



Market Place Gallery Armagh | 19 Sep – 7 Nov 2020

Threshold is an exhibition about art in the service of reflection. It is a seminal exhibition by the final year students of the MSc Art Therapy course at Ulster University's Belfast School of Art.

The British Association of Art Therapy defines the art therapy profession as:

“a form of psychotherapy that uses visual art media as its primary mode of communication and... as a means of self-expression” (2020).

Clients who come to art therapy need no artistic skill and yet art therapists have a solid identity in art making. These artists communicate through fine art practices as diverse as printmaking, jewelry, painting, drawing, sculpture, ceramics, textiles, weaving, photography, journaling, and eco-art.

The works in *Threshold* are the visual and tactile expressions of art psychotherapy trainees and their journeys of identity. The exhibition represents collaboration and a venturing forth into professional practice.

We hope you enjoy this exhibition of works alongside the artist's statements explaining their journey.

No. 1 *Windows into Nature* (Nature Weaving) – Philippa Bennett

I wandered through the silent woods,
Collecting nature as I go,
To weave a weft from borrowed goods,
To show what nature can behold.

No.2 *Moving Through Thresholds* (Print) - Fionnuala O'Neill

While studying Art Therapy I often felt myself standing still, not moving forward. Just like the colours in this piece, the course could be very intense. Sitting still with clients, I soon found a place and rhythm that I felt comfortable with. I'm now much more confident in assisting my client through thresholds.

No. 3 *Descending* (acrylic on card) - Méabh Meirs

The enactment of a feeling or event through art making can be a live experience where the art object seems to assume a life of its own. These moments in art therapy can surprise the maker and bring about new realisations. This painting is an embodied expression of a transition from surface to depth in my experience of becoming an art therapist.

No. 4 *Eco Art Therapy – Lockdown Summer 2020* (Framed Photograph) – Sarah Edge

No. 5 *Tree Series 1, 2 & 3* (Framed Photographs) – Finola McGreevy

Exploring local forests. The curiosity and need to seek. Seeing through the darkened layers of forest to the light and beauty within.

No. 6 *Crossing* (Installation) – Bridget Nugent

This installation created within a door way illustrates the 'before' stage of crossing the threshold, what is beyond is unknown. Do we cross the threshold and surrender to the unknown or do we stay before and wonder? The words of John O'Donohue have inspired this art, encapsulating the complexities of crossing over and the idea of surrendering to be awakened. Below are excerpts taken from his book: **To Bless the Space Between Us.**

*At which threshold am I now standing?
At this time in my life, what am I leaving?
Where am I about to enter?*

*A threshold is not a simple boundary;
it is a frontier
that divides two different territories,
rhythms, and atmospheres.*

*At this threshold
a great complexity of emotion*

*comes alive:
confusion,
fear,
excitement,
sadness,
hope.*

*It is wise in your own life
to be able to recognize and acknowledge
the key thresholds;
to take your time;
to feel all the varieties of presence
that accrue there;
to listen inward
with complete attention
until you hear
the inner voice
calling you
forward:*

*The time has come
to cross.”*

No. 7 *Volcanic Reverie* (ink, acrylic, charcoal, and graphite on card) - Méabh Meirs

‘It is the lava of the imagination whose eruption prevents an earthquake.’ (Lord Byron)

Inspired by thermodynamics, psychoanalysis is originally based on the idea that the release of what is repressed in the unconscious mind is fundamental to psychological wellbeing. During the Art Therapy masters course, the volcano became symbolic, for me, of the process of art therapy, where below ground is unconsciousness, above ground is consciousness, and lava is the artwork. This painting is an imaginative wandering around volcanic landscape as I approached the writing of my dissertation entitled ‘Holding the Volcano’ – an exploration of the significance of the volcano image in art therapy.

No. 8 *Breast* – (Textile) - Laura Clark

My piece reflects the idea that skin is the threshold from the outer to our inner world.

No. 9 *Lumin I, II, & III* triptych (ink and acrylic on card) - Méabh Meirs

A triangular relationship can evolve in art therapy between therapist and client, client and artwork, artwork and therapist. This series of paintings, inspired by witnessing bioluminescent plankton glowing in Kenmare Bay, Co. Kerry, is an exploration of the concept of what happens when people, aspects of oneself, colours, or any two diverse entities meet, and how they might influence one another. My feeling is that it is at the threshold spaces of

these meetings that transformation can occur. Art therapy itself can be interpreted as a threshold, in-between, or liminal space.

No.10 *A process to be trusted (Painting)* - Sollie McDaniel

Over the past two years it has been refreshing to re-learn the concept of 'art making'. A process not so concerned with the aim to aesthetically please, but one that is liberating, somewhat childlike and enjoys the process over the outcome.

Each person from my class is represented in this art piece. It was created with a heart thankful to have walked over the threshold and a deep gratitude for all the learning that happens through friendship and a common interest to trust the process.

No.11 *Let it Go, Let it Flow 1, 2 & 3(Framed print works)* – Finola McGreevy

Mirror printed text in acrylic, etched with fingernails. Reflections on the process of 'letting go' and finding a peaceful 'flow' in life.

No.12 *Eyes & Eyes III |2020 | 12x8in (Oil pastels on canvas)* - Lisa Kelly

When I felt I was on the threshold of two different places, eyes became my focus and helped me understand my next move. This course invites you to look at yourself in ways you never have before. Once you open up and take an honest look at yourself, your client work becomes so much more valuable.

