

**MY
WAY**

GARVAN GALLAGHER



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Foreword

Draíocht is a multi-disciplinary arts centre situated in Blanchardstown, Dublin 15. It serves a population of over 100,000 by programming arts experiences that encourage and facilitate people's engagement as audience members, creators and participants. Our engagement with artists is pivotal to our work, both in terms of supporting their own practice and artistic development and also their crucial role in delivering the high quality programmes that we are committed to.

Draíocht opened in 2001 and so 2011 saw us celebrate 10 years of operation. Over those 10 years, Draíocht has exhibited work from local, national and international visual artists both emerging and established, from all disciplines, in our two Galleries. We have facilitated many artists in our Studio Space with residencies usually ranging from 3 – 6 months. To celebrate our 10th year, we wanted to do something different. We wanted a different kind of engagement with our Artist in Residence, a longer one, a deeper one. We wanted something quite difficult to find; an artist whose practice was exceptional but who could also facilitate a project to the high standards we require. We wanted an artist that would engage not only in his/her practice but one whose process and engagement in the residency would have an impact on the participants, on the artist him/herself and the arts centre. We found all we were looking for in Garvan Gallagher. Garvan's 15 month residency (March 2010 – May 2011) has resulted in two exhibitions,

an exhibition of work entitled 'Earliest Memories Through a Pin Hole Camera' which was the culmination of an inter generational project which involved both the Children/Youth Arts and Visual Arts components of Draíocht's work and 'My Way', an exhibition of his own work which this publication celebrates and records. Both essentially explore relationship. Both have people at the core. Both are a testament to Garvan's practice, his respect for the subject, his commitment to his art. It has been a pleasure watching the process and a joy to see the end product.

I would like to thank all the participants who gave of their time and their thoughts freely and openly. Much has been learnt from you.

I wish to acknowledge the work of Niamh Ryan, Draíocht's Visual Arts Administrator and Sarah Beirne, Draíocht's Children/Youth Arts Co-ordinator. Thanks to Rory O'Byrne, County Arts Officer, Fingal County Council and all the staff in the Fingal Arts Office.

Emer McGowan
Director, Draíocht

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Introduction
by Garvan Gallagher

¹ Bond John, Peace Sheila (ed.), *Ageing in Society*, SAGE, 2007. p.1

² Gibson, Pamela-C., ‘No One expects me anywhere: Invisible women, ageing and the fashion industry’ in *Fashion Cultures: theories, explorations and analysis*, by Bruzzi, S. & Gibson, Church-P (ed.), Routledge, London, 2000, p.81

³ Pink, Sarah, *Doing Visual Ethnography*, SAGE, 2007.

We’re living longer. It’s official. By 2050, one third of the world’s population in the developed regions of the world will be over 60¹. One third is a very large slice of the pie in consumer terms, yet older people continue to voice their concerns and understandable frustration at being the invisible members of our communities and our societies.

This project began looking at the invisibility older people feel as they age. In a group discussion at the beginning of the project, one woman called Joan told a story of sitting in a dentist’s waiting room with two younger people. The nurse came over to the younger couple and assured them the dentist wouldn’t be long. Joan looked at the nurse and asked ‘what about me?’. Invisibility has many faces, and the one I chose to look at in terms of this body of work was in fashion. Fashion and photography are intertwined when it comes to the production of desire. Fashion photography has been used since the beginning of the 20th century to promote something that women could aspire to, something they could buy and essentially ‘become’.

One of the most prominent reasons I choose to work with older people has to come from my grandparents, whom I had the utmost respect for. I remember them wearing what can only be described as a sort of uniform. Apart from dressing up for Sunday Mass, my grandmother generally wore a heavy dress that came below her knees, an apron that seemed to be permanently fixed to whatever dress she was wearing, a few layers of tights and comfortable shoes. My grandfather, typically autumn coloured trousers, shirt, jumper, peak cap and heavy shoes.

While researching this project, I read something that intrigued me from Pamela Church-Gibson in her writings about fashion and older age. She observed women and men in their 60s seemingly choosing to wear “neutral colours, a seeming desire for camouflage and anonymity”², regardless of their financial circumstances. I thought about my own grandparents. I thought about this: Do older people abandon fashion or does fashion abandon older people? Are older people invisible to the fashion industry?

Having a residency in Draíocht allowed me to arrive into a community, a blow-in, but one that could potentially be trusted. I was surprised at first at how open people were; so open that I wished I had recorded the conversations in the beginning. The idea for a video piece soon emerged, along with recreating the iconic fashion photograph and most importantly, having the participants being a major part of the final product.

Visual ethnography, according to Sarah Pink³, is an approach to experiencing, interpreting and representing culture and society. In other words, it is a process of creating and representing knowledge about society, culture and individuals. The methods by which this is done usually involves the ethnographer living with the people under study, getting to know them, collaborating with them on generating a variety of documents (writing, video, photographs etc.) which represents a culture, society or group of individuals. From the outset,



1. Anne Flanagan as photographer
2. Pauline Hughes photographing Joan Kelly
3. Eddie McGinley as subject
4. Lilian Harris as subject

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the participants engaged with me on every level. I set up a small photographic studio at the first group meeting we had. I asked each person to be the photographer and photograph someone, who would then take the photographer role, and chose another subject. To my surprise, there was very little resistance at either being the photographer or to being photographed. In the weeks that followed, I asked them, on an individual basis, to help shape the work along with me. From conversations and one to one chatting, their input began to take shape.

