

Dr Eleanor Wheeler

Hello, I'm just going to run through an overview of my post so far as Artist in Residence as part of the Development Department in Belfast City Council.

I was appointed as one of the artists that Maggie has just told you about through the PROJECT scheme in April of last year. My funding from them ran through for a full calendar year and then my post was renewed and funded through Belfast City Council which in itself shows the Council's commitment to looking at how art might fit into their Urban Regeneration schemes and ongoing programme of work.

My role has largely been to interface between community groups that are part of the ongoing Urban Regeneration programme 'Renewing the Routes' – there is some information about that on the Belfast City Council website. My role is to work alongside urban regeneration officers within the planning and transport unit and to go with them to community groups and look at ways in which art might actually enhance urban regeneration schemes such as re-doing shop fronts and a range of scale of works along the main arterial routes into the City of Belfast. A lot of the work that has been done to date has been quite low key, I suppose what might be perceived as 'quick fix' things and really I've been working with the Culture and Arts Unit to start developing a model of best practice in how art might be included into various regeneration schemes.

I've got 2 or 3 slides of my own work – all my practice generally for the last 10 years or so has been large scale architectural works mostly in ceramic, brick, plaster mosaic - a lot within health care and mostly within a social architecture context. I work very closely with the design teams involved and very often there's also a large degree of working within a community context; for example within the hospital, working with a group of psychiatric patients who made the small panels you see in the background of the brick seat.

This was a piece done with Laganside Development Corporation 2 years ago. I was asked, as part of their ongoing Cathedral Quarter streetscape project - which is in fact the oldest part of Belfast – to look at ways of bringing people's attention (both tourists and locals) to the very, very rich history of the area – so I made a tactile map. Initially I'd only planned to have a border of tiles that were going to be done by local shop owners and the residents of the Cotton Court Managed Studio Workspace next door to this piece. And it sort of took off and ended up with about 1500 people involved in this particular piece. There's actually another 600 tiles sitting in my workshop in Dundrum that are soon to find a place within the Cathedral Quarter as well. It's been very popular and I think is testimony to Laganside who basically gave a free rein to go ahead and

manage the input of the local communities and visitors – I also did a workshop within the Cathedral Quarter Arts Festival which attracted a great response. And apparently it's still getting photographed, so it must be alright.

This is a very small scale work – more in the scale of some of the works that we've been doing with Belfast City Council. This is a small community garden in North Belfast, it was managed and designed by Community Technical Aid in Belfast. And again just a wee visual highlight I suppose within a garden that also gave the opportunity for local children to be involved and with the general optimistic thought (and so far so good) that if they had some input into this scheme, then it would be less likely to be vandalised and the garden has proved very popular to date.

This is a piece I made in collaboration with Greater Village Regeneration Trust. It is a series of carved brick walls down Glenmachen Street in the South of the City going out towards the M1, towards Dublin. It was done in consultation with a number of youth and community groups round South Belfast and was part of the 'Renewing the Routes' Initiative. I was actually commissioned to do this before I knew that I was even likely to apply for the job as Artist in Residence on the Renewing the Routes Initiative, so it's quite nice that I actually had a chance to do a piece of work before. These series of walls are to do with the history of the local area – some modern, some ancient and some within the last 50 or 100 years. And you can see just on the gable end wall there are going to be panels put in that were done by local schools and community groups.

The context of public art in Belfast is quite interesting; it's really only in the last 15 years or so that Belfast has really got into this public art 'stuff'. There's been a long history of community development here throughout the last 30 years due to the political upheavals and social disturbances. There's been a very great deal of work done on community development. It seems to me since doing this job the last year and half, I've been out to more community centres than I thought actually existed in Belfast. They do often work in isolation due to the geography and social and economic context of the City. Very often you might have a main road, but either side of the road won't really have much to do with each other. And they each have, usually, very well equipped and very good community centres. So we're using the community centres and the existing infrastructure in the Renewing the Routes Initiative. We're using local knowledge as much as anything to see what actually is appropriate to different areas; different communities have different needs; different communities have varying degrees of experience of working with artists and in some areas there is quite a lot of what might be called be indigenous artwork that has been there for quite some time and quite a few are now looking at ways of replacing some of the more threatening murals and artworks with things that say something positive about their community groups and their traditions and history of the areas.

There's quite often a lack of confidence with communities as regards art. They quite often would express a view that it's got nothing to do with them and what would they know anyway. But literally within the second or third meeting, you'll find that they have actually very strong views. And the Culture and Arts Unit has just done a very small survey on favourite and not so favourite public art works within Belfast and there has been some very strong views on that as you can imagine.

