

From Threads of Life to Following the Thread

The Liverpool Irish festival experience 2009-2010

Janet Wilkinson & Susan Beck, the facilitators of the process have said:

In 2009, as part of the Liverpool Irish Festival, there was an exhibition at the World Museum Liverpool called 'Threads of Life'. It was curated by Roberta Bacic. Arpilleras and quilts from Chile, Peru and Northern Ireland were exhibited. Arpilleras (arr-pee-air-ahs) are stitched appliqué textile wall hangings that tell a story.

A series of textile workshops with community groups in Liverpool were also set up, inviting people to respond with stories drawn from their own heritage. For some individuals the making of their arpillera was a profoundly moving experience, re-awakening old memories and emotions.

The workshops varied from half hour drop in sessions at the museum for children and their families, to full days offered to exhibition visitors who wanted to stitch a piece of their own. There were half days with adult education groups and a series of workshops with a local junior school and with two Irish community groups. Some groups were relatively new to Liverpool and from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds.

Everyone enjoyed the opportunity to be creative, the talking and sharing. Some groups and individuals are going to continue with arpillera making and other sorts of stitching.

The groups were encouraged to talk, to share life experiences and this was as important a part of the workshops as the final textile pieces.

The Liverpool workshops resulted in twelve textile hangings containing the work of approximately 160 individuals. The pieces from each group were mounted on a large backing of hessian type cloth - which is the meaning of the word 'Arpillera'.

These were exhibited in June 2010 at the World Museum Liverpool as 'Following the Thread'; along with one of the original Peruvian arpilleras.

On show here is the Sun quilt with figures connected by the thread of life – each person was made by a visitor to the museum to represent someone special to them. Also on display is the Granby Soft Furnishing Group. Some participants were newly arrived to the UK with little or no English and some had no sewing experience.

This textile display has been curated by Roberta Bacic, as part of the permanent rotating exhibition at the Verbal Arts Centre since March 2008. It will be on display August through October 2010.

