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Community Art: An Insight into Macnas

by

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Introduction

This thesis is concerned with the development, the aims and objectives and the future plans of the Galway based community arts group Macnas. The first chapter is historical. It highlights the social and political aspects which resulted with the appearance of community arts in Ireland. It is not intended to be a comprehensive history. Instead it is intended to shed some light on how community arts emerged in Ireland and what community arts can offer to society.

The community arts are now a recognizable movement in Ireland, it was in 1980 that the Arts Council included it as a specific form of art in their budget. During 1985 a joint, initiative was made by the Arts Council and the Calouste Gulbenkian foundation to establish Arts community Education, ACE. This was a scheme resulted in various projects becoming established. One of these was Macnas, and it has now become a stable fixture in the Irish Arts.

This chapter examines the emergence of Macnas through its involvement with the Ace project. It discusses the influences which have inspired the group to work in the manner that it does and details the proposal presented to the ACE committee, envisaging its concept of community and community arts.

The bulk of research for this chapter was conducted through reference to written material. However the remaining research for the thesis was compiled from an interview the Pádraic Breathnach, the managing director of Macnas, on Friday 18th November, 1994.

Chapter two concentrates on the aims and objectives of Macnas. It looks at what the group hopes to accomplish with the community through its work.

It believes that there is a need for ordinary people to realise that by unleashing their own creativity they can make a difference to society. Also discussed here are the other hopes which the group are attempting to fulfill.

Macnas have become occupied not only with establishing the importance of community art, but also with the ability of the arts to create employment within the community. It wants to revolutionize society.

The need for further governmental support is illustrated here. Electoral representatives seem to have overlooked the importance of community arts. As a result, Macnas is considering becoming involved with the democratic process and creating allegiances with political groups, such as the Green Party, which is also concerned with the environment. Macnas would like to put forward a candidate for local election so as to enable it also to create change from a political angle.

The chapter discusses how Macnas differs from standard community arts groups. For instance, it believes product to be as important as the process, as opposed to the general opinion which states that the process is of more importance. It is the product which is accessible to the entire community, whereas the process is just available to those involved with the workshop. It wants to make art available to every member of the community.

The group also hope that by using old Irish folkloric stories that not only will these traditions be revived but also that Irish people will be able to delve into their mythology and reconstruct a positive cultural identity and dispose of the negative, inferior complex which has developed from portrayals of the Irish by America, England and Europe. Once this happens the group believe that Irish people will realise the cultural heritage they have and become less passive and accepting and take steps to change society.

The third and final chapter deals with the future plans of Macnas. It opens with a section which discusses the importance of the West of Ireland, particularly Galway, on the work of Macnas. It is inspired by the striking difference between the two common lifestyles in Galway; that of the young vibrant, energetic people who want to express themselves and the traditional stable lifestyle of the older generation of farmers. There is a quality of life in the west of Ireland which needs to be enhanced and preserved.

The issue of finding and the money which the group requires in order to produce their shows is discussed. It illustrates how Macnas is attempting to subsidize the lack of public funding by trying to become more self sufficient through its own fund raising and staging theatre shows.

The final section of this chapter concentrates on the approach which the group is taking to create employment and to make the community arts more widespread so as to bring about change on a larger scale. It is in the midst of establishing two companies, Mac Teo and Mac Eolas. These companies are concerned with creating props on a commercial basis for film etc, and with providing training programmes in the arts. The ultimate goals of the group are also discussed. These include setting up a community arts studio and eventually to becoming involved in politics under the arts banner.

Chapter One

Art is the spearhead of every cultural advance because it is the opening of the 'inward eye' the record of life from the deep unconscious drive to the highest intensity of emotion and awareness.

(Suzanne Langer, Cited by Kaufman, 1966, P.47)

There is no society in which artistic activity does not exist or creativity cannot be recognised. It would seem to be a necessity which satisfies a common need within human life. Ireland is not an exception, however the troubled history of modern Ireland and the austere political and religious outlooks during the early decades of the State did nothing to encourage artistic activity in the country. When Ireland became a Free State the educational system became geared towards academically orientated activities with art thought of as unimportant and therefore disregarded. This resulted not only in a large proportion of Irish people who lost the opportunity both of learning about their own artistic history and of developing creativity within themselves, but it also caused a division, by placing the 'high arts' on such a level as to be a pursuit of the socially elite.

Art is not and should not be the privilege of a select few - it is part of the social amenity to which everyone has a right.

(French experts report on the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art, 1927, cited by Kennedy, no date, page 5).

Art and creativity are elements to which everyone has the right of access, regardless of financial, educational or cultural status. This had not been the case in Ireland until recently. Now art is slowly becoming a part of everyday life. This can be explained by the emergence of various movements during the past two to three decades. One such movement which is helping to bring this about is community arts.

Community arts activists hope to make art available to everybody by safeguarding the artistic heritage, encouraging creativity, ensuring equal access and providing an environment which enhances the quality of life.

The incorporation of creativity into everyday life is important as it provides opportunities for developing self expression and self exploration in a way that other activities are unable to do. It is not the product which is important, but the process, for it is during the process that the self is expressed, decisions are encountered, problems solved and control is engineered. We are living in a period of high unemployment and low income, where people's self confidence and self esteem have been undermined. The creative process can help change this by developing a person to make a positive move towards change rather than a negative, passive acceptance of a situation.

Developments within the community arts movement have been occurring, worldwide throughout the last three decades. A provisional definition of a community arts is contained in a policy paper produced by the Community Arts Advisory Panel of the Greater London Arts Association, this is calls its 'terms of reference'.

....The term 'community arts' does not refer to any specific activity or group of activities, rather it defines an approach to creative activity embracing many kinds of events and a wide range of media
....Community arts activists operate in areas o deprivation using the term 'deprivation' to include financial, cultural, environmental or educational deprivation.

(Ref) (Ellison, 1994, p. 13)

Community Arts emerged in the west as part of the democratic movements of the 1960's. It challenged the traditional, exclusive relationship between the arts and the social elite and the conventional definition of what constitutes the arts.

Community arts is based on the idea that non-artists are not just consumers, that they have a valuable contribution to make towards artistic activity and a role to play in building culture. By doing so they become integrated with a culture, rather than merely consuming a culture which is ready made by mass media or professional artists. Artists are not seen as people to place on a pedestal and admire, they are viewed in a practical light, in a social, economic and political context. They are professionals who can assist in bringing about personal and social change by advising and helping non-artists through new processes. Process is understood to be an important part of product, an ongoing and integral part of life in the community. Community arts encourage critical thought, action and involvement amongst participants and observers as the arts are enjoyable and stimulating, adding new dimensions to many lives (Ref) (Harris, 1984, P. 8 - 9).