No. 13 *Homecomings (Painting)* - Sheila Lavery

I'm thinking about the multiple thresholds we cross between old and new; familiar and unknown; inside and outside; dark and light; safety and vulnerability... as well as this threshold between student and professional. The painting references the importance of a safe base, however temporary, and the significance of a transitional object at times of change.

No. 14 *Cloud Sailing (Acrylic on Canvas)* - Sheila Lavery

During my training I had a recurring dream about sailing out across an expanse of water with no map or navigational aids, but I was not alone or afraid. The painting is of a small crafted boat that symbolizes relational connection. Art has the power to make special the fragile, undervalued and overlooked.

No.15 *Once upon a Reflection (Framed Photograph)* – Finola McGreevy

The doorway is a literal threshold, an invitation in to the unknown. Here it is reflecting the natural world back at the viewer through misted glass. Creating pause within the self to consider "Are you ready to walk through the door, in to the unknown?"

No. 16 *Beach 1, 2 & 3' | 2020 (Framed Photographs)* - Finola McGreevy

Taken at Holywood Beach, Belfast. A closer look at local beaches, appreciating what this environment can provide us with in times of stress or need. A place, to breathe, to reflect and feel connected to nature. A place that welcomes us to examine it, and by extension ourselves.

No. 17 *Threads of Discovery* (hand-woven piece framed) - Philippa Bennett

The base represents my feelings and emotions associated with starting something new - the pressure and weight I put myself under. The woven part represents my learning, putting all the threads together, starting to work with clients and exploring my new role as a therapist. Using those feelings to discover and develop who I am and weaving all the experiences together while reflecting on how I got there.

No. 18 *Overflow* | July 2020 (Ceramic, paint, PVA glue and decals) - Claire Thompson

When you cannot hold your feelings any longer, they build and build, grow stronger

your cup may overflow, but this you must know

once thoughts start flowing

you create a narrative, a way of knowing

just keep going, just keep going (Claire Thompson 2020)

**No.19 *Emotional Landscape* (Mixed Media) - Rose Quinn
Mick's Garden | Front Field | Duck Field**

Capturing the essence of the natural local landscape using natural materials to connect to our emotions and thoughts creates a visual metaphorical language and our reciprocal relationship with nature. Traditional art materials and natural found materials are gathered from my family farm to symbolise my cultural identity and roots.

No. 20 *Threshold* (Watercolour) - Harriot Underwood

Threshold – moving across the boundaries that separate the past and the present. In therapy, the artwork became a 'portal' transporting clients back in time, allowing them to revisit loved ones and happier moments in life. This watercolour represents myself on the left and my client with dementia, observing their move into their memories.

**No.21 *Ironing it Out* (Found objects and recycled textile & paper scraps) -
Andrea Clare Plunkett**

Three vintage irons and a vintage ironing board form part of this artwork. The smaller of the two irons on the ground is called a 'sad iron' or 'sadiron', which is an old word for 'solid'; this was an object in domestic use from the 17th century. When the sadirons were in use the entire object became very hot, therefore the addition of the detachable wooden handle around the 1870s was a welcome reprieve for women, seen in the second iron on the ground. The third iron, sitting proudly on the top is from the 1940s and was one of the first electric irons. The wooden ironing board, also from the 1940s was made before steel became the standard material to produce ironing boards.

The tapestry made from pieces of paper and fabric starts from the top in golden tones and shiny shades, set off by the silver shine of the easy to use electric iron. For me, this is indicative of the start of my journey towards becoming an art therapist. I felt the excitement, newness of attending university was easy to do, and enjoyable, the pieces of paper used are fit nicely and flow easily.

Moving down to the second iron with the detachable wooden handle the tapestry goes from gold to green, depicting the growth that came with reflectively using art.

The last part of the story moves to the dark and rusty 'sadiron', where things become slightly hotter and harder to handle!. The pieces here are richer in colour but are visibly coming apart, this then leads to the final pieces of both my journey and the tapestry, which are rich in colour but not attached and seen strewn across the floor.

No.22 *Crown of Growth* (Polymer Clay forms on Mannequin) - Maeve Cassidy

This crown represents how as a trainee through our learning and experience, our skill set grows and our capacity to show empathy and hold our clients develops as we continue our journey through the masters course.

With this flourishing crown we are able to cross over the threshold of being a trainee into being a practicing art therapist.

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No.23 *The Next Step* | 2020 (Air drying clay, found objects and wire) - Mary Mawhinney

Through my journey to become an Art therapist, I have discovered the need of containment for both my clients and myself and the importance of holding and providing a safe confidential space. It has been a long and winding path like the coils of this pot, each layer built slowly, allowing me to learn from my experiences. It has not been without its difficulties like the cracks that needed my attention and repaired. It resulted in personal and professional growth, which has allowed me to come to this threshold in my life, ready to take the next step.

No.24 *Amulet* (clay, acrylic, and beads) - Méabh Meirs

The 'Magnum Opus' (Great Work) of Alchemy, the goal of which was to create precious stones out of base materials, was originally thought to have four stages of transmutation represented by the colours black, white, yellow, and finally red or purple, before becoming the desired 'Philosopher's Stone' (usually gold). Carl Jung found parallels between alchemical symbolism and images, which arose during the process of individuation or psychic transformation in psychotherapy. I see this precious handheld 'Amulet', contained within a box bearing the colours of the 'Magnum Opus', as a magic talisman which symbolises the synthesis of learning gathered along the passage to becoming an art therapist.