

Even Her Nudes Were Lovely: Toward Connected Self-Reliance At The Irish Museum Of Modern Art

A Research Report On The Museum's Programme For Older Adults

Ted Fleming and Anne Gallagher
Centre for Adult and Community Education
National University of Ireland Maynooth
June 29, 1999

An EU SOCRATES funded project on **Museums, Keyworkers and Lifelong Learning**. In association with the Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin; Victoria and Albert Museum, London; Swedish Museum of Architecture, Stockholm; Forum d'Art Contemporain, Luxembourg; Buro fur Kulturvermittlung, Vienna; Museo Muncipal de Vila Franca de Xiva, Portugal and the School of Educational Studies, University of Surrey, England.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

CHAPTER ONE; RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

Demographics

Well-being of Participants

The Irish Museum of Modern Art: Valuing its Visitors

- The Royal Hospital Kilmainham
- Giggling at the Nudes
- Valued by the Museum

The Programme: Revisiting Childhood and having Fun

- Teachers, School and other Memories
- Art
- Exploring Modern Art
- What a Waste of Chocolate: Making Art, Meeting the Artists and Interrogating the Art

A Sense of Themselves: Identities Developing

- Even her Nudes were Lovely they weren't these Big Floppy Fat Ones
- In those Years you were to be Seen and not Heard

A Sense of Connectedness

- To Engage in this Swapping of Talk and Ideas
- Family
- The Nature and Dynamic of the Group
- Outreach Workers for IMMA

Conclusion

CHAPTER TWO; WHAT DO THE FINDINGS MEAN?

Introduction

Demographics

Well-being of Participants

The Irish Museum of Modern Art: Valuing its Visitors

The Programme: A Learning Environment of Fun and Laughter

Sense of Themselves: Identities Developing

A Sense of Connectedness

- Outreach Workers for IMMA

Conclusion

CHAPTER THREE; PROPOSALS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

CHAPTER FOUR; RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

REFERENCES

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research project was made possible by the generous and enthusiastic participation by the members of the Irish Museum of Modern Art's Programme for Older Adults:

Jean Brady
Joan Brennan
Annie Delgarno
Teresa Egan
John Kenny
John McEvoy
May McGibney
Phyllis McGuirk
Helen Moore
Margaret Nolan
Rose Nugent
Nora Ryan
Carmel Walsh

The Researchers also wish to thank Helen O'Donoghue, Senior Curator and Ann Davoren, Curator, Education and Community Programmes, Irish Museum of Modern Art for their support and collaboration in this work. The work being reviewed is theirs and their openness to discuss, think out loud and engage in debate across the worlds of art and education was of critical importance.

Ted Fleming
Anne Gallagher
NUI Maynooth
June 1999

INTRODUCTION

The Irish Museum of Modern Art is housed in the Royal Hospital, Kilmainham, one of the finest 17th century buildings in Ireland. The Royal Hospital was founded in 1684 by the Viceroy to Charles II as a home for retired soldiers. It continued in that role for almost 250 years. Restoration work by the Irish Government was completed in 1984 and in 1991 the Royal Hospital was re-opened as the Irish Museum of Modern Art.

Before the Museum opened to the public a close working relationship had been established with St. Michael's Parish Active Retirement Association, a group of older residents in the nearby area of Inchicore. This was in keeping with the Museum's policy of involving the local community in the life and work of the Museum. It also recognised the potential and role of older people in contemporary visual culture. The painting group of the Retirement Association exhibited work as part of the Museum's inaugural exhibition *Inheritance and Transformation*.

A partnership was then established with the national agency Age and Opportunity which provided support and advice for the work with older adults. The initial liaison with the painting group has developed into IMMA's Older People's Programme, which forms part of the Museum's Education and Community programme. Their work has led to an exhibition at IMMA by the members of St. Michael's group and the Bluebell painting group in 1999 called *"...and start to wear purple."* From time to time works from this programme have been exhibited and autobiographical works such as *Ribbons of Life* and *A Sense of Place* have developed from this involvement.

The objectives of the programme are:

- To ensure that the Museum is catering for as wide an audience as possible and to encourage involvement in the Museum by identifying and responding to peoples needs.
- To work with a small group of older people in order to inform the wider policy of engagement with the community in general and with older people in particular.
- To break down existing barriers to the involvement of older people in contemporary visual arts, by involving them in as many ways as possible, including the influencing of museum policy.

The programme is structured to involve three elements of art education: making art; meeting artists and discussing the conceptual basis of their work; and looking at art in IMMA's temporary exhibitions and permanent collection.

In the United Nations International Year of Older Persons (1999) the Irish Museum of Modern Art has undertaken this study of its programme work with older people with support from the EU SOCRATES programme.

CHAPTER ONE

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter we present the findings of our research from the individual interviews and focus group. We allow the voices of the participants to speak for themselves. They spoke with great openness and willingly shared their experiences with the researchers. As researchers we are aware that, revealing as they are, these interviews reveal surface narratives. The depth and complexity of their stories is not grasped comprehensively in this set of interviews. The study and analysis of their responses to the programme and their assessment of its impact on their lives reveal a number of recurrent major themes. While discrete themes are identified, they actually form a seamless intermeshing and interlinking of influences and effects, a web of relationships and arenas in which facets of individual development are played out. The findings will be describe under the following headings:

- Demographics;
- Well-being of Participants;
- The Irish Museum of Modern Art: Valuing its Visitors;
- The Programme: Revisiting Childhood and having Fun;
- A Sense of Themselves, Identities Developing;
- A Sense of Connectedness.

We have not used any names in this presentation in order to maintain confidentiality. Even changing names might not allow each speaker to remain anonymous, as it is difficult to sustain anonymity in such a small group where people know each other really well for such a long time.

It is important to state clearly at the beginning that their own account of their experience of the programme is overwhelmingly positive.

Demographics

We live in an ageing world. The number of older people as a percentage of the world's population is increasing dramatically. In 1996 about 7% of the population of the world was over 65. By the year 2150 this is expected to increase to over 30%. Life expectancy in this century has increased from under 50 years to 80 years for women and 75 year for men. In this context the work of the museum is timely.

Eleven women and two men are in the group which forms the IMMA Older Peoples Programme They range in age from 62 to 83. Two are under 66 year of age; five are between 66 and 77; and six are between 78 and 83. All, apart from three, have been in the group since its beginning in 1991. Some continue to be involved with the Inchicore Painting Group. Four

are single and nine are married. Of these nine four are widowed. All the single and widowed are women. All those who are married have children. Seven live alone.

Eleven of the thirteen members left formal school after their primary education. Two continued to secondary school; one left after Intermediate Certificate and the other completed Leaving Certificate. Some did Vocational Training, e.g. in clerical work. Occupations before retirement included policeman, shop assistant, factory worker, catering and clerical work. Four worked in clothes manufacturing.

They have lived most of their lives close to the centre of Dublin, in an area of working-class and lower middle-class homes in Inchicore. This area of local authority housing was built in the 1930s. Many of these houses are now privately owned. Two grew up in Inchicore but now live in neighbouring districts. Three members of the group are originally from outside Dublin but have lived in the city all their working lives.

Initially, their reasons for joining the group were simple: they were asked; they were looking for something to do; they had time in which to do it. Some mentioned the desire to improve conditions for older people or the need to make new friends after a long period of isolation, and a wish to become involved in a new prestigious national institution opening up on their doorstep. Some were persuaded by friends or neighbours to *see what it was like and what was going on*. For one woman, whose husband died;

It made another new life for me all the things we were doing here, and I slowly got back into my normal life...and it was a challenge for me and it was something that really brought me on...everything was new to me....I look back on that as nearly the beginning of a new life to me.

Another explained;

I was staying at home. It was like a prison, I didn't want to go out and I found all the people I made friends with here...we began to look forward to it coming here every week and different things being done with us....and that's how it started with me but it made me a different person.

One person spoke of rebuilding her life, of being at a cross-roads;

That was a difficult part of my life because...I lost friends you know I had to rebuild my life when [husband] died, you know I was at a cross-roads I had to really start all over again.

Some spent a considerable number of years looking after aged parents and other members of their families who were ill. A number mentioned how a death was the jolt they needed to go and do something;

Well I never started singing in front of people 'til 1967, the year my father died. My parents never knew I sang. I never let on to anybody, I'd sing on my own, the house to myself I'd sing at the top of my voice...but as I say after my Da died I just couldn't stand still. That in a way I always said my father must have been working for me after

he went but I still didn't have that confidence even getting up to sing...it was when I came here that I really started to get confidence.