(ref slides) This would be, I suppose, from outsiders to Belfast and maybe those that are from here as well, this would be what would be perceived as what we think of in terms of public art in Belfast.

And this is now what people think of when they think of people art in Belfast – this (ref: John Kindness' the Big Fish) came out depending on your belief in statistics and I generally don't really believe in them, but anyway, this would come out as Belfast's favourite and best piece of public art work - or least favourite and worst piece of public art work depending on whether you believe the statistics. So! But judging by how visible this piece is and, you know, it would seem to be a very, very popular and successful piece and landmark piece. This in fact involved large numbers – John worked with large numbers of schools and groups from the city and their images are actually incorporated into the tiles and a few years ago I was speaking as a ceramicist and constantly been questioned about vandalism and ceramics and could it be smashed. I think this is a testimony to how things maybe have progressed in the City that something made out of ceramic has not been smashed up.

Another piece of work that there was a lukewarm response to initially and it now appears according the statistics to be very popular (ref: 'Harmony'). So popular that it's actually been nicknamed 'Nuala with the hoola' or various other things.

Smaller scale artworks and may be less noticeable and less kind of, I suppose, recognisable to most people are starting to appear around the City. I have to admit I'm a big fan of lower key and maybe less visible pieces of artwork – I think they can just give a nice little bit of quality and a wee surprise as you're going around the City and this piece is made out of glass as well.

Another piece, a piece by Rita Duffy opposite the new Law Courts.

And this piece by Deborah Brown was initially in the Arts Council buildings up in Stranmillis, South Belfast, and then was relocated here. This part of town was originally the site for the

markets and it's a very popular piece – children love to climb on it and again I think it's a great thing to have a piece of public art that, doesn't need to be too precious – people can actually jump around on it.

Again a smaller scale piece relating to the local history, history of the area, outside the Kube on Dunbar Link in Cathedral Quarter in the centre of town. These pieces refer to the Corn Exchange that was on the site and again a very functional piece of artwork, but nice and subtle, nice and low key.

A piece by Ground Work Northern Ireland, they co-ordinated it with residents of East Belfast. This would be one of the main target areas for the Urban Regeneration Programme 'Renewing the Routes'. The Newtownards Road, I think someone mentioned it just before break, is becoming a much more visually pleasant place and these small scale works bring a touch of humanity to an area which was really quite desolate and down trodden with the closure of shipyards – a once very, very vibrant and bustling part of the city.

And another temporary piece of work which was done down on hoardings around the newly refurbished Art College down in Cathedral Quarter. This shows how even hoardings and low key, small scale and probably low budget pieces can make a difference. And even if they're only there for a while, I think they can make people start thinking about their environment and it maybe draws your attention to other possibilities that are more long term or larger budget, larger scale.

I'm just going to zip through this because I've touched on it before, the notion of consultation within an urban regeneration programme. Really my role is to try and enable people to have an input into their environment. Even in a small way, if people can have a say and either literally, physically make something that gets put into their immediate environment or have a say as to what an artist might create alongside them or facilitate them, I think it's very, very important. I think it re-establishes a sense of ownership and pride in areas where maybe that has been eroded over the years and I have found that the art making process gives you an ability to allow people to bring up very potent thoughts and feelings about the development of their area – the housing, social needs, etc. Whereas perhaps if you had a public meeting and asked people outright what you think about this, they might be a little shy to put their views forward. It also enables people to think about the history of their local area and to celebrate that in some way. It may well enable a link into much larger scale works both within development schemes and also within larger art schemes.

This was derived from a conversation I was having in the office a few weeks ago about whether there's a link missing within consultation. We were trying to work out some way of evaluating projects that we had done and looking at ways of making the consultation more meaningful. I'm not really going to offer up any answers to this and I think in one of the afternoon sessions this will be explored further, but I think that the most important thing I've found is to consider the appropriateness of the consultation; the appropriateness of the outcome, what sort of outcome people are looking for – large scale, small scale? And also that it should actually have quite a good long lead in potentially.

One of the major problems that we've found with community consultation is that very often within community groups, the people that you're trying to get onboard to voice their opinions and even to look at the means of reducing long term vandalism and disruption within the area, are very often those people who just don't come to the community centres. I have tried all sorts of cunning schemes and means and cajoling – but I would say probably a good long lead in and building up trust is a very good one. And I would make a plea for consultation to not just be about ticking boxes and more to do with long term strategy.

Some projects to date – there are about 30 slides here so I'm going to whiz quite quickly through these.