In a few instances, as part of these conversations, many had expressed the need to be photographed as they are, in their own fashion. When someone poses for a fashion shoot, a new identity is portrayed to the viewer; their own identity masked in make-up, hair and costume. I therefore asked each participant to chose a location that was relevant to him or her and to wear something they would wear to a special occasion. This allowed them control every detail of how they would be represented, unlike the fashion recreations. For these, they chose a look from a series of fashion images from the 20s to the 90s, but had no input into the clothes, hair, make-up or location.

The video piece, shot in the same location as their own individual shots with their own fashion, introduces the real person, where three participants discuss their own personal views on the subject, and on ageing in general.

Lilian Harris conveyed to the group a story about how she had to cope with her ongoing ageing reflection through mirrors, which was a feeling shared by a lot of other people. This inspired a series of photographs where each person engages with their own reflection, through their own mirror.

I began this project with the idea of the fashion photo recreations. I thought I could do it myself. I hadn’t really thought it through. There are so many people who gave their time and services to this project with no strings attached. Claire Barman and her IADT students along with students, teachers and graduates from the LA Academy gave their time with make-up, recreating the faces of past decades. Sorcha McClenaghan and Niamh Hogan worked on the styling. So many others gave locations, props, time and advise. To all of you, and especially to the participants I have met, chatted, laughed and had tea with over the past fifteen months, thank you for sharing your stories with a stranger. It was a pleasure.

Finally, I would like to extend my sincere thanks to Draíocht, especially to Emer McGowan and Niamh Ryan, for giving me the opportunity to make this work.

My Way

by Monica-Ann Dunne

Now in Autumn Years
Such a good time to glance back -
Relive those moments of joy, pain,
tears, laughter
Each day a precious gift -
Full of wonder and gentle surprises -
To be savoured so much more fully
Because of my own maturing.
No need to rush -
To fill each hour with sixty new
experiences -
A true appreciation of 'ordinary' things -
familiar situations.
Wines: sipped not gulped - less
frequent - more fine.
Food: 'Less' being really 'more'.
Friends: so valued - rarer - pure gold
Love: Everlasting ...

Would I turn back the clock?
Childhood? Adolescence?
The dizzy merry-go-round of my 20s?
The challenges of my 30s, 40s, 50s -
My more reflective 60s?

Never!

Now, being 70-something
I have come home to myself.
A new starting-point
To continue the adventure of Life's Journey
On different levels -
within the heart of the now 'me'
In the vastness of the universe and its
tantalising mystery
The one the more immense, mysterious,
The other even more profound
Oh! How glad I am to still have the passion
To Reach for the Stars ...



This Is Me

From group and individual meetings with participants at the beginning of the project, some of them wanted to be photographed in their own fashion, as themselves. My direction to them was to choose a location that was relevant to them and to wear something that they would wear to a special occasion.

A video interview was made with each person in this location, getting his or her views on fashion and growing older in general. With this process, the participants had control over almost every aspect of their representation - location, clothes, hair and make-up.







The Problem with Old Age

by Garvan Gallagher

“Hour by hour, and week by week, the thing upon the canvas was growing old. It might escape the hideousness of sin, but the hideousness of age was in store for it. The cheeks would become hollow or flaccid. Yellow crow’s-feet would creep round the fading eyes and make them horrible. The hair would lose its brightness, the mouth would gape or droop, would be foolish or gross, as the mouths of old men are. There would be the wrinkled throat, the cold, blue-veined hands, the twisted body, that he remembered in the grandfather who had been so stern to him in his boyhood. The picture had to be concealed. There was no help for it.”

Oscar Wilde

The Picture of Dorian Gray, 1891

¹ Bazin, André, *What is Cinema?*, University of California Press, London, 1967, p. 14

² Green, David, ‘Marking Time: Photography, Film and Temporalities of the Image’ in *Stillness and Time: Photography and the Moving Image* by David Green (ed.), Photoforum and Photoworks, 2006, p. 13

Living in the Western world, we are constantly confronted with images of the perfect body or commodities that promise to give us what we can never have. Two ingredients feed this false ideology. One is an obsession with youth; the other is an inherent fear of our own mortality. Neither of these are new phenomena. Oscar Wilde’s fictional Dorian Gray was obsessed with the idea over a hundred years ago. Photography’s history also provides us with an insight around the same time. The Victorian’s used photography to record dead children as angelic sleeping babies, thereby coming to terms with mortality in their own way. It can be seen as a sort of embalming tool for a world they had little comprehension of, one where death seemed a little more reasoned. Lewis Carroll used photography to record childhood as an innocent fairy tale, albeit a highly sexualised fairy tale. His ‘Alice in Wonderland’ accounts for the cultural fantasies of a growing girl struggling in a small world. His photographs of young girls served only himself it seems, as fetishised objects of girls that never grew up, that could forever be young, embalmed and present.

Childhood and youth is a stage that has always been seen to be important. On the flip side, growing old was seen as something to be rejected; to be, as Dorian Gray felt, concealed. The mechanical process of photography seems to have been used as a tool to mythically halt the advancement of time itself. It provided the means to avoid the unavoidable for the Victorians and for some cultural theorists. André Bazin describes the subjects of the Victorian family albums as being “freed from their destiny”.¹ Some saw it as death itself. Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*, which can be described as a form of grieving, constantly refers to the subject as being dead, but forever there, present. Photography provided Barthes a reprieve in the grieving of the death of his mother, finding a photograph that was a suitable likeness, for fear he would forget. Ironically, he only found her likeness or “the splendor of her truth” in a photograph when she was aged five, and not as she was when she died: an old woman. Freezing, embalming time is of course as impossible as the myth of never growing old, yet photography continues to function in this myth. It plays a pivotal role in the twenty first century in keeping this myth alive, with advertising that promises a young healthy beautiful body and everything else that makes the advertising machine work: the production of desire.