Well-being of Participants

Well-being emerges as a key theme in the interviews. We mean by well-being the physical and mental health of the people on the programme. They speak of the programme keeping them healthy and active and this has a major impact on their lives as older people. They expect to live longer and healthier lives as a result. Both mind and body are stimulated with ideas and a range of new and creative activities. They contrast this with the kind of lives which some of them have experienced when older people stay at home. Most have seen at first hand how many older people are isolated, watch television, become melancholy and are frequently unwilling to leave their homes. Using the mind and keeping it active has a particular significance for them because of their very real fear of developing Alzheimer's.

Though well-being may not be an intended outcome it is clear that a significant consequence of the programme is the continued active and healthy lives of the older people. One woman put it this way;

It has added life to my years....I was getting older and I suppose feeling, you know, older and useless...and I wanted still to do things. I had the space and the scope I wanted to do things and coming to this place that solved all my problems....I've a few more years left and I'll continue on...I'm glad when I look at the other members now....I know a lot of them would be dead and gone by now if they hadn't come in and got involved in the events and activities of the association. And we play bowling as well...and we get out. We get away from the television, we get out, and this is where I'm really happy.

Another found it;

Useful in that they're keeping mentally and physically, they're keeping alive and ticking and not getting dormant and stiff and sore and...by getting their minds working first and then their hands and maybe their feet. That this is the point, to keep alive and keep interested in what's going on all around you.

It was clear that the older people believed that to stay alive took effort. One needed to keep alive in mind and body. It was not enough to do exercise, in fact the mind was of concern to them. They seemed to think that inactivity would lead to a state a number of them called melancholy;

Well, I've learned to use my brain, and one thing I'm not sitting back and letting me head go numb 'cos I find if you sit back and do nothing and look at the telly you go brain dead. You would, you'd go melancholy so it makes you, it kinda stimulates the brain type of thing.

Another put it this way;

You use your mind more I think, you know. And I suppose I don't know whether it would or not it stops you from getting Alzheimer's. I'm hoping it does. Well like, it makes you think...And I could stay at home looking at the fire and looking at television and making mesel comfortable. Well I do often come out on days when you'd barely be able to breathe when there's rain or a breeze and if I hadn't something to do I wouldn't come out on those days so on that alone it's beneficial and then the enjoyment at the end of the day... Yes, but you see, if you're not enjoying something it won't do anything for your mind.

This woman went on to explain that there is something about art and especially the artists she met that supports the sense of well-being;

Well, I learned first of all that...different types of art isn't everybody's idea of art and second of all there's a great sense of well-being with artists. They never seem to lose their cool. They are so gentle and when you see that you do say really I'd love to be a real artist, to be like them.

The changes brought about in the group and through the art have a profound effect on minds and bodies;

I was a person that was very shy and when I'd come into a place I'd make for a corner and that was it. And if I was asked anything I used to get so embarrassed and so uptight that I couldn't talk if I could get two words out and gradually since about 1966 after my father died...just something snapped kind of inside...and I started coming out of myself just gradually...I started getting more confidence when I started coming here.

Feelings of isolation, so common among older people, are reduced through the activities of the group;

and when you go home especially when you're living alone you don't feel so lonely because you know you've someone out there even though you're not talking to them they're there if you want them and you feel like one happy family...

Companionship and care characterise the happy family;

But you see, when you have twelve people together and you're coming down for so many years you get to know them. You get to know their problems and you get to take over their problems as yours and you get talking to them. I can knock on one of their doors now and we can stand and have a chat and just chat say about the museum or chat about something that you've seen and it's a great feeling and you know if you weren't feeling well one of them would knock and say "are you all right?" I knew that they were genuinely worried about me...they're not just the drift in friends and drift out...

In the interviews, they do not often or easily talk about the problems of older people but from time to time they relate how easy it might be to not do anything and succumb to the melancholy.

Melancholy is that sadness that comes from having lost so many friends and partners, neighbours and colleagues. Each one has memories, one person explains. Some are good and others bad; some are sad, especially the memories of those who have died. Being part of the programme helps get away from the sorrows of life and let in some light. If you spend too much time on sad memories;

You wouldn't be able to cope with life. Like sorrow in your heart it would cause depression. So you must keep the bright side of life out all the time. If you don't well you could be very sick 'cos all these things, we all go through sorrow and death and think well you just can't keep that in your mind all the time 'cos you'd cry every day. It would be a very unhappy day, year, if you were to cry every day. You have to keep the bright side in everything.

I had a cousin that was in my life. All my life she was the same age. We were on our holidays last September and one day she fell and the following week she was dead and if I had to keep that in front of me every day...you have to have sorrow for a certain length of time...and like coming here you're coming to something that's bright and well I'm going to have a bit of a laugh today and I'm going to have a chat, something different...you see it doesn't get monotonous....We're all growing old together and we can see it.As I say, the joy we get out of it is very hard to describe...[without it] you'd just give it up, you know, cave in.

The Irish Museum of Modern Art: Valuing its Visitors

Most people, having lived all their lives in the area, were aware of The Royal Hospital Kilmainham as part of their local place. However, it was always a "no-go area". The refurbishment of the building as a museum and the location of the programme there now serve as a metaphor for much of the impact of the programme. As children and younger adults, most of them walked and played in the "shadow" of the Royal Hospital. Now they express a pride in the museum which is close to a sense of ownership. They feel themselves to be a valued part of IMMA and this has important consequences for them. To some extent they are reclaiming a national and city heritage and a locally significant institution which was out of bounds; they are also reclaiming and setting free that within themselves which was out of bounds, unaccessed and undiscovered.

The Royal Hospital Kilmainham

Many speak of the Royal Hospital as being mysterious and inaccessible in their youth, it was *a no go area...remote*. One person said;

To me it was just an avenue with just a building, a dark building....It was always a mystery.

And another;

When I look at these grounds, when I was a child it was owned by the British Government and it was a no-no. You could never get in on those gates or Kilmainham Gaol or places like that or the Memorial Park and when you feel now that you can walk in those grounds it feels great because it feels you've got your heritage back.

The Royal Hospital is now a place to bring the family on Sundays, to walk along the avenue, enjoy the gardens, or to look at the artwork. The famous avenue is invoked in a metaphorical sense;

It's opened up a new avenue altogether.

Many mention how they *love going there on visits* and spend *hours just going round looking* and enjoy the special atmosphere they feel. *Everything is so relaxed* we were frequently told. In its peace and relaxation they find another home; this is ironic in the context of its history as a home for retired soldiers.

The participants are proud of the Museum;

We're so proud of here that we want to show it off.

They asserted that they have a right to the same learning, facilities and resources as anyone else;

We don't have any money, you know, for paying for the workshops or anything like that, you know, we all have pensions and that makes all the difference...I had been always involved in working as a trade unionist...and I carried that on when I retired. I wanted better conditions for the elderly and I still carry that on.

Another told us;

...to help other people that is very important in there's so many people who haven't the scope to do things for themselves and nobody to advise them.... There are a lot of people in need every day.

Giggling at the Nudes

Some of the participants grew up with the view that museums and galleries were not for them. Though their visits to other museums were rare, museums and art galleries were sometimes associated with nudity. As children or teenagers, a number mentioned visiting galleries and giggling at the nudes. Perhaps they went there for that purpose. Others however were not allowed to visit them because of the nudes on display;

I wouldn't have visited them very much, they were places that were down town but they were places on the fringe of life...art galleries wouldn't have had a great attraction. think they were for the upper class...I always thought that it was for those of higher learning.

[When] you were about ten or twelve and you'd have the money to buy an ice-cream and we'd go into the galleries and of course we'd sneak past the naked thing, you know the way we were brought up with the church, you know you weren't even to look at a nude figure or anything like that...

I used to go into them big picture museums, you know when you'd nowhere to go, when you were fourteen and fifteen...and you'd see the huge big pictures that used to take up the whole wall. They're still there in town and when we'd see the ones with nudity you'd giggle and you'd run to the next picture you know... and you went to them places because you'd no money and it was free in and if you got the bus in well you spent the bus fare coming home on sweets.

This programme for older people has been crucial in facilitating access to the museum and providing an experience that allows people revisit places that were taboo, forbidden or considered dangerous in a previous more conservative age.

Valued by the Museum

When we come to look at how the Museum relates to the people on the programme one aspect of the relationship comes to the fore. The Museum, through its staff, values the participants and this is not only an abiding memory of the years with the museum but in many ways the necessary foundation for so much of the development and learning. All spoke in glowing terms about this;

Well first of all, I have to admit that the social side is terribly important, the atmosphere, the welcoming atmosphere, the attitude of the staff, crucial, and the fun that we have. I mean a lot of us are senior people and our lives are virtually, well most of our, they're, they're, a lot of our lives are behind us and we're coming down here and young people like the staff here welcoming us and making us feel that we're important or you know that we have a value in this museum and we feel a part of this museum. I tell you what it does, it gives you a boost a personal boost.