It was not however until the late 1970's that community arts became identifiable in the Republic of Ireland. It was a time of high unemployment rates with sprawling working class suburbs and inner city decay. Social inequality was rampant with people suffering from economic, social and cultural deprivation. In response to this the trend in adult and development education and the women's movement was growing. These groups were organising educational workshops to explore creativity, help stimulate health and well-being and encourage people to take control of their lives, through creative processes. Coupled with this were developments occurring within the Arts Council. During the mid 1970's the Council was putting into place policies of increased funding for regional arts centres, theatre groups and touring groups. However, it was not until the Arts Council's budget in 1980 that Community arts was included as a specific expenditure with two main categories under which funding was initiated.

- A. Professional groups which work outside the usual forums and concentrate their activities in and on the community.

B. Amateur activities which increase community interest in the arts.

As a result of this, there has been a growth in community arts organisations throughout Ireland such as Graffiti (Cork), CAFE and TEAM (Dublin).

During 1985, the Arts Council and Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation made a joint initiative to establish ACE, Arts Council Education. This was an experimental scheme to develop and support projects in community arts and education arts in the Irish Republic. Community arts and arts education organisations were invited to submit proposals to ACE. Those chosen would receive funding and support for a minimum of one year and a maximum of three years.

In all ACE grant aided and worked closely with six projects, three in the domain of arts education and three in the domain of community arts. One of those was the Galway based arts group, Macnas. Macnas was the first ACE project to begin work and the first to conclude its project and report. Macnas, along with CAFE, have continued from strength to strength and have become stable fixtures in the Irish arts world.

Translated literally, Macnas means joyful, exuberance, and abandonment. It is a name to which the group certainly pay justice. Their work is a colourful spectacle full of rhythm and excitement. The group is an organisation which has built a large reputation in the relatively short space of nine years. The group originally consisted of three members, Tom Conroy, Peter Sammon, both designers, and Pádraic Breathnach, heavily involved in organising the Galway Arts Festival. Their work at this stage involved projects which varied from working together on shop displays to building parade floats for the Galway Corporation.

The Galway Arts Festival was a major contributing factor the birth of Macnas for it provided acts by international theatre companies whose performances have a strong emphasis on visual imagery and upon street location, such as Els Comediants (Barcelona) and Footsbarn (Britain). Macnas were both influenced and inspired by such groups.

ACE provided an ideal opportunity for Macnas to become involved in the funding net. In order for this to happen their ideas needed to be resolved and professionally presented. Administration was handled by Ollie Jennings, an arts administrator from Galway. Writing the proposal for ACE required much thought. Together they discussed ideas in minute detail, debating and arguing about them, gathering information to support reasons as to why they should or should not be successful. This was recorded and documented and from it a varied and ambitious proposal was produced. The proposal involved theatre, sculpture, visual arts, parades, childrens' projects and education projects, an entire range of different ideas developing a multi-disciplinary approach to the arts. The main feature of the proposal was called "The Big Game", to be performed at the Connacht Football Final in 1986. This was a direct approach at bringing art to an old-fashioned country celebration. The Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) is one of a few organisations with a representative in each parish and because of this it is a powerful rural organisation.

The GAA after the Catholic Church and Fianna Fail is the only other organisation in the country with a Cumann (Committee) in each parish.... So by linking in with those I think that the ACE committee found us a very exciting way of integrating arts in with other activities in rural areas. Making arts part of life the way GAA is part of life.

Pádraic Breathnach

Macnas were, and still are, interested in communal celebration. They hope to start bringing people together to celebrate occasions through festivals and fairs.

They are not involved with creating new traditions, but with reviving old traditions and pagan celebrations, such as the Holy Well, Fair Day and Wren Boys. These traditions are still, to some extent, common in the West of Ireland. The group have coupled these old traditions with the live tradition of carnival in Europe, to provide free street entertainment for everybody in the community to enjoy. All of their ideas are involved with the mythology and paganism of the West of Ireland. Communal celebration was abandoned as the structure of society changed and Macnas want to reintroduce it to the community.

In October 1985 Macnas forwarded a letter to ACE envisaging the concept of the project being as follows.

We interpret the word community in the broad, popular sense. We are interested in the pastimes, games and rituals of our community in the west. We wish to create dramatic, visual spectacles using and exploring these popular forms of communal entertainments. Our spectacles will be created in the community, in large, outdoor familiar spaces. We hope to make fun and have fun on a grand scale and amongst ourselves..... Our initial project is entitled "the Big Game" and will be staged during the Connacht Football Final in 1986. "The Big Game" will involve over a hundred people as actors, models, characters, puppeteers, stage hands and design assistants. The centre piece of "The Big Game" will be a play within a play during the interval at the Connacht Football Finals.

During February of 1986, ACE announced they would grant-aid Macnas under two conditions. Firstly, that Macnas provided written confirmation from the GAA that "The Big Game" could be performed and secondly that they employ 20 workers under the Social Employment Scheme (SES) for one year. Coisde Chuige Chonnacht of the GAA gave their permission in April 1986 and the Department of labour informed Macnas that it was willing to fund the project through the SES. In June 1986 Macnas received funding of £20,000 from ACE. They also received aid from other quarters:

ACE	£20,000
SES	£116,480
Sponsorship	£2,000
Fundraising	£3,000
Local Authority	£500
Ireland West (Bord Failte)	£500

Total	£142,480

Macnas had an ideal circumstance for starting a project, sufficient funding, solid ideas and the help of ACE, providing active involvement and advice on how to manage, mature and document the processes involved in the project. The documentation produced included information on how Macnas operated in order to begin and complete their project. It was then given to the Arts Council to use so as to illustrate to other community arts groups how Macnas tackled their ideas and project. "The Big Game" was a success and the involvement with ACE taught Macnas how to manage an ambitious project. "ACE is probably the best thing to happen in Ireland in the last 20 years" (Pádraic Breathnach). After "The Big Game" Macnas moved on to projects such as "Gulliver", "Tír Faoi Thoinn" and "Capaill". The development and expansion within the group since 1988 has been considerable, particularly within the structure of the group. Originally it had been based along the lines of one-man shows with either Pádraic Breathnach or Ollie Jennings as the general manager. That structure has evolved to one of the collaborative structure. There is now a management team of twelve people which meet weekly to discuss the weeks work and to deal with ongoing problems of the company. The management are also members of a board which includes two members of the non-managerial staff, together they discuss projects and plans of the company At the moment they are moving towards a more genuine collaborative structure.

The success of Macnas has not only currently secured fifteen full time jobs and thirty five full time seasonal jobs within the company but it has also brought them to the forefront of community arts nationally, and to some extent, internationally. At the moment the group are concerned with increasing the amount of employment that they provide and with ensuring that the arts become the preserve of everybody.

