

Taking art to the workplace



Emerging from a wheelie bin at a public refuse site in the pouring rain, Fraser MacDonald looks as far removed from the stereotypical image of an artist as possible. They say that all artists must suffer for their art, though, and doing his Oscar the Grouch impression at the official press launch of the "Nine Trades of Dundee" project, Fraser is no different.

"I think there might be shards of glass in there," Fraser says to the assembled photographers and camera crew who help get his 6'5" frame out of a vessel it was never designed to fit in. "At least it's empty, although it doesn't smell too nice."

For anyone reading in bemusement, here's the deal: Nine Trades of Dundee seeks to take art directly to the workplace and challenge preconceptions about who is, and who isn't, an artist. Each project is run by an artist who is either working in a job that helps fund their artwork, or who has done so in the past. Fraser (23) is a Fine Art graduate of Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design, as well as a former street sweeper in Perth. He was inspired to apply for the project by his experiences working at Friarton Recycling Centre in the Fair City.

Fraser's unique project will investigate the importance of work done by the employees of The Environment Service of Perth & Kinross Council. He has created an art movement which, in keeping with the themes of the workplace, will run as a mock trade union called "The Garbologists".

Garbology is a term that refers to the study of refuse, and anyone who works for The Environment Service and who wants to be involved can become a Garbologist.

Fraser has built a shed at Friarton, which will serve as headquarters of the movement. Refuse collectors may not be the first people that you think of as artists, but Fraser explained that he wants to turn people's preconceptions on their head and demonstrate that art isn't just an elitist activity enjoyed in art galleries and that we all have the capacity to be creative.

"The point is that everyone who wants to can be an artist," he said. "I've worked at the Centre on and off for four years. I thought my experiences there would make for an interesting study that fitted with the theme of the project."

"I get on really well with the guys, so hopefully they'll get behind what I'm doing and get involved with the project, which should be a lot of fun. It's all about the different crews and workers and the different happenings that occur on the lorries and on the site. I will be working with the other employees to record stories, take photographs and do a lot of filming."

"I want to investigate the importance of the job, both in terms of keeping the streets clean and recycling. All contributions from workers are welcome, as they are the artists in this movement. We'll also be engaging with the public to show them what's going on."

"In the spirit of the project I want everything to be as green as possible so I'll be travelling to Friarton on a bike that's been rescued from garbage. I'll be looking out for interesting items that the public have thrown away, and the furniture in the shed/office will be rescued from the skips as well.

"I hope to produce a union paper, which will feature a "Find of the fortnight" section, but really it's not so much about the rubbish as the jobs these guys are doing because it is such an important job and often one that is overlooked.

"I know from my own experiences how much hard work and humour is involved in the job, and I'm setting up the art movement as a way of showing this. Hope, this will make people think twice about what they might see as a dull, everyday job. The final outcome of the project will be the film I make, as well as a publication bringing the relevant documentation and photographs together. Hopefully, afterwards we'll leave the shed onsite and open to the public to visit."

Nine Trades was initiated by Exhibitions at Duncan of Jordanstone College of Art and Design. It was inspired by the 'The Nine Incorporated Trades of Dundee', an organisation that has been operating since the 1600's. Originally concerned with commerce and standards of the city it now functions as a charity and is involved in the preservation of heritage.

The project aims to increase arts access and encourage more participation for non-arts audiences by bringing art activity and creativity to the heart of the workplace. It is funded by The National Lottery through the Scottish Arts Council's Inspire Fund.

The outputs of the 'Nine Trades of Dundee' will include nine core collaborative commissions; a 'Nine Trades Final Gathering' event bringing together the artists, participants and wider audience in July 2010; and nine 'Nine Trades Apprenticeships' for Duncan of Jordanstone students.

The project will commission nine artists with second non-art trades to lead collaborative art projects with workers from that particular trade. Commissions will be developed to fit the individual artists practice and the working environment and the artist will receive curatorial and peer support as part of the larger 'Nine Trades of Dundee' project.

In addition to Fraser's Garbologists, a further two projects are currently underway.

Alan Grieve, who worked as a hairdresser for 25 years before graduating from DJCAD continued to cut hair throughout his studies. For his project, Alan works one day a week in Nori Hair Salon in Reform Street.

“ The point is that everyone who wants to can be an artist. ”

His 'comment of the week' wall in the salon helps him to start a dialogue with colleagues and clients alike, offering a weekly insight into his thoughts in the form of drawings and illustrated texts. From this exchange he will create a magazine with his colleagues that will be distributed to salons throughout Dundee.

Ben Robinson, a customer service advisor at a call centre, aims to make 'art happen from what would previously be dismissed' by gathering the 'doodles' that many people draw during their time at work. Working with a group of colleagues he formed a printmaking group at DCA to turn the doodles into something 'more monumental'. The resulting works will be framed and hung in the working environment of the branch. This exhibition has since been exhibited in the Upper Foyer Gallery in DJCAD, and is available to tour to other locations - especially workplaces.

A further six projects, and the commissioned artists, will be announced shortly. More information is available by visiting www.ninetrades.com.