Another comment spoke of the role of the staff;

I think mainly it was the people that we were working with...they kind of drew whatever was in you out and they never made you feel that well you were useless or anything like that, and I'm afraid I was one of these people that was always I was always very self-conscious had this big inferior complex that I could do nothing and kind of all of a sudden I realised the amount of things I could do. I often sit down and say God did I really do that, you know, I'm kind of amazed at the amount of things I've done but mostly what I've got here is I've got a lot more confidence.

The Programme: Revisiting Childhood and having Fun

The participants on the programme have had an opportunity to revisit and relive their childhood by means of reminiscence and the actual activities and structure of the programme. Working with a range of materials, dealing with issues such as confronting nudity, establishing new types of relations with 'teachers' and artists, having the opportunity to express themselves verbally and artistically; they are doing things not allowed in their youth or at school. They have found a freedom to explore and experience the joy and excitement of the unknown and unpredictable in lives that are now more constrained by age and infirmity but

which paradoxically are expanding and breaking free of (long-internalised) restrictions carried around for most of their lives. They delight in using this freedom and speak both of fulfilling dreams and of doing things previously undreamed of. They are growing while playing, having fun, messing around with clay and giggling at some of the art work.

Teachers, School and other Memories

Most left school early and did not complete secondary education. Their experience at IMMA has revived memories of schooldays and led to reflection on the differences in schools today. Their experience of school is not recalled in a positive way. It is always spoken about as closing down options;

It is all new to me because I went to school in 1941...you were never ever brought to museums you were never brought to anything...the only thing I ever did in school was cooking...sewing and once a month brought walking to confession.

Leaving school early imposed a ceiling on their education, career and life prospects.

At the summer holidays I was fourteen years of age and I left school and I told my friends I would see them when we were going into secondary and I never went back. My uncle had a job for me and I had to go into this...factory and work and I never went back to school, like I kind of done my Primary and that was it. But last year I went over to [names school] and I done English and Maths...

The teachers at IMMA are described as *hand-picked, smiling*; they listen to your opinion and don't put you down, they have *a lovely way with people. They're encouraging you*. This is contrasted to the fear and punishment remembered from their own schooldays.

In those years we had nuns and we had teachers but to you when you were in school they were like God Almighty and you were the lower level and you were afraid, you were always afraid to speak out you know, but when I came down here that was the wonderful thing about it...

The new relationship with staff is characterised by equality;

I feel on the same level now as them where I always felt that bit lower than the teachers when I was at school. But of course, I left when I was fourteen so you're just kind of coming out of childhood then, you're not kind of going into adulthood....But the thing was like, we were bringing home money, and no matter how little it was you were helping in the household and it was of use but you always felt as the underdog once you couldn't go on to school.

I tell you what happened to me as a child. I was drawing one day and you know in those days when you made your outline you had to use a pen and ink and I put a blot on the copy and the teacher gave me a crack across the knuckles and that finished me, kind of, I got scared of doing it in case I would do something wrong. ...that's the lovely thing about the people here, they talk to you, they don't talk down to you. They don't make you feel like inferior and that's what I love about this place.

All are very aware of missed opportunities and that what they are experiencing and learning in the IMMA programme is making up for lost time in all kinds of ways. They contrast their schooling with that available to children now; *we never got a chance when we were younger you know*. Being at IMMA was

...like as if we were back in childhood again rolling this mala thing [plasticine]... We didn't have anything like that when we were going to school...I think children now are getting a chance to express themselves and it's amazing what comes into a child's mind no matter how outlandish it is, it's their expression, I think it's terrific...we never had a chance...if only they [people of her generation] had got the chance to continue their education, but a lot of them, the need for them to go to work.

The participants speak of the impact of the varied activities and elements of the programme: the programme structure of workshops, looking at artworks, meeting and working with artists has provided a variety of arenas or fora in which to explore, discover and learn. The workshops in particular seem to have provided a means of accessing the memories and fun of childhood, for example *messing with the clay*. Memories of long lives are shared and used as the basis for individual artwork.

It brought back memories that's why I think the workshop enables your mind to start. You know you go back and you start thinking of all the different areas where you've blocked away for years and years.

Well you can call Friday morning playing because to me it's not work, it's relaxation, it's fun, it's fun. I'd say I've just started to grow up now. I didn't do the growing up years ago I was kiddish, I'm only starting to grow up since I hit fifty, since I started doing things for me you see.

Art

Art is seen as broad and multi-dimensional; it involves and stimulates thought and planning, memory, personal expression, taking time to look in new ways, taking different perspectives on ideas and life. The participants speak of being more aware of and looking in new ways at the world around them. The natural world and streetscapes give them great pleasure. They really look at things, *it's like a window being opened*. One said of art;

Well through that really you kinda look at the world different, you don't go around with your head on the ground, you're looking at the shape of roofs and trees and the skyline and you see things.

A link is made between art, the ability to see things in different ways and an awareness of poverty and homelessness in these quotations from the same person;

Yes, yeh, and you see the world different if you get interested in art. You see the world different you look at things...I go down to Galway a good lot and I'd never get tired looking out the window at the different shades in the grass and the bogs and the trees and the sky and everything you know.

I had to go on the bus down to Kingsbridge and cut through the railway station...Last year when I was there there was a small little bush and someone was sleeping under it and I see now they have a bit of plastic and that over it you know and it sort of activates your mind all those things really you know...I'd love to do something but what can you do. You don't know whether they're sleeping under all these blankets or what and they were soaking...and I suppose if you were good enough you could paint what you feel about that situation.

They not only see art as a means of personal expression and communication which allows for differences of interpretation and expression, but have felt the satisfaction of putting themselves into their own art; *in art it's really yourself that's coming through.*

There is some people and they're very shy and they don't talk but yet like you can see in their work what they do, that they're expressing themselves a lot, like you know, in their work you know.

It brings it alive...real memories of my own life you know that I'm looking at, completely different to just looking at an ordinary painting because it's part of me...and have thought about the different stages of my life so there's been a lot of thought going through the whole work.

Making artwork is an opportunity to *have our scope and space to develop our own creativity.* Many speak of their enjoyment of *messing with the clay.* The art workshops were important because

[without] the workshops I don't think I would have been interested and I would have looked at it [art] entirely different. were, yes, definitely surprised and we didn't know whether we'd be...I felt oh Lord! I'll never be able for any of this working with material and collages and textures and clay, but we did, we got it now.

They have the freedom to explore the unknown and are excited by the unpredictable; they wonder what the next session will present them with and require of them.

We actually look forward to Friday morning because you don't know what, you're coming down and every week it's something different, you don't know what you're going to be working with and it's kind of exciting.

The programme is a space in which dreams can be fulfilled; art is providing a way both to dream and to act on those dreams.

You could come here sit down and dream if you wanted to. At our own pace and we have our pace and our space and if we did dream of things in our younger days, well now, we can put them into practice and fulfil them.

Exploring Modern Art

Modern art is seen by some of the participants as having more life and thought in it than traditional art. Opinions on it range from *weird and way out, crazy and expensive;* to *beautiful; interesting* and *something you have to take time to look at* and think about. It requires an effort, unlike the "traditional art" which you just admire. It is a vehicle for dreams, fantasies,

memories and as a way of working out personal issues. It *may not be what we like but we're learning all the time*. There is an ambivalence toward modern art;

There were times when we looked at the modern art and we thought it was a load of (pause) rubbish but we didn't express it. But you see there's different things over the years that were lovely, very interesting.

You really want to look at it and stand back and take time like thinking about it whereas with the other art you went around and you looked and you saw, it was there you just had to admire it I mean I marvel at these artists [the "traditional" artists].

Many enjoy using colour and enjoy art that is colourful, but some modern art is seen as very dark and depressing; *they're very black like you know*. Describing an exhibition one person said;

It's a huge big black, a whole wall with black and one white dot in the centre. Now that I could be looking at from here to doomsday and I still couldn't make head nor tail of it, but I can make head nor tail of a massive load of colours.

..the dark ones always gave me the impression that the painter was very depressed and...that they didn't see the sun. They always gave me the impression that they painted underground in the dungeons.

The participants speak of older people and attitudes to modern art;

...when you're older, you're on your own because nobody likes modern art.

When one was asked about younger people and their attitude to art she said;

I think they're more open, they accept modern art, where older people don't. A lot of older people think it's just kind of all scribbles and splashes...

What a Waste of Chocolate: Making Art, Meeting the Artists and Interrogating the Art

On this programme the participants made art, met artists and were part of the exhibitions held in the museum since 1991. This is an extensive experience over a very long period.