We've done workshops to give a quick introduction to process, to get people on board and to engage people in a very informal and unthreatening way. We've found quite often that in areas where there maybe hasn't been a lot of lead in time that a workshop to get a sense of what people might want to do in the future is very useful.

We've done quite a lot of small scale commissions – really trying to find out what works. And in the last year there have been a lot of what might be perceived as quite 'quick fix' projects that we're hoping will lead into longer term and larger scale projects. This would be an example - some workshops that we did in North Belfast resulting in the York Road Train.

We've also been looking at disused shops and derelict premises to try and draw attention to the potential for development.

This was a piece done with 6 community groups and 3 artists near Broadway roundabout; it's a construction site at this stage and we thought it would be something for people to look at when they're driving along and swearing at traffic jams. It's also helping to get people on board to

discuss the possibility of large scale artwork that will be on Broadway roundabout some time in the future. These are also in the post card pack.

And another series of workshops produced banners – trying to discuss openly and within an arts activity, how local ideas and cultural traditions could be fed into a larger scale artwork that will be commissioned for Carlisle Circus. I suppose it's a good one to finish on. It's a very contentious site and it needs a great deal of buy in from communities. The banners allowed local community groups to make some artwork to look at their cultural traditions and images and to have their works exhibited together. And these pieces hopefully at some point in the near future will be hung on the buildings around Carlisle Circus and will in a small way open up a debate about ownership of space - and in a very contentious space - to look at ways groups can move forward to turn it into a space that celebrates cultural traditions and diversity rather than looking at ways to argue over it.

(Applause)

Frank McDonald

I think there's bound to be some reactions to those 2 presentations. Our final speaker this morning is Angus Farquhar who is Creative Director of nva. He's been involved in doing large scale public art works and events in places like Glasgow. His work on illuminating the Clyde Weir is probably the best known and producing the Hidden Garden Project because of the transforming effect it had on Glasgow and Angus – come on up now, you're on! And we'll still have, if Angus holds to about 25 minutes, we'll still have 15 minutes for people from the audience to fire questions and comments from the floor.

Angus Farquhar

My time in Belfast – I've just got a lovely story, you know, that notion of the transformation of a city and people coming in from outside. I found myself in Belfast Harbour 1999 to see in the Millennium – could have gone anywhere in the world and ended up because of close friendships in Belfast and I'd spent a year and half planning proposing to Anne, my long suffering and long term partner – we'd been together for about 11 years – and for a year and a half I worked it out that as the bells went down I was going to propose to her in Belfast. And we got there a bit the worse for wear and as the bells went down, and an Abba tribute band had just finished, and as the bells went down 5, 4, 3, 2,1 - went Anne will you marry - and then as it went on to 2000 - me and she looked at me and the first words I heard in the new Millennium were – 'are you joking'?

(laughter) and then Madonna's 'Ray of Light' came on and I've always loved that song and we did get married in a wee Humanitarian ceremony 2 years later so it was a great moment. So Belfast has this, a very strong connection because of that and many earlier stories.

At that time we talked about optimism and moving out of the depths and how you move forward as people. And for me, I don't know if you look back to 1999, 98, I perhaps foolishly had an optimism about the world where I was thinking you put these artificial moments where 1000, 2000, 3000 have a meaning and I thought, this is it, this turning point. Is there going to be a cessation of war? Is there going to be somehow an elevation in our capabilities as humans to move on, to actually on an evolutionary scale move beyond conflict. And I just had that little hope in my heart like billions of people in the world who live peacefully with each other that the goodness in the world, the innate goodness in human nature might somehow as a mass movement make a better world and this morning 6 years on I looked at that statistic of the £212 billion that the Americans have spent on waging war in Afghanistan and Iraq - £212 billion pounds. And I'm not here to make a political speech, but it just puts in context the desperation that I sometimes feel at humanity's incapability to transcend the sadder, weaker side of its nature that can only resolve problems through violence; dress it up as terrorism, dress it up as gentlemanly war, dress it up as you want – people killing other people and the absolute tragedy of that and it just seems like the cycles go on. And then you get these pockets, you get these little moments of change and the moment you're at now, why this conference is happening now, and just to raise the benchmark a bit about what's been talked about in the context of art in this context. These moments of transition, unless the vision, unless the benchmark is raised, unless the active imagination to become better human beings is at the bedrock of public art – whether it is in a small way as discussed just previously or on a very large scale – it absolutely needs artists and thinkers and philosophers and planners and everyone here today to just to keep that big picture in mind which as we know in the pragmatic process of life it's very easy for it to be, in the real world, just crushed down and those little moments where things can become great become crushed down, and become weakened, but this moment of transition in history that Northern Ireland is at, it's a wonderful, wonderful opportunity for you, but it must be led and it must be inspired and everyone must be inspired to walk onto that ground. It doesn't, of course it happens incrementally, everything is a tiny, tiny step along the way – and it is those little ripples that matter, but everybody had to make that ripple and that for me is the starting point for the project I'll describe today, because I think it's a huge responsibility on you as this generation, but boy this is a great moment. And as an artist of course you have the freedom, I mean that's the interesting thing, I have the freedom to say this because I am not encumbered by a strategy, I'm not, I'm not forced to present my language in a very contained rationalistic, materialistic way – it's not my role here today. I know how to do it and that's strength, artists of course it's often what we will

