

## **A Shared Experience - Stories of the Making of 26 Atlantic Crossings**

26 Atlantic Crossings was 26's first international project and my first as project leader. It was a wonderful experience. 52 creative people, strangers, unique individuals, made the crossing, bridged an ocean, connected, created and shared astonishing encounters.

Throughout the project, however, I worried that the distance between us all, across the vast Atlantic and the miles of the British Isles and Ireland, would be too much. I could create the opportunity for people to contact each other, to offer them the option to do so, or not, but it wasn't up or down to me. Some did. Some didn't. But all made a connection – with themselves and their work, with their artist and their writer, with their viewers and their readers.

For the exhibition in Canada, we made a folder to share the behind-the-scene stories of how connections were made, friendships formed and imaginations soared despite the fact that 26 journeys by air or sea were not practically possible. I've gathered them together for you here in the UK and Ireland.

### **Thanks**

There are many people to thank, not least the 52 creative artists and writers.

Thanks to Terry Culbert, who not only is a wonderful painter but a brilliant photographer, that we have a record of the launch of 26 Atlantic Crossings.

Thanks to Mihal Zada of the Times of Wellington, and Rick Conroy its owner and editor, that we have a lovely video of the event. <http://youtu.be/3Ju2sFiWTPU>

Thanks to Wendy Matthews that 26 Atlantic Crossings turned into a wonderful exhibition on the Canadian side.

Thanks to Joanna McFarland, artist, co-conspirator and my sister, and to Sophie Gordon designer and writer, we have an elegant, printed book of all the artworks and sestudes.

And if you didn't manage to get your hands on one, you can download the e-book *26 Atlantic Crossings* for free. <http://thesecretarchaeologist.co.uk/sawp/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/26AC-ebook.pdf>

### ***On with the stories...***

#### **Francis Glibbery made the leap**

"Our Francis is coming! Our Francis is coming!" A small but powerfully built man grabbed my hand and pumped it hard. His face beamed with a grin from ear to ear. "Yes, I know!" I replied trying frantically to match face, name, artwork, writer. "This is Paul Ross, the wood turner, and his wife Lynn," said my sister Joanna McFarland, introducing me formally and digging me out of an embarrassing hole.

I knew every one of the 26 artists and 26 writers intimately, through their work. I knew Paul Ross as 'Star Bound' a futuristic sculpture in turned wood, rope, wax linen, shells and beads. I knew Francis Glibbery through his response to Paul's piece, his sestude. I knew all the artists and writers this way. But I had never met any of them in person before (except John Simmons. Who hasn't?). Their excitement at the idea that Francis was going to make the trip to Canada and visit them during the Prince Edward County Studio Tour was infectious. 'Wonderful!' I said. My sadness that only one writer, me, was at the launch of the 26 Atlantic Crossings Exhibition was lifted slightly. The silent chorus of 25 writers, eloquent in their written words pinned next to each of their artists' exhibits, seemed a little less mute.



*Paul and Lynn Ross*

## **26 Atlantic Crossings – It's real!**

Having a zero budget for the project is a constraint most creative! Sophie Gordon designed a beautiful, elegant e-book for all to download for free. But Joanna McFarland, my sister and co-conspirator on this project, wanted something tangible, a real, paper, hold-in-the-hand book. So we took a punt and got 100 printed. They were sold out by noon on the first day of the exhibition. 'Why didn't you print more?' everyone asked. Because when we posed the question, 'Who'd like to buy a book at a miserly price of £5 or \$10?' we only got 60 committed pre-sales. Success breeds best-sellers it seems. Until then, you're an unknown.

For me 26 Atlantic Crossings began to feel real on the day after I arrived in Canada. My sister drove us to J B Print Solutions in Trenton Ontario. The smell of the ink. The weight of the boxes. The crossings had been made. 26 Atlantic Crossings was real!



*Office of J B Print Solutions, printer of 26 Atlantic Crossings*

**Neil Baker made Margaret McFetridge (and a few others) cry**

“When I read this, I cried!” announced Margaret McFetridge. “And so did everybody I showed it to.” She was brandishing an email from Neil Baker explaining how he came to write his sestude in response to her *Ditch Divas*. Then we all cried.

