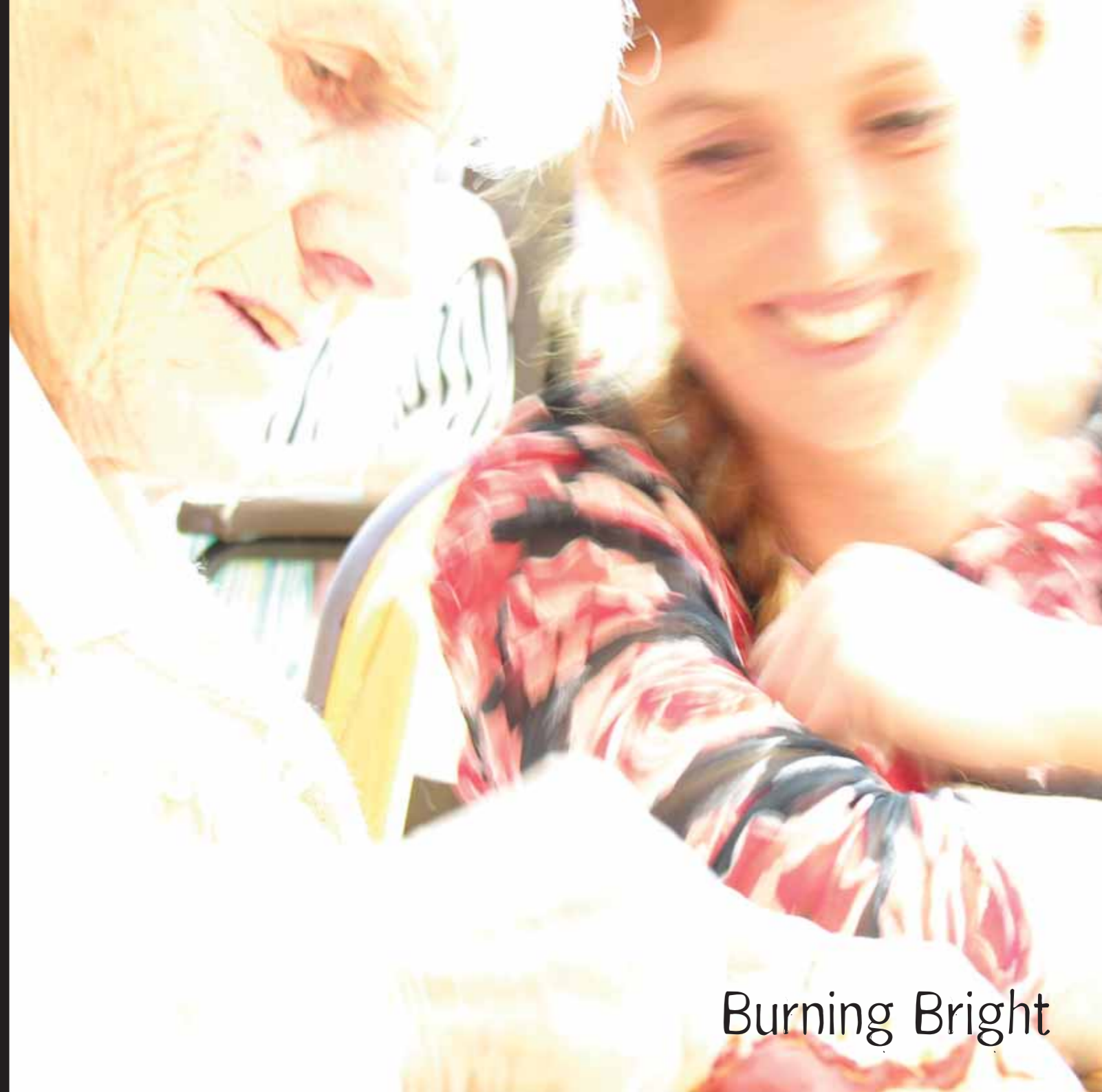


Burning Bright

For further information please contact
the Arts Office Galway County Council
on
091 746875
or e-mail artsoffice@galwaycoco.ie

Burning Bright





The Artist in Residence Initiative comprises a number of freelance artists who facilitate and provide input into projects in Galway nursing homes. These projects are developed in partnership with various arts organisations.