describe you today is a difference in language, how you integrate the visionary thinking with the real world and the real outcomes and that's often the point of conflict that has to be worked on between the two.

But I'm going to talk today about the Hidden Gardens and a little bit at the end when I get my little gavel blow at the end I'll talk about a festival of light I staged in Glasgow as well.

(if we can move to the first slide)

This project was based in East Pollock Shields which is the main Scottish Asian area, but also has a very strong Jewish community and within that Asian diaspora is a combination of people of Muslim background, Sikh background and Hindu background. There are also 15 denominations of Christian Church within 2 square miles plus a massive secular and pagan crowd in there, as well plus a small Buddhist community. So you've got this incredible selection of people all within a radius of about 3 square miles of each other. And in about 2002, not in response to what was going on internationally, but in a sense to have a starting point for a project like this, was my belief that you as an artist have had 2 choices in the way you work. Of course some great universal art gets made just out of the sheer internal presence and imagination and skill of an artist and then they bring that into the outside world and the sheer beauty or intensity or imagination of what they've made can communicate to a very wide public. The other choice as an artist is to engage actively into the outside world and engage into the social realm and then bring artists to have that quality to react to a very social way of working and that's what we did with the Hidden Gardens. And we decided, just it was a very straight forward decision we were going to make a peace garden. Peace because through the use of nature the definition of paradise going right the way back to the first paradise gardens from Persia, of course as we know it the cradle of culture actually going back into Iraq and Iran where these ideas really first evolved, often with the building of temples as mimicking the shape of mountains because Gods were seen to live in the mountains. Right the way through to the monastic garden, the same, all the main faiths is that the symbol of paradise, or one of the main symbols of paradise, is through a relationship to nature and the relationship to light.

So we began to conceive of a project that would really try and take on board different people's visions of paradise and their own faith traditions and how these might be manifest simultaneously into a garden because of course they all share the same roots. It was interesting this notion of renewing the roots because it is that at the base of all of these discussions is the notion of mutuality – mutuality is the respect for difference. Can you live respecting something you disagree with and then actually through that act of respect build the territory that you walk on to

together. And the beautiful thing in a garden like this is that you're able to see very, very simple things like the square route; it is the same square route that is was walked around the Hajj in Islamic tradition; it is the square route that is walked around the Hindu temple; it's if you take the old pilgrimage traditions of walking up or down mountains or around Islands. If you take the monastic Christian tradition of walking the square route around the cloister – all of these can be layered on top of each other and have the same meaning for every different community as actually a shared symbolism without even having to say it. There are no polemics involved in that process, it's a very nice way that you can in a sense overcome that desire to make a pastiche of the past and this is a problem with engaging the communities, because as we said there is a lack of confidence in the way people relate to art – very quickly they will go to conservative forms and the type of art they've grown up with, seen in the past, and then what you get are watered down representations of that past which is a good process and builds confidence, but what we tried to do on a community level was to engage people philosophically in the garden, to engage them intellectually, to respect their intellects and not ask them to design a garden. So a crucial difference in community work is to let the artists be artists, let the architects be architects, let them be good at what they do, but find ways of involving that community that are profound.