In modern times, we are presented with the pervasive glossy magazine that keeps this production line active and alive. David Green argued how the “presentness” of the images in the contemporary glossy magazine is merely a veneer behind which we try to shelter from the inevitable.² This veneer is what offers us the chance to remain young and beautiful. This veneer is what nurtures the belief that old is ugly. It seems only logical then that the idea that old-as-beautiful is something that can never be part of the consumer culture. It is after all in the interest of the media to promote ageing as something that is ugly and avoidable at all costs.

To understand the background into the media’s under-representation of this important social group, it is important to understand some history, a sociological history, so that we can make some sense of why the older members of our community are perceived in a different and sometimes, negative and unbalanced way. To begin therefore with a question: what exactly is ‘old’?

The life stages that we are so accustomed to in the West are nothing but social constructions. That is to say that they do not necessarily simply exist in other cultures. Middle-age or old-age are not naturally occurring organic concepts. Sudhir Kakar highlighted this in his article *The Search for Middle Age in India*, when he went asking diverse and random people in India what they thought was ‘middle-aged’. He only found people who were aware of the concept at a cocktail party of upper class people well versed in the English language and Western concepts.³

Within each life stage, a series of rules, regulations and etiquette must be adhered to in order for us to fit in to what is expected, to what is normal. These too are social constructions, and evolve from generation to generation. The sociologist and historian Norbert Elias traced the evolution of manners in *The Civilizing Process*⁴ from the twelfth century to the twentieth century using courtesy manuals as his map. His theories detail the complexity of how the social body was shaped. For example he details how table manners evolved, on how to properly pass wind (in either direction) , on how the knife and fork came to be common utensils in our eating habits or how natural bodily functions became regarded as improper and impolite and thus privatized to a special room with special equipment. The Civilizing Process maps out the growth of civilization in Western Europe as a slow complex evolutionary process. The privatisation and therefore taboo and stigma associated with natural bodily functions can often afflict the life of a senior citizen. As our bodies grow old, societal rules and regulations can often burden us with feelings of embarrassment and shame when certain organs fail to function as they should.

The varying perceptions of senior citizens in Western societies are therefore deeply rooted in historical, sociological and cultural discourses. The ever complex and evolving social body is never static. Retirement can bring joy and celebration, yet the social effects of retirement invariably have an effect on how the social category of ‘senior citizens’ is perceived. As is often the case, they are rarely represented in the world’s myriad types of media in a fair and balanced way. Our obsession with youth and glamour, and our inherent fear of mortality feeds this under and misrepresentation.

Viewing the 21st century with a contemporary lens, the obsession with youth invariably points us to an ignorance of death and all that goes with it. The consumer culture that is very present and visible in today’s society will always silently avoid the unavoidable that people like Barthes and Bazin openly discuss. The obsession with youth is certainly not a simple turn of events. Rather it is complex and layered in centuries of history. The Western world is driven by this obsession and the desire to remain forever young, socially tipping the seesaw of life too far for Nature to balance. Everyone will get older, and with that, the Western perception that everyone will get more ugly will inevitably hold true. It seems the only remedy to the bitter aftertaste of old age is to change social attitudes, towards the elderly, towards dying, towards mortality; to alter the perception that because one ages does not mean one becomes ugly; to alter the perception that because one ages and slows down does not make one stupid or less intelligent than before. These are monumental social issues that were formed over hundreds of years and it is unlikely that these attitudes will change anytime soon.

³ Kakar, Sudhir, ‘The Search for Middle Age in India’ in *Welcome to Middle Age! (And Other Cultural Fictions)*, by Richard A. Shweder (ed.), University of Chicago Press, London, 1988. p. 75

⁴ Elias, Norbert, *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations* (Revised Edition), Blackwell Publishing, 2000

“Do older people abandon fashion
or does the fashion industry
abandon older people?”













"In the West the dominant trope for ageing has been the decay and decline of the body. Time or age, we will say, writes itself on the body. For the most part we fear what will be written there. We repress the subject of ageing. We relegate ageing to others. We do not recognize it in ourselves."

Kathleen Woodward

My father told me recently he got his last 10-year driving license. After someone reaches 70, an application is required every few years. It's strange to think of them as actually getting older, of being 70. My parents are married 40 years this year. I clearly remember my grandparent's 40th wedding anniversary. My father then was the same age I am now. Only recently I was given the first indication of my own ageing self when my physiotherapist said that the resistance in one of my muscles might just be a thing I have to live with. Really?

One of the threads which has been spun off from my conversations with older people in Blanchardstown is that of our ageing reflection. I've never really given it much consideration. At approaching my forties, my laughter lines are only beginning.

Lilian Harris, who is in her 60s brought this up at a group discussion we had at the beginning of the project, which caused me to write something down in my notebook. Her thing was that she started to

notice a new face at 40, and at 50 she started to see her mother looking back at her. Now in her 60s she has to get used to another face, which will change again in her 70s. I talked to another lady, Monica-Ann Dunne who was a former model in her 20s. She told me that when she looks in the mirror, she knows what to expect. It's when she's accidentally confronted by her own full-length reflection from a shop window that she sometimes gets a shock. Another woman said she didn't like looking at photographs. By doing so, she sees herself as others see her.

Ernest Jones, in his biography of Freud, wrote about Freud's elderly mother Amalia. Upon being given a beautiful shawl, she refused to wear it because "it would make her look too old"¹. Amalia was in her 90s. Commenting on a photo of her in a newspaper, she said that it made her look a hundred, that it was a "bad reproduction".