In the beginning we didn't know what modern art meant but it, these artists a lot of them work with texture, it's material, it's clay, sticks, doing collages, that was part of it....They'd bring us over to the Museum and say pick out something there. Like for example we went to see Godspipes that's really about parts of the human body so we'd pick out one thing. And then we done dolls and we done icons. The icons were very good now....And another very interesting thing was memories of the sixties. That was very good. I made a list of forty-one in all, forty-one memories from the sixties and what happened and the one I picked was the first heart transplant in South Africa....Everybody picked something different.

An important part of the experience over the years has been the frequent meetings with artists who are encountered through their work on display, as tutors in the workshops and as exhibitors talking about their work.

The artists are very good, they explain it to us so if you want to know anything all you have to do is ask. So like that apprehension, that fear went that "Oh I'm going to make a complete ass of myself here," so now like we're quite relaxed about it.

They have learned much from looking at art and listening to the artists .

You learn that art is not something just to please the eye at a first seeing...there's all sorts of levels and areas like social comment and philosophical ideas and concepts that artists have in mind. You learn this from listening to them speaking as well as, even more than looking at their pictures, the two are connected of course but you learn that art is much wider.

Their opinions on some world renowned-artists are not flattering. Some artists have evoked sympathy for being *off his rocker* or *depressed*, some are thought to be crazy in a copped-on sort of way (because they could make money!) others are out to shock their audience. The actual meetings with artists however have brought a realisation that these are people with memories and concerns much like everyone else. Some have been surprised to find that the "bohemian" strangely-dressed creatures they expected are much more "ordinary" a *nice man dressed like everybody else*, although still "real artists" with technique and expertise which they admire. They now *understand more about what makes them tick* and can get inside their work. The artists they have met are part of the general atmosphere in IMMA of welcome, kindness and well-being.

The artists are seen as the authority on the meaning of their work.

I just accept what they say...Well my own impression, that wouldn't enter into it once they tell you what it meant.

I would regard the artist as the first authority because he's the one who did the work, because he put down something of himself...

Many preconceived ideas about artists were rethought. In discussions with the artists ideas were explored and impressions formed about their art and its meaning;

Because you were learning and the lectures I found very interesting especially the artists discussing their own work because we'd go round and like you'd look at something all right but you wouldn't have an understanding of where it was coming from but like when the artists would be discussing their work like it was a new picture and I'd go around looking I'd kind of have a better understanding...of their memories...and of their ideas...

Most members of the group find the talks and lectures difficult to understand. They feel that the art needs interpretation and that *sometimes there is stuff that does go over your head*.

Another commented;

...to me you would almost need an interpreter like to explain some of it to us.

I find that the explanations are very technical or philosophical...I'm not saying that they should express it in my terms but I would like them expressed in terms that I

could understand...I feel that...some explanation on the part of an artist or an authority is necessary in this in new things presented.

Even when they did not understand, they formed a definite opinion of the artists;

My image of artists was very vague I must say. They were people who were very remote and on a different level to my thinking...The concepts and the ideas that they would be expressing would be things that I could never, that I would never even have thought of, like em...even in so far as I understand them, and I don't understand half of what they're saying a lot of the time I have to say, but for instance Andy Warhol, I'm still not clear what he was...but it's a puzzle to me to look at that, but Andy Warhol to me now is way out. I don't really follow him very much at all. And that forms a lot of my thinking in relation to modern artists, they're a bit out there now as far as I'm concerned. But at the same time, having said that, while they're out there they're real, in another part of reality, and I wouldn't say, like I know somebody now who...says "ah that stuff down there that's not art", now that'd be wrong to say that because art is wider than our own ideas, it's like saying I don't understand therefore it can't be right. I'd never say that. It's much bigger than I am...

When asked whether this was a problem one person responded;

I feel a bit lost, but I don't feel rejected, but I feel a bit outside of, there's something in there that I'm not, that's outside of me and that I'm in an area and they're in an area and there's a bit of a passage or a gap between the two things because I don't really, when I don't understand something I feel apart from it d'you know but not in a bad sense.

The members of the group did have a clear understanding of art and particularly how it related to life, as this response indicates;

That's a great question, what is an artist? We're producing art as well. Well, I think that being an artist is involved with the person that you are, with your history, with your memories, with what life has been to you or how you have seen life maybe, with your own, your own philosophy, whether you're a religious person or a non-religious person, whether you believe in God or you don't, all these deep things, what the hereafter, whether there's a hereafter or not, mankind themselves where they fit into the whole scheme of things. I mean that's a terribly wide canvas but I think art, art has, in its broadest sense, can have to do with bits ,or any, or all of that, you know it's so broad and art in the widest sense, now I mean in music, painting and sculpting, whatever, whatever element of art we're involved in you know it's to do with life and what life is for the one who is purporting to be an artist.

In spite of this most did not see themselves as artists;

No I wouldn't say I'm an artist and the reason I wouldn't say I'm an artist is because I have not a technique. My technique would be extremely limited. I see an artist...as

having studied and...maybe not perfected but have developed good techniques in whatever area they're interested in, you know, I'm not, in that I would have a little technique.

There was considerable agreement that artists are "mad." This response was typical of the way they spoke about artists;

I think he was a bit mad, but he got away with it...hard neck he had. I think he'd a hard neck. I'd say it's his idea of art but it wouldn't be my idea of art.

"Crazy" and "mad" were frequently used terms when speaking of artists;

There were some things in the gallery that were absolutely beautiful and there were some things that were absolutely crazy. Some of them were in hysterics thought we'd be arrested. There was another one with a fella with his head in a bucket, in a bucket of you know what, and some thought that he was doing something else. That didn't do anything for me at all...I think he [Andy Warhol] was crazy but crazy that suited himself.

One person said it this way;

To me I think art should give you pleasure, you know what I mean, and I don't know whether I was sorry for him or thought he was nuts or something, it didn't bring the art to me. It brought to me the kind of thing that he thought was art do you understand? I didn't get any message out of it because I thought he hadn't all his marbles.

And another;

No not with those things. Now there was some there was a person did sculpture in chocolate. Now while it was beautiful it was really beautiful. I kept thinking what a waste of chocolate.

Revisiting museums and art galleries, now as adults, was different;

Oh I love going to the art gallery. Oh I'd spend hours just going round looking and real looking now. Before as I said I'd look at something, and I'd just rush by, but now I really...you take it all in and that's what painting has made me aware of, the shapes...colour, detail...

But others approached galleries and art in different ways;

I haven't found a great inclination to go to other museums or art institutions...but at the same time I feel a bit opened up to what art is...I feel as a result of coming here art is much wider than I would have seen it. I don't understand most of it, but you learn that art is not something just to please the eye at a first seeing...there's all sorts of levels and areas like social comment and philosophical ideas and concepts that artists have in mind. You learn this from listening to them speaking, as well as, even more than looking at their pictures, the two are connected of course but you learn that art is much wider...It's a kind of a challenge and a little adventure and I feel very much, very much on the fringe of it, but still it's great to contemplate.

A Sense of Themselves: Identities Developing

The participants sense of themselves is changing. They now see themselves as people able to take on a challenge. Horizons and the realm of the possible are expanding for those whose younger lives were circumscribed by gender, economic circumstances, the society of the time and family responsibilities. In many ways they now see themselves as more powerful, more empowered. They are also negotiating and tackling some of the developmental tasks of their age group and have an important opportunity to revisit stages and tasks of their younger lives. They are developing their identities in a supportive and nurturing environment. One of the best examples of how this is taking place is provided by their comments on how their sexuality and views of the human body have changed. By looking at and thinking about the human body in art and discussing and sharing their reactions, many have come to be more at ease and open with nudity and sexuality.

Some members of the group speak of growing up and living much of their lives in difficult economic circumstances; they remember a time of hard work and the need for teenagers to take a job in order to help their families. A life of economic hardship circumscribed by family responsibilities, having to leave school early and work left many preoccupied with other matters rather than their own developmental needs. Their engagement with the museum was an opportunity to redress matters, to have a childhood, to have an adolescence and reclaim lost ground.

We had no carpets on the floors, floorboards, and I'd have the whole house scrubbed down when she'd [her mother] come home, all splinters in your hand and all that you got off the floorboards...it was [hard work], but you know you sang doing things years ago.

The women in particular speak of the past years as filled with family responsibilities; looking after brothers and sisters (sometimes so that parents could work); caring for family members who were ill, rearing their own children (sometimes alone after the death of a husband). Now they are taking time for themselves after a life of caring for others. One speaks of listening to and understanding the artist who painted a red girl with a paper bag over her head; her depiction of the years she was *just a housewife stopped at home* until she took up art; another figure of a girl dancing was a symbol of her release.

I'd say I've just started to grow up now. I didn't do the growing up years ago I was kiddish that I'm only starting to grow up since I hit fifty since I started doing things for me, you see. I was all my life, well I mean, helping my brothers and helping Mam and Dad and then looking after the kids. I never got the chance as I say till me children were reared to do things for me...It's only in the last couple of years that I'm doing something for me, so that's how I started to do something for me. I joined the Royal Hospital I joined the art, I joined the bowls, this is me now.