Chapter Two

1995 will be the tenth year in which Macnas have been together. Since they first became a community arts group it has been their objective, as with other community arts groups, to use the medium of the arts to bring about change in society. They intend doing this by enabling the ordinary person to understand that by unleashing their own creativity, they can make a difference to both personal and social life. During the relatively few years that they have been together their ambition and confidence has grown which has resulted in their objectives expanding. They see themselves working to redefine not only a new way of understanding what interaction within the community means but also, helping to build a positive cultural identity. By this they hope to show what it means to work together as a unit and what it means to live in the West of Ireland. Macnas have become occupied not just with establishing the importance of community art but also with the ability of the arts to create worthwhile and decent employment within the community. They see themselves as a role model for new community arts groups and at this stage they also want to start becoming a role model for community employment. At the moment their objective is to revolutionize society. They aim to do this by helping to free the imaginations of people, by creating the opportunity for everybody to take part in the creative process, by building a climate of participation in the arts and by creating genuine employment. It is their belief that by accomplishing this a difference can be made in society.

However ambitious their aims may appear, Macnas seem to be succeeding in fulfilling their agenda. Through street shows such as Tír Faoi Thoinn, An Capaill and the Congress Centenary Cavalcade they are certainly able to captivate the ordinary person and encourage communal celebration.

Their workshops and offices are providing employment and future plans of the company foresee a large expansion in jobs. Nonetheless to accomplish their objectives fully, the group feel that the importance of companies such as Macnas need to be taken more seriously by local governments. Therefore the group are contemplating having to add political activity to their work so as to be completely recognised.

They believe that they may need to become more political in order for administrators and electoral representatives to become aware of the needs of everybody and of the contributions that everybody can made to society. However to make an impact such as this Macnas require more funding from local authorities. They feel one way of doing this by attracting enormous audiences to their shows so that politicians realise by supporting Macnas they can gather votes.

I think in some ways the contributions that artists make to Ireland is often ignored. Take Galway for example I often feel that the local authorities and the local public administration are very uninformed as to what it does for the city and subsequently the level of funding the arts get from the local authority are very low.

Pádraic Breathnach.

In response to this Macnas are considering the possibility of putting forward a candidate for local election under the arts banner, to politicise the arts in a more standard way so as avoid being overlooked by government. They want the arts policy to become included as part of the electioneering process. As Macnas are concerned with the quality of life within the community they are interested in creating allegiances with other groups, such as the Green Party or the Environmental Aspects Lobby, who are also genuinely concerned with the quality of life. They want to become involved in the democratic process to enable the ordinary person to make choices and create change.

The approach which Macnas take towards the community arts differs slightly from that taken by other community arts groups. Standard Community arts groups see themselves as facilitators using the arts process to assist a community in bringing about personal and social change. "The facilitator connects with the community and facilitates their wish toward art creativity" (Pádraic Breathnach). Although Macnas do this, it is not a major interest of theirs. They see the community as being everybody, therefore they wish to not only to bring creativity to people involved in workshops, but to the entire community. Macnas believe that "The product is as important or more important than the process", as distinct from other community arts groups. They believe the product to be important for two reasons. Firstly, Macnas full appreciate the work accomplished during the process in workshops, but they believe that the product, is a visual accomplishment of the work done and that the product is remembered after the workshop has been completed. Secondly, it is the product which is seen by the remainder of the community and which has the ability of creating a sense of excitement within that community. Macnas believe that this results in the people involved with the workshop feeling a larger sense of accomplishment and with the remainder of the community been given the opportunity of being excited by the arts.

You need the reassurance of your peer group to feel that you've achieved something in Ireland. So we think that the product on the street is as important as the process ... We're very much out of line with conventional community art thinking and we enjoy being out of line.

Pádraic Breathnach.

It is because they want to involve the entire community with their spectacles they Macnas spend much time discussing what will or will not create an atmosphere of excitement. To do this their work is centred on the reservation of local traditions and folklore.

All of the ideas behind their work are there in order to cater for the community, so that everybody is reminded of old stories and enjoy themselves in an environment of celebration. Their aim is to thrill street audiences “We don’t make theatre shows for theatre people, we make shows for the community” (Pádraic Breathnach). It is probably because of this that their work appeals to all sections of interest, to every member of a community from the theatre critic to the ordinary person.

We have a sort of rule of thumb that the show be accessible to all people. It is extraordinary for a theatre company like Macnas, that they can go to Dublin and be the hit of the festival, and win an award and we can turn around the following day and play to 800 thirteen year olds in Birr and that they get as much fun out of the show That is crucially important to our work. We see the community and every member of it.

Pádraic Breathnach.

Apart from using Irish folklore for their subject matter so as to interest local, ordinary people, they also use it in order to revive old Irish stories and mythology. Macnas believe that the people of the West are a people of storytellers, but that the tradition of storytelling has diminished due to various reasons. Because of this they have ample source material for the production of shows, with endless stories to retell and eager audiences to watch and listen to them. These stories are an expression of the local community’s self identity. Apart from wanting to revive these stories for the sake of tradition, Macnas realise the potential of reaching back into our mythology to rebuild a positive cultural identity. They believe that in order to make a genuine effort towards personal and social change it is necessary to shed the “inferiority complex” that many Irish people have.

Macnas sternly believe that the best possible way to change this complex to one of a positive nature is through the revival of old Irish culture and mythology.

We see a great need for a cultural identity in Ireland, from the Hollywood Paddy, to the terrorist. We'd like to lose all those negative elements of the Irish character..... We'd like to think by going back into our mythology we can define ourselves as a nation of people with imagination ... intelligence ... sensitivity ... history ... wit and humour. You can redefine yourself in a more noble way and not be accepting the cliched lititents that we're given by England, America and Europe.

Pádraic Breathnach.

It is their hope that by accomplishing this they can reidentify what it means to be Irish and from that, work towards encouraging people to create change for themselves. Nonetheless, they do realise that not everybody is interested in changing society and that as a result the public perception of Macnas is not always positive. There are reactionary groups who see Macnas as being some sort of threat to society and as being nothing more than a "dreadlocked, nose ringed, dirty, crusty, dope smoking, hippies". Macnas do not however, see reactions such as this as being a threat to them. They are fully aware that there is a part of society which is very adverse to change. They see these people as being " ... conservative, racist, facist..." and as being the main reason for the need of change. The group think that this negative reaction is proof that they are starting the wheels in motion with regards to changing the way society operates.

We are about change and in some ways unless you have a reaction against you, you're not doing anything even though there are very heavy duty elements of racism and conservatism stacked against us ... there is huge popular support for us as well.

Pádraic Breathnach.

It is this support which Macnas is interested in, The work they produce receives widespread support. They generate an enormous atmosphere of excitement where ever they happen to perform, whether in Ballinasloe or in Barcelona. But it is in Galway and the West of Ireland which they feel most attached and where they would hope that their work would pay the most dividends.

