

'Determined to keep the Rogue alive'

Eoghan Dalton Reports

The team behind a Waterford city arts studio fearing closure have stepped up a campaign to secure their future. Janie Kavanagh, director of the Rogue Gallery and Studios, told the Munster Express that the artists based at No 25 Michael Street were assured by the local Council that they would be moved into O'Connell Street's Cultural Quarter.



This has not happened and Kavanagh fears the gallery will go the same way as other local art spaces which were forced to close their doors despite being told they would be provided with alternative spaces.

Galleries and studios have been closing because their temporary homes are being converted by developers for other use. In the case of the Rogue Gallery, which holds regular arts classes and is a workspace for over ten local artists, the premises is to be knocked to make way for the long-awaited shopping centre nearby.

While that development is still some time away, the uncertainty has created consternation among artists who use the studio for their work.

An intense lobbying effort has been underway over the past week. In a letter seen by the Munster Express, the gallery's board members contacted the chief executive of Waterford City and County Council as part of their campaign. "As you may be aware, Rogue Gallery is facing eviction from our Michael Street home due to the upcoming construction of the New Street Shopping Centre," they told Michael Walsh.

"Rogue contributes, on a daily basis, to the artistic vibrancy of Waterford and we believe that the loss of Rogue would be a serious blow to the cultural life and community of Waterford." "We would like to formally ask Waterford CCC to find new premises for The Rogue Gallery and Studios." They added that they had been "given to understand" that the gallery would be included in the plans for the city's Cultural Quarter: "But this space has not, as yet, materialised." The former Youthreach building at No 66 O'Connell Street is singled out as a suitable location for the gallery's new home as it is currently vacant with the Education and Training Board leaving the premises last year, however the body still owns the building.

"Rogue would bring life to that end of O'Connell Street, providing an additional anchor for the Cultural Quarter.

In a statement included as part of the gallery's campaign, called 'Going Rogue - A Shared Vision', Janie Kavanagh stated that the gallery has been able to partner novice artists, performers and event managers with more experienced members who can share their skills, while running the space on a shoestring budget - its 2017 programme came to no more than €3,000.

"There's no way to save the current, physical gallery, but we're determined to keep the Rogue alive as an entity.

Since 2015, we've done everything we can to show that art isn't an elite occupation - art belongs to everyone, and it can change our community for the better." Waterford City and County Council did not respond when contacted. The issue has been repeatedly raised at Council meetings by Cllr Seamus Ryan (Lab) who has been told each time that the local authority's arts officer is working with the gallery to secure a new building.