The group members speak with pride and delight of the changes they have experienced as a result of their involvement with IMMA. They see themselves as different people now; they are amazed at the new talents they have discovered and are confident in their ability to meet new challenges. They are doing things they never thought possible; they see themselves as achievers.

You end up being amazed at yourself. Like they're great at drawing you out...whatever way

they come to you you accept the challenge.

I find when I'm at home sometimes we're after doing things here and I say well I'm going to try that again...I felt really the bees' knees "look what I learned down in the Royal Hospital," and it was something now that I'd never have thought of doing on my own.

Never thinking that I'd ever achieve, especially where art is concerned you know...it gave me a marvellous thrill...I felt that I had achieved something.

Even her Nudes were Lovely, They weren't these Big Floppy Fat Ones

One of the most talked about-and important issues discussed in the interviews was concerned with the changes that took place in relation to the human body and sexuality. When the participants first came to IMMA they were *like giggly children*. Since then they have seen many depictions of the human body; they are no longer shocked and are less embarrassed; they *don't see anything wrong in them anymore*. The merits of different nudes can be discussed. The body and its sexuality are seen as natural *it's natural it's just like part of life* and a part of modern art. This new openness involves greater freedom.

even her [Mainie Jellett] nude figures were lovely, they weren't these big floppy fat ones...

Oh I don't mind that at all yeah, well I mean you know everything was a sin then. My God you couldn't look crooked but you were committing a sin it was all so stupid ...

...it [human body] doesn't embarrass me, I've seen so much of it in the Royal Hospital, you know, in all sorts of, in wooden and tin and everything. I've seen the human body so it doesn't bother me now you know, you get more open-minded...you get more open-minded to a lot of the things you see, you have to.

One participant feels that the change has come about because of the openness and straight talking she has encountered in the museum.

Well probably, from all the different lectures and people talking so straight about things you know, where years ago you'd never hear anybody talking about things like that, you know it was all hushed under the carpet as they say or brushed under the carpet and they never spoke about things.

If we stay for little longer than usual with one person's response we can see the interconnected web of changes that go to the centre of her self and span the generations too;

...there was em another rude thing that was here one time there was a whole floor and it was all men's penises and they were all in little plastic things and I had no glasses on...and we just went into the room...and the floor was covered in these like little glass tiles and I said "Ah lovely roses"...I thought they were all pink flowers...and then I said "am I missing something" and I got my glasses, and I said "Oh good God!" and poor [name] walked in and ran out as quick you know. Now the likes of that! What on God's earth..."did they go around taking photographs of them?"

I'd love to have him back now you know. I would. For to see the grandchildren and to bring him up here and to, to do things together it'd be brilliant, yeah.

I think I was an old woman when I was forty and it's only now...I'm doing the things I shoulda did...I don't get shocked or anything like that I don't say "Oh quick, somebody's looking at you" you know. Where years ago you did things like that. You'd have one [grandchild] in the bath, you'd take them out you'd dry them in the towel and you'd put the other one in the bath now I put [her grandchildren] into the bath and it wouldn't bother me and if they were to ask questions well and good I'd answer them ...

Overcoming the closed *sweep it under the carpet* of previous generations; the censorship; being more aware of violence in society and discussing it; were all new freedoms won and enjoyed.

In those Years You were to be Seen and not Heard

Another area in which important personal change is taking place is the ability to speak out. Many participants, both men and women, are finding their voice for the first time and are able to express opinions and talk of their experiences in an atmosphere free from the threat of humiliation and punishment.

It was really great because you had the freedom of expression, you could express yourself without feeling embarrassed. You know I'd go other places...and you were afraid you were always afraid to speak out you know but when I came down here that was the wonderful thing about it like speaking to the girls.

Situations and people who were long-feared have been confronted.

I always had a fear of going back into that [school] building because I left it at a very young age...but through coming here I was able to walk into that building and stand beside the teachers and speak to them like as I'm speaking to you.

...even though I could read, but when somebody'd say to me "read that paragraph" I'd all of a sudden, I'd nearly see it blank. I'd get through it, but it was just the fear inside

*of me. I'd take me time like you know, and like that's all gone now you know...
If I'm asked a question I can speak now when I'm spoken to. I couldn't before, as a
child I couldn't because we were told you keep down like you know...so you were
sent out...*

*Today's way of teaching the children is much better. They're able to express
themselves and they haven't got this empty feeling inside, it's a horrible feeling.*

Some have spoken at public gatherings about their work and memories.

*I spoke at a lecture one day. Now, I never stood up in me life at anything, I needn't
tell you, and we were in the lecture room...and I just felt real relaxed...I did stand up
but it was truth and it's very easy to talk about the truth isn't it,...and you know about
it.*

Another has found a voice with which to challenge injustice;

*I'm a person that doesn't like injustice...I used to sit there, and I'd be kind of all inside
I'd be thinking if I could only get up and say something about it. But now I can...if I
feel there's something not right I'll say "well I don't think that's right," you know
especially if it is an injustice, I'm able to stand up now and say it. Years ago I wouldn't
have had the guts.*

A Sense of Connectedness

A sense of connectedness is another key theme and a far-reaching element of the impact of the programme. Connection is such a strong contrast to the isolation of many older people, especially those living alone. The people we met know and feel that. Inclusion is part of this also and there is perhaps a hint of their own sense of potential and past exclusion in their appreciation of the fact that they are valued and taken seriously; seriously enough even to be researched!

They are also in touch with the modern world, its art, its young artists and teachers, in ways unavailable to many of their peers, some of whom they characterise as "old-fashioned." The theme of connection is also evident in the way participation in the programme contributes to their ability to retain and adapt their role within their close and extended family.

Communication is embedded in this programme: the new forms and media of communication they are learning; the process of working through the themes chosen for the artwork; the meetings with artists and others visiting the museum. They speak too of becoming better people, understanding more about others and learning from talking with and listening to each other and visitors.

To Engage in this Swapping of Talk and Ideas

the connectedness they speak of is across the generations and between peer groups. Participants feel that they are in touch with the world and with the modern age in general *coming down here was a completely new era for us.* The old and the new have come together, both in the location of a museum of modern art in an eighteenth-century building and in the encounters that are fostered there; *you have the old and the new the modern and the future.*

The participants feel included; in their relations with the museum and its staff, with the artists and visitors, with the young people they meet there. This sense of inclusion is expressed in their pleasure at being taken seriously.

They always seem to take a great interest in us as older people and we always seem to mingle well. Wonderful! because I mean, usually the younger people haven't time for the older ones, so we felt like that maybe we were giving them something. We were gaining an awful lot from their youth, the way they told us about themselves and we seemed to get an awful lot from them.... We hoped we were anyway [giving something to the younger people] expressing our thoughts or giving different opinions that they [the young teachers] used to say it was a good idea or they've learned something from it, from listening and giving our opinion about different things that were going on at the time and they always seemed to be interested in what we had to say or what story we had to tell.

Family

Relationships with family, especially grandchildren, grand-nephews and -nieces are important in the lives of the group members. Their role is changing as they age and they use what they are learning and experiencing in IMMA to adapt to that change.

The new-found celebration of the imagination is transmitted to a younger generation; in the way they play with grandchildren (actually using ideas from the workshops to construct games); in bringing them to the museum and asking them what they see in the artwork; in encouraging them to experiment with painting and drawing. Grandchildren and others are beginning to take an interest in and reveal a talent for art.

You can use your head now. I'm doing things with the children that I wouldn't sort of have even did with me own children, you know, because I have seen different things even here in the art and I'm bringing different things home to the kids....and I have all these games at home for the grandchildren so we play like that. So the art is helping even me grandchildren...I can see now what's in young [grandson's name] and I think it should be helped, you know. Where years ago, you never got a chance of helping, you know, now, if I could help...now I will. I mean I bring him down to the museum and I'm showing him things.

Well what I do when I bring her [grand-daughter] down is I let her tell me her story of the painting...now to me it was kind of the piping that went into the kitchen and things like that but I didn't tell her that. She was looking at it and I said "what do you think of it?" and she said "look up there it's like the shape of a person" and she could see these tubes as the inner part of a body, you know. She saw the opposite to me.

New knowledge, skills and a firm sense of what might be provided for the next generation in contrast to missed opportunities in their own gives them the motivation to systematically contribute to the education and development of their grandchildren.

The Nature and Dynamic of the Group

The dynamic nature of this group is a crucial element in connection and communication and an important factor in the success of the IMMA programme. People say that they learn from each other, listen to each other's opinions and stories, share memories and concerns. They have become genuine friends and can be relied on for support and company. They have fun and laugh together and help to create a learning environment marked by equality, lack of competition and a willingness to help and share. For some, membership in this group has been a way to come out of themselves and to lose inhibitions. They share *happy times together* and are *like one happy family*.