At the moment they feel that the quality of life in the West of Ireland is already quite high but, that it has the potential to be even higher, which is what they want to happen. Apart from the vibrancy that their shows generate, Macnas play quite an important social function in Galway. they provide quite a number of people from the community with a direction, a way of contributing to an organisation which is trying to make a difference to the quality of people's lives. They believe in the plural of society, of taking care of each other and maintaining a caring and social environment and organisation. This sense of togetherness is not just something which effects the people involved with the group, it is also evident in their performances. The shows which Macnas produce are vibrant from being full of cohesion and energy. This collective energy can not materialise without togetherness. It is this sense of togetherness which provides the high level of energy which is obvious throughout their productions. Not only do their shows offer a high level of entertainment and communal celebration but at the moment Macnas also generate up to a million pounds a year in Galway. This is a large contribution to the social, economic and commercial life in the city. Their future plans do not merely involve helping to assist ordinary people to make personal and social changes. They plan for the employment they provide to expand greatly and for the amount of money that they generate in Galway to increase within the next four to five years. They want to improve all aspects of life in the community with which they are concerned, the West of Ireland.

Chapter Three

Although Macnas have been received with acclaim nationally, they have no desire to vacate Galway in order to set up elsewhere, regardless of the financial problems that being based there presents. The group feel that the positive aspects which have evolved from being based in Galway far outweigh the negative aspects. They feel the one and only problem created by being situated in the West of Ireland is cost. Phone calls, transport of materials and travelling to destinations to present their various productions would be greatly reduced if the company moved their head office to Dublin. But they think that the extra costs are worth it in order to stay in Galway. The West of Ireland offers Macnas many things, a certain quality of life, a mixture of different types of people and a wild, undeveloped scenery. They consider these aspects as major contributors not only to their emotional and psychological well being but also, to the standard of the production that they create.

...You have this extraordinary energy in the West of Ireland, in Galway particularly. Strong and young people ... who want to express themselves. And side by side with that you have farmers ... who have been living the same lifestyle for 70 years and their fathers before them. Not only are you at the forefront of young, mad, radical, creative energy but next door to it is a very old, stable, folkloric tradition. Side by Side.

Pádraic Breathnach.

This extreme contrast of lifestyles inspires Macnas. They feel it offers them all the ingredients for artistic creativity and all the inspiration for art, especially as these lifestyles are very much alive and vibrant. This coupled with the survival, to some extent, of old Irish traditions in the West of Ireland makes Galway a vital, almost essential, component in order for them to produce work. Because of these things they feel as though they are standing on the periphery and the edge of things.

We're always more close to falling off the cliff, so it creates an insecurity, it lacks stability ... it allows you to be more imaginative in the art you make, when you're a non-rigid, conformist structure, and this is a non-rigid climate here.

Pádraic Breathnach.

Galway, it's surroundings, people and sense of folklore inspire and urge Macnas to continue with their work despite low funding. "Money is something we never get enough of, so we don't view money as a vital ingredient" (Pádraic Breathnach). The group try not to allow lack of funds affect their drive towards bringing art to the community. Although Macnas receive funding from the Arts Council, University College Galway, Galway Corporation and the Galway County Council, it is not sufficient. As with other organisations, Macnas are vastly underfunded and are currently running at a deficit of about £100,000. Of the money which Macnas spend, about 25% of it is received through public funding, the remainder, 75%, is money which they gather either from earning it themselves or from collections during their own fundraising. "Our turn over since we first started would be about £800,000" (Pádraic Breathnach). Macnas have been operating in a deficit situation for about six years. The financial pressures have proven to be a huge strain on the company. Although the funding which the group is receiving has been increasing it is however still grossly limited. Their only hope with regards to public funding is that eventually, they will receive proper recognition in order to get a more steady funding base. In the meantime they obviously require money to purchase materials, cover costs etc, so as to fabricate and produce their spectacles. To prevent relying solely on public funding, the company are attempting to become more self sufficient. They are trying to accomplish this in a particularly simple way. Firstly by producing and staging a show under a subsidised environment, they assess whether or not it may be viable to apply that show in a commercial sense. If that becomes an option, they will stage the show commercially. The past two years have seen Macnas producing more theatre shows than previously.

Shows such as Buile Shuibhne (The Sweeney) and the Táin have been received with success. Their theatre shows have evolved to help subsidise public funding but theatre was something which emerged from their street performances through a separate circumstances, which was as follows. A group of people from SES scheme working with Macnas and enjoyed both performing and being involved with the company. However, they felt that they wanted to express their work in a much more structured state than on the street, whilst at the same time, remaining with Macnas. The result was theatre. Although theatre is not the principle activity of Macnas, they now have an ensemble of ninety people who have been involved in this area for just over two years.

Their shows have been very successful and received a good response from the ordinary person to the critic "This is a strong, vibrant, energetic and moving piece of theatre" (Sweeney, Evening Press, no date). This is the first year that the group will be receiving a theatre grant, £20,000.

Macnas are not restricting themselves with theatre in their approach to raising funds and creating employment. One new project which they are involved with is establishing a company of theirs called Mac Teo. This is a fully commercial company set up by Macnas in the business sector, essentially to provide full time employment for the technicians and artists who work with the company. Mac Teo is comprised of a team of designers, artists and fabricators who design, build and manufacture creative props and specialist objects for films, plays, displays etc. The aim of Mac Teo is to meet the needs of clients in a timely and cost effective fashion while retaining the creative dynamism which characterises the work of Macnas and creating worthwhile employment. In comparison with the initial, experimental departure of Macnas into theatre, Mac Teo was also nurtured under the subsidised climate of the company.

They are a long considered programmes. Macnas is a good climate to try something out and then know if it will work and give it a life of its own.

Pádraic Breathnach.

A second project being tackled by Macnas is the establishment of a company named MacEolas. However, this is not a new project as this company ran a very successful programme two years ago. It provided training in the arts and is about to run a new series of training in the arts during 1995 and 1996. Between these two new projects Macnas will have created twelve full time jobs by 1996. They hope that within the next ten years both companies will be providing twenty full time jobs.

Apart from continuing to establish and mature these companies, Macnas have various other ambitious projects and future plans. Most immediately they plan to maintain their present level of work and continue to develop various aspects of it. The main development they will undertake within the following two years is in the area of theatre.

They hope that the present ensemble will remain together, as they work well as a unit, and tour both nationally and internationally with new shows. Apart from continuing to work together on creating and producing new spectacles the company intend to develop a national community arts studio. They already have a proposed building in Galway in which they want to facilitate the community arts. They want to establish the full provision of a library concerned just with the community arts. This library is to contain an entire selection of reference books and information on technology. In this community arts studio they also plan to set up and maintain network systems which will link directly with other community arts groups nationally and with various groups internationally. They also propose to provide studio space for workshops, dance, music etc.

They hope that they will also be able to provide training by establishing consultancy team who give a 'mothering' service for new community arts groups. They believe themselves to be a success story and they want to give advice and help new groups to set up. If their plans materialise, the end result will be a facility where people can visit to gain information on and learn about every angle of the community arts in Ireland, particularly in the West of Ireland. Macnas have given themselves about five years to begin establishing this centre.

Apart from all of this their ultimate goal is to put forward a candidate for European Parliament so as to instigate change not only from a community position but from a governmental position to create a fully democratic, plural society.

