Launch of the winning design for the Trinity College Dublin campus sculpture installed in November 2013, 'Apples and Atoms' by Eilís O'Connell RHA to honour Ernest T.S. Walton, Nobel Laureate in Physics in 1951 with Sir John D. Cockcroft

(L-R) Prof. James Lunney (Head of the School of Physics, Trinity College Dublin), Catherine Giltrap (Curator of the Trinity College Dublin Art Collections), Eilís O'Connell (sculptor), Marian Woods and Philip Walton (Ernest Walton's daughter and son), Dr. Patrick J. Prendergast (Provost, Trinity College Dublin)

Eilís O' Connell was born in Derry, N. Ireland in 1953. She studied at the Crawford School of Art, Cork (1970 - 74), Massachusetts College of Art, Boston (1974-1975) and The Crawford School of Art, Cork (1975-77), where she received the only award for Distinction in Sculpture in 1977. Other awards followed, including the G.P.A. Award for Emerging artists 1981, a Fellowship at The British School at Rome 1983-1984 and a P.S.I. Fellowship for New York from the Irish Arts Council. While in New York she won a two-year residency at Delfina Studios in London and was based there until 2001.

From her London base she exhibited widely and won many public art commissions, receiving the 'Art and Work' award for her sculptures at 99 Bishopsgate from the Wapping Arts Trust, and winning the Royal Society of Arts Award in 1998. She was selected to represent Ireland at the Paris Biennale in 1982 and the Sao Paolo Biennale in 1985. Eilís is a founder director of the National Sculpture Factory in Cork, a former member of the Arts Council of Ireland, a member of Aosdána, and a member of the Royal Hibernian Academy.

The majority of her commissions are on display in the United Kingdom, the most significant being 'Secret Station' made in 1992 using bronze, fibre optic light, and steam for the Cardiff Bay Arts Trust at the Gateway, Cardiff; 'Vowel of Earth Dreaming its Root', a twelve-metre high Kilkenny limestone sculpture for the London Docklands Development Corporation at Marsh Wall, The Isle of Dogs, London; and the Pero footbridge, a rolling bascule bridge fifty-four metres long, designed in collaboration with Ove Arup Engineers, London in 1999. She has also completed two sculpture commissions for Lismore Castle in Co. Waterford.

In 2002 her monumental bronze work, 'Unfold', was lent by the Cass Foundation to the Venice Biennale and smaller scale sculptures were also shown at the Guggenheim Museum, Venice. Since moving back to Ireland she continues to carry out commissioned work for significant international state and corporate bodies and has been engaged in a variety of commissions for Irish locations, one of the most notable being 'Reedpod', measuring over thirteen metres high in hand beaten copper and stainless steel for Lapps Quay in Cork, commissioned by Howard Holdings.

In 2012, O'Connell was one of six artists invited to submit a design for the commission of the first-ever site-specific campus sculpture at Trinity College Dublin. Her successful design was launched during Dublin city's term as host of ESOF – The European Science Open Forum. The completed mirror-polished steel sculpture, of over four metres in height, was unveiled on the 15th of November 2013 by Ruairí Quinn T.D., in his capacity as the then Minister for Education. The work is entitled 'Apples and Atoms' and celebrates Ernest T.S. Walton (1903-95), Ireland's first Nobel Prize-winning Scientist and Erasmus Smith's Professor of Natural and Experimental Philosophy, Trinity College Dublin from 1946 to 1974.

The Artist's own thoughts on the creative process which led her to this design:

"Having researched Walton's drawings at the Churchill Archives in Cambridge, I noted that he could convey the maximum amount of information with minimal line drawing and text. His minimal, reduced aesthetic approach influenced what I proposed to make.

Spheres as a formal sculptural element appealed to me because they were used to create spark gaps for the particle accelerator with which Walton and Cockcroft 'split the atom' in 1932.

Reflected in the stack of spheres are specially planted native Irish apple trees that refer to the private man and his keen interest for growing fruit trees.
The sculpture pays homage to Walton's most important characteristics – his intellectual rigour and hands-on ability to physically build the particle accelerator and his nurturing ability as teacher and father. A man is not defined solely by his academic achievements but also by the memories he leaves behind in others."