Separate Storms

An exhibition of artworks by participants of the Waterford Healing Arts Trust’s Open Studio Workshop

Thursday 8th September – Friday 7th October 2011
Waterford Regional Hospital
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In 2008, the Waterford Healing Arts Trust renovated its premises in the grounds of Waterford Regional Hospital and created the first physical Centre for Arts and Health in Ireland comprising an artist’s studio, a dedicated Arts and Health library and a participatory arts space that can accommodate all artforms. With this, it also created an opportunity to extend its programme beyond the context of Waterford Regional Hospital into the wider community. We took the view that health and healthcare is not bordered by the walls of the hospital and therefore why should our creativity be?

A vision grew to develop an art making facility which would be as accessible as possible to all adults living in the community in terms of cost, booking and arts experience (none was needed). We particularly wanted to reach people who might be socially isolated for reasons of recent or chronic ill health. And so the ‘Open Studio’ was created.

People came. Some came back a second time and a third time, and soon what began as an abstract strategy ‘to bridge the acute hospital with the wider community’ became a set of real relationships with real people we have come to know, primarily through their art – the materials they use, the subjects that interest them, the rhythm with which they work and so on.

The success of the initiative is due in no small way to Claire Meaney, who, with the help of Sarah Lee, Natasha Edmondson and Denis Power, leads the Open Studio. Claire walks a careful tightrope between encouraging participation in a general sense and supporting people to take their own creative risks. At the centre of this is an ethos of listening to the individual. The diversity of voices, which has been one of the most exciting parts of the Open Studio since its inception, is reflected in this exhibition Separate Storms.

Mary Grehan
Arts Director, July 2011
The Artist’s Toolbox

Claire Meaney

Participatory arts is the term used for the practice of engaging people in making art in collaboration with an artist. Given the growth of this work within healthcare settings in Ireland over recent years, it is important for artists to reflect upon their practice, document their learning, share and debate this with their peers in order to work towards an understanding of best practice on a national level.

In 2010, I began a journey to develop my own practice as a participatory and collaborative artist working in the context of Arts and Health. I was supported by a bursary award from The Arts Council. Prior to this, I had experience of delivering participatory workshops in community settings and had been working with the Waterford Healing Arts Trust (WHAT) as the Assistant Arts Director since 2007. When the WHAT Centre for Arts & Health opened in 2009, my role expanded to encompass the delivery of a weekly Open Studio Workshop which became the first opportunity for me to combine my learning from both my participatory arts experience and the Arts and Health sector. A new set of challenges arose which I wanted to explore.

The Open Studio Workshop was established to provide a creative and social outlet for people living in the community. The workshop has existed since March 2009 with a regular weekly attendance of approximately 12 people comprising users of the Mental Health Services, the Disability Services and others not affiliated to any service. The participants have different levels of abilities, interests and motivations which require me to work on a one-to-one basis within a group context. The drop-in nature of the workshop means that some people may only attend for one or two session while others have participated on a continual basis.

Certain questions have emerged for me relating to finding a meeting point between my artistic values and those of the participants and understanding how to take creative risks while ensuring the dignity and safety of everyone involved.

Often, the distinctiveness of an artist’s practice can be best understood by comparing it to others. The Arts Council bursary enabled me to look further afield at how other artists work. In November 2010, I visited Arts and Health projects in Manchester, Salford, Leyland and Bentham in the north of England. I hosted a series of round table discussions with artists in Sligo, West Cork and Waterford. I also visited artist Deirdre Walsh - who has

Kevin Murphy, Grádaí, (detail), Watercolour on paper
extensive experience in this field - in Castlebar, Co. Mayo and I attended one of her workshops.

The artists were generous in giving their time and sharing their practice and experience with me. In these meetings we discussed a range of issues common to us including the degree of direction we offer, practical methods for engagement, our thoughts on collaborative arts practice and the particular challenges of working in the context of Arts and Health. We also explored questions about the authorship of the artwork, the relevance for an artist of having a separate studio practice and the personal qualities we bring to Arts and Health workshops.

A consensus was not reached (nor was it aspired to) as artists inevitably differ in styles and approaches as well as ideas about collaboration and participation. In order to encourage other artists to share their experience with me, I described and named my methods for engaging people in art making through the Open Studio Workshop.

As a participatory artist, my primary aim is to enable others to reach their creative potential. In the context of Arts and Health, where the participants may be vulnerable for a multitude of health and social reasons, there is a particular sense of responsibility for the welfare of the individual.