Macnas have many plans for the future and seem determined to accomplish their proposed ideas. Their previous work indicates the ability that they have in fulfilling their propositions, regardless of how ambitious they may appear.

Conclusion

Emerging trends nationally within the area of community arts indicate new understandings of what the arts are, what the arts can do and who can be an artist. The work of groups such as Macnas create a sense of excitement and communal celebration within a community, encouraging people to pull together and work as a unit. If more and more people are receiving an introduction to art and developing the confidence to express themselves then not only will the so called arts establishment automatically find itself under redefinition but also so will other establishments which revolve around elitism. Development in community art which enhance access to the arts are to be welcomed. At local level there is a large growth in informal creative developments and educational activity. Communities are beginning to learn about their own artistic heritage and to take from it. Hopefully from reaching into the past it will result in communities building a positive cultural identity and becoming more confident about themselves and the possibilities they can bring about to change their lives. Producing work within workshops, exploring and stimulating creativity results in people being encouraged to take control not just of creative side but also of their lives, the ultimate goal being one concerned with changing society.

The work produced by Macnas has been, and still is, successful in its attempt to bring art to the average, ordinary person. Without a doubt, their spectacles create an atmosphere of excitement within Galway, or wherever they are performed. The shows which they produce succeed in reviving old Irish mythology and traditions and succeed in making people proud of the fact that these stories are from Irish folklore and are part of Ireland's artistic heritage.

The groups wants to revolutionise society and help ordinary people realise, that they can change society to one of a truly democratic nature. Their work has certainly not gone unnoticed nationally or internationally. It has made an exciting impression in the area of Irish art and has been received with open arms by the critics.

The work produced by Macnas places community art in a new view, the group have shown with great success that artistic creativity can be produced to a very high standard by the so called ordinary person and be received with critical acclaim. It is creating the opportunity for everybody to take part in the creative process whilst at the same time, creating genuine employment.

Despite the work of community art groups who have been improving access to arts events, there is still much need for increasing the opportunity for everybody to discover and enhance their creative potential through participation. The spread of community arts activity and the number of grant giving bodies remains small.

Although the Arts Council has demonstrated a commitment to community arts through its involvement in Arts Community Education and its committee for Community Arts, the Councils financial review of 1992 show that only £219,000 - 2% of its total expenditure went to community arts and festivals. Only six community arts organisations (including Macnas) received grants.

(Ellison, 1994, p. 46).

Nonetheless, Macnas refuses to allow the lack of public funding affect it in its aim of bringing art to the community. Instead it has used the lack of money as an incentive and opportunity to create and develop community employment through the arts. The group is involved with establishing two companies, both connected with Macnas but with separate objectives. The first is MacTeo which is a company concerned with manufacturing props for film etc and the second is MacEolas which will be involved with training people in the arts.

Macnas can be viewed as a success story with regards to the community arts. It is aware of this and as a result sees itself as being a role model both for other community arts groups and for community employment. Because of this it plans to establish a community arts studio. The aim of this will be to provide encouragement, help and advice to other people considering setting up community arts groups. However, the ultimate goal of the group is to put forward a candidate for European parliament under the arts banner.

It feels that this is the only sure way of bringing about change in society. This is a rather surprising move to consider as community arts groups are generally apolitical. It will be interesting to note the impact which proposed move into politics will have on the group and whether or not it will affect things as foreseen.

APPENDIX

TRANSCRIPTION OF INTERVIEW WITH PÁDRAIC BREATHNACH

JF: What does Macnas mean?

PB: Macnas literally translated means joyful exuberance and abandonment. But it comes from a story we have of a young calf that is born in the winter and wouldn't be let out until the first fine day of spring and when he's let out he's jumping around the place with great enthusiasm, that's called Macnas. Or an old fella gets stoned on a Tuesday gets a bottle of whiskey and fancies his changes with a young one, that sort of sexual lunacy would be called Macnas as well.

JF: What does Macnas mean to you ?

PB: Joyful, exuberance and abandonment, cutting loose, getting out there.

JF: Whats the structure within the group ?

PB: Well the structure within the group that would be changing as we go on. The structure at the moment is a collaborative where group members meet every Monday morning and discuss the work.

JF: With the ACE project was there anything going on before that ?

PB: Yes. There was 3 of us, 2~~0~~ arts designers Tom Conroy, Peter Sammon, and myself used to work in this building making up shop display, Patricks

day floats for the corporation and a few other little projects like that an anti Regan protest and a few other projects like that. So we were interested in working together and then when the ACE funding was announced we decided to ask Ollie Jennings, who was a well known arts administrator in Galway to see if he could shape up our ideas and get us into the funding net as such and he succeeded in doing that. So our roots come from sort of from, parades to sculpture well Tom Conroy is an artist a designer trained in the NCAS I think and Peter Sammon is a performer and a designer whose self educated and I'm a stage manager, so we just needed a bit of administration and away we went. So the roots were based in Galway french theatre and the arts festival would be the roots of Macnas. Particularly the arts festival. The arts festival was bringing in groups, comedians, footsbarn so on and so forth, and we saw these groups and we saw what they were doing. Simple it was in some ways now difficult it was in other ways and we felt we could do that. We could have a go at that, so the Arts festival was a major - Macnas was a product of the arts festival in some ways. Foots barn is a big influence on Macnas life Rod Goodall who used to be an actor and director with Footsbarn is now the director with Macnas. So we have a pretty close tie with Footsbarn over the years so its been a great cross fertilization of European theatre really.

JF: What input did the ACE Project have and what was the result of becoming involved with it.

PB: The input was basically money. There was another thing about it. It forced us to create a submission they gave us money, feeding money to create a submission on what we would do over 3 years a 3 year plan for Macnas. and that forced us down in a room for 6 weeks and make up the ideas. It forced us to work through all our ideas in detail and put them on paper.

And the oddest thing about all that we made this 3 year plan day one we had to make it look good as ambitious as possible or we won't get the money and the strangest thing that happened is we did everything we said that we'd do in 3 years which is a phenomenal achievement. So it forced us to lay down all our ideas on paper, think them through argue for them back them up with evidence. So the time we started the project we didn't want to be thinking done so the process of ACE was great in that way. It forced us to think because you had to realise a submission and then when you got the money you got plenty of it. We got a big lump of money so you had an ideal circumstance starting a project. Ace is probably the best thing to happen in Ireland in the last 20 years. They did 8 or 9 projects I think at that time. There's a report the ACE report. I'm not sure about the success of other projects but I think they have been a considerable success but we're an obvious success story from that.

JF: Did they give more than money - did they give advice ?

PB: Well initially we got a load of advice off them. ACE also had an active involvement in that they got to come from Limerick Peter Gormal for example a writer came in and worked, he wrote a document on us on the involvement and process so we have to create a report we also create education projects and wrote those up and submitted them to the arts council for use by other education groups so there was a lot of experimenting with an idea, getting advice on the idea, doing it, writing it up and giving it back and saying - this is how we did it, this is how it worked. Thank you very much. So there was quite a lot of interaction in that way between Macnas and ACE.