Burning Bright
"Art knows no age.
The body may grow old,
But the imagination
Still burns bright."

Jane Alexander,
Former Chair of the National Endowment for the Arts, USA

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Acknowledgements:

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The staff of the nursing homes, hospital and day care centre which participated:
Árus Mhuire Nursing Home, Tuam
Árus Ronan Nursing Home, Inis Mór, Aran Island
Árus Mhic Dara, Carraroe
Maryfield Nursing Home, Athenry
Portumna Day Care Centre
St. Anne's Nursing Home, Clifden
St. Brendan's CNU, Loughrea
St. Brigid's Hospital, Ballinasloe
St. Rita's, University College Hospital, Galway
Tobair na Smaointe, Inis Oirr
Unit 5 and 6 in Merlin Park Regional Hospital

All the artists:

Ceara Conway
Amantine Dahan
Helen Flannery
Sarah Fuller
Katriona Gillespie
Paula Gleeson
Sharon Lynch
Tricia McCarthy
Sybil Ni Chuimin
Alannah Robbins
Ruby Wallis



Photographer:

Sharon Lynch

Participants on the Programme:

Pat Flaherty, Joe Flaherty, Madeleine Maloney, Josephine McGuinness, Tom Eagleton, Bridie Collins, Mary Kennedy, Patrick Jo Conneely, Sean Ward, Julia Condon, Martin O'Connor, Louis Hanley, Peter, Freddie Skehill, PJ, Christie, Peter Heffernan, Mary McDonagh, Sarah, Peggy, Jimmy, Mary, Ray, Barbara Joyce, Sean Bartley, Peter Carroll, Dolly Kennelly, Joanne Fahy, Annie Paige, Reny Dwane, Margaret Keeneghan, Lily Murray, Johanna Dunlevy, Marjory Ruth, Kitty Fahy, Teresa Hussey, Josephine Hyland, Bridget Joyce, Agnes Kelly, Ena Keher, Maura Daly, Mai Forde, Nan Farrington, Mary Kelly, Maureen Potter, Lily Watkins, Nora Mae Carr, Brid Flaherty, Mary Ni Fhatharta, Mary Conroy, Brid Ni Chonghaile, Mary Folan, Maire Seoige, Séanin Currin, Mary Flaherty, Brid Wallace, Lizzie Flaherty, Eileen McDonagh, Annie Ni Mhaille, Barbara Seoige, residents in Árus Mhuire, Tuam, residents in Aras Ronan Nursing Home, Inis Mór, Aran Islands, residents in St. Rita's Ward, University College Hospital, Galway, Ellen Molloy, Chrissie Delaney, Rose Condrón, Margaret Gibbons, Eileen Delaney, Francis Kelly, John Davon, John Joe Hynes, Pat Geary, Pat Burke, Joe Cuertín, John Glynn, JP, Enda Spellman, Tom Power, Máire Uí Chatháin, Róisín Uí Chualáin, Caitríona Uí Chonghaile, Máire Uí Chonghaile, Brigid Ní Chonghaile, Sarah Teresa Conneely, Mamie Ó Donnacha, Máire Uí Fhlatharta, Bríd Ní Ghríofa, Máire Ní Ghríofa.

Some of these participants are no longer with us and we would like to acknowledge their enormous contribution to Burning Bright.

This project has been co-funded by the Arts Office and under the RAPID Scheme in Galway County Council, Galway Rural Development under the National Development Plan and the Arts Office in Galway City Council.

Introduction

This to be included by Marilyn and signed by County and City Mayor



History of Burning Bright

Burning Bright is a partnership project between Galway Arts Centre, Galway County Council and Age Action West. It was first established in 2005 with a series of art workshops in nursing homes throughout County Galway. The first series of workshops gave rise to a whole new level of interaction with participants. They had an opportunity to be creative, exploring art materials and creating works of art while chatting and interacting with the facilitators.

