



The Quiet Heart:

An exhibition by Martin Fahy, Artist in Residence with the Waterford Healing Arts Trust, WHAT Centre for Arts & Health and Waterford Regional Hospital
13 September to 2 November 2012.

This text is from a talk given by Grace Wells at the opening of the exhibition.

Grace Wells won the Eilis Dillon Best Newcomer Bisto Award for her first book, the children's novel, *Gyrfalcon*, which was also an International White Ravens' Choice. Children's books, *One World, Our World* and *Ice-Dreams* appeared in 2009. Her debut collection of poetry, *When God has been Called Away to Greater Things*, was published by Dedalus Press in May 2010. It won the Rupert and Eithne Strong Poetry Award 2011 and was short-listed for the London Fringe Festival New Poetry Award. She lives on Sliabh na mBan in County Tipperary.

This is a multi-faceted exhibition, which relates to different qualities and talents of the heart. The work stems from a couple of different impulses and I think it's helpful to look at the pieces knowing something of their origins and inspiration. For me it's as if the whole exhibition has developed a kind of heart language, and that language is sub-divided into two areas, one being the artist's personal discourse with the heart, and the other being Martin's work with hospital patients and staff, the more public discourse which centred around Martin asking people if they wanted to share remembered things learned by heart.

That aspect of the exhibition speaks, outwardly at least, in a light-hearted and playful language. I think it's very interesting how we as adults come to these images. For me they felt like illustrations within a children's book, and I found myself confronted, as if an inner voice wanted me to look seriously at serious art, and Martin actually wanted me to open the iron door of my heart to its lightest, most playful aspect. I think as adults within the serious environment of a hospital, as adults within the serious environment of life, it can be very hard for us to re-enter a playful world. Children, lambs and foals all skip, gambol and leap unselfconsciously, but grown-ups tend to be more staid and sedentary in our beings and in our views. So I really like the way these pieces open the doors of the heart. I imagine we all have very different doors, some are huge and impregnable as the security doors that guard

the Crown Jewels in the Tower of London, and some are light as Japanese screens that slide back with great ease. Behind these doors part of the heart wishes to play and these pictures facilitate that, they open us to that space and give us permission to be juvenile, incautious, happy.

The language of these artworks, their colour, shape and deceptive simplicity, creates a kind of pattern like a pattern of familiar things that we can all tap into. Martin has captured something of the world-wide-web deep within us all, these are images and phrases from the collective unconscious, the shared pool of universal information, and coloured threads weave from the people who volunteered each 'off by heart' phrase, through Martin, back onto the page and back out into each of us. For me these images are all about our connectedness, our shared lineage of small scraps that do indeed inform and fill our hearts.

And yet there's a beautiful gravity in these pieces, a very deep quality that has something to do with memory and commemoration. All these pieces were inspired by individuals, by little sound-bites that they remembered and took in, retained and held all their lives. And sometimes it is these little remembered phrases that can so easily conjure people for us; that can in fact define people. My mother was forever using the phrase '*You can't burn the candle at both ends*'. A phrase which was intended to discourage her teenage daughters from combining essential school-work with essential partying. It's a phrase I've used so often with my own daughter that it's become a shorthand for conversations about her well-being, I only have to ask her '*how's the old candle?*' for us both to know what I mean.

And while Martin has opened our hearts to the light-hearted I wanted to offer up a Limerick my father could be relied upon to embarrass us all with. It goes like this:

There was a young girl from Westphalia
Who went to a dance as a dahlia
The petals revealed
what they should have concealed
and the dance as a dance was a failure.

Where it came from and who taught it to him remain unknown. The words passed on into his six children, and on through them into the wider world, but the Limerick is also a direct path back into the memory of everything he was as a man.

The gravity of Martin Fahy's light-hearted images, is that they create holding spaces which commemorate particular people and pay homage to the entire universes that hover unseen around old-wives sayings, Limericks and lines of poetry.



The second aspect of the exhibition, the part I referred to as Martin's 'personal discourse with the heart' contains a number of 'artificial hearts'. Martin wants us to think about the fact we never actually see our own hearts, for the most part they are quiet, busily going about their quiet business. But what do these unseen hearts look like? How might we imagine them if we never actually knew the reality? Say someone describes a heart to you, its medical function, its emotional capacity—what would this organ look like? I keep thinking of something the size of a football-field. I very much like the idea of the heart being made of 'things', beads, flowers, wallpaper. The science of the

heart may be about cells, tissue and valves, and science may argue it is the brain that holds all memory, but it is the heart that stores and keeps the really vital matter of life. So it's very rewarding to come here and have the collective heart examined, to have the personal heart opened and to see this marvellous organ considered anew through the inspired and quiet heart of Martin Fahy.