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Don O'Neill and Roisin Fitzpatrick - art and fashion take center stage at NYC's Irish consulate

Intimate setting plays host to top Irish designers and artists

By MOLLY MULDOON, Irish Voice Reporter

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Over 200 people packed into the Irish Consulate in New York on Monday night, for a celebration of Irish fashion and art.

Fashion designer to the stars Don O'Neill from Co. Kerry, and artist of the light, Dubliner Roisin Fitzpatrick, showcased their creations in the intimate setting.

The collaboration saw the gathered crowd first enjoy Fitzpatrick's contemporary art, which has been on exhibition in the consulate for the past two months, before a fashion show of O'Neill's Theia collection took place.

Celebrities such as American actress Angela Bassett proudly wore a stunning black creation from Theia on the night, while many other women dressed in O'Neill's designs.

Coming from the man who has dressed stars such as Oprah Winfrey, Nicole Kidman, Natalie Portman and Taylor Swift, O'Neill gestured at the crowd as he told the Irish Voice, "The women here are all drop dead gorgeous."

"What an honor as a designer, to be in the Irish Consulate of New York," he added.

To kick start the night's event, Fitzpatrick addressed the crowd. The Dublin-based artist explained how a near death experience inspired her artistic creation.

"A few years ago, I was very fortunate, I know it sounds crazy to say that, but I was very fortunate to have a near death experience," the artist told the crowd.

Having previously worked at the United Nations, European Commission and European Bank, Fitzpatrick decided to create a series of contemporary artworks, the Artist of the Light® collection, after she suffered a brain aneurysm.

"The only thing that matters in life is treating everybody with respect, living a life of joy and following my passion and sharing the light with people.

"That is what I have done through this art," the artist told the gathered crowd.

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Irish Consul General Noel Kilkenny, Roisin Fitzpatrick, Don O'Neill and Hanora Kilkenny pictured at Monday's event
Photo by James Higgins

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Near-death experience changes Irish artist's life

By CAHIR O'DOHERTY, IrishCentral.com Staff Writer
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In 2005, a sudden and unexpected near death experience completely changed [Wicklow](#)-based artist [Roisin Fitzpatrick](#)'s life.

It wasn't just the shock of almost dying, although that was bad enough. It was also what happened in the immediate aftermath that set [Fitzpatrick](#) off on a new artistic course.

"I had just turned 35 and I was in wonderful health," Fitzpatrick, whose work is currently on display in a SoHo gallery until May, tells the [IrishCentral.com](#). "Then, the day after my birthday, I just turned my head from right to left and bam – in one moment I had the most horrendous headache.

"All I could do was call an ambulance and lie down. A wonderful ambulance man came along and he helped me enormously. I was seen quite quickly in the hospital because he insisted on it."

Unknown to her, Fitzpatrick, now 39, was suffering from what medical specialists call a subarachnoid hemorrhage, a dangerous bleeding occurring at the base of the right side of her brain.

Immediately she displayed classic symptoms of the condition, including a thunderclap headache and vomiting. Up to half of all of these cases are fatal, and many die before even reaching the hospital. Others end up with severe disabilities. But Fitzpatrick survived completely unscathed.

"I wasn't scared. For years I had practiced meditation and that really helped to keep me calm, it kept my blood pressure down," she says.

"And then suddenly out of the blue, in the midst of all of this, I had the most wonderful near death experience. As I was waiting in intensive care I felt myself coming out of my body.

"I felt a deep sense of bliss, a sense of calmness and joy, and for me it suddenly didn't matter if I got back into my body or not, because I was discovering that there was no such thing as death. Once you realize that it totally transforms your whole perspective on life. Once you learn that life is infinite it becomes a matter of enjoying every moment, because there is nothing to worry about."

Next morning the medical specialists were astounded to discover that the bleeding in her brain had stopped.

"I was able to stay calm. It certainly helped the situation. And the whole experience has stayed with me and informs my work now. I create from that state of joy and bliss I discovered unexpectedly," she says.

Now Fitzpatrick's unlikely artistic discoveries have been rewarded. When she exhibited at the New York Art Expo recently she got a phenomenal response from attendees.

"As children we're in touch with that universal energy until we learn to forget it. I mean, just look up at the Milky Way sometime. It really puts you in your proper perspective. We don't even know how big the universe is," she says.