JF: What kind of proposal did you hand into them?

PB: We handed in a very varied proposal to the community arts group. That were involved in theatre, sculpture visual arts, parades, children's projects, education projects. Projects tied in with the GAA for example, where we were using that as a way of local heroes. A whole range of different ideas, developing a multi-disciplinary approach to the Arts. And I think they were impressed by the idea that we could actually tie- up sort of old fashioned country organisations the GAA. That we were able to persuade the GAA to take on this idea. And that really swung it for us like the GAA after the catholic church it was the only organisation after Fianna Fáil and the catholic church is the only other organisation in the county with a cumann in each parish. So it was a very powerful rural organisation. So by linking in with those I think that the ACE committee found us a very exciting way of integrating arts in with other activities in rural areas. Making arts part of life the way GAA is part of life.

JF: What traditions are you coming from?

PB: Well we've always thought that we were coming from the old traditions of the patron, the holy week, the wren boys, the old vestiges of pagan celebration that are still common in the West of Ireland.

The old fair day for example, before the marts the local saint feast day but as well as that those coupled with knowing those traditions exist but then picking up on a more realistic value on the live tradition of carnival in Europe. But initially and still, all our ideas are to do with mythology and paganism in the west of Ireland. The first thing we did was the Ballinasloe fair and we did the wren boys that year as well - 1986.

We had Bishop Casey on the wren boys with us that year. Reviving the wren and ideas like that they were people very keen on. There's loads of days of communal celebration that we have abandoned in Ireland, society structure has chanted. There's no fair days anymore the fair day was the biggest day of the year in parishes and villages. Regattas and races and agricultural shows they are declining in the West of Ireland because of the decline in population. So we have this notion of reviving days of communal celebration and the idea would that it would free that you would bring your family and enjoy the day. They were the influences that started us off.

JF: has it developed from the original notion?

PB: Oh yes - we have developed a radical approach to unemployment. Now we see actually creating employment creating worthwhile and honest and reasonable employment in good conditions the second most important thing in Macnas and life. That wasn't a thing we thought of in the beginning. We never thought of the potential of Macnas to create employment. But now we've made that our, after the only truly revolutionary acts to free the imagination, the only worthwhile is to create a profit making of employment they're the 2 main guidelines of Macnas at the moment. So it had developed a lot in that we see ourselves now not alone picking up on the traditions of the West of Ireland in the past but we see ourselves trying to redefine a new way at looking at what work is and what interaction with the community is, what a life is in the west of Ireland and we're trying to set up a role model for community employment.

JF: Is the success something which was expected or has it been a struggle?

PB: Well we always expected to do well, we always thought our ideas were good and our commitment to the idea was very good. Success had brought its own problems with it. But has secured 15 full time jobs and the equivalent of 35 other full time jobs seasonal employment we create. You have to use success. But there was an old scaffolder, in Mayo that told me one time if you let success turn your head you're staring at disaster. Success is a two way thing the main thing about success is to deal with it rationally and reasonably and not get carried away with it. Its only a very inferior thing media hype and success. It impacts on our lives in that we get more work but also more is expected of us and people don't believe the financial problems we have. There is negative aspects to it. The positive sense allows us to do our work rather to command respect.

JF: Do you think you're creating any new traditions?

PB: Yes. I think that maybe not creating new traditions, but maybe reviving old traditions. I think that the influence of Macnas in street parades in Ireland can be seen in every community festival in Ireland now. When you look at the paper you'll see Coote Hill Art festival or south Liffey Arts festival or Skibbereen Arts festival you see Macnas type animals and objects and creations. I think we've made a major influence on the parade the communal celebration aspect of art I think our work - in 9 short years the influence of our work has been phenomenal and will become more. Oh yes I think we have changed a lot. I think that we have maintained our independence as well over the years and I think that we have proven that it is possible to live an independent life without being overly influences or overly hampered by the heavy duty bureaucracy or the heavy duty religious repression. I think we've proved you can live with those two things and still be creative.

JF: In retrospect are there things that you would have liked to have done differently?

PB: There are loads of things I'd like to have done differently. I would like if Gulliver hadn't caused me to have a nervous breakdown. I would've like if I'd learned more about meeting and communication in the first 2 years of Macnas and I would've like if I hadn't fallen out with the artists that I fell out with in 1987. There are loads of different aspects that we would've like. Macnas is a big learning process for us as a personal development the 9 years of Macnas have been the most traumatic changing time of my life. But at 9 years all you can say is that we have thrown convention to the wind and all we're prepared to do now is openly embrace change welcome it and that is a very positive attitude. I think that we, in the beginning we were too conservative, too restricted, too careful. Now we're much more radical and much more better placed to embrace change and take change on. Personal level the developments of ones character in the last 9 years have been phenomenal and I think that there's lots of things to regret lost of friendships thats the only thing that you would regret. But the tension of the work did cause us to loose some friends.

JF: What are the main aims and objectives?

PB: The main aim and objective of Macnas is to revolutionarise society by freeing he imagination the second objective is to create worthwhile and decent employment, that is not created for profit making. Society is obsessed with creating employment, all employment is creating profit for somebody. Third aim is to create the opportunity for each person to part-take in the creative process and the forth is to create a climate of participation in the arts.

JF: Are you succeeding in your aims and objectives?

PB: Yes I think so, I think though that given the nature of humans that we're going to have to become more political in a sense that we're going to have to put our view points across to the administrator and to the electoral representatives more. So we may have to add a political activity to our work to make sure that people make decisions in government and local government, are aware of our needs and the contributions we can make towards society. I think in some ways the contributions that artists make to Ireland is often ignored. Take Galway for example, its hailed as the cultural capital of Ireland. I often feel than the local authorities and the local public administration are very uninformed as to what the art activity in the city is and very ill informed as to what it does for the city and subsequently the level of funding the arts get from the local authority are very low. So I think another aspect we'll have to look into in the future and we're keen to have a got with it, is to politicise the arts I a more standard way, to actually put forward a candidate for local election under the arts banner, to make the arts polity part of the electioneering process and to create allegiances with people like the Green Party or the environmental aspects lobby, to work on the quality of life because the arts impact greatly on people, quality of life and I always maintain that we have a great quality of life down in the west and to maintain that quality of life we must set up strategic allegiances with people who are genuinely concerned about quality of life, not concerned about business so on and so forth. So I would see a situation where arts to make people aware of the achievements and aims of Macnas for example. That we would have to draw allegiance and start participating in the democratic process i.e. setting up people for election.

JF: What do you see as the groups social function?

