reflective work on many levels: physical, universal, and personal. The silver leaf reflects the light; the work explores the *“universal”* concept of water as a blessing; and it also draws from Dowling's Irish family roots.

He states, *“When I was growing up if we asked my Irish Grandmother where she was from and she would say ‘From Queens County, known today as County Laois after the medieval kingdom Loígis. The Ó Dubhlaing, Dowlings were one of the seven Septs of Loígis and are among the oldest Irish families and trace connections to the Tuatha Dé Danann, the tribe of the gods’.*

*In any case, my grandmother family lore has it she was the one in charge of the bucket at sacred well site associated with St Bridget and the Celtic goddess Brigit. She knew when to draw the water and the power of water as a blessing. She kept a small bottle of holy water in her home in Quincy. Always empty. When you went to visit she filled it from the tap and sprinkled a bit on you. I remember saying to her one day that isn't blessed, her reply as she tapped me on the shoulder was “it tis!”*

*Well house is dedicated to my grandmother and the blessing of water, more specifically to water as a source of life and blessing.”*

For twenty five years, Dowling (US/Ireland) has been harnessing his art and his artistic vision to create needed places for people to gather and to heal. Some Boston-based examples are: *Medicine Wheel*, an annual 24-hour vigil with a major sculptural art installation that brings people from every walk of life and every social class together to commemorate the tragedy of the AIDS epidemic on December 1st/World AIDS Day; *No Man's Land*, an urban wild public art and poetry park located in South Boston; and *Hand in Hand*, a new model of inclusion that uses cultural action to facilitate moving from resistance to reconciliation by participants creating public art together. For the last decade, he has been working on an ambitious project, *The Tonnes; A Meeting of the Waters* on the border region between Ireland and Northern Ireland. Phase one of the Tonnes was funded by the EU and Peace III moneys as part of a post peace process dialogue. *“Well House”* is also part of *Culture Ireland's* Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme- a global initiative to mark the centenary of the 1916 Easter Rising which set Ireland on its path to independence.

*(For more info about Dowling: [www.mwponline.org](http://www.mwponline.org))*

*“Well House” and Caoimhghin Ó Fraithile's “South of Hy-Brasil” were commissioned by Medicine Wheel Productions as part of Tír na nÓg, a temporary public art and public engagement project in the Fenway section of Olmsted's Emerald Necklace Park System. Tír na nÓg is in partnership with the Fenway Alliance's Public by Design Initiative & their annual “Opening Our Doors event held on Columbus Day (October 10). Tír na nÓg is a vital component of Medicine Wheel's multi-year Brooch Project that is engaging and connecting the communities along the finished and unfinished links of Olmsted's Emerald Necklace Park System and it also celebrates the 2016 Centennial of the National Park System of which the Emerald Necklace is part of. (“South of Hy-Brasil” is located in the lagoon)*

*More Info & Supporters List: <http://mwponline.org/wordpress/projects/tir-na-nog/>*