Artists have what I like to call a ‘tool box of tricks’ for working in this way. My ‘toolbox’ has expanded since this project began and it can be categorised into two strands. The first strand comprises practical techniques. The second strand is about the artist’s philosophy and methods used to engage people in a meaningful art making process. It includes ideas around collaboration, how and when to motivate and encourage and how and when to take creative risks. The following key points underpin this second strand in the Open Studio Workshop:

**Responsiveness**
At all times I try to listen to the voice of individuals and draw out their creativity through dialogue with them. This is one of the key points of the ‘Participatory Arts Practice in Healthcare Contexts: Guidelines for Good Practice’ published in 2009 by Waterford Healing Arts Trust and HSE South (Cork Arts and Health). In the Open Studio Workshop, everyone has the choice to opt out of the art-making activity at any stage. With some participants with whom communication can be non-verbal, it is by offering a choice of different materials and resources and closely observing their responses to these that I can understand what works for them.

**Balance**
The aim of the Open Studio Workshop is to provide a space for people to come together to meet others while exploring their creativity. I balance the banter with the art-making and create a space where socialising can happen alongside the creative work. The interpersonal skills of the artist are important in balancing these two elements.

**Risk Taking**
Mutual trust is important and allows for the artist to guide in a manner that is responsible and does not harm the dignity of the participant. In the Open Studio Workshop, I have been working with the same group of people for two years and we have built up a level of trust between us. This, coupled with my knowledge of the participants built up over time, enables me to gently push them when necessary and know inherently when to hold back. The duration of the Open Studio has given the participants the time and space they need to explore their creativity with confidence. They have a better understanding of different materials and methods with which to express themselves and they are not shy about trying new approaches such as playing with scale and new media, and asking for assistance if necessary. Through this progression they begin to discover their own artistic voice.
Collaboration

Collaboration is the joint creation of a work by more than one person. In the workshop, the nature of collaboration can vary depending on the unique mix of artist, setting and participants. Some collaborations are more artist-led and others more participant-led. I contribute to the creation of the participants’ artworks by seeing the creative potential in something, making suggestions and enabling decision making. It involves sharing artistic processes and encouraging participants to think like artists. An example of this in the Open Studio Workshop is working with Ciaran Connell who over the past year completed a series of self-portraits. In order to motivate Ciaran to progress this body of work further, I set him the task of creating a large self-portrait that he would work on and consider over a series of workshops. I suggested the format of the artwork on a theme that he had already identified.

A Hook

To engage someone in a new project, I try to work out the participant’s interest and encourage them to use this theme as a starting point. I call this a ‘hook’ or an ‘in’. It also allows for the exploration of materials and techniques that are not traditionally associated with artmaking. A good example of this is my work with Philip Douglas. Philip is interested in all things to do with the army. I brought some toy soldiers to the workshop one day for him to use. He spent many weeks exploring different ideas by using the toy soldiers to create a variety of photographic images and animations. Once the exploratory phase was completed, he reviewed his own work and selected the most successful images for exhibition.

Confidence

An artist needs a degree of confidence in delivering participatory Arts and Health projects in order to develop a relationship of trust with participants. Artists Deirdre Walsh (Mayo) and Alison Clough (Bentham, UK) were unofficial mentors to me during my bursary project and both gave me enormous encouragement. My discussions with them and observations of their work affirmed my own practice.

I am also invaluably supported by volunteers in delivering the Open Studio Workshop. It is important that we share similar values in the way we work so that we do not confuse participants. We communicate with each other regularly throughout each session and debrief at the end to ensure that we are clear about what exactly each participant is pursuing in terms of their weekly tasks and overall concepts.

Throughout the course of my bursary, I tested my ‘discoveries’ with the participants. I introduced new art materials to the workshops and new ideas for exploration which I had gathered from other artists. I closely examined my methods of working by maintaining a reflective journal; elements of which I shared with the artists I met. The result of this ‘R&D’ is the Separate Storms exhibition of work made by the participants of the Open Studio Workshop. As you read through this booklet you will see examples of each artwork and how we worked together to make this possible.

My repertoire for engaging participants is an evolving process and I will continue to reflect on my practice and share it with others in order to refresh and sustain it for the benefit of the participants, myself and those working in this field.

1. Participatory Arts Practice in Healthcare Contexts: Guidelines for Good Practice (2009), Waterford Healing Arts Trust and HSE South (Cork) Arts and Health Programme.
I am extremely grateful to the many artists who shared their practice, experiences and time with me during the past year and made the *Separate Storms* exhibition and publication possible.

In October 2010, I travelled to the North of England where I met with Anne Marie Rickus from Arts on Prescription, Salford, Brian Chapman from Lime, Manchester, Cath Moran from Chorley & South Ribble Employment Project, Leyland and Jay Haigh, Alison Clough and Tony Stephenson from Looking Well, Bentham.

In Waterford, Nuala Early, Eileen Singleton, Alan Shoosmith, Miriam Robinson, Iva Krama, Joan O’Dwyer and Boyer Phelan attended a roundtable discussion I facilitated as part of the WHAT Exchange Day for Arts and Health practitioners in February 2011.

In Sligo, Niamh O’Connor, Maria Casey, Sam Lewis, Pia Lück, Sherrie Scott, Dorothee Kolle, Catherine Fanning, Daniel Chester and Sarah Stevens attended the second roundtable discussion.