In 2006 a further series of social engagement art workshops were given in eight nursing homes throughout Galway city and county. Facilitated by professional artists, these workshops introduced participants to a wide selection of art materials and techniques and encouraged them to celebrate and engage in their own creativity. The visual art experience enhanced their opportunity for self-expression.

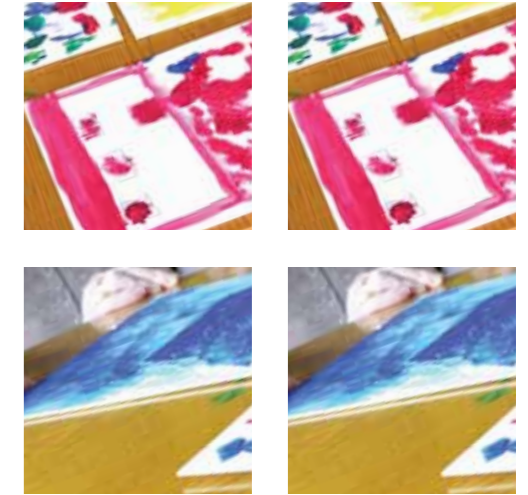
Burning Bright's emphasis is on the creative process, not on any end product, although high quality work emerged and culminated in two exhibitions in Galway Arts Centre during the Bealtaine Celebrations in May 2005 and 2006. The process continues in the individual nursing homes where the artwork is on display for residents, relatives and staff to enjoy.

We feel that Burning Bright met its aim: to demonstrate, promote and develop the positive role that arts can play in care settings for older people.

Margaret Flannery
Project Manager
Galway Arts Centre

Marilyn Gaughan
Arts Officer
Galway County Council

Carmel Sheridan
Regional Development Manager
Age Action West



Maryfield Nursing Home Athenry

Participants: Names withheld

“Working with the residents in the Alzheimer’s unit at Maryfield was both a rewarding and enjoyable experience. Having worked with the residents in the past proved to be helpful in this year’s workshops. Although residents no longer recognised me from last year, it wasn’t long before we built up trust again.

The workshops helped me get to know the residents better, and to form a relationship with each person, always bearing in mind their needs. The workshops also helped to break down barriers and diminish any feelings of anxiety that the residents may have had.

One person in particular was wary of joining the group and it was only after a few weeks of encouragement

that I convinced her to join in. She talked about the use of colour and balance in a picture. By the end of our time in Athenry, she would come to talk at the end of each workshop.

There was a great sense of achievement for both the residents and myself when a finished product emerged at the end of one or a series of workshops.

Connecting with the residents through the use of art was an enjoyable experience, as was working with the artists involved in Burning Bright.

Artist: Katriona Gillespie



Árus Mhuire Nursing Home, Tuam

Participants: Kitty Fahy, Teresa Hussey, Josephine Hyland, Bridget Joyce, Agnes Kelly, Ena Keher, Maura Daly, Mai Forde, Nan Farrington, Mary Kelly, Maureen Potter, Lily Watkins, Nora Mae Carr.

I had the privilege to work as an artist with the day care and nursing home residents of Aras Mhuire, Tuam.

When I started working in February 2006, I met all the usual negative thinking: "I can't paint" "I'm too old" and even "I've forgotten my glasses today, dear." However a few brave people decided to have a go. Their achievements as well as the fact that they were having great fun encouraged the onlookers to experiment. I now have 8-10 people painting each day and they really enjoy the process. With the encouragement and support of Matron and the wonderful staff, we created our own art gallery in Aras Mhuire.

It is marvellous to watch people who never had the opportunity to paint before doing so with enthusiasm, concentration and enjoyment. Some participants are also painting at home now.

Painting has no age barrier. I have a nonagenarian who consistently tells me how delighted she is to learn. Painting was something she always wanted to do but she didn't have time. This only proves you are never be too old to begin!

Artist: Helen Flannery.