In the beginning I felt very gratified, I won't say surprised, because I knew a number of the people, but I was very pleased they've turned out to be fun as well. That was very important, that it wasn't terribly serious and awfully intellectual.

The general attitude, the feeling there is in the group because we're all, a very important element that there is here is that nobody is vying with anyone else. We're not in competition, nobody's in competition and everybody is exploring themselves and with the help of the artists you know, exploring just what they can do with this and thinking, so, and it's all done with a sense of fun. The fun mightn't be apparent at the time but there's always a laugh about something you know, and an attitude of we're in this together and sure my God you know we're not, none of us are artists, but it's great to be engaged in this.

Outreach Workers for IMMA

One aspect of this research was to explore the role and potential of this group as outreach workers. IMMA has seen this group as mediators for the museum; as part of the IMMA outreach programme and an important part of the process of bringing people into the museum and engaging with them in exploring art and making art. They meet and host visitors, guide them through exhibitions and work with groups both in the museum and throughout the country making art. They are involved in advertising upcoming events, appearing on television, advising tourists they meet to visit IMMA, bringing their work on tour to other

groups of older adults etc. They are now confident and capable workers on behalf of IMMA. They are part both of the access and accessibility of IMMA.

The nature of the relationship established with IMMA and its staff is at the core of their understanding of and motivation for this role. They see this as a reciprocal relationship, with encouragement, learning and enjoyment on all sides. They see their advocacy as a way of "paying back" for what they have received.

They wanted to know how we ticked as elderly people and what it meant to us coming down here and working on those projects. They have been studying us as well and they know how we feel about things and it gave them great encouragement to carry on doing it because they could see what it had brought to us the enjoyment it had brought to us and fulfilment of our ideas and it has given them the encouragement now to continue on and to get as many more of the elderly persons to take part in the projects and workshops.

Yeah well they've been so good to us that you feel you have to sort of try and give something back. I think it's like that with all sort of life isn't it, I mean if somebody is kind to you you'll always try and do good turns for them.

Well we've got older and more mature we're anxious to please well please the staff here. We hope that we're doing them a not a favour but that we are making their work worthwhile this is what we're all out to... They have taken such an interest in us and given us so many facilities we hope that we're doing something to pay them back.

Well we always think that we're contributing something towards it [the museum]. It mightn't always be the best at the end but sometimes it's very good. There was a few very good projects that we did that everyone seemed to enjoy and even the teachers seemed to get enjoyment out of it as well.

One participant speaks of her opportunity to explain their work to younger people.

And it was amazing they said they even found it hard to interpret our work and they'd say "oh when you know what it's about it's very interesting" so that's the way I think about that's the way it affected youth there was lots of young fellows and girls...

On a number of occasions this group has worked with other art groups around the country. They have introduced to them an experience of making modern art and acted as a vital part of the museum's policy of bringing its education programmes to community groups. A visit to a retirement group in Achill is mentioned as a special memory for many, an opportunity for groups from very different parts of the country to come together. There they showed and explained their art and worked alongside others, almost as tutors, introducing them to new ways of art-making.

Well to us we felt now when we got down there we didn't realise now we knew we were going to do a workshop but we didn't know to what extent like about the people.

We knew they were only starting but how long they were started we didn't know and when we went down what got me was a few of the ladies said..."do you know we were terrified about youse coming down?" I said "why?"; "well we felt that youse knew what you were doing and we knew nothing..." Well we were in the same position as you because we were coming down not knowing what to expect from you...but when we were all together it was like as if we were there all the time because they needed encouragement and when they seen what we were doing and...the fact that we were able to tell them that we started off exactly like them that we didn't know what we were doing.

Conclusion

Our research findings have been outlined under the six headings of demographics, well-being, access, the programme, the development of identity and a sense of connectedness. Much more could have been presented from the rich tapestry of material for the narratives. Though the reader will draw conclusions from this data and findings we will turn to formally ask in the following chapter what these findings might mean.

CHAPTER TWO

WHAT DO THE FINDINGS MEAN?

Introduction

The findings presented in Chapter One provide a broad range of material for further discussion and consideration. They have implications for the policy and practice of IMMA. In this discussion we hope to follow the themes identified in Chapter One and consider the meaning they have for the policy and practice of the Irish Museum of Modern Art. By engaging so sensitively, thoughtfully and comprehensively in the art education programme for older adults, IMMA, and the Education and Community Department in particular, have created a space and model for significant adult learning. The transformative power of connectedness is a thread that runs through the data. It emerges as one of the key concepts of the study.

Demographics

The participants are not a representative sample of older people. Indeed their willingness to join the Active Retirement Association in the first place and later to venture into this work with IMMA may indicate a certain adventurousness and openness. In this, perhaps they are the more advantaged of their peers. The involvement by IMMA with this group of older people also helps keep the issue of older people to the fore in the policies and activities of the museum.

Though research indicates that the brain continues to lose cells as it ages, it appears to have an inherent plasticity, i.e. it has a modifiable and regenerative capacity (Boucoulalas, 1988, p. 16). The readiness on the part of group members to learn, explore, and work towards their aspirations is a powerful reminder of the 'lifelong' nature of learning. Their generally low levels of formal education may be a positive factor in their determination to take the opportunities offered while also posing a challenge both to themselves and to IMMA in dealing with some of the more conceptual elements of the programme. We will return to this later.

Gender did not emerge as a significant issue in the data.

Finance and transport are often presented as barriers to participation by older people in programmes. In this programme there is no fee and transport is provided; thus ease of access is greatly enhanced. It would be a useful exercise to determine the costs of this programme in order to clearly identify the cost-benefits of the programme.

Well-being of Participants

Strong and moving stories are told in the interviews about the realities of life for older people. References to 'melancholy' and the risk of Alzheimer's disease indicate how they experience the connection between health, mind, art and learning.

Many have been carers for others; their testimony reminds us of the toll in psychological and physical health often paid by carers. Life can be reduced to simply coping, often alone in a home that is like a prison. The stories told of friends persuading them to join the group call to mind those elderly without friends, support, or educational opportunities; they are the disconnected and isolated. They have no access to the health-giving and life-enhancing potential of connection, art and learning. Disconnection is associated for some with a depression which robs them of the ability to see beauty in the world and in its art forms. These stories raise issues beyond the immediate concern of the museum. They have social and political implications for Government policy in culture, education and health. Participation in programmes such as this is life-enhancing, health-promoting and people believe they live longer as a result. They delight in their well-being.

Although the pursuit of well-being, as expressed in some recent writing, may appear to be a denial of death (Fleming, 1999), it seems that this group has found a balance and a means of working through such issues as a result of their engagement with art and their closeness to group members who have died.

The Irish Museum of Modern Art: Valuing its Visitors

The change in the role and image of the museum and art gallery in the late twentieth century has been characterised by Benson (1989) as a transition from temple to forum. The testimony of the participants in this programme gives voice to this change. Access and accessibility, an opening up of places and experiences, are major themes to emerge from the data.

In a museum as temple, the worshipper is in awe of the unattainable, of a state of being which is outside oneself, of power and authority. Unquestioning adherence to dogma is expected. It is a space in which people look in one direction to worship; they do not interact and are disconnected from each other and from the object worshipped. A forum, on the other hand, is a space for citizens to meet for discussion and debate, where opinions and multiple voices can be heard; a space in which people are interacting and connected. Openness is the defining quality of the forum.

Reclaiming the heritage of the Royal Hospital is about transforming what for many is a symbol of power and domination (rather like the temple) into a space open to and owned by ordinary people. In a similar transformation, the aim of IMMA's education programme is to de-mystify art and artists, to present art and ordinary life as facets of a continuum rather than distant

polarities, and to enable all to grasp, exercise and manipulate the power of art for their own transformation.

Benson (1989) writes of the uniqueness of art residing in something that it does rather than in something that it is. This active quality is central to the impact this experience has on this group. Art allows people to make meaning and to construct an experience with the artwork. Making meaning (Greene, 1995) is central to the developmental and learning process in the lives of individuals; one that continues throughout the life span as we encounter new experiences, challenges, issues and crises.

Most in the group do not visit other galleries in the city. There might be an opportunity here to explore connections with more "traditional" art; an opportunity to reinforce continuities and to build upon and validate the participants' love for non-contemporary forms of art. Links with other galleries would also help to open up the city and its visual art culture. This might also help to locate the learning more firmly in the social, political and economic arenas/spheres.