Everyone has stories that mirror this observation. In the course of this project, a participant told me her mother would go along to senior citizen events, she a senior citizen herself, and would serve tea but would not sit down with the other senior citizens. Not doing so allowed her to be feel younger than the group she helped out with, even though their ages were the same. We all will carry our youthful self with us till the end, and as Woodward so eloquently puts it, old age is something that is relegated to others and not recognised in ourselves.

As part of this project, I made a series of photographs where I asked the participants to engage with their own reflection in their own mirror, and found out their views about ageing with their mirrors.

¹ Woodward, Kathleen, *Ageing and its Discontents: Freud and other Fictions*, 1991, p.3

The Me In The Mirror

by Lilian C. Harris

A meeting with Garvan Gallagher and hearing his plan for a photographic project with older people in Dublin 15 sounded like something I wanted to be involved in. As a Community Development Officer working with older persons I am constantly on the lookout for new and different ideas that could involve them in interesting and innovative projects. Over a cup of coffee Garvan told me the question he wanted ask was “has the fashion industry abandoned older people or had older people abandoned fashion”. He had my interest.

During our chat I found myself telling Garvan about my own experience with fashion, hair, make-up, body shape and the many changes that have occurred over the years. I also spoke about the “new me” that has appeared in my mirror every five to ten years since I was twenty. To say he looked a bit lost would be an understatement.

It’s like this I told him. When I looked in the mirror in my twenties and up to about thirty-five, I saw a young woman who lived a busy life, had four children, worked part time, played hockey, didn’t wear much make-up apart from eye liner and lipstick, who dressed casually and looked reasonably good, slim and fit.

Over the next few years the changes started. My hair had to go a lighter colour. I began to wear more make-up and noticed some lines around my mouth and at the corner of my eyes. Mostly I ignored them. Then, one day I looked in the mirror and said out loud, “Who are you, I don’t know you”. It took a few months to get used to this new person, but after a while I got to know and like her and started minding her a bit more. I loved my forties. I felt good, more confident. I did the return to work bit, changed how I dressed, fell in love with suits and jackets and smart looking clothes. I felt I would love this stage to last for a long time.

One morning a few years later I was in the bathroom brushing my teeth and the face I saw looking back at me in the mirror was my Mam’s. “Ronnie, get out of my mirror, you’re seventy-five”, I

shouted. I've always known that I really look like my Mam and was happy about it as she aged beautifully, but that morning I knew that the next change was on the way and I was not one bit happy about it. My hair was now golden blonde and new lines were appearing around my mouth, on my forehead and strange dark skin was developing under my eyes.

Turning fifty was strange. My kids had an open house party for me and invited lots of my friends at different times during the day. They decked the house out with black balloons with '50' written on them. That's the part that I remember most. Once again it was 'getting to know you' time, only this time it took a bit longer. The make-up bag got bigger as I added new goodies, including my latest piece of armoury - a concealer to deal with the weird bluish colour that was appearing along with the bags under my eyes. I also installed a full length mirror in the bedroom so I could check the full view both front and rear before I went out. I just had a feeling that I might be developing a small shelf on my ass.

I began putting my make up on in stronger light and wearing my glasses to iron my clothes. This time it took much longer to get to know the new me. This person needed much more care. A change of appearance was needed so I began wearing long skirts, knee length boots, hats, fake tan in the summer. I also decided that I would grow my hair. I think mildly eccentric was the look I was trying to cultivate. I was caught somewhere between middle aged and mature and heading somewhere that I was very unsure of. I also had a new name to get used to; was it to be granny, nanny, grandma or just my own name? In the end the kids decided themselves that it would be granny or granny Lily.

One day I was in town doing some Christmas shopping and out of the corner of my eye I caught a glimpse of myself when passing one of those pillar mirrors they have in clothing shops, "O God! that couldn't be me" was my thought, so I went back and stood directly in front of the mirror. There was no doubt, another "new

me" had arrived but this time I hadn't noticed the changes, they were just there in the mirror looking back at me.

Lots of things had happened in the previous few years, both my parents were now gone, my husband had been very seriously ill, my youngest daughter had a horrific traffic accident and my family had continued to grow to now include seven wonderful little people . I simply did not have the time to notice how I looked. I decided that once again it was re-invent time, this time with the realisation that I was no longer middle aged, I was now in my sixties. What is the fashion for women in their sixties? I needed a new look but didn't know what it was.

Out of the blue I got a call one day from Ena who is friend of mine, she asked me if I would be willing to be a guinea pig for her. She had been taking a course to become a stylist and needed someone to practice on. Of course, I jumped at the chance. So for the first time in my life I spent an evening with a stylist. I answered lots of questions, I stood and had a life sized outline of my shape drawn and pinned on the wall. When asked what I thought of my outline, I told her that she had made a mistake, the shape on the wall was nothing like me, it had normal size shoulders, nice hips and a waist. She got me to stand against the wall again and outlined my shape again.

I could not stop looking at the shape, the me on the wall was not the me in my head, and so began my next fashion adventure. Ena advised me about colour, accessories, scarves and clothes. I did as I was told and got all my long clothes taken up to the knee, got the shoulders taken in a bit, some extra darts put in and bought some fitted dresses and lots of belts. The hair is now very pale blonde, the fake tan still goes on every Saturday during the summer, the make-up is a bit lighter, the lipstick a bit darker and the eyebrows are dyed a nice shade of brown.

I kind of like where I am right now. I'm not too sure what's around the next corner, but I guess that's for another day.