To describe the site – this was a very, very damaged industrial site which had been a car works and a previous tram works. It had over 150 years of industrial use and we worked with 7 artists. I should say from the beginning that this, probably unlike any other project you'll hear about today, was an art led project. We set it up ourselves, we raised the money ourselves. I raised a £1.5 million from 40 different public sources and private sources. So that's just to understand what we went through as artists to lead this process. There was of course a lot of suspicion about an arts led process because rather than the public agencies employing us or us going through a tender process we said we want to do this, we believe it's important, we actually have the skills and the professionalism to do this – trust us, let us do it, if we don't do it well never give us any money again – which I always think is the best incentive to making good work. It's very simple, if someone doesn't deliver, don't employ them again and that's about as much incentive as you need to do good work. Plus we'd had the Scottish Parliament so I was very aware this project had to come in on budget – so we'd 40 different funders putting in from a variety say £2-300,000 through to £10,000 for a small planted area. But it was an arts led project and of course there was a lot of suspicion about that. The crucial word that came out again in the last session is how you build trust with public partners and within communities. And the way we did it was to do that consultation period for two years prior to a stone being built on that site. Two years consultation which was led by a dedicated community officer and then each of the artists were individually asked to engage in a whole set of face to face meetings with a variety of the different groups who lived and worked in that area – there were 60 organisations who consulted within that 5 mile

radius and 400 individuals. So the artists' work, while it could be completely abstract or could move away from obvious reactions to that it had to be informed. And that was the crucial thing, the work should be informed, that it should reflect some of the values that were being given back to them by that community.

The second thing was about the way the artists themselves worked together and I took an unusual step of bringing in what I would call a, almost a spiritual advisor, I brought in a guy called Devia Patea from Mumbai - Bombay - in West India who, you know, occasionally in your life you just meet somebody who radiates intelligence and radiates good human values. Guru is a very dressed up word, but in real terms it just means teacher, very simple, it's just a teacher, we don't have a strong tradition outside school of having teachers and I recognised in Devia a person of true intelligence who I felt should have no role except to influence the process. So for one year Devia came over 7/8 times and just met people, met the community groups, listened to what they had to say, listened to the artists and then got them to work together so that their egos could handle the changes that they would have to make to make a really good integrated piece of work - because as you know it's often letting go of things, what you want to hold on to, what you're precious about that will end up with the type of conflicts that end up with things not moving through in timescales, all the usual practical problems that can get in the way of work. And Devia's role was really just to listen and guide and to create a momentum for a way of working together.

And we carried that through right the way into the contractors and it was very interesting what was said from the first speaker about the choices that you're given. Our landscape architects when we put this out to tender told us that we had to go with the cheapest who came in, who came in about £50-60,000 cheaper for the build than the second or third. And we sat down for the first meeting with that contractor and he kind of, mid life crisis, drove up sunglasses on, coupé sports car and said listen I've done this before, just let me tell you how we're going to make this garden and we just had that - we had that moment where we just, everybody just at the table just froze and we cannot work with this person. We were already contractually engaged and we had to, we refused to carry on, we stopped the meeting, we went into lawyers' negotiations for 2 months, disengaged ourselves happily from each other. I then chose the most expensive and we worked with them over one year and the important thing for me because of the values of this, by making a peace garden, was that the build itself, the positivity and the belief of what this was about - trying to create a sense of real beauty for local people and on a national level - should carry through, right through to the final design.

I'm such a talker I haven't even given you a single image to look at. This is just before we opened and I remember 4 days before we opened seeing a guy on his knees from the builders going down the line of that grass cutting it with a pair of scissors, edging it on his knees – you wouldn't normally see this in Scotland, may be you do in Northern Ireland, but it's more the thing I would associate with that kind of care of duty you might get in India or somewhere - someone painstakingly caring that much - unasked for - to make something perfect. And for me that was profoundly important that the relationship, the ideals with which this had been made should carry right the way through into the build process and that we as a team should have common values working together.

I'll take you through into the field – this was actually the opening day. You can see the design there – I haven't obviously talked about the design at all, but what you have is a very, very formally laid out garden in the front, you can see the square route, the Caithness slab that forms a square and this is the very formal part of the garden. It's very, very minimal, it's very modern, it has patches of softness within it – that hardness is then softened by the way the planting happens. So again we didn't attempt to pastiche any particular form in any religion, but just again buried the layers within the way the design was manifest. And then at the rear of the garden you can see it blends away into trees and woods which is that romantic version of nature that many people want. Many people don't want that hard edged minimalism, although that's an incredibly good functional area where we can work with lots of people and it's very good for children playing.

Now you'll see that we actually left the chimney up and again this was not an attempt to obliterate the past, but to incorporate in the design elements of its industrial history into it and accept it was an industrial site and not attempt to fight that. We created it as, this is one of the art works by a Skye artist called Julie Brooke working with a classic rill, a classic canal of water, here creating this notion of eternity in the circle, but one which is then broken. It's the notion that we all seek the ideal, but it never quite gets there was where she was coming from.