The Programme: A Learning Environment of Fun and Laughter

Participants learn to see and feel the continuity between art and ordinary life; they see art in the ordinary and the accessible in art. The art-making workshops are essentially about making connections. They enable the group to feel that they have a valid "treasure trove" of experience and to confidently draw upon that for their work. In this way they learn that artists tap into what everyone else is interested in. The discussion that takes place during these sessions feeds into the work. When adult educators discuss the ideal conditions for supporting learning they are describing what has been set up in this programme. The conclusion of the research team is that the success of this programme is built on the thorough grasp and implementation of the principles of adult education. This is a superb example of how adult education ought to be practiced.

- The programme creates in its processes and engagements ideal conditions for significant adult learning. The collaborative and connected learning has resulted in profound change.
- The physical environment at IMMA is bright, comfortable and welcoming; the participants feel at ease and the entire institution is felt to be at their disposal. Staff are sensitive to the physical needs of older people. The group is a valued part of the institution; the emotional and psychological climate is equally positive, affirming and highly motivating.
- The programme is student-centred.
- Enough time is allocated to programme activities so that significant learning can take place; this is especially important in the negotiation of developmental tasks. The pace of the programme responds to the needs of the learners.
- Relationships of equity, trust, ease, friendship, and sharing have been established.
- Group discussion and exploration are at the core of the programme activities with healthy amounts of fun, laughter and play.
- The programme is experience-based, both in terms of the actual hands-on experience in the workshops, and in the use of the intelligence and insights of accumulated life experiences as a platform for further learning.

Different modes of cognition and communication are catered for and encouraged: making, painting, listening, looking, talking, welcoming others to the museum. Multiple intelligences are called on, built upon and strengthened: the visual/spatial and the bodily/kinaesthetic intelligences are involved in creating and responding to artworks and in the skilled manipulation of materials, media and tools; the personal, interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences are used in interacting with others and in understanding and exploring the self. Musical and linguistic abilities within the group have also been drawn on in the workshops. (Gardner 1984).

The more conceptual intelligence is required in that part of the programme which involves understanding the concepts behind the artwork on display, and it is in this area that difficulties arise. The participants have difficulty understanding some of the artists who speak to them about their work. This is an aspect of the learning experience which needs consideration and which has important implications, especially in the context of connectedness, continuity and accessibility.

The problem is one of degree. An awareness that there is more to learn is motivation for the curious mind; however, a feeling that something is beyond one's grasp and unattainable may reinforce a sense of disconnection, of being an 'outsider.' It reinforces a view of art and the artist as being on a different plane or in another reality; the artist as authority and expert. Some artists have made themselves understood, and where this has happened the participants speak with enthusiasm of the insights gained. Our concern is that when this element does not work, it transmits contradictory messages to the learners; messages which are at odds with the overall impact and aspirations of the programme. This also has implications for the vision of this group as keyworkers at IMMA.

It is probable that the ideas presented by the artists are difficult and unlikely to be understood easily by any audience, but this particular audience is one which has perhaps less experience than many in dealing with abstract concepts. In such a situation, the educator must construct a learning process which moves from the concrete to the abstract, from the known to the unknown. Most artists are not trained in these processes and may not wish to engage in them; others may not have the high level of ease and facility with ordinary or vernacular language required. Yet this element of the programme is potentially very effective and, as stated above, has had a powerful impact when it has been successful.

Laughter and humour play an important part in the group's experience. The power of humour to break through barriers of fear, anxiety and tension is well-recognised. It is part of well-being. Their laughter is a way of defusing the discomfort, the anxiety of confronting images and artworks that may be embarrassing. It allows them to look at something they may not

otherwise confront and makes it easier to return to it and look again. In the workshops laughter releases creativity.

Opportunities to revisit childhood, have fun and play, provide important opportunities for learning. According to Erikson (1977, p. 191) in play one is;

on vacation from social and economic reality - or, as is most commonly emphasised: [in play] he does not work....even the most strenuous and dangerous play is by definition not work.

He clearly identifies how taking our time in trifling, in dallying, we lazily thumb our noses at [time] this our slave driver (Erikson, p. 191). It is both developmental and therapeutic.

The comments of the participants on their experience of school and teachers explain some of the power of the IMMA programme to change their lives. Learning is now possible in a non-judgmental and non-competitive atmosphere; an alternative experience of care and concern. The group frequently spoke of IMMA as a new home. Not only has the programme transformed their own homes into places where they remember ideas and try out new roles; they have made IMMA into a home for themselves and, in their host role, for others who visit. This calls to mind Belenky's 'public homeplaces' as places of learning which are nurturing and welcoming (Goldberger, et al., 1996 p. 301).

For many of the older people, brought up in an era in which looking at images of the naked body was thought to be a sin, museums and art galleries were places they went as young teenagers to see nudes. In an appropriate completion of the circle the museum now provides a place and context in which to deal with sexuality, to confront, to stand in front of that which they ran past before.

These encounters with art in the programme have opened up a world which is multi-dimensional, a world of multiple opinions and perspectives. This increasing openness and awareness is a major step in the development of the person. Modern life requires new attitudes and skills, one of which is a willingness and ability to see multiple perspectives. By facilitating this in a group of older people, the programme empowers them to take a more active place in the modern world and to feel that they belong here.

One critical comment suggests itself here; it is easily made and perhaps not as easily addressed in a programme. If we take an example of an incident it might illustrate a point of entry. In a session on the use of colour one participant spoke about the colour green. The group went on to discuss the use of green and its meaning in the work of various artists. It seemed from the interviews that the discussion remained within the realms of art and the making of art. It strikes the researchers, coming from an education background rather than an art one, that an extension of this debate could have focused on green as the colour of a green movement, a global movement with a concern for the environment and sustainable

development. This is an example of the apparent absence in most of the programme of an explicit social dimension. There is concern for the personal, the interpersonal, the family, and even the community, but a ceiling is placed on the kind of awareness possible. The limit is drawn below the political, the social, the economic dimensions which would make the learning comprehensively holistic.

Another concern of the researchers is that the participants have taken part in the programme for nine years but in one important area have not made the kind of step forward one might expect. They were and are dependent on the course organisers, visiting artists, etc. to provide the material, the subject matter, the structure for their activities. This is of course appropriate at the beginning of a programme but nine years on one might expect greater progress by the participants towards being proactive, innovative and taking the initiative in bringing material or projects to the group.

Every programme we started, first we were saying "oh God! what will we do?" but then when it was explained to us and all the stuff was left out you just do your best and just do. We wonder what...has in store for us now but we never have felt we came something that we could not tackle.

The programme might think of ways of moving the group into a different, less dependent mode, by for instance, providing space in which members might initiate projects or experiences in art of their own choosing. They might also make connections with other initiatives taken by the Education and Community Department with other groups, e.g. *Unspoken Truths* (1993). While we understand that both projects are built on different assumptions. *Unspoken Truths* was a community development project firmly embedded in social and economic issues of concern to the participants while this older person's project had a leisure focus nevertheless the issues of learning whether for leisure or social action might be enhanced by broadening the range of agendas addressed.

A Sense Of Themselves: Identities Developing

To an impressive extent the adults on this programme have engaged in the process of their own development; they have consistently worked on their own identities i.e. who they are. Many psychologists have attempted to explain this process.

Erik Erikson (1977) spoke of achieving a sense of identity as the main task of adolescence. Many of this group left school early, began work in their teen years and started a life of adult responsibilities before others from a different social background had completed school or university. Participants' references to growing up now and having been old before their time seem to bear out this idea that what they experience in IMMA is in some way a chance to reclaim a missed opportunity to grow. They had to navigate another path toward maturity, one that is not always the most conducive to growing and maturing since adult responsibilities intervene before the individual may be quite ready for them. This leaves one vulnerable in the

early adult stage when a firm sense of identity is a prerequisite for the responsibilities and tasks of early adulthood.

Of course it is never guaranteed that a firm sense of identity will be established at the end of adolescence, whatever path is chosen, and economic realities may limit the explorations and questionings that help the process. According to Erikson's theory, it is possible, even necessary, to revisit the task of achieving a sense of identity at any other stage in the lifelong development of the adult. It is here that the programme achieves its spectacular success. It has provided precisely the environment in which adults of any age can explore who they are, what they believe in, and what they wish to do with their lives and relationships.

James Marcia (1980) called this process of questioning a developmental moratorium. It is characterised by two things: the leaving aside of responsibilities and commitments and engaging in a process of wondering and questioning. That both of these activities are part of the experience of this programme is certain. The programme, by providing this moratorium, is essentially a process of development for the participants. It allows people to step away from commitments to ideas, beliefs and attitudes in politics, religion, sexuality, etc. and engage in a process of wondering what beliefs, ideas and values to hold. The time given to the programme and the unhurried pace are important in this context; these are not tasks which can be rushed.

Such a developmental experience facilitates the emergence of the mind-set required to live in the modern world. The participants are well situated to cope with and find a space for themselves in a modern culture which makes profound demands on the mental capabilities of each person (Kegan, 1994).