*Hi Margaret,*

*Thanks for the lovely email. I'm glad you liked my 62 words. I was struggling to find a way in to this piece. Then, just before the deadline, I went away for a writing*

*week in Andalusia. I've visited that part of Spain before, but only in the late summer, when the fields are burned to a crisp. In May, the dehesa is green and the meadows are full of flowers. On my fourth day in Spain the sky was unseasonably grey and I felt terribly homesick and stuck with my writing. So I packed a rucksack – notebook, water, apple, camera – and went for a long walk. For the first hour it rained steadily and I felt increasingly sorry for myself. But then the sun came out and lit the fields so beautifully and I was quite literally stopped in my tracks. I realised how lucky I was to have this time for my writing. I thought of my wife at home and how much I loved her. And the first line of my sestude came to me, like a gift.*

*Keep painting.*

*Neil*



*Margaret McFetridge admiring Terry Culbert's and Amelie de Koenig's work*

## **Kirsten Irving and Florence Chik-Lau's fantasies**

At a first glance of Florence's *Lady Hare and Cardinal* you might ask yourself, 'What's this got to do with the Atlantic and crossings?' Kirsten answered that question with enthusiasm.

*What a brilliant opportunity to tell the story of 26AC! The sculpture that came from Florence Chik-Lau had a distinctly folklorish feel to it, with echoes of Little Grey Rabbit, Briar Rabbit, the Blue Fairy Book and Kipling's Just-So Stories. A hare and a cardinal, seemingly in disjointed conversation. I wondered what they were saying to one another, and decided to make it about an imagined mythology on the hare's part, contrasted with the real dreams of the bird. The cardinal rarely travels outside its home turf, so to link it to my artist's home area, I had him secretly yearn to explore the rest of Ontario. It was such a magical frozen moment to work with.*



*Florence Chik-Lau (left) in conversation*

**Duncan Mackay was in just the right place, as Andrew Innes intended with his painting *A Settled Place***

*My 62-word sestude is a poem about bridging and settling/unsettling. Bridging the gap between Anglesey, north Wales, where the picture is set in 'a settled place', to Canada by Lake Ontario where the artist lives, also a 'settled place'. Somewhere, unseen and unrecorded by both artist and writer is the vast Atlantic Ocean. In the first verse I imagined that the Irish Sea part of the Atlantic Ocean could be glimpsed from the windows of the house hidden in its tree-girt hideaway on the island of Anglesey. By the end my poem has strayed from solid, dependable buildings into unsettling thoughts of impermanence and catastrophic change, the opposite end of the spectrum of being settled.*



*Andrew Innes raises a glass with Wendy Matthews*

### **Life mirrors art and art mirrors life according to Joan Lennon's pairing with Sharon Fox-Cranston**

#### *They Do It with Mirrors*

*It turns out that my artist, Sharon Fox Cranston, has a history that is a mirror image of mine - she was born in the UK and moved to Canada, while I was born in Canada and moved to Scotland. And, when I was trying to find the words I wanted in response to her painting Wild 6 - The Great Canadian Landscape, I suddenly remembered a technique my artist son had taught me. When he wants to see an image he's working on in a fresh way, he reverses it. I tried that with Wild 6, holding my laptop up to a mirror - very high tech! - and all at once I could see what I wanted to say! Sharon, me, Wild 6 and the sestude I wrote in response - all connected by mirrors!*



*Sharon Fox-Cranston (left) shares a moment with Pamela Carter*

**Artist Dayna Law described her relationship with Suz Cunliffe in an email to Wendy Matthews**

*Hi Wendy...*

*This has been the most amazing experience for me! I must say, I waited with an utter feeling of trepidation... When I did not hear from the writer who was partnered with me, my imagination ran wild. Perhaps she could not relate to my abstract view of reality. Perhaps writer's block had set in. Perhaps... perhaps! Nothing could have been further from the truth. When my sestude arrived, I was blown away... poignant, powerful, insightful, clever, incredible and yes, exactly 62 words! Suz Cunliffe and I have emailed back and forth... And, we are now friends on Face Book. Suz lives in the beautiful seaside town of Porthleven in Cornwall. She deliberately did not contact me during the writing process, as she wanted to formulate her own words and not be influenced by anything I might have said. Much later, I was able to explain to her my painting process from initial idea to completion using multi layers of vibrant acrylic on yupo paper... I have visited Devon in the south, but not Cornwall. Definitely, I would love to return to England and definitely, I would visit my new friend, Suz Cunliffe. 26 Atlantic Crossings has*



*opened the doors to a multitude of possibilities... It has been an extraordinary initiative on both sides of the Atlantic! I am proud to have taken part.*

*Dayna*



*Dayna Law with her painting 'Rip Tide'*

**Jan Duffy, artist, wrote to Wendy about her relationship with Sarah McCartney**

*Hi Wendy.....just thought you might like to know that Sarah McCartney and I have been in touch and she once again said she would love to own a piece of jewelry like the one I submitted....however, as you know since it was found at the bottom of the*

*sea, it's too fragile to wear. She refers to it as the Boudicca piece -- to quote her: "I would LOVE a Boudicca piece, I would rule Acton."*