PB: Macnas have a huge social function in Galway, in the sense that it gives a lot of young people direction, it gives them hope, it gives them a way of contributing to an organisation and also it gives them a reasonable expectation of a full time job - down the years I mean it could take 3 or 4 years to create a job but its better then, and also the amount of money which Macnas generates in Galway, it generates up to a million pounds a year at the moment which is a major contribution to social life economic and commercial life of Galway. And also the fact you have a group of confident, talented people in this city adds, the flavour of Macnas can be seen, fashion show, public events, shop launches supermarket openings, all that all over the city. And also there is a huge social aspect of people looking after each other we believe in the plural of society we believe caring for each other, a lot of people in Macnas see Macnas as their family their home when they have a problem or a grief Macnas rocks in behind them;, people can use the Macnas workshop to make a new coffee table for their house. The actual emotional support and the social interaction between people is hugely important and its ignored in a lot of human structures but in Macnas we see that as a vital part of our activity in caring for each other looking after each other, having a caring and social organisation. We give paternity leave and also if people have kids to look after and we're busy with work, we'd make some consideration towards their baby sitting costs. That's very important, and the way that we talk to each other and we communicate with each other the way that decision are made is social, there's very few boss-work relations.

JF: How do you see this affecting an audience?

PB: Well, what strikes people about Macnas is the cohesion and energy of it and you don't get collective energy without togetherness. So its the togetherness that give you that level of energy.

Also when we go off to do a community project elsewhere, the way that we react to each other and look after each other, set a tone for the project, sets a tone for the work and set a style for the work it would be unhelpful, although it has happened in the Macnas process to raise your voice and shout at somebody. The style of work and the way which we interact with each other, interact with people we work with sets up a philosophy its a user friendly style or work.

JF: How do you think you integrate with the community?

PB: There are a couple of arguments here in the standard community arts process, where you are supposed to be the facilitator, we're the facilitator, we're supposed to work with groups in the community. We don't do an awful lot of that, we do a bit of that. We don't see that as being the only inroad into the community.

JF: But you are bringing arts to a group of people who wouldn't ordinarily see or be interested in art?

PB: Thats right, but that seen as the community arts process i.e. the facilitator connects with the community and facilitates their wish toward art creativity.

We do that and we can do it very well, but we prefer to define community as everybody around us so our idea of community activity is to if we go to Belmullet to make a show we involve boatmen, truckmen, tractor drivers, farmers, shopkeepers, everybody involved in the project. Forget about if your signed up with the local ICA group or the local Macra an Feirme group or whatever, we need you its a very personal thing, we need you to give us a hand and that the way we relate to a community. As distinct from other community arts groups we believe that the product is as important or more important than the process Let me explain that to you. A lot of community arts processes these days are about making workshops in the community and people learning to react to each other and create things and so on, but at the end of the day, they do the workshop, and its all over, its gone. We believe by doing the workshop and putting he product on the street and creating an excitement in the town you get people saying - Oh that workshop process last week was really valuable in this town. You need the reassurance of your peer group to feel that you've achieved something in Ireland. So we think that the product on the street is as important as the process which gets us into a lot of arguments with more conventional more traditional community arts projects thinkers. We're very much out f line with conventional community art thinking and we enjoy being out of line with it.

JF: Do you consider the community when your working on ideas. Do you consider your audience?

PB: Absolutely. We have a sort of rule of thumb that the show should be accessible to all people. Its extraordinary for a theatre company like that they can go to Dublin and be the hit of the festival and win an aware and that they can turn around the following day and play to 800 13 year olds in Birr,

and that the 800 13 year olds get as much fun out of the show, more maybe than the theatre critics that saw it the night before in Dublin. That it crucially important to our work. We see the community and every member of it we don't make shows for sectional interest. We don't make theatre shows for theatre people, we make shows for the community. So if you ask us if the community affects our work - everything we do, you have to look at it like an ordinary person and say - Oh yes, I can understand that, we try to avoid this superior, up your own hole, interactive stuff like a lot of artists do on with. We're more audience geared than most groups, in fact, we would say that the audience are the most important thing, because we do free shows and the only way you can prove to funding authorities sponsors or local authorities that it's worth doing is if 1000's and 1000's of people come out. Then they see a free vote and they do something about it. So you have to be popular to get the support to do free shows so we're very aware of the humour and the conventional humour of the audience and the style of an audience.

JF: Why do you choose the themes you do? Who decides on a theme?

PB: There's a group of people, there's three or four of us that have been here since the beginning and we're sort of the artistic committee and we sit down and work out what we might do or what we should do. And then we go ahead with what we think is the best idea. It's usually fairly obvious what things will excite people the most.

JF: Is it normally folklore?

PB: Yes, essentially folklore. Stories we always start with a story. We're not into this slice of life idea.

There's no ending and no beginning and no middle like a lot of theatre processes are about. We want a beginning, a middle and an end. That what we feel the audience relates to. We're obsessed with the stories. Telling stories, hearing the ones we heard as kids, the stories we tell each other, the way the west of Ireland works telling stories, yarns and stories that what keeps us going and that's what the influence is really.

JF: What do you think the public perception is of you?

PB: I think that like everything else, there are aspects of the public perception of us. I think the most positive perception of us is colour, excitement, magic daring new. The negative element is of dread locked, nose ringed, dirty, crusty, dope smoking hippies. I think that's another aspect of it and I think that comes out in a lot of arguments against us.

JF: Do you not think your work overrides that ?

PB: I don't think so. I think Ireland is very old fashioned conservative and racist society when you do and I do personally speak out against the establishment to a great degree especially the church, and we do live our lives in a very bohemian, perhaps attitude in the sense of our clothing and our style or whatever I think that allows the forces of reaction to identify and label you and I think in a lot of people's heads they do label Macnas as dope -smoking crusty's and that they're a threat to society, that we can lead their children astray, that we're providing the wrong example for their children. I think that those forces will always be against us because people don't necessarily want change the majority of people.

We are about change and in some ways unless you have a reaction against you, you're not doing anything, so in some ways you expect by doing your work you expect a reaction, and even though there are very heavy duty elements of racism and conservatism stacked against us sometimes there is huge popular support for us as well which you cannot deny, even among the ordinary people of Galway - area what the hell if they wear colourful clothes, aren't they great. A lot of people transcend that but there is a romp of society that see us as a threat and that is good because if they didn't see us as a threat we'd be useless we'd be doing nothing. But we're aware of other people and we're social people, we don't cast together people for being white-winged reactionary racists Catholics we just say we're very very sorry for you for being so thwarted and so twisted in your thinking and maybe you should go and read up your bible on the true God and your believe in and see what their beliefs were because we live by our beliefs why don't you live by yours. That they to deal with it, we live by ours you live by yours. If you confess to be a Catholic well then read your bible. Mind your own business.

JF: Do you see yourselves playing a role in cultural identity?

