

CONFLICT TEXTILES

Arpillera Workshop: War-Torn Children, Friday 14th April 2016

<http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflictextiles/search-quilts/fullevent/?id=163>

As a closing activity for the exhibition we had an arpillera workshop. The workshop was very well attended and newcomers were intensively involved.

We had offered 15 spaces which were all taken.

See announcement on page 3.

http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflictextiles/mediafiles/921_Linenhall-library-programme-Apr-June-2017.pdf

The group was met in the performance room where the space was set up in a circle, resembling an arpillera workshop around 1980. There were 11 women and 4 men in attendance and the workshop was facilitated by the curator and assisted by Eva Gonzalez.

Once each of the participants introduced herself/himself we had a brief guided tour so as to give people the chance to engage with what was on display. It is relevant to say that only four people had seen the exhibition at that stage.

The instruction given was to connect in particular to one of the pieces on display so that the doll making workshop would be in response to the chosen piece.



Part of the group looking at the four guiding pieces to the curatorial line; the top two showing the devastation of war in children's daily life and the two underneath are two stitched photographs of anti-war actions that give an account of what can be done in the present circumstances.



Participants engrossed working on their character doll. Conversations took place during the whole time and in the background we played very softly Chopin music to create a relaxed ambience but also to facilitate privacy when talking in small groups. The conversations went from personal experience to bringing out discussions of what was possible to do in the present war context around so many places. It was significant to listen to a participant who works directly with refugees in Greece and hear participants' reflections on what/how they thought they could contribute.





Towards the end of the activity the dolls were placed on this red cloth to create a sense of community.
People were given the chance to either take or leave their dolls for future exhibitions.

Each person shared the character they created and to which arpillera, photo or poster they connected the most or which brought out something significant in them that might mark a change in their attitudes towards refugees.

A couple of testimonies:

"When I see the faces of the people fleeing I realize that these people leave their countries because life is not possible where they are. Here in Northern Ireland people had to go during the famine and many also because of The Troubles."

"The news is only a small part of what tells us what is going on beyond our own environment. The stitched stories in the arpilleras is not just a shot, it makes visible, almost palpable, the damage to daily life. This short 2 hours workshop allowed me to feel the relevance of time and reflection invested in telling the stories."

As final exercise participants were asked to summarize in one word the experience they had. It could be a thought or a feeling. This is what came out:

emotional - hope - vibrancy - gratitude - lucky - resilience - desolate -

despair - involved - empowering - empathy - thought provoking - stimulating - commitment



This doll was made and left for future workshops by a participant who is a teacher and found especially moving seeing the refugee boy in Greece writing homework in the street and being so involved and concentrated. She made this girl to show she imagined her reading in deep concentration, having to cover her ears due to the noise in the streets where the activities take place.

Report prepared by Roberta Bacic
Photos by Eva Gonzalez
Sunday 16th April 2017