Perhaps one of the tasks of the programme designers now is to find new challenges and contexts for exploration so that this aspect of individual development may continue.

A Sense of Connectedness

Throughout this report we have noted the theme of connectedness as it permeates the activities and impact of the IMMA programme. In his work on human development Robert Kegan (1994, p. 217) identifies the two "fundamental longings" of connection and separateness. In the lifelong activity of meaning-making the processes of integration and differentiation of the two longings occur again and again. Without outlining in any detail the importance of these processes, we can state that the participants on the course have achieved an integration of these longings. They have achieved this by developing self-reliance on the one hand and connection on the other. Opportunities have been provided for integration and differentiation. This has allowed the participants to develop new ways of connecting with the world and has also fostered identity development which strengthens their

individuality and autonomy. They are both more connected and more self-reliant. To put it more correctly: they have achieved a connected self-reliance.

In connecting with the younger members of their families, for example, by introducing them to art and by being more relaxed about play, questioning, nudity, they are contributing at the family level to broader cultural and social change. In the activism they demonstrate in this arena, and in their ability to act out of their new sense of self, their development can be described as transformative.

Outreach Workers for IMMA

Without repeating many of the findings and meanings itemised above it is clear that this group has performed the function of key worker in an imaginative and exciting way. Their strengths are that they have been through an extensive programme; that they have been expertly supported by the staff at IMMA; that they relate well and meaningfully with visitors to IMMA and art groups around the country. They have learned a phenomenal amount about art, themselves, and the process of making art.

Their weakness is in their attempt to transcend the concrete and engage in conceptualising or theorising about the processes and experiences. The researchers were of the opinion, not without its disadvantages, that these were Outsider Workers in much the same sense as the artists of the Musgrave Kinley Outsider Art collection are outsiders (Marshall, 1998). The disadvantage of calling them outsider workers is that it has the potential to marginalise rather than locating these keyworkers at the core of the museum's outreach.

The members of the group, because they have got so much from their involvement with the museum feel that they ought to give something back and this is the motivation for their involvement as keyworkers. This concept of giving back has the merit of being built on a sense of equality and reciprocity.

The researchers are of the opinion that the term host might better describe the work they already do, without the negative connotations of the "outsider" title.

Finally, this programme, if the reservations mentioned in this chapter are addressed, can be used as a model of good practice for training and supporting keyworkers.

Conclusion

In this discussion we have sought to examine the findings of the research study in the context of their meaning for IMMA's Older People's Programme, and in the wider context of adult education generally and education for older adults in particular.

The programme can be said to be developmental in the sense that:

- It fosters connected self-reliance.
- It provides an opportunity to deal with developmental tasks related to identity.

Art has been the catalyst for important learning; "art is a way of living, a means of power" (Benson 1989). The programme is a testament to the power of art and of a well-designed and skilfully-implemented programme of adult education. Much of the learning may appear to be different to the stated aims of the programme, but if continuity and connectedness are in fact the key issues in the learning here, then that is a broadening out of the message the museum wishes to transmit in relation to art and its connections with the ordinary.

Issues which are at the core of adult education are seen here in practice in IMMA. Adult education is about forging connections and seeing more than two polarities; it is about moving away from dualistic thinking to more connected and holistic modes of learning and action. The programme is a powerful introduction to new ways of thinking, perceiving, acting and interacting. It has important implications for arts in the community.

CHAPTER THREE

PROPOSALS FOR POLICY AND PRACTICE

The research team proposes that:

State Policy:

- encourage active, life enhancing and life extending activities through art and education for all adults.
- support art education as a valid second chance option for lifelong learning for all ages
- adequately support carers as a right in society
- Adopt connected self-reliance be a key ideal and principle for work with older adults
- support with adequate finance and transport the involvement of older adults in learning programmes.

The Irish Museum of Modern Art:

- and other museums continue to develop as fora for discussion and debate
- and other museums enhance their links and collaborations with each other particularly in Dublin
- continue to encourage and support participants on this and other programmes to visit other museums and places of visual interest especially in the city so as to contextualise the learnings and experiences in the life of the city and the history of art
- continue to support conditions for learning that are always located firmly in the social, political and economic fora
- give increased attention to helping people understand visiting artists and difficult language, concepts and ideas through simplifying catalogues, brochures, text panels, and other communications, etc.
- study the feasibility of designing, on the strengths of this programme, a university credited training programme for a broadly defined role of museum keyworker
- develop new workshop opportunities (e.g. studio space) and links with other groups at the museum in order to enhance the programme's contribution towards an increasingly self-reliant environment for older people.
- The IMMA undertake a comprehensive cost analysis to identify the cost effectiveness of this programme for older adults.

CHAPTER FOUR RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology employed in this study involved two stages: the collection of data and the analysis.

Collection of Data

A number of preliminary meetings were held with the Senior Curator and Curator, Education and Community Programmes at IMMA. Having identified the group of people to be researched, interview schedules were constructed in line with the research brief. The interviews were designed to gather both the essential quantitative data (age, gender, class, education, work, etc.) and qualitative data.

An initial meeting was held with the members of the St. Michael's Active Retirement Association who are involved in the IMMA Older People's Programme. The aim of this meeting was to outline the purposes and process of the research and reach agreement with the group on their involvement in the collection of data. Each member of the group was interviewed individually for about one hour, with subsequent opportunities to revisit the discussions for clarification. Group members also participated in a focus group to discuss a number of topics and themes which were common to everybody. These included a discussion of the keyworker concept and their experience of that role. The Education Co-ordinator was also interviewed. All interviews, both individual and focus group, were taped for ease of transcription and analysis.

Analysis of Data

The main instrument of analysis was concept mapping (Deshler, 1990). This is a schematic device which allows the researcher to represent sets of concepts embedded in the data. It allows us to summarise the data for any individual interview or focus group under various headings; thoughts, feelings, values and other concepts that arise in the interview, and make connections between the various concepts. Data which emerges in linear form can be reconstructed into a more holistic visual imagery in which complex interconnections and relationships are clearly revealed. The technique was particularly useful in this research. Even though the data are presented under a variety of headings many of the themes and concepts are related. It was difficult to see the theme of family, community, connectedness and learnings about oneself in any way other than closely interrelated.

Concept mapping then allowed us to code the research data for ease of analysis and presentation.

REFERENCES

- Belenky, et al., (1986) *Women's Ways of Knowing*. New York: Basic Books.
- Benson, C. (Ed.) (1989) *Art and the Ordinary: The Report of the Arts Community Education Committee*. Dublin: The Arts Council.
- Boucoulalas, M. (1988) "Research and Development in the Neurosciences: Relevance for Adult Education." *Proceedings of the Adult Education Research Conference*, no. 29. Calgary, Alberta, Canada: University of Calgary.
- Deshler, D. (1990) "Conceptual Mapping: Drawing Charts of the Mind." In Mezirow and Associates, (1990) *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adults: A Guide to Transformative and Emancipatory Learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Erikson, E. (1977) *Childhood and Society*. London: Granada.
- Fleming, T. (1999) 'A Review of Sheehy, G. (1998) *Understanding Men's Passages Discovering the New Map of Men's Lives*'. In *The Adult Learner* (1999) forthcoming.
- Gardner, H. (1983) *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*. London: Heinemann.
- Goldberger, N., Tarule, J., Clinchy, B., Belenky, M., (1996) *Knowledge, Difference and Power: Essays Inspired by Women's Ways of Knowing*. New York: Basic Books.
- Greene, M. (1995) *Releasing the Imagination; Essays on Education, the Arts and Social Change*. New York: Jossey-Bass.
- Josselson, R. (1991) *Finding Herself: Pathways to Identity Development in Women*. Oxford: Jossey-Bass.
- Kegan, R. (1982) *The Evolving Self*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Kegan, R. (1994) *In Over Our Heads: The Mental Demands of Modern Life*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.
- Marcia, J. (1980) 'Identity in Adolescence' in J. Adelson, ed. *Handbook of Adolescent Psychology*. New York: John Wiley.
- Marshall, C. (Ed.) (1998) *Art Unsolved: The Musgrave Kinley Outsider Art Collection*. Dublin: IMMA in association with Lund Humphries, London.
- Mezirow, J. and Associates. (1990) *Fostering Critical Reflection in Adulthood*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (1991) *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning*. Oxford: Jossey-Bass.
- Perkins, D. (1994) *The Intelligent Eye: Learning to Think by Looking at Art*. Santa Monica, California: Getty Education Institute of the Arts.
- Murphy, A., O'Donoghue, H., Downey, M., & Fagan, R. (1996) *Unspoken Truths* Dublin: IMMA.
- Tennant, M. (1997) *Psychology and Adult Learning*. 2nd. edition, London: Routledge.