Prior to Burning Bright, I had no experience of working with older people. Helen Flannery was the artist

employed by Árus Mhuire and, prior to my arrival; she had established a programme for the benefit of both residents and day care attendees.

My role was to work with individuals, many of whom had disabilities, resulting from degenerative illness. Working on a one to one basis helped to build up their confidence. In order to meet and to work with as many individuals as possible, I attended the nursing home twice weekly.

The benefits of this project were twofold. Hand in glove with the artistic side of the project was the social contact. Some of the conversations around the table were priceless, to say the least! Their sense of humour was something I looked forward to every week. I gained great respect for the strength of character of a generation that lived in far less fortunate times than now. In the process of working with them, I gained from their wealth of experience, and it was a privilege to work with them.

Áras Mhuire is fortunate to have the support of Tuam Youth Federation as well as students from the Mercy Convent, both of whom visit the Nursing Home on a regular basis, mixing with the residents, thereby creating a sense of community involvement.

Thanks to all the participants and staff involved in the project.

Artist: Paula Gleeson



St. Brendan's CNU, Loughrea

Participants: Michael Ward, Cepta Holland, and Julia Cummins

My sessions with the residents of St. Brendan's were held on a one-to-one basis, sometimes at the bedside or in the common room. Although I was working individually with people, this was done in a shared space with other residents close by. I did not want to impose or force people to be active if they did not want to. I found drawing to be a good way of getting others involved in the project.

Many of the people that I made a connection with and who expressed a desire to communicate with me were not keen to participate on a practical level. I found participation was often about communication through simple things such as the willingness to share a recipe or a story.

Several residents have very little sight and are physically disabled. I tried to strike a balance between enabling and encouraging people and just being with them. For weeks I brought books to one resident because that was what he wanted most. After reading a book on Picasso he said that he was ready to draw. He wanted paints and paper. After one week he produced masses of drawings, having never done anything like it before. He has now found another activity to engage and occupy him.

The Burning Bright programme has been a deep

learning experience and an area of work that I will continue with.

Artist: Sarah Fuller

Quotes:

"One thing I'd say now is I can't bring it to mind what it would be to be depressed. There's always a good side."

"If I was young again, nothing would stop me. Let's live life to the full.

Michael Ward

"I came in with the 1916 rising.
I came in with a bomb.
I will probably go out with one too."

"I was always sweeping the floor. They would say, 'Throw your leg over and fly up to the sky!'"

Cepta Holland

"Everywhere it's flowers I'm looking for. Now it's all nettles and briars."

Julia Cummins



St. Brigid's Hospital, Ballinasloe

Participants: Unit 16 & 21: Ellen Molloy, Chrissie Delaney, Rose Condron, Margaret Gibbons, Eileen Delaney, Francis Kelly. Unit 7 & 10: John Davon, John Joe Hynes, Pat Geary, Pat Burke, Joe Cuertin, John Glynn, JP, Enda Spellman, Tom Power.

I have been working in St. Brigid's Hospital on a weekly basis since January 2005. Each session lasts up to an hour and a half and takes place in the day halls of the wards.

We have worked with watercolour and acrylic painting. Participants have also enjoyed drawing as well as pastel work and craftwork such as making stencils for mobiles and Christmas decorations. Working on group projects has worked very well for some participants others benefit more from working on quick exercises and individual drawings and paintings.

The art classes provided residents with an outlet for self-

expression and a way of describing their memories. The sessions were also very sociable events, sparking conversations and debates on topics and encouraging new friendships. As in Merlin Park Hospital, participants spoke of the relaxation and enjoyment derived from the art process as well as the pleasure of participating in an activity that they may not have had the opportunity to experience before.

Thank you very much to the staff and residents of Wards 7, 10, 16 & 21 for their continued participation and support of the art classes.