In mid April, the final roundtable discussion at West Cork Arts Centre brought together some of the WHAT artists - Boyer Phelan, Martin Kennedy and Denis Power - with artists Sharon Dipity, Julia Pallone, Anne Harrington Rees and the Education & Community Co-ordinator Justine Foster from the Arts for Health programme in West Cork.

In May, I spent a day with artist Deirdre Walsh in Mayo. Deirdre has extensive experience of Arts and Health practice and has established an organisation entitled Hearth which aims to enable older people who are isolated geographically or otherwise to...
explore creativity in their own homes. Following a morning
discussion, I attended one of her afternoon workshops.

I also gratefully acknowledge the Arts Council for financially
supporting this endeavour and the Waterford Healing Arts
Trust (WHAT) for helping to realise this project.

I am particularly indebted to Mary Grehan, Arts Director of
WHAT, who supports me and from whom I have learnt a great
deal.

I would especially like to thank volunteers Sarah Lee, Natasha
Edmondson and Denis Power who continuously assist me in the
delivery of the Open Studio Workshop and the care staff who
tirelessly support the participants each week.

Finally, I must mention all the Open Studio Workshop
participants who make my Thursdays wonderful. The Separate
Storms exhibitors are Derek Bolger, Michael Carey, Ciaran
Connell, John Deevy, Philip Douglas, Ray Grace, Fiona Hayden,
Pat Hennebry, Bill Irish, Catherine McDonald, Kevin Murphy
and Tracey Power.

Claire Meaney
Separate Storms
the artists & the artworks

Derek Bolger 16
Michael Carey 18
Ciaran Connell 20
John Deevy 22
Philip Douglas 24
Ray Grace 26
Fiona Hayden 28
Pat Hennebry 30
Bill Irish 32
Catherine McDonald 34
Kevin Murphy 36
Tracey Power 38
‘I like painting, I’m proud of what I have done in the workshop and look forward to what I will do in the future. Both of the paintings are of me. One describes a boy on a bike as I like cycling so much. I like the other portrait too because of the colours that I used. They really brightened me up. I come here; it changes my day so much. It’s a hobby and brightens up my day.’
‘I like coming to the art group when the weather is good. I developed drawing skills through mechanical drawing class at school. I love to draw and this is why I come to the Open Studio. I want to develop my painting skills. The Open Studio is well organised.’

Right:
Michael Carey

*Plant in a Pot*
Acrylic on canvas board
‘This is a picture of me. I made it using collage. I used skin from magazines to make my skin. For the eyes I used photographs of me because it looked well and it was funny. I like coming to the workshop every Thursday to socialise and to make artworks.’

Right:
Ciaran Connell
*Self Portrait (work in progress)*
Collage on board

Left:
Ciaran Connell
*Self Portrait (detail)*
Collage on board
‘I decided to draw and paint a cactus plant because I like to work in the garden. I found it fun and enjoyable to create. I find the art studio good and I enjoy chatting to people who attend the art studio.’

Right:
John Deevy
A Cactus Plant
Mixed media on board
'I really enjoyed working on these art pieces. These are creative art pieces taken in different location outdoors. I chose to work with toy soldiers because I am interested in the army. I used drawings of characters for my second art piece because I love to draw different characters and thought it would be fun to see what they would look like in different places outdoors.'
‘I enjoy coming to the workshop. I learn new skills from week to week among friendly people. This year I have been mostly painting Tall Ships because of the mood of Waterford in the build up to the Tall Ships Festival.’

Right:
Ray Grace
P.S. Kilkenny
Acrylic on board
‘This artwork is a picture of Tramore beach early in the morning. As you can see the sun is just appearing and shining across the water and sand. The beach is my utopia.

I have been coming to the Open Studio for over a year. I am inspired by my teachers every week.’

Right:
Fiona Hayden
*Sun, Sea and Rock Pools*
Acrylic on board
Pat Hennebry

Right:
Pat Hennebry
*Untitled*
Acrylic on board

Below:
Pat Hennebry
*Untitled*
Acrylic on board
‘This painting was inspired by the artist Thomas Ryan. I saw his work in a book about the Waterford Municipal Collection. It conveys Reginald’s Tower and the quayside in the 1950s.

I like coming to the Open Studio to socialise and to learn new art skills.’
Catherine McDonald

‘I chose flowers for my project because I like nature. I’ve been coming to the Open Studio for a year and a half and I really enjoy it. I enjoy working with different materials. For this project I’ve used paper and watercolours’

Right:
Catherine McDonald
Flower Designs
Mixed Media on paper
‘Different people gave me words. I painted onto circles how I felt each word looked in my imagination. I found the work very inspiring and interesting. I found the art studio very helpful. The people are really kind and friendly to work with.’

Right:
Kevin Murphy
Circles I (details)
Watercolour on paper

Circles II (details)
Watercolour on paper
Tracey Power

Tracey Power

Tracey’s Patchwork
Watercolour on paper
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