PB: Absolutely I think that would be one of the more important roles we'd see ourselves doing we see great need for a cultural identity in Ireland from the Hollywood paddy wackery to the gun totting terrorists to the schemer corduroy trousers, navey, the liar the glib singer, we'd like to loose all these negative elements of the Irish character and put in some context. We have been chasing so many ghosts in Ireland chasing so many false gods, since we became our independent the Celtic dawn like Yeats and the boys were great in one sense in trying to redefine an Ireland, but unfortunately what they did was reinforce the conservative GAA and Conservative Catholic anti

-Brit Ireland whereas we would like to think by going back into our mythology we can define ourselves as a nation of people with imagination people with intelligence people with sensitivity people with a history, and if you've got those things you don't be a racist or facist. You can redefine yourself in a more noble way and not be accepting the cliched lititents that were given by England or American or by Europe. We've got to loose those images, the predominant image of the Irish is the drunken paddy the next one is a drunken poet, if we cold leave out the drunken bit we'd be great and indeed if I was personally asked to comment on the greatest curse in western Irish society today, I would say drink.

I would say the total over reaction to cannabiss by the forces of law and order in the west of Ireland is so ludicrous when you see the social destruction and devastation alcohol has brought to the society. We need to redefine ourselves. We need to look at ourselves and say we are a grand people there is no need for us to have an inferiority complex there's no need for us to have a chip on the shoulder, there's no need for us to be the race of conservative bastards that we are. We are fine people we have a history we have tradition, we've had noble people in our past, we have histories, and we have identities and above all we have humour and wit and let us proud about these things. So its very important thing for us to do and for Macnas ot identify or reidentify what it means to be Irish - It's very important.

JF: What are the advantages and disadvantages of being based in Galway?

PB: It brings huge problems in that there's practical problems - every phone call you make outside of Galway is costing - phone costs are huge transport cost of materials to bring something from Dublin, materials are imported to Dublin from London. Transport costs to get from here to a show.

That the negative side. The positive side, the quality of life the colour in the sky the water in the river outside the door, all these aspects contribute to our emotional and psychological well being and coupled with that you have this extraordinary energy in the west of Ireland in Galway particularly strong among young people who want to do something that have creativity and want to express themselves, so we're picking up on that. And then side by side with that you have farmers on their bicycles that have been living the same lifestyle for 70 years and their father before them. Not only are you at the fore front of your mad radical creative energy, but next door to it is very old, stable, folkloric tradition. Side by side. So you can speak to a seanachie in Connemara today lunchtime, you come into Galway you can speak to a radical feminist at 6 o'clock and then you can go and see a show by a new theatre group that was formed 4 weeks ago and then you can go to a session. Afterwards with some of the best musicians in the country. So at your doorstep you have all the ingredients for art and all the inspiration for art and its there and its like the old traditions in Ireland have survived longer in the west of Ireland because of the economic backwardness and its isolation and being a periphery and in some ways because we are on the periphery of things and the edge of things were always more close to falling off the cliff so it creates an insecurity, it lacks stability and that lack of stability is not necessary for the production of art, but it allows you to be more imaginative I the art you make when you're a non rigid, conformist structure, and this is a non-rigid climate we are in here. Galway and this particular building, that field and that river the spiritual dynamics of that space have been as vital to Macnas as its people and they are the 2 vital ingredients. Money is something we never get enough of any ways so we don't view money as a vital ingredient.

JF: Who funds you ?

PB: We get funded by the Arts Council, the local authorities. Our total funding from say 1984 would be about £190,000 our turn over from 1984 would be £800,000 so about 25% of our funding is public funding. The rest, is earned and gathered through fund raising or whatever. Funding is a major problem we are vastly under funded we are currently running a deficit situation now for about 6 years. Its a huge strain on the organisation to stay going from financial pressures we are hoping that eventually we will get the official recognition that we need to get a more steady funding base ? But our funding it has been improving but is still grossly limited.

JF: Would you try a move towards being self sufficient ?

PB: What we like to do here is we like to try our ideas in the safe environment of a funded subsidised company and then if we thinks there's a commercial application to that we'll set it loose. We have a sort to a company called Macnas Ternachta. Mac Teo which is concerned with making props and specialist objects for films plays etc. Its a departure of Macnas, its a commercial company and subsidiary of Macnas, set up by Macnas in the commercial sector to provide employment for its technicians and its artists. This is an idea that has been nurtured an cared for in an under subsidized climate of Macnas and then cut loose into the world on its own. This company will take 4 - 5 years to establish itself. We feel confident about its future. We also set up Mac Eolas a company to provide training in the arts which ran a very successful per uniform programme 2 years ago and is planning a whole series of training in the arts next year - '95/'96.

So there's another idea which has developed within Macnas, we set up a separate company and we're now developing that as a commercial intricate independent company. Between those two companies we should have created 12 full time jobs in 1996 and hopefully in 10 years time they'll both be running with up to 20 full time jobs. They are long, considered programmes Macnas is a good climate to try something out and then know if it'll work and give it a life of its own. So that part of or thinking as well.

JF: Are you moving into theatre?

PB: No. Theatre is a big part of our work. We've done more theatre in the last 2 years than we have done previous to this and there's a very simple reason for that in that we look on people in an SES scheme and they worked with us for a number of years and they really liked working with us and they really like performance and they wanted to express their performance in a much more structured state rather than on the street so we created theatre e show and little did we realise that we could make it into a wonderful ensemble of people we started the first show we did we tour end that 2 years and now we have a situation we have 90 people with extraordinary talent that work really well together. Did what kept them together was an ensemble for 2 years now - no other theatre company in the country can improve that. Kept the same group of people together for two years and we're not getting a theatre grant. We don't get money to make theatre. We didn't until this year, we get £20,000 in extra this year so its extraordinary how the theatre end of Macnas developed in itself and we will maintain that, but its not the principle activity of the company. Its the principle activity created that is losing money for the company.

JF: Where do you see thing going from here and what are your future plans ?

PB: We see us maintaining our present leave of work and developing aspects of it. The main development we see in the next two years is theatre that would be one are and we will maintain our performing ensemble and create new shows every year and tour with them nationally and internationally and there's plans for that well on the way. The next major development we'll have in this period will be the national community arts studio with a proposed set up building in Galway here that will facilitate community arts and what I mean by that is we would provide a library there with reference books we will provide information technology we will set up and maintain network systems with various groups in Europe, we will provide literally studio space for work loads, work shops dance music so on and so fort and we ill provide training. And providing the facility we'll be like a centre where you can go - if you want to learn about community arts in the west of Ireland, and Ireland come to Galway go down to Macnas building you'll be met you'll be put in touch with the various factors and we hope to set up a sort of a consultancy teams there , that you can come in a talk to and they will help you out and they will provide a service for your group, a mothering service, for a couple of years. So we intend to take the Macnas model as a success story and help other people take aspects of that or take the whole lot and develop their own models of community arts in a rural context. So, that it a fairly major undertaking. So if it take about 5 years to get to. After that we'll probably take on something like electing somebody for member of parliament in the year 2000 or something like that, maybe European parliament, we'll probably take on something like that as well.

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