Artist: Tricia McCarthy



Unit 5 and Unit 6, Merlin Park University Hospital

Participants Unit 5 - Pat Flaherty, Joe Flaherty, Madeleine Maloney, Josephine McGuinness, Tom Eagleton, Bridie Collins, Mary Kennedy, Patrick Jo Conneely, Sean Ward, Julia Condon, Martin O'Connor

Participants Unit 6 - Louis Hanly, Peter, Freddie Skehill, PJ, Christie, Peter Heffernan. Respite Patients: Mary McDonagh, Sarah, Peggy, Jimmy, Mary, Ray.

I have been working in the day halls of Units 5 and 6 in Merlin Park Hospital once a week since March 2005. Each session lasts an hour and a half. The participants are made up of long-term residents of both units as well as respite patients in Unit 6 who are also free to attend the classes.

Since the workshops started, we've used different media to illustrate various subjects. Participants made drawings to illustrate their school memories for a publication called The Cat's Cradle. They made paintings of the cottages they used to live in, the boats they used for fishing and the animals that they farmed. Still lifes and landscapes were also produced. A set of paintings was framed and exhibited in Tulca 2005 and now hangs permanently in the hallways of Unit 5 and 6. And a scarecrow watches over and guards the vegetable patch in the garden that was built last year!

Participants worked on their own individual projects within the group. Some participants chose to work from their room. One lady felt the light was better in her room, and one of the men felt most comfortable working from his bed. I would take time to visit these participants in their rooms and also to chat to other

residents who did not take part in the workshops. I worked with each person individually, based on their interests. For one man who was very interested in birds, we gathered relevant information and images and he enjoyed working with these. For another, books about Michelangelo and his work in the Sistine Chapel were of interest as he had taken a trip to Rome in the 1950's.

Continued long-term engagement in the project produced many benefits. Most notable was the growing sense of achievement as people developed new skills and became part of a cohesive group. Participants developed artistically, with some now painting on a daily basis. They spoke of the relaxation and enjoyment they got from the art process and the pleasure of working with others. I believe that the introduction of the arts into Merlin Park has given participants an outlet for expressing themselves and a creative way of recording their memories.

Thank you to the staff and residents of Units 5 and 6 for their continued participation and support for the art sessions.

Artist: Tricia McCarthy



Aras Ronan Nursing Home, Inis Mór, Aran Islands

I have taken to arriving for the art sessions at Áras Rónan as early as possible, and have found this practice to be invaluable to my work as a facilitator. Firstly, it has given both the residents and myself more time to become acquainted. I also have ample time to review the previous week's work and to hang it on the wall. Having time to set up the workspace helps to make the atmosphere of the session more relaxed. Finally, arriving early gives me an insight into day-to-day living at Áras Rónan.

Among the residents, there are regulars; 'Cáit 22, from Kilrónan' is often the first to arrive at the workspace, and is most eager to paint everything. She dislikes getting her hands dirty, and as a result, has little interest in clay modelling, but produces abstract pieces in one or two colours.

Pateen, who I'm told celebrated his 97th birthday a few weeks ago, should win first place in the Áras Rónán races, so quickly will he disappear when he decides he's done enough! But behind him he leaves detailed paintings of perhaps a house with a garden, or maybe a man smoking a pipe.

There is Kate, who with a poker face will inform me that she can do nothing, and then as soon as my back is turned, will produce seven little men in clay, or elegant line drawings of drakes, sometimes on their own, and sometimes accompanied by men. She is so quick I have yet to observe her at work.

Bríd draws houses and these are usually accompanied by text. She speaks of big houses, loneliness, love and happiness.

Maggie often joins in on a purely observational basis. Last week, with encouragement from one of the island-born aides, she took up some colours and tried them out on a page. Perhaps she is ready to participate in a more hands-on way.