Eddie McGinley

GG *You've heard Lilian's tale of growing older through mirrors. As a man, how have you found this? Does it make sense?*

EMcG The mirror can be very stark in a way because you tend to think of yourself as one way, you have a picture in your own head of yourself probably when you were about 25 or 30 and then you look, and you think 'oh Good God', can that be the same person. I'm thinking about? It can be very good in a lot of ways because it's bringing you in touch with reality, and as long as you don't become addicted to the mirror. I think men are more vain than women in a lot of ways, you know. It's an acceptance thing. If you can accept yourself then you probably can accept what's in the mirror. It can turn out like a Dorian Gray thing you know, you want the thing in the mirror to remain forever young and you'd probably grow old.

GG *Would you say it's through the physical limitations of your body or seeing yourself grow old through reflections that you can most relate to?*

EMcG It's funny, I don't feel the limitations in the body; it feels exactly the same really – except for the odd creak and groan here and there, but you can notice in the reflection that you've changed. Especially when people say to you, my God, what's happened to your hair? You've gone very white or grey. I think we should see ourselves as we want to be and try to make that image in the mirror as close to that image of ourselves that we want. Cause I've heard a few people like Bill Cullen, how he looks in the mirror every day and tells himself he's wonderful. It sounds a bit overdone the way he does it, but I can see the point in it, the logic – what you want to see you actually look for and you make it there. I remember Bob Hope actually said that. He always looked in the mirror and always saw this confident person. He never let the reflection become morose or depressed. It's the way he tended to see himself then.

GG *What were you going to say to me before I turned this on?*

EMcG I find you don't really see a real image of yourself in the mirror, you see a kind of inverted image. Unless you have two mirrors, only then can you see ... this all sounds very vain, that I look in mirrors all the time. But that your real reflection will only come up in the second mirror. It's good to actually see the real you in the double mirror. I don't look in the double mirror all the time, but sometimes I do. Try it out yourself. You'll be doing it now all evening.

GG *Where is your wedding photograph?*

EMcG Under the bed, the best place to keep it. Do you want to see it?

GG *One question I ask is how does it make you feel when you look at a photo of yourself when you were 20?*

EMcG Sometimes regretful you know. Just to suddenly think is it that long ago? I suppose you should feel happy in a lot of ways, as it was a happy time. Ruefulness or regret, or whatever the feeling is. You have to keep active as well. It's very important. A lot of people, very young people just give up, you know, people who are 45 or 50 and they say that's it. I've met people over the years, it could be a family thing as well. There is an ageing thing and a negative way of thinking. It's a mental habit; it's a way of thinking and outlook thing.

Monica-Ann Dunne

GG *Can you identify with Lilian's story on reflections?*

MD Oh well, yes. But not in exactly the same way I suppose. This has nothing to do with mirrors, but I would be more likely to look at myself in a photograph at different stages of my life, and well then see the enormous changes as I go along. I've always been hung up on photography or just snapping. I would have an awful lot of pictures over the entire range of my life, and I find that seeing myself at different stages, I would find that very illuminating.

See the thing is that as you age, the changes are very incremental. They're quite gradual. So if you're looking at yourself in a mirror every day, you probably wouldn't see the same dramatic differences.

I'll tell you, talking of reflection, I find myself reflected more in people that I know, in their reaction to me. I can see my reflection in them and how they react.

GG *Would these be people you may not have met in a while?*

MD Yes, probably. Like for instance I think I was telling you about a funeral I was at relatively recently, and I would have met a lot of people I wouldn't have seen for ages, maybe 20 years or something. One of the remarks was 'I remember, I remember your face, but I can't remember who you used to be'. I kind of laughed and said well I'm still here you know. A more revealing one, maybe 50 years ago, we used to be dating and anyhow, cause we hadn't seen each other in a long time, he said, 'Monica-Ann, what happened to the 22-inch waistline?' Obviously it's not 22 inches anymore and that's one way where you really do see a big difference. You can see now why he never made the cut!

What I'm trying to say is that there are different ways of reflecting the progression of ageing, and for me, one of them would be other people's reaction to me, and indeed my reactions to some people that I wouldn't have seen in a long time, and I have to say now in a couple of cases, recently, I found it very diffi-

cult to even recognize the same person in the older person. Now there would have been a huge gap between the time we saw each other, before and now. So change really is gradual, it is incremental. So that people you are seeing all the time, you would never get the same reflected back at yourself reaction.

GG *Do you have an image in your own mind as a much younger Monica?*

MD Well obviously I do because I picked out the Schiaparelli dress image that I wanted to wear from the images you had in your studio, and I mean there is no way in the world I would have suited it now. But that would have been an image from a particular time in my life, years ago. And that would be one that I really would have gone for and loved.

GG *In terms of physical appearance, when you look at a photo of you when you were 19 or 20, what would your initial split second feeling be upon looking at it?*

MD Oh yeah. I'd probably say 'My God, what was I like?'. No, I'd probably be a bit embarrassed at myself when I was at different age because I like being now. I wouldn't ever feel sad about it, in fact I'm very glad about being the 'me' I am now. It would be not so much my face, but my body. Generally speaking I don't really think about age.

GG *What about physically?*

MD Joints begin to creak, then they get arthritic, then painful. That's mega, this is big. A lot of people say arthritis is Ireland's biggest pain. And you know it does inhibit, your movements just aren't the same. And memory. That's a huge thing in ageing. It's a gradual progression, and hopefully one doesn't fall into the dementia category or Alzheimer's category. It's quite high for Ireland. That would be major. See I think as long as you're mentally alert, well I think that is probably the most youth-afying thing, if I can use that word, that you can have.