We always designed it that it would be a used space, in particular we've set up a series of festivals of light and this was the interesting thing, talking on a community basis. We started by doing celebrations at the end of Ramadan with the Muslim community, Hanukah with the Jewish community, celebrations with the Buddhist community and then separate celebrations with the Hindus and Sikhs together - and then a Christmas celebration. And the starting point was to do it separately, just give people a space, work with them, give them fantastic light artists to work with so you do separate festivals and just allow integration to happen very, very slowly. It's that sense that if you do this year after year you may start with only 5/10 % crossover from different groups

coming into, because they feel ready or confident to, to share each other's values. You start by accepting the separation and then bit by bit, as people feel confident and relaxed working together, and again in a very, very relaxed setting you get people culturally feeling able to come together and share that ground together. And the garden has worked very well that way.

This is a very simple idea, these are the round trees which have little wishing tags where you just get, you know, everything from I wish Henry Larsen hadn't left Celtic through to, you know, I wish my Mum and Daddy were still together – you get that kind of incredibly heartfelt and fun side by side through the notion of the wishing tree.

So, the Hidden Gardens – for me this is about almost attempting to create ideals in your time. How will history be written? You know, it was that sense when people look back in 500 years, a 1000 years to different points in history - Who writes that history? Who leaves the marks? And you know are we still going to be remembered as the sort of tide of Thatcherism where everybody suddenly discovered sort of commerce and learned the language and sort of buckled down and that was the revolution of our time. Whose voice is remembered? Is it Iran and Iraq and the devastation that's gone on at the start of this century? It seems to me that as artists and makers, as those who leave the axe of imagination, you have to at least leave some ideals, something a little bit more heartfelt – just to say well there was an alternative, not everybody believed in the bad things that happened, but actually wanted to just present the world as it can be – as a slightly more hopeful place. Of course, these are all microcosms, these are tiny statements, they are not big, the words can be big, but the reality is incredibly small – it's exactly what was said before – it's creating small things that can inspire people in all their work to make, you know, to make better work and to make a better world. And that to me is the idealism of that work and unashamed in going for that and setting the benchmark high.

I think I've probably got about 5 minutes left. I'll just take you into – 2 minutes – right I'm going to whiz through – this was just, again we've often used light in our work and it was interesting a lot of the projects again mentioned light and how that can be used to regenerate a city. And last year we established a festival of light in Glasgow that took place in November which we're now doing in Newcastle this year – this December – a festival called 'Glow' in Newcastle. And again just picking up on a couple of the points and reinforcing them from earlier. This was about a free flow around the streets, about 60,000 people over 3 days walked around the city centre of Glasgow and we absolutely purposely – instead of just placing the work on the grand civic buildings, we took you into some of the hardest alleys and the sort of places people just do not go down – the place that drug users, alcoholics, people kind of basically hiding in those little dark lost areas and we really created the route in a way that would re-own that territory. It's almost like

saying if you can get enough people out there, get enough people out on to the streets – and what was brilliant this was just ordinary people, families with their kids in midwinter reclaiming their city and saying this is ours, this is our city, you don't own this bit, you don't own that bit; we're going to move through it as a mass. And using light as that medium for change and regeneration.

You can see there is a church with red lights on top of it in the right hand corner – that church was having a dialogue with the Mosque across the river. So the Mosque would have a pack of lights on top and would send a message which was then caught by the Cathedral and then bounced back to the Mosque again which worked really well for those congregations. Again symbolic links between people.

This was a work by Simon Corder in one of the toughest alleyways in the city centre, but for me it was all about ownership – these are wonderful works by a guy called Frank Scurty which are these kind of melting signs from pharmacies and tabac shops and lotto shops. And again just how you can use light to bring imagination and value and how your city can be brought back into the realm of imagination. And as you know at night when cities are dark – it was interesting that Newcastle street that was voted, I know that street well, it is totally dark at night and yet it's still voted, but I mean just through bringing light into that street you can add a new dimension and I think offer people a different vision of their city. Which I hope is what today's about and I commend your afternoon and that you enjoy it. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

Frank McDonald

Well I'm sure you'll all agree that that was great stuff altogether from all 3 speakers in the final session this morning. We still have about 15 minutes so who wants to make the first comment – I thought there might have been some possibility of generating a bit of friction of the issue of whether artists should merely have a decorative rather than a conceptual role – I thought that was one of the nubs of the points. Certainly architects would have views on that. Yes, in the middle there –

Rajesh Rana, urban designer and artist

I noticed in some of the earlier presentations by Maggie and Eleanor there was mention of art in conjunction with projects that involved road schemes. I'm not familiar with some of those road

schemes across the water, but I was thinking about the sculpture that's planned for the Broadway roundabout for example. I'm just slightly nervous that art might be used as a bit of spin to decorate projects that people otherwise might object to or may not depending on your opinion. I'm just wondering if the speakers had any opinion on that?