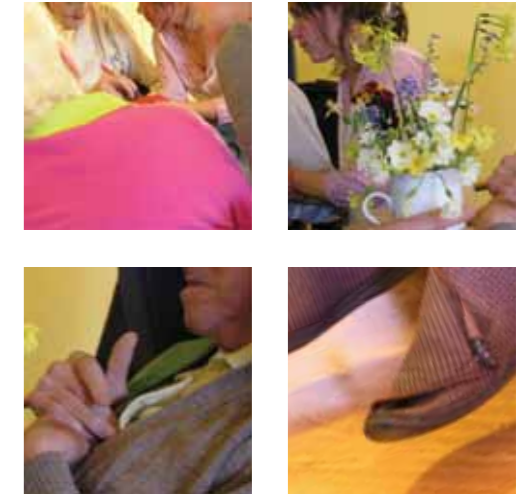
Of course, not everyone is as enthusiastic and encouraging. For the first three sessions, which consisted of drawing and painting, Peter, whose mobility is compromised, would arrive

objecting quite loudly to attending at all, and subsequently, on finding himself installed at the table, would promptly fall asleep. However, when he was given some clay, he moulded it into a smooth baton, with tapered squared ends, thickening in the middle and didn't seem to feel the same need for a snooze. 'You don't know what it is', he told me, and he's right. I don't. The shape brings to mind something I can't quite recall- a pipe? A tool for weaving? A Polynesian artefact? I believe that Peter himself had a clear intention while he was making it, but disappointingly, he disowned it completely the following week. But he still participated in the session.

Úna is the most regular of the day care participants. She is a small woman with big gentle eyes and an even bigger smile. On our first day, she drew a spinning wheel. Later, during the third session, she expressed a wish to 'do more', but added that it seemed pointless if it was to be for a short time only. Nonetheless, she appears at each session, cheerful, willing to experiment, and enthusiastic and is often reluctant to stop working. With the clay, she made a number of small bowls and dishes, which she had not quite finished painting when last weeks' session came to an end. She told me she planned to finish painting her scheme of coloured concentric circles this week.

We missed a week during the Galway races, and the importance of constancy with this group was brought sharply to my attention the following week; they all reverted to speaking English to me, as one does in the Gaeltacht, to stráinséirí. It took most of the session to slip back into the easy banter of the vernacular. Cáit apologised for thinking I was the doctor and trying to hide.

In the short time I've spent with Cáit, Pateen, Kate, Bríd, Maggie, Peter, and Úna, it is clear that the possible directions each of these individuals could take with the project the making of their art are as diverse and varied as their initial, individual approaches. The same is true for the rest of the group.



St. Anne's Nursing Home, Clifden

Participants: Barbara Joyce, Sean Bartley, and Peter Carroll.

I first visited St. Anne's Nursing home in 2005, as part of the Burning Bright project. I found the work very satisfying and fulfilling and so I continued to work there, initially on a voluntary basis. The nursing home then paid me to continue and this year, I was invited to work on Burning Bright again. The health and ability of many of the residents has declined within the year and, sadly, some who had partaken fully last year have since died. For this reason, I found my work this year to be more process than product-based.

Some days I would bring a bucket of seashells in to the centre, and we would look through them together. Many of the residents are from seaside communities and this activity seemed to resonate with them. We would look through the shells, discussing the colours and textures of the shellfish, their names and how to find and eat them. With Peter, I could spend a long time arranging the shells on a small table. We would

take it in turn to place a shell, almost like a game of chess, making temporary pictures on the table. This activity was entirely based on the process and worked very well with Peter. He took great enjoyment from both the interaction and the evolving patterns. We also approached drawing together in a similar way. I would make one mark; then he made his mark, and so on, using chalk pastels. I've found, in this sense, that longer involvements with the same individuals produces great benefits. Some people work best when left alone, while others thrive on the attention of a more interactive approach.

More than anything, my experience in St. Anne's is an inspiration. I continue to marvel at the courage of these individuals to laugh, and try some thing new even when their bodies are failing and restricting them.

Artist: Alannah Robbins



St. Rita's Ward, University College Hospital, Galway

This is my second year to be involved in Burning Bright. As well as participating as an artist this year, I've also had the opportunity to travel to each nursing home, documenting the project. The entire experience has given me an insight into the value of these short-term projects and the potential for the arts in health care settings.

