

Breda Collins, Mary Sheehy and Eileen O'Brien 2005
an interview by Ignacio Uriarte

Three members of the Skibbereen Library staff talk about their experience during the Office Art Workshop
non-edited version

Breda's interview

Ignacio:

This is the first time I do something like that, this kind of an office-art workshop. What I saw is that you really got into it. That's at least what my impression was, right? That you didn't have much difficulties like to get... you know? To, to start...

Breda:

In the beginning we had no clue what it was going to be about and we were maybe a little bit hesitant in case it was trivializing what we were doing because our work is fairly mundane but we deal with the public a lot and normally anything like this that happens, happens with the public and not with the staff. So we didn't know what angle things were coming from. But when we started to do it, it was great fun. And we started off like children, giggling, rolling up the balls of paper and having great fun and the different sizes... and you were very precise about the sizes and the way it should be folded and your suggestions and... we got very... very into it, definitely and I think we've become very protective of the paper, about snow-cakes... and it definitely was a lot of fun. It wore the skin off our hands... (laughter) I think it looks effective. I probably see it in a totally different light to how I would see it if I hadn't been involved in making it and overall, as that, it's good because it makes you look at things differently.

The paperclips... were great fun because I think we all string paperclips together when we are on the phone and then of course we have to take them apart. So it was great to actually do it for a purpose and... while we were doing it, we got really enthusiastic. Maybe we get enthusiastic about anything, I don't know... (laughter) but the feel of them was quite good, slipping through your hands and at first it reminded me of making a daisy chain as a child and then it was like..., it reminds me of rosary beads or saying prayers, of things going through your hands and then, when you started to hang them, they really looked good. I never thought paper clips would look as good as they did or as they do hanging up there. We seem to be getting a lot of positive comment from the public about the exhibits.

Then the flight, the sheets of paper that were folded very precisely to make a line... Again: It's how you look at them because you saw the precision of Margaret folding and measuring to make it, and I think on the wall they remind me of something taking off and in some ways it reminds me of us being here at work and taking off in different ways. So it's been a great experience and it's been lovely to be involved with what's been happening.

Mary's interview

Ignacio:

What I mainly wanted to know is how you felt about this office-art workshop?

Mary:

In the beginning, I suppose, when it was first mentioned, I just kind of felt: Oh! This is... different! Because normally it is the members of the public that get the opportunity to do a workshop. The staff never does. And I kind of said: Oh, here I go. I'll give it a go, you know? I enjoyed it, I must say. I really enjoyed it, even though I had sore hands, alright? I enjoyed it. And I really enjoyed the paperclip one, you know? In the end I think: really successful and the public is enjoying it.

Ignacio:

What did you enjoy about the paper-clip thing? The... what about it? Can you remember how it...?

Mary:

Well, I was only there enough for the putting together of the paperclips. It was all finished when I came in afterwards, you know? But... I just felt it was very therapeutic, really! You know? And an eye-opener to see how dirty the paperclips are and we go around with them in our mouths all the time, just interesting. Interesting...

Ignacio:

What do you think happens when you do routine-work like that, routine-work that actually feels a little good in your hands, that you see growing, I don't know. Do you have an idea what could be happening while you do that? Do you relax or what happens?

Mary:

You do relax, you do relax. You kind of... you drift. You drift with it. You forget about everything else really. You are kind of concentrating in what you are doing and I don't know, I suppose it is the whole thing of taking part in it and seeing what is going to be the end-project really. It's what you are thinking about, you know? So...

Ignacio:

And do you like the end-results?

Mary:

I do. I do.

Ignacio:

Could you tell me something about what you liked better or worse?

Mary:

The paperclips, I think I liked the best. Now, I do like the flight one as well but the paper-balls (laughter), really... I still don't know what to think about it, but I am getting used to it. I am getting used to it. I kind of decided: After all I went through to scrunch them, it's worth it.

Ignacio:

Have you had any reactions from the public?

Mary:

Yeah, there was a lady this morning. She thought the paperclips were beautiful. The flight she couldn't... she said she was getting used to it the more she looked at it. She just couldn't understand the crunching balls. She just couldn't understand that...

It was good. It was good and it's nice to think and to be able to say to people: We did that! You know? Sooner than saying: That and that person did it, it's nicer to say: We actually did it. That's it!

Eileen's interview

Ignacio:

I had the impression that the whole stuff really got into the workshop. So, if you could just tell me what your impressions are.

Eileen:

I think the whole stuff did really get into it. There was one person that didn't get into it and I think afterwards she was probably a little bit sorry when she saw how much fun it was, all the fun that we were having. I think some of them were a little bit, a little bit skeptical, but I don't think that they were... I mean, nobody was like... opposed to it, you know? They were all really... you know? They were open, they were open to being, you know, to kind of..., I don't know. I suppose open to have a bit of fun and I don't think there are an awful lot of real art-lovers among the stuff. I'd suppose myself and Breda would be interested in art anyway, but I don't think any of the others really are.

I think what you were explaining first was the one with the fold and the line and stuff. I kind of had an idea of what you were talking about but not really. But I think when we got to do it, it really started to become clear and especially when you made out your proposal. The scrambling, unscrambling was just such fun. It was great. That was the first day of it and it was really... it was a real good bounding session for us, as stuff, you know? We were just like kids, it was great fun, like it was really hard in the hands, it was brilliant, and I think it does look well. A lot of people are making fun of us, but we don't care.

But I think definitely the most beautiful piece is the paperclips. I think that's really impressive. I think just the way it looks... I've seen a number of people walking over to that one, looking up and expressing real interest in it. Also the fact that it's made of paperclips and doesn't look like it from afar you know?

I think the third piece, I kind of didn't have great hopes for, either like the first but I was really pleasantly surprised by how it turned out, you know? I thought, I think it looks so well on the wall. I would have never expected it to look that good, you know because it almost looks like wings of a bird, kind of folding in on themselves. And that they've just opened, kind of taking off and it's great to have Brenda coming up with such good names for the pieces because I think often titles can mean enough, they can kind of, where a piece isn't obviously about something, they kind of give a slight bit of guidance to the viewer as to what they can take from this. I mean, I think the title snow-cakes is brilliant, it's just our impression of what the piece is but I think you could call it any number of things. And that is what I really like about the first piece, that you can impose so many interpretations on it. I mean the second piece isn't imaginatively as stimulating, but it probably looks prettier, you know? But it isn't quite as... you couldn't talk about it as much as you could about the first piece and the same about the third piece: I think you could talk about it forever. So it's all been great and I think it has been a very valuable experience for staff because it's the sort of stuff that is so out of our routine, you know? We never do things like that. I mean, we always have fun at work because all do get along really well together but I think if people were to have that kind of a break from the home-drawn routine of work on a regular basis, it would do so much for staff-moral, for motivation and stuff. It's just brilliant. I'm really, really glad that we... I'm really, really glad that you wanted to do it here and I'm glad that we did it, because it's very valuable... That enough?