Maggie Bolt

Well with that scheme Barnstaple was completely kind of locked really in terms of traffic, everyone hates it so everyone knew it had to happen. But I think it was more the upheaval which was going to be caused while that period of change was going on, rather than what the outcome was going to be because for all residents, everybody, it's just a complete nightmare there because of the geography of the space. So in fact I would say if there's one scheme that might have thought it was going to start off with using artists in that way, it would have been more the Pathfinder project. But, as I hope I demonstrated, things moved ahead anyway and the artist found an area where it actually did make a real difference to the community because she'd stopped and looked at the smaller impacts because the larger scheme was going off keel anyway, but that is a danger, definitely that artists can be brought in as a kind of placebo and used to kind of iodise a situation, but the artists themselves need to be wise to that and if they feel they are being compromised then, you know, move out of that situation and organisations like myself also would explain why that was an issue.

Frank McDonald

Arthur Acheson, Architect in Belfast

It's a question for Eleanor – have you brought any bricks today for me to carve? And if not where can I learn to do it, it's something that I feel there's an intrinsic craft and it's a word that maybe hasn't been very much mentioned today, but I think it applies whether we're talking about architecture or art or indeed landscape that the craft element I think is very vital to success in any of these. And certainly when you see the Big Fish and the craft as well as the art that goes into that it's may be one of the reasons why it's successful.

Frank McDonald – Eleanor? Do you want to give away some trade secrets?

Dr Eleanor Wheeler

No I haven't and you can give me a shout and I'll bring you down to Tyrone Brick. I think, I noticed Jan Irwin's floating around somewhere ... Jan Irwin would be a big champion of the crafts

and applied arts as well. I think quite often, one thing I have discovered over the last couple of years working for the City Council and also just within my own practice over the last years is that it is true that – well I think John Kindness said in a conference a wee while ago, there's one thing people in Belfast love – is they like to see there's a lot of work in something, you know, they can get their hands on the fact that a lot of work has been put into it and maybe don't understand it, but so long as there's graft, you know, that's alright. I suppose it's one of those things that is sort of an ongoing debate really within the arts about the value of sort of arts versus craft and so on. But I have found over the last couple of years that quite often when you go out and you're talking to community groups and you're working, trying to put together a brief - maybe together for artists with the Urban Development Team and Culture and Arts Team and whoever – maybe the client through Belfast Regeneration Office or the Housing Executive or whoever. What people think they want and what they really want are two completely different things. Quite often what they think they want is public art – big 'P', big 'A' – and actually what they really want maybe is craft or furniture design or lighting design or some that maybe has an element of tangible making in it rather than something conceptual. So and often within the sort of community consultation projects that we do, very often if you were to invite a group to draw, they would be very shy of doing it, but very often I've found – this is purely from personal experience – that I go in with a bag of clay and start rolling it out that very soon people will get on board and start getting stuck in, so maybe there is just an inherent thing about materials that people, people like and can relate to. Maybe it needs to be considered more often.

Frank McDonald

Sam Jones

I'm studying Public Art and New Strategies and I was really inspired by the last project there and kind of questioning then, what's going on in Belfast because the last project to me, like one of the lines was 'How will history be written?' and I feel a lot with Belfast, it looks, it's constantly the works looking at the history – it's constantly looking back; it's constantly about craft and community projects and there's no – like all the public art shown in the centre of town, there's very, very little of it and there's very little imagination in actually looking towards public space and my question is to the people who commission work why's it's constantly about the history and sort of searching back and building community – because that is a part of it, but it's the only part at the moment.

Frank McDonald – Does anybody have any comment on that?

Angus Farquhar

I could answer very briefly – I mean I think it's about building confidence and it's about where people, you know, if things had been really isolated for quite a while, as you say, it's very, very difficult to make – if there is going to be community engaged with it who are going to stick with it right the way through and actually do stuff together; boy, that may take 5, 10 year project before it's finally manifest for that to really be a meaningful thing. For people to be, to feel that what is now is here to stay, that it isn't just fragile, it isn't going to get messed up by the 1% who can mess it up. And it seems that entering that space, that really does take a bit of time and it's not that you can't have work on that level but again, I mean, sometimes it's as was mentioned with certain key buildings in the 80s and 90s, sometimes it is about the big act that just says let's be bold, let's go for it, let's make something of that scale happen, irrespective of the problems, irrespective of the toes that get trodden on. But working on it on a local level, I think there's still probably a bit more trust to be built. And even the fact that the name of this conference and the people who are all here together in this room, the fact that these type of relationships are being discussed publicly now is a fairly new thing. So it's actually, I feel the whole way of working is still finding its feet.