Betty Shanahan

GG *You were at the first meeting where Lilian was talking about her experience with reflections? Can you identify with it?*

BS I can, but I don't have any model to look at. My mother died when I was very young, so I couldn't see me in my mother, or anyone else. The only thing I do notice, is my younger sister, how alike we are, and I've only discovered that in the last ten years, you know as we get older, we get more alike. I'm about seven years older than her, so she's the one that should be worried!

GG *And were you alike when you were younger?*

I never thought we were. That changed over the years.

BS *When you were 40 or so, what were the first features you saw changing?*

I suppose the wrinkles. I felt my face was far fuller. I thought my face was narrower and it was fuller than I realised. I probably put on a bit of weight. When you see a photograph first, well I notice the wrinkles. And when I look at the photograph a few years later, the wrinkles weren't bad at all because now I had more wrinkles. You know, so then you realised that you are ageing.

GG *And what about physically?*

BS Well of course that too. I get the biggest shock when I go into a shop and I see myself in the mirror. Because I see myself, I think I see what I look like. And I walk into a shop, and I'm bent forward, and I'm not as straight or tall as I used to be, and a bit rounder in the middle.

GG *And what age is that person in your head?*

BS I don't know, it's very hard to put an age on it. I don't feel as old as I look. I still feel physically younger, but how many years I couldn't say. I couldn't put an age on it. My vision of myself is straighter and slimmer. I know at my age, I can't possibly look that young, you know. But I expect to be straighter and

slimmer, and I get a shock when I see what I look like. I've lost at least an inch in height. That's because I had a hip replacement, and one leg is slightly shorter so that's partly why. And then in a photograph all my children are very tall, except one that's slightly taller than me, and I'm tiny compared to them in a photograph, which is a bit of a shock.

GG *So what is it like when you see a photograph of yourself?*

BS I don't like it. I never did, and over the years when I look back, I find they weren't bad at all. It's just my feeling about them. I felt they're not right.

GG *I suppose it's to do with that person in our head.*

BS Yeah, but in the mirror at home, I am myself because I'm looking at it every day. Most of the time it's just my face. When I was in America with my daughter, I got up one morning and went into the bathroom and I was facing the mirror, I couldn't avoid it. My hair was standing on end, I was like a witch. It was the first time I really felt, this is dreadful. I got over that though. We're not all perfect in the morning.

GG *I've started to look at my own reflection. I'm coming up to 40 and am noticing lines around my eyes. I'm not sure if I would have been so reflective if I weren't doing this project.*

BS You probably wouldn't. I think most people do think like that when they come up to 40. I don't know why 40, because people at 40 to me now are very young looking. As you get older, younger people get younger and younger looking.

GG *When you look at your wedding photograph, if I were to ask you what you felt for the first split second you looked at it, what feeling would it be?*

BS I was so slim and skinny. The difference. I looked quite well in the wedding photograph, but at the time I thought it could have been better. I don't feel sadness. I accept it. It's just the way things are. It's just life. I remember looking at a photograph that was taken over in the grass over there. I was reading the news-

paper and I wasn't expecting it you know, and I saw the photograph I said 'My God that's dreadful' but when I saw that photograph years later, it was a lovely photograph. With me, my first reaction is always a bad one.

GG *So the fashion photograph I took of you with the light behind you, you didn't seem to mind that much.*

BS Well I think I expected worse, I really did. I expected worse. It's not me anyway.

GG *Is there anything else you would like to add about growing old.*

BS The only thing that I find hard to accept is how slowed down you get. You know it's harder to do things. You even speak slowly. You hesitate, you even think about what you're going to say. And I think that young people talk so fast nowadays, you can't always understand them. My own age group have no problem, but trying to talk to younger people is impossible. As well as that, you have all kinds of disabilities, and there are little bits falling off you that have to be replaced. You have to be repaired all the time, I think we're all living on medications of one form or another. It's hard to get used to that, especially when you've always been healthy. I'm used to it now. When I reached 70, I said I'm old now, there's no point in pretending I'm younger.

GG *Was there an element of letting go, in terms of what other people think of you? Do you care less what people think?*

BS There is. It gradually happens when you reach retirement age, which would be about 65. You sort of stop whatever work you've been doing. Things have been going on normally up until then, and things change, and I think you have more time to sit back and think. And you do realise that you're not worried what people think of you, to a certain extent. It gradually builds up. I could never say I don't care at all, I do; but it does ease a bit. Just go along and do what you want to do.

You don't go around trying to please everyone.

GG *How was retirement for you?*

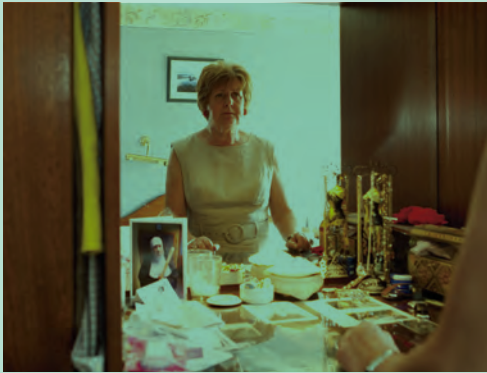
BS It was OK. My husband retired a year before me, and you know it was fine. I was in a lot of classes mostly art classes. And I went and did yoga. So I was out a lot. So when my husband died, it changed my life completely. Now, my life is completely different to what it was. I joined the active age group. They're great, and good for people. It may not be always active! We talk a lot.