At present, I am mid-way through my residency at St. Rita's Ward, University College Hospital Galway and each week brings a new challenge and new rewards. I have learned the value of a little chat and to take the time to settle into the environment of the hospital and to fit in with the rhythm of the ward.

During a chat with one patient, it was driven home to me how important this settling in is. One particular woman was having difficulty remembering details of a story about her working career and she said, "I'm all confused now... sure it's a different world in here. No wonder I'm getting all mixed up." I think it's important to appreciate the context I find myself working in. Patients and staff can be under huge stress and the art activities that are offered have to be appropriate to the needs of all parties involved.

St. Rita's is for short-stay patients and very often I work with people who will soon to be moving on from the ward. One woman was eager as soon as she saw paints. She dived right in although she hadn't painted since she was a child. "I haven't painted since I was four. We used to get paint sets for Christmas and we'd spend hours in front of the fire, painting. This is bringing

back memories, all happy memories. We used to play outside too, in the garden with stones and flowers. It was bliss." She giggled all the while and at the end said "I think I might even take up painting classes now."

There's something special about having art activities in unusual settings. I love that a person can go into hospital for respite, a time that can, no doubt, be difficult for the person on so many levels. But then, to think that, during this time they can experience something creative, do something they never imagined, like make a painting, and surprise themselves.

Some of the nursing homes involved in Burning Bright have developed ongoing or longer-term art projects for the residents. During my time documenting the project I witnessed some amazing work. Artists and residents developed strong and trusting relationships within the nursing homes and these relationships have in turn enabled residents to develop and grow creatively. I truly believe that time is the greatest resource and that artists need to be supported long-term in order for the full potential of the arts in nursing homes to be realised.

I would like to thank the staff and patients of St. Rita's and also Carmel Sheridan, Margaret Flannery and Marilyn Gaughan for their support during the project.

Artist: Sharon Lynch



Portumna Day Care Centre

Participants: Dolly Kennelly, Joanne Fahy, Annie Paige, Reny Dwane, Margaret Keenaghan, Lily Murray, Johanna Dunlevy, Marjory Ruth,

I think of Burning Bright as a great opportunity for older people to explore both crafts and creativity. In the course of my work, I saw that a real interaction took place on a very human level.

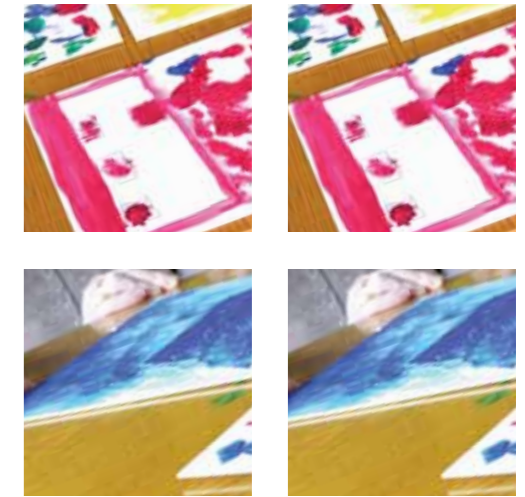
I think we tend to underestimate the capacity of older people in care to respond. The work I did was quite ambitious but very rewarding because group members were able to meet those expectations. In a way these expectations were gradually becoming their own. The more I discussed the project with them, the more enthusiastic they became. Their collective level of expectation was inspiring and this environment led to a shared and democratic approach to the work.

The sense of religious faith seemed to be very strong in my group and I felt it would be interesting to work in parallel with this. I brought in materials such as a statue and scarf and related them to the Madonna. This

approach was interesting in that group members really opened up and talked a lot more, telling stories of the Church. I asked them to draw from memory the Church they used to go to and its surroundings, using watercolours and pencil. In another session, I brought in clay and asked if they would be interested in making a big rosary with their own personal icons. They liked the idea very much, first shaping the beads, and then painting them. We then played with printing Madonna icons on the beads. The finished set of rosary beads was beautiful and of course much reminiscing happened during the making of them!

We also tried Embroidery. The women enjoyed it so much that they asked for a book, which illustrates all the basic stitches. They now feel that this is an activity that they can continue independently at home.

