

'Plantation – Process, People, Perspectives'

Textile Art Quilt by Deborah J. Stockdale, 2013

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Background

The Artist's remit was to create a large scale textile art piece that commemorated the Ulster Plantation, the beginnings of the Walled City and the key people of the time.

As a quilt maker, Deborah had dealt with historical subjects in previous projects and filled her notebooks with research, ideas and sketches.

The Plantation was essentially a prototype, a European colonial venture that characterized the histories of the Americas, Africa, Australia and Asia. The Plantation of Ulster could be considered an imposition of culture, business, infrastructure and governance on the native population. It also became a transfusion of energy, people and a different way of life that changed the landscape, lifestyle and the people.

Deborah focused on topics such as the changes to everyday life in farming, animal husbandry, field systems, hunting and hedgerows. The intensive restructuring of the landscape resulted in road building, large scale timber cutting, water mills and large scale fish processing. The creation of houses for the planters developed into towns and villages, and fortified houses for the landowners for protection during turbulent times. Changes were evident in language, music, education and fashion.

The early years of the 17th century were a complex time of transition for the native Gaelic population and for the planters who were moving to an unknown and unpredictable region.

Textile Response

The sheer scope of the topic, so many details and potential topics to include led to the identification of some key points on image creation. Deborah also was keen to use Irish tweed, yarn and linen as much as possible.

Research of historical images led to a plan to develop a style similar to antique maps and documents, illustrating a time and a place.

Styles of stitching were looked at, different linens and textiles were gathered, and fabric painting was combined with gentle washes of paint.

Figures, buildings and places were sketched. Sketching directly onto linen or carbon paper to show outlines. Moving to the sewing machine to outline every line with black thread in a close zig-zag stitch. Occasional free-embroider the details. The vignettes were painted with textile acrylic paint, often several stages of light washes.

Creating the background was difficult, initial thoughts of mountains and lakes proved too cluttered. Deborah developed a series of interlinking threads and curves, like a weave over the whole quilt, to symbolize the links between the cultures and traditions. The four curves were made with tweed, stitched onto backing fabric, weaved into an interlaced pattern.

All the vignettes were then stitched to the main quilt. Putting the backing fabric together with the quilt and 'couched' all the individual pieces first with black yarn and then coloured yarn. The layers of stitching secured the pieces together. Adding borders, and a title panel.

An incredible project with many complex components, challenging techniques but full of interesting characters.