GG *My own mother wouldn't go on the bus that takes senior citizens to Donegal town, as she saw that as a facility for older people, even though she herself is retired. Do you find that everyone has that?*

BS Yes, especially in the active age group. We don't want to join it. It's for old people. You feel a lot younger than they are. When you join them though, you find everyone is the same, especially people the same age. So they're not older than you.

GG *So what's the difference?*

BS I don't know. I think you suddenly realise you are the same age as they are. But it takes a few years. I know a lot of people won't join because they think we're all too old for them. It's interesting. Maybe it's the mental age in your head again? I think it is that. You don't feel you're ready for that stage in your life. I think you feel that you don't need something like that.



1	2	3	4	5
		6	7	
8	9			

- 1.Eddie McGinley
- 2.Betty Shanahan
- 3.Vincent Reilly
- 4.Monica-Ann Dunne
- 5.Michael Tighe
- 6.Mary Toole
- 7.Deirdre Owens
- 8.Bernadette Gallagher
- 9.Anne Flanagan

Where Do You Think You're Going?

HD Video, 2011

Duration: 11 minutes

At a location of their choosing, three of the participants talk about their own experience with fashion as they have aged, along with their recollections about the particular places they have chosen.

"I would never wear anything outlandish. I wouldn't want to draw attention to myself. I think that's the Irish male – don't draw attention to yourself."

Eddie McGinley

"It's really not regarding older people as still living extensions of what they were in their youth, which was interested in fashion ... it's assigning the older person, fashion wise, to a category of the most unfashionable that you can possibly imagine."

Monica-Ann Dunne

"They [older people] are left on a limb, and then some of them have an attitude 'oh but we're old and we can't be dressed up' and then other older people look at you when you are dressed up and say 'oh look at you all dressed up, where do you think you're going', and that puts people off, being all dressed up"

Anne Flanagan



Reflections Of An Old Man

by Vincent Reilly

‘Every man desires to live long, but no man would be old’. So said Jonathan Swift way back in time when he was looking at life with a jaundiced eye. There has been so much written and discussed about the ageing process but, I personally, didn’t really think about it too much, I am blissfully retired, in good health, have grandchildren to play with and enjoy, and can while away my time, more or less, just as I please.

I go to the gym, I go walking, I dabble in drawing and painting and even took up playing the guitar again. It was during my guitar playing attempts that I got a little hint of my reactions slowing down. Could it be age related? I hadn’t played for many a year but I thought that, with a little practice, I could just pick up where I left off. To my chagrin, I discovered that my fingers were just a tiny fraction late fingering the chords and I never quite got back up to speed with the playing. I still have a go at the odd tune, but it’s for my ears only.

Last year I saw an advertisement in a local newspaper that caught my eye. A professional photographer, Garvan Gallagher, placed it. He was looking for older people, volunteers, to take part in a project reflecting on the general public’s and Official Ireland’s attitude to the elderly. He also wanted to probe older people’s viewpoint on fashion and how easy or difficult it was to buy appropriate clothing. I went along to the initial meeting and a dozen or so other older citizens had turned up.

We had an open discussion on ageing and I was surprised to hear so many of the attendees express heartfelt feelings of being ‘invisible’ to shop assistants, receptionists, etc. Some spoke of the difficulty of buying suitable clothing and the physical limitations put on them by the ageing process. Another viewpoint was the abhorrence of the deteriorating

physical appearance one sees in the mirror daily as one gets older, particularly in the facial features.

I must confess, I have never had issues on these lines. I expressed the opinion that you'll only be 'invisible' to other people if you don't approach them with self-confidence, even if you don't particularly feel it. Of course, this is true no matter what age you are. Personally, I have found that people with roles as shop assistants and personnel who deal with the public in general, are usually very polite and helpful because, I believe, I'm perceived as an elder and, therefore, deserve to be treated in a respectful manner, just as I treat them.

With regard to buying clothes, I don't have any difficulties in that particular area either. I am very fortunate to have had the same sizes in clothing for most of my adult life, which happens to be in the medium range. I buy the odd item but mostly my wife buys my clothes. She is very familiar with the sizes, colours, and styles that will fit me and nine times out of ten these criteria are correct. Like most men, I would be content to wear the same old clothes day in and day out, I'm not at all fashion conscious so the arrangement with my wife doing the buying suits me just fine.

As to the old and wrinkly face seen daily in the mirror, my attitude to that is, what can I expect at my age? Accept it, it's inevitable. At this stage I was feeling that I wasn't a suitable candidate for Garvan's project: I wasn't passionate or controversial enough in my outlook on the ageing subject. I was, maybe, a little too smug and self-satisfied. To my surprise, and to Garvan's credit, he invited me back to the subsequent meetings.

So far in the project Garvan has photographed me outside the house that I was born in at Arbour Hill, Dublin.

This was a section of the project where the subject had photos taken at a location that had a particular significance to him or her. This session also afforded the subject the opportunity to don their finest rigout and try to debunk the belief that fine tailoring or fashionable clothes only looked good on the young. At least, I think that was the point of the exercise.

My latest photographic encounter with Garvan entailed me being photographed looking at my reflection in a mirror within my own house. The idea behind this particular scenario was to capture the subject on camera as they contemplate their own image and analyse their feelings about what they are seeing and then convey these feelings and thoughts to Garvan via a recorded interview. I didn't feel particularly comfortable with this suggestion and I opted to put my thoughts down on paper instead - hence this journal.