Artist: Amantine Dahan



Inis Oirr

Participants: Máire Uí Chatháin, Róisín Uí Chualáin, Caitríona Uí Chonghaile, Máire Uí Chonghaile, Brigid Ní Chonghaile, Sarah Teresa Conneely, Mamie Ó Donnacha, Máire Uí Fhlatharta, Bríd Ní Ghríofa, Máire Ní Ghríofa, Scoláirí Scoil Chaomháin, Coiste Comhrá na nAosach, Deirdre Ní Chinnéide
Alissa McCarty Zimman - Facilitator.

Comhra na nAosach is a senior citizens group on Inis Oirr. The group was formed in November 2004 with a primary focus on eliminating social isolation. The group meets on a weekly basis at the island arts centre Aras Éanna. From January to April 2006, Comhra na nAosach members participated in a series of creative workshops around the theme of "Memories of Childhood". Over the course of these workshops the members used clay, sculpture, collage and even made their own photographic postcards. A group of local school children participated in the project, listening to the elders' stories and giving their insights. The project culminated in an exhibition entitled Tobar na Smaointe, which was exhibited locally at Aras Éanna during the Bealtaine Festival.

The creative process can be as vital at the end of life as it is in early childhood and can help to restore a sense of beauty, dignity and celebration to the lives of all those involved.

The elderly community of Inis Oirr has lived through extraordinary change; they hold precious memories and stories of a unique tradition, customs and history of the island. The goal of this project was to create a safe, positive and fun environment in which the members could share and creatively express these personal memories and stories in new and diverse ways.

Artists: Sharon Lynch & Ruby Wallis



Aras Mhic Dara, Carraroe

Brid Flaherty, Mary Ni Fhatharta, Mary Conroy, Brid Ni Chonghaile, Mary Folan, Maire Seoige, Séanin Currin, Mary Flaherty, Brid Wallace, Lizzie Flaherty, Eileen McDonagh, Annie Ni Mhaille, Barbara Seoige.

"Má tá muid fós anseo an chead lá eile le cunamh Dé!"

Working with such a wonderful group at Aras Mhic Dara has been a blessing and a major learning curve for me. I was curious to see how people develop confidence through the process of making art and change their "I can't" statement to one of "I want to AND I can!"

Here was a unique group of women and men who came from a very different hard- working generation. Gradually I began to see that they enjoyed the work even when they felt there was no logic to it. Many a time I heard the words, "Nil a fhios againn ceard atá muid ag deanadh ach tá sé go maith!" "We don't know what we're doing but it's fun!"

And so we continued to work in this fashion, where I let go of focusing so much on what their work was about and instead began to see that what was most important was that they felt happy and secure enough to want to create.

Every week it has been a pure joy for me to see Séanin Currin's face light up when he has finished a piece of work, or when Mary Folan asks if she can take away some paper to draw on during the week. Here was a lady who would not pick up a pencil for

fear of making a wrong mark on the page! Beautiful work has been created over time as well as stories reminisced. But the group's efforts to marry me off to a nice young man from Aran haven't manifested just yet!

I was interested to see how the group would respond to working with glass. Noone batted an eyelid at our use of smelly bitumen tar to print images on glass surfaces and they have made mosaics as though making them all their lives. There has been a positive "lets try it, no matter how mad it seems" attitude which I admire and I've seen a distinct growth and development over time.

Each session has ended with the saying; "Feiceadh muid arís thú an chead lá eile le cuna Dé má tá muid fós anseo" ("We'll see you next week with the help of God if we're all still here"). This statement used to shock me, but it's now a constant reminder of the importance of the time we spend together creating, growing and learning.

It has been an enormous benefit to be working with the support of Galway Arts Centre, Galway County Council and Age Action West, where their open approach and understanding of the organic development of such work is vital. I would like to thank all the staff at Aras Mhic Dara for their support and especially Baba Seoige who is an amazing artist herself.

Go raibh míle maith agaibh.

Artist: Ceara Conway