



VAC – Story Makers 2008-2012

Tuesday, 13 March 2012

Introduction – Bernadette Walsh, Archivist, Heritage & Museum Service, Derry City Council

In 2007 HMS met RB and began planning the first collaborative exhibition and events programme titled 'Art of Survival'. The exhibition was launched in March 2008 and it consisted of a trail of quilts across the city in venues as diverse as galleries and museums to community centres and religious houses. We had a related learning programme of workshops and lectures.

I don't think anyone who was involved in that first project envisaged what adventures it would lead to. Certainly here at the VAC, the quilts have become part of the identity of the centre. A place to share stories, experiences and histories – which is what is at the heart of what the staff here do.

The task of collecting, preserving and making publicly accessible collections of intrinsic value is vitally important for the city's memory bank. It was with these thoughts in mind that the HMS have continued to work with RB, community and history groups, venues and artists, to showcase significant collections of international and Irish quilts.

Certainly for the staff of the HMS, it has been empowering and insightful to meet quilt makers from all over Ireland and beyond. We have shared, not only tea and biscuits, but conversations as to what the projects have meant to the local communities and to women's lives as individuals –

whether it's just an opportunity to meet and talk, or to learn, to share, to exhibit, and to document.

Quilt making, textiles and fabric have long been entwined in the history of this city. Women have used fabric to tell stories of conflict, struggle, survival, history, friendship and to document events of a year.

The creativity expressed in these pieces of textile art (I think there are much more than just quilts) is testimony to the determination of women from the city and from across the world.

Today, as we celebrate the launch of the 25th exhibition and link it to International Women's Day (March 8th) – a day we have always used as a focus for such project. It has its roots in that very first exhibition in 2008 which became a rotating display of textile art – I commend RB and the staff of the VAC for their energy and commitment to promoting such work. The textile artwork gives women a voice and a creative outlet for their stories and memories. Whilst Roberta's experience at an international level has brought groups together to share and document – groups that could never have envisaged meeting together in the same room.

What the future story – we certainly hope to continue to work with and to be available for local community groups and individuals to help bring out their voice and their story to a wider audience.

The HMS were so enamoured by the pieces of textile art that were created across the city that we intend to have a specially designed piece of artwork installed into the Guildhall as part of the 'Derry~Londonderry 400' exhibition.

We hope this exhibition will stimulate further interest and awareness in working with fabric but also in preserving memories and understand the importance of documenting a person history and heritage.