

Ageing with attitude |

Brush with art leads to a new outlook on life

Artist Ciara Rodgers teaches older people how to rediscover their creativity and regain confidence, says **Rowena Walsh**

FOR artist Ciara Rodgers, who is in her 30s, drawing is her passion. For Walter Taylor, one of her students, who is in his 70s, it was something he hadn't done since he was 15. But Walter has rediscovered his love for art while attending a weekly course run by Ciara in Castleisland Day Care Centre in Co Kerry.

Although wheelchair-bound, Walter paints regularly and, in just one week, he completed eight drawings he was happy to show.

It's quite a feat. As a professional artist, 90% of what Ciara draws or makes isn't seen by the public.

Another of Ciara's students suffered a stroke, which left the right side of his body impaired. Together, he and Ciara found a way to help him draw using his left hand.

The seven-week course was an artist-in-residence programme for Age & Opportunity.

"I went into the residency with the idea of it being a creative exchange," Ciara says, "where I would share drawing skills with them and encourage them to keep a sketchbook practice and, in return, they would give me information, tell me stories, and we would make a connection that way."

It worked. Ciara says that her students shared real historical knowledge, as well as anecdotes and myths about the sites, including the supposed location of the Irish crown jewels at Kilmurray House.

Initially, Ciara's students weren't as confident as she had expected. But she says getting to know their stories helped to build trust. "There was no judgment. The art-making is for them, it's not for anybody else. Nobody even has to see it, if it's in your sketchbook," she says.

Ciara says that when an older person rediscovers their creativity, "there's a great autonomy and ownership over it, when you're at a time in your life when maybe you don't have much control over other things, like your health or family circumstances."

"Keeping a sketchbook or finding beauty in the mundane can be something really nice for people."

It's a belief echoed by Julia Cameron, author of *The Artist's Way*, who believes that creativity is the solution to the midlife crisis.

It can be difficult learning how to nurture a facet of your personality that may have lain dormant for years. Sometimes, people need direction. Ciara suggests attending a workshop as a first step and to learn how to gather your research and make a piece of artwork.

If you prefer a DIY approach, she advises keeping a sketchbook and gathering materials that interest you. These could be fabrics, pictures or objects — anything that sparks



DRAWING ON EXPERIENCE: Artist Ciara Rodgers says older people's rich personal histories can be a source of inspiration.

joy.

YouTube tutorials can be more engaging than a book, says Ciara, and can show you visually how simple the process can be.

"Very often, when we're trying to draw something, we're trying to draw something we see," says Ciara, "and it can be very frustrating when it's not coming out like that on the page, the way we expect it."

She says that charcoal is great for beginners, because everything looks nice in it. "It is a beautiful medium and it's inexpensive. You could pick up a few sticks in your local art supply shop for about €3 and you could pick up a sketchbook for a fiver."

Ciara has previously worked with older people during a course on botanical drawing

at UCC's Glucksman Gallery. She recommends checking out a local art centre or gallery, because they often have workshops for seniors.

"Workshops are often a space of reciprocal learning, where I'm learning as much as the participants. At the botanical drawing classes, I came to it with very little knowledge of plants and weeds. We worked together, in the sense that they were teaching me about the plants and I was teaching them how to draw them," Ciara says.

"Every time I've worked with older people, it's been a reciprocal space of learning."

Next year, she and her Castleisland students will exhibit their work.

Empowering age

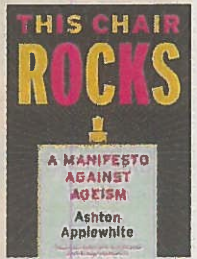
Empower yourself, This Chair Rocks: A Manifesto Against Ageism by Ashton Applewhite, £12.99

From childhood on, we're barraged by messages that it's sad to be old. That wrinkles are embarrassing and old people are useless. Author and activist Ashton Applewhite believed them too — until she realised where this prejudice comes from and its harmful effect.

Lively, funny, and deeply researched, *This Chair Rocks* traces Applewhite's journey from apprehensive boomer to pro-ageing radical and, in the process, debunks myth after myth about later life.

Whatever your age, this book will shake you by the shoulders, cheer you up, make you mad and change the way you see the rest of your life.

Ashton's empowering manifesto calls for us to embrace and celebrate ageing.



SILVER SURFER

Check out exa.mn/brain which features the latest books about neuroscience as well as interviews with world-leading scientists

“There is a fountain of youth: it is your mind, your talents, the creativity you bring to your life and the lives of people you love

— Sophia Loren

Expo for all ages

Make your way to the Tower Hotel in Waterford next Tuesday (December 17) and Wednesday (December 18) for the South East 50 Plus Expo, which is taking place between 11am and 4.30pm each day.

There will be over 50 exhibitors showcasing their wares in Waterford next week. There will also be free health checks and talks at the Expo, as well as cookery demos, sampling and giveaways.

Attendees can check out government and statutory information, recruitment, senior care, arts and crafts, holidays, fashion and lots more.

For those who are travelling by train to Waterford, there is a free shuttle service from Plunkett Train Station to the event. Go to exa.mn/seniortimes to book your free admission to the Expo. You don't even have to be over 50 to attend.