*So I told Sarah I would make her a similar piece that she can actually wear and it will be her Christmas prezzie. She has her own company called 4160 Tuesdays ([www.4160tuesdays.com](http://www.4160tuesdays.com)) and has a Canadian distribution, so it seems I will be the lucky recipient of a bottle of one of her perfumes.*

*Just thought I would pass this info on.*

*Jan*



*Jan Duffy and David Scott in close concentration*

### **John Simmons found himself crossing the Atlantic while contemplating J Douglas Thompson's work**

*While I was on one trip, crossing the Atlantic towards Chicago, I found myself writing a first draft of my 26 Atlantic Crossings sestude. I looked at the map showing where the plane was at the time. It was just north of the Great Lakes so I guess I was poised above Prince Edward County at the time.*

*I was looking at a small print-out of Douglas Thompson's painting - and his words where he talked about struggling against depression and the idea of light in his paintings giving a sense of hope. So that informed my sestude.*



*J Douglas Thompson discusses his painting 'Highland Descent'*

### **Nick Jefferson replied to Pam Carter's email**

*Hi Pam - and thanks so much for getting in touch.*

*First of all, I want to tell you how much I love the painting. It forced me to think; the mark of serious art. Second, I also wanted you to know how desperate I was to contact you through the process but how I resisted because I had told myself that it needed to be entirely objective and 'pure'. So please don't think me rude! For me, the really interesting thing about this piece is why the girl is so smartly dressed when working in a cafe. It's an odd juxtaposition. She is clearly needing to impress someone, but I couldn't really believe that it was a lover - given her somewhat angsty look. So I thought about who else people are keen to impress. And then I had this idea about family and roots, and whether or not we can ever truly escape them. It's about identity and belonging. In Canada, she is called 'Irish', but she's never been. Her aunts and cousins, in a very bitchy 'old world' kinda way, still live in Ireland and always resented the girl's second-generation mother and her 'wealth' (relatively speaking). They still do, even now after the old lady is buried and they are showing it by turning up at the cafe ('she works in a cafe you know!' they'll*

*gossip back in Ireland). The girl knows this, remembers her mother calling them 'bitches' and dressing smartly and wearing the pearls is her little act of defiance. The old man had wanted to break free from Ireland, yet here she is - two generations later - still caring what they all think. Is that a good thing or a bad thing? I don't know. A genuine pleasure working with you - if you ever decide to sell the painting, let me know :-)*

N



*Pam Carter has a laugh with David Boorne*

### **David Boorne and a strong case of serendipity with Henrietta McKervey**

*Serendipity has a lovely way of linking somewhat extraneous items together.*

*I designed and built a lovely large room in the attic space of our 1880s farmhouse. It was to be a general purpose room but as a carpet layer was leaving he turned to my wife and said, "You sure are going to have a lovely bedroom up here." Plans changed; what evolved ended up as an ultra modern bedroom decorated in white, orange and black.*

*Instead of the traditional headboard I created a 20" x 80" sculpture made of old picture frames that were painted white, orange and black.*

*An invitation from the executive of the Studio Tour led to submitting photos of "Frames. They are the Picture" to the 26 Atlantic Crossings exhibit.*

*A short time later I received an email connecting me to Henrietta McKervey from Dublin, Ireland as my literary half of 26 Atlantic Crossings. After sending her more information and photos she responded with her 'sestude' on "Frames: They are the Picture."*

*Initially I thought she must have sent her reply to the wrong artist! Now, you must understand that I am not a reader of poetry so I passed the piece to Anne, my wife who sat silently after she read it. I re-read the poem and I too sat in silence with a tear in my eye. It was absolutely wonderful and compelling. Her ability to transform wood into words was magical.*

*I emailed Henrietta a note of thanks for the 'sestude' and the next day she thanked us for our reply stating that the day prior had been a wonderful day in her life not only because of our thanks but also because of a particular link that she sent.*

*Clicking on the link we received an article from the front page of the Dublin Times. It pictured Henrietta receiving the Maeve Binchy award for writing - an award that allowed her to travel about Ireland and write travel articles for that paper.*

*The award was given in memory of Maeve Binchy who for many years reported for the Dublin Times.*

*Serendipity found Anne reading Maeve Binchy to her mother Madeleine at this precise time. We relayed this connection to Henrietta. A few hours later we received a reply stating that Gordon Snell, Maeve's husband, was a friend of hers. He was happy that Madeleine was enjoying Maeve's work even asking what book was being read.*

*Prior to and during this time, Dr. Elizabeth Christie who is and was Anne's and Madeleine's doctor sailed her boat to Ireland with her husband. They had circumnavigated Ireland and as all sailors in Ireland do, consulted the "Shipping Forecast" which is a very famous BBC weather forecast about all the ports in Ireland and the British Isles.*