As it happens, I had been showing Garvan my wedding album just before the session. There I was, in the prime of my life at age 27 looking, well, like a typical young man of the time (1967) on one of the most important days of his life. Looking at my 70 year old reflection some forty-three years later, I was struck by the difference in the two images; there simply was no resemblance between the two people, the young man in the wedding album and the old man in the mirror. At the same time, I didn't feel any sadness or grief at the loss of my youth, just an acceptance of the inevitable results of growing old. After all, what could I expect a seventy year old to look like?

My only fear of growing old was always that I would develop medical conditions, while not fatal or terminal, would be debilitating and affect my quality of life and I may linger in that condition for years and years and have to take lots of medication to

survive. With that in mind, and as my prime motivator, from way back to when I was 30 years old or so, I kept myself as fit and active as I could and watched my weight and what I ate. To this day, I still exercise regularly and have kept my weight steady and, thank goodness, I enjoy good health and take no medication.

Sometimes, looking back, I wish that school in my time was as it is today with friendly teachers, interesting projects to take part in, excellent learning aids and research tools like computers, etc. I think and believe that I would have thrived academically in those circumstances. As it was, I had to leave school early and begin working to help support my widowed mother and siblings. Sometimes I would wonder what it's like to play football in that very light, comfortable and colourful looking football boots and test my skill with the synthetic and lightweight ball.

I have few regrets about my past life but there are some things I would do if I had my time again. I would join a brass band and learn to play trumpet or trombone. Then I could play in a traditional jazz band in my spare time. I'd like that. I would go to art school and learn formally to draw and paint as I always felt there was an artist in me waiting to be let out like a genie out of the bottle. The opportunities to learn or try out new things weren't so readily available in my youth.

In conclusion, I will say that I don't think too deeply about old age, I just think of it as another stage in my life and I'm comfortable with it. I'm fit and healthy, I am loved by, and enjoy, the company of my wife, family, my in-laws and my grandchildren. I'm enjoying being retired and manage to get away on holidays at least twice a year.

I don't regret growing old, it's a privilege denied to many.



Final Words

by Garvan Gallagher

¹ 79% said fashion was something that was important to them in their 20s and 30s

This project began the way most do, with a small idea. My idea was focused on the invisibility older people feel in society and so, it became a natural extension of my previous project *Wearing Purple*. This project, *My Way*, developed in a very organic way, a very new and exciting way for me. It was mostly shaped by the participants, which can only add a very rich and unique layer to how the work is received.

A middle-aged man such as myself, can only research this topic. It's simply not known first-hand. As part of my research, I created a small online survey of ten or so questions, which I asked the participants and others to complete. The project had one question at its core: Do older people abandon fashion or does the fashion industry abandon older people? I didn't know the answer to that.

Forty-three older people completed this survey. Out of those who took part, 26% were aged 50-60 years, 51% were aged 61-70, 21% were 71-80 and 2% were over 80. One of the common questions I put to people throughout this project, was how old they felt. Most people recognised they had a vision of themselves, usually somewhat younger, in their mind. In the survey, when asked what age they felt, the most popular age was 50.

The premise of the core question, and I suppose my assumption was that yes, it does become more difficult to buy clothes as you age, particularly if you were always interested in fashion¹. Out of those surveyed, 60% said that it was more difficult to find clothes as they got older, whereas 5% had no opinion.

Does our fashion sense change as we age? Do we tend to buy more comfortable clothes and footwear? Not surprisingly, 72% said that comfort was more of a concern over style, but just over half (58%) said that their fashion sense had changed as they got older.

One of the most common phrases I have encountered in all the interviews and field research I've done, was that of 'mutton dressed as lamb'. Almost everyone mentioned it, usually referring to a question I would have asked about his or her fashion and whether it changed as they grew older. The phrase is considered offensive and generally directed to an older woman who dresses in a style of clothing that is more suited to a younger person. Almost 60% of people said that they thought older people wore what society thought they should wear. This, I suppose, implies that older people do not wish to be ridiculed or to be seen as acting other than 'their age', even though they might like to wear, and could wear, something a little more fashionable.

My introduction to this publication began with the staggering statistic that by 2050, one third of the population in the developed world would be over 60. Of all the people surveyed, only 30% had said that money was a concern when they bought clothes. The baby-boom generation will no doubt have a lot more spending power than the current older generation. They'll be living longer and there will be a lot more of them.

So, does the fashion industry along with all the other retailers ignore the over 60s, and can they continue to do so? Out of the people surveyed, 28% usually stick to one or two shops, whereas 61% said that they tend to buy clothes from more than two shops. While they don't quite ignore the over 60s, the choice of retailers for the older demographic is certainly less than the younger demographic, and according to Monica-Ann Dunne, designers simply seem to ignore body shape when it comes to the older woman, leaving the consumer with very little choice:

This uniform that's now presented for older people is so lacking in imagination or creativity. It's either trousers and a skirt, and straight from the shoulder with no waistline, no hint of any body shape at all. Supposedly being kind to older people to cover their lumps and bumps, but not really. Not really –

Monica-Ann Dunne
(video interview)

Personally, one of the most enjoyable parts about working with older people, is that they don't really care what other people think, within reason of course. It seems as we age, we lose the barriers we are so fond of in our younger years. Maybe it's about proving ourselves as young adults, as achievers, as mothers and fathers, as businessmen and women. From my experience working with the people on this project, there were very few barriers. People were open, honest and frank in their discussions with me. 46% of the people surveyed agreed that they care less about what other people think of them now than they did when they were younger. 35% never really cared in the first place. This is a nice statistic to end with.

In terms of my own experience, I can honestly say that it has been made richer and healthier because of these discussions. Perhaps I'm now well equipped to deal with the new man in the mirror, who will no doubt make his presence known, any day now.

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