Maggie Bolt

Also I'd just say, there's obviously a set theme here, but I often come across a lot of people who consider public art to be an art form and it's not, it's not an art form – it's just a way artists engage in certain contexts and there many, many ways of doing it and there's no formula and you have to do the kind of research and development as to what's going to be appropriate. I mean on our other website you have a card of, we've got case studies from all round the world and artists work on a huge range of things – artist led projects like the one Angus was talking about – it's all sorts of different ways of doing it and it is sometimes a trap that people think it's only going to be valid if it's got some kind of heritage base; but you know, a lot of artists will kind of root themselves in the meaning of that place and then what comes out of that is very forward looking. But I agree it can be a trap and that's why briefs mustn't be really restrictive – there must be room to come in and start talking about what we're all trying to achieve before any ideas start to be put down about when it's going to be this, it's going to be that and it's those categories that are the problem and I know some people feel that when artists' work is truly integrated is that almost some kind of sell-out? You know, does it just get lost in this kind of seamless sea? But I don't really, I mean, the point is that at the end of the space or whatever's been created works and you know it wouldn't have had that quality, or that value or that meaning for people if it hadn't have been approached in that way and each project's unique and each project has to have really strong creative thinking at the forefront from everyone, not just the artist.

Frank McDonald – in the 4th row there Richard, is it?

Thank you very much – I'm **Richard Pearse, an architect from Enniskillen** – I'd like to direct this question to Angus please because I really appreciated his tremendous breadth of vision. The best art is often a single clear individual vision, whether in hindsight one might think of them, whatever one might think of them politically, some of the best urban designs, architecture and art, in the past has been carried along on the coattails of egos of Kings, princes, Archbishops and their need for the best artist to provide a fine background for their lives. With democracy has come the apparent of dilution of the single individual aspiration for a country, city, town or village. How do we best manage to bridge the gap between democracy and clear vision for both client and artist – particularly on large scale projects?

Frank McDonald – Is that not the key question?

Angus Farquhar You know, I have to say I'm just a believer good work is good work and I don't care where it comes – I don't care if it's the ego of a Foster or, you know, a show architect, I mean may be that's unfair to call them show architects, but you know there is a huge ego driving those practices. If they can just make a great building and what was lovely about the discussion of health centres this morning that they were, it was not only good architecture but I had learnt to focus on the person who was using it – just like a garden, it's all about the people who use it, it has to manifest itself in the final moment. I don't care how people get there, I don't care whether it comes from some dirty slush money that some chronic billionaire has decided to drop in there that somehow – so what, money's money, you know – I'm being facetious, but for my practice it's slightly different because that's the world I happen to believe in, but I sure as hell wouldn't impose that on other people. Ours is a chronically tedious way of working, I mean I can have the job of standing up here now and talking about it, but that 3 year's worth, 2 year's worth of negotiations with the council alone, prior to getting the site, I mean there's the tedium of making work collectively. I mean, the beauty of it is that you do get true ownership so that we have a sense of – we took it right the way through to the management committees, so the management has local community on it who then rotate every year – it's really driven through on to that profound level – but it doesn't work for everyone. I think again you have to say – to me all that matters is the end work is good and good work is done irrespective of where you come from – I know that's a cop out, but.

Richard Pearse

It seems to me that the most important thing perhaps is the idea for the project in the first place and in the democratic society not everybody feels they have the right to do that. And what I just

want to get back is this idea of the clear individual vision it comes from, but does the idea come out of the mud or is there just one person pushing – it seems to me that in Bilbao for instance that the gold star should not necessarily go to Gehry, but the person who commissioned Gehry; the person who decided that he was going to be the architect. So I just wonder how you bridge the gap between democracy and this clear vision?

Angus Farquhar

Benign dictatorship is what I do believe in – I had had this debate with my board where what happens if I get run down by a bus and is nva a collective or is it actually, you know, run by me and a bit of me just doesn't care. Let's do work for as long as we're alive and if I get knocked over a bus tomorrow, if it carries on great, if it doesn't so what. It just – it doesn't matter.

Frank McDonald – Great, we're going to have to leave it there for the moment.

(Housekeeping - details on locations for workshops, lunch and registering for City Tours)