*Henrietta then forwarded us the topic which she was going to write using the Maeve Binchy grant. She was going to drive around Ireland and visit all the ports mentioned in the "Shipping Forecast" and report back to the Dublin Times writing about her adventure.*

*And so, like ships passing I read my 'sestude' on "Frames" and wonder what Henrietta will write about Viking, North Utsere, South Utsere, Forties, Cromarty, Forth, Tyne, Dogger, Fisher, and German Bight. Wonderful poetic words I imagine....*

*The beauty of art and life!*



*David Boorne reading a sestude*

**Aimee Chalmers (writer) connected city with country in response to Sam Sakr's painting titled "City to Country".**

*I immediately responded to the vibrant colour, the angles of the houses, the higgledy piggledy... I suspect I'm not meant to like the city, but the wee windows*

*are so expressive - just about bursting out of the walls, striving to keep the connection with outside. And hinting too, at the life going on behind them, all these people crowded in their little (big) boxes.*

*I love the colour of the water (Is it Lake Ontario?) But the black - what is this? It's difficult to see on the small scale email image. Animal like, powerful, dominating, but...could it be a grand piano?. Does the classical music of civilisation crowd out the sounds of nature? Certainly there's no sign of life in the country other than grass and the water of the lake. No birds, no animals.*

*I look again at the water, the small house beside the lake... is the water level rising? Will it encroach on the land? Will the bars on the verandah keep out the forces of Nature? Will the little house be flooded? The city itself? Maybe the painter is concerned about the loss of natural habitats?*

*The name puzzles me slightly though, as I tend to think of people migrating to the city for work rather than the other way round. I'd love to know what was in Sam's head as he painted. Nervously, I email him to ask.*

*He says that my first impression and analysis of "City to Country" is 'a remarkable revelation and an eye opener that led me to have a deeper understanding of my painting that I never thought possible.' He tells me its history.*

*For many years it was Sam's dream to leave the city and move to the country, to live in a house by the water, in order to escape the noise and chaos of the city which he thinks of as 'almost at war with itself'. The countryside here, being beside water, represents quiet, solitude and peace. The painting was actually started 26 years ago in Toronto, the finale of a grand piano series. The grand piano is possibly a metaphorical symbol of fertility, mother, a lover, a Madonna.*

*And the sentence which really reached out to me... 'Because I have a deep affinity for music and never had the chance to study or practise it - I paint music in me.'*

*I haven't told Sam this yet, but one of the themes of my recently published fictional biography of the poet 19<sup>th</sup> C Scottish poet Marion Angus – 'Blackthorn' – is about the power of music. As Marion looks back on her life, what does she regret? Certainly not her relationship with a Tinker fiddler. She regrets that her fine lyrical poetry lacks the quality of song.*

*'A pure voice, frae the heart, that's a gift. Without any words, it speaks to the soul, intoxicates you. Poetry, now ... that's craft, a skill folk learn. The words lose something as they're pulled through the marrow o the bones. They might touch the soul, but they'll never hae that same power.'*

*Sam paints his music. My sestude is an attempt to capture his vision in musical terms.*

*I love that Sam started this painting 26 years ago (Blackthorn only took me 8 years.) I love his 'child's vision'. I love that he doesn't try to fool the eyes or impress the viewers. I love the fact he repaired the painting after his cat used it as her favourite scratchpad. And I'm so pleased he's now moved to his house in the country, by the water.*

*Although I've never been to Canada, it's been on the list of 'places to go' for some time. Many members of my extended family moved to Ontario in the 1950s and, many years ago, one of my husband's relatives (Gladys Forbes, married name Mrs Lloyd Reid) had a holiday home in King Edward County from where postcards arrived annually.*

*The artistic scene in Scotland is vibrant and exciting at the moment as we campaign for a more democratic country and a fairer, more equal society (Independence Referendum, 18th September 2014). Although I'm a writer, I've been working on arts projects – for 'no', 'undecided' and 'yes' voters, in an attempt to build bridges rather than barriers across the political divides. But I'm so glad that I took a little time off to take part in 26 AC. So glad I've 'met' Sam Sakr!*



**And Sam Sakr** regarding his relationship with **Aimee Chalmers**

*Aimee Chalmers, the writer with whom I was paired in 26 Atlantic Crossings, could not have been a more perfect match for my painting. In fact, she was too perfect! She heard the music sounding in my “City to the Country” and responded with a poem. I am not a musician but I paint musically with my instruments: brush, paint and collage. Aimee assumed that I know music so she used musical terms and lingo and even invented strange new words. Once I understood her language, it became clear to me how she felt and listened to my painting, seeing it even better than I could. Brilliant! Now the painting would be missing something without the poem.*



*Sam Sakr in conversation with FayeSharpe and Joanna McFarland*