



The 1913 Lockout Tapestry

A personal account by MLSA Member, Mary Hunter

The 1913 Lockout Tapestry is an ambitious, large-scale collaborative visual arts project to commemorate the Dublin Lockout. When the idea for the Lockout Tapestry was first mooted it was decided it would have to be community based and involve people in reclaiming their own past rather than simply commissioning a work of art. Two of the country's leading artists, Cathy Henderson, who passed away in October 2014, and Robert Ballagh designed a narrative based on a timeline provided by historian Pdraig Yeates and NCAD provided Angela Keane, a teacher and artist to provide technical advice to groups working on the panels. However, the crucial element in commemorating this epic story was the involvement of over 200 volunteers who were drawn from schools, trade unions, community activists and above all from the arts and crafts sector.

One of those volunteers was our own Mary Hunter, a Senior Medical Scientist in the Laboratory in Holles Street Hospital and a long time activist in the MLSA. Mary gives an account of her involvement in the project:

“My introduction to this wonderful project was when the artists Robert Ballagh and Cathy Henderson, along with representatives from SIPTU, came to an Irish Patchwork Society (IPS) meeting to ask for our co-operation in a new community project.

I was intrigued because the ‘tapestry’ was not presented as a completed project ready to be stitched, but as an organic project which it appeared would grow with those who were taking part. This also presented an opportunity to work with well know artists on a project where one of the commissioning bodies is a union, an

institution not normally connected to art. There was also the historical context, the centenary of the 1913 lockout, and perhaps a little irony as we were once again going through employment difficulties. Probably the most important reason for many of us was the challenge of interpreting the artists' ideas in stitch, combining fine art and craft.

Many of the groups that had been asked to take part met up in Tara House on Tara Street for the first meeting in July 2012. The panel that was being discussed on that day was the Bloody Sunday panel and there were many ideas put forward on how this should be approached. Two of the IPS groups went away with samples of the fabrics to be used and a tracing of a section of the panel and set about interpreting it in fabric and stitch. The samples were brought back a couple of weeks later and they were so alike that the two groups decided to work together and we continued to do this every Wednesday evening for fifteen months.

A tapestry is traditionally woven, however the 1913 'tapestry' employs many different methods of translating the artist image onto the background linen fabric. Our panels have used many of the methods employed by traditional stitchcraft, patchwork, quilting, appliqué, embroidery and some not so traditional – fabric painting.

Each panel took a long time, and all presented their own challenges. On Wednesday evenings up to nine of us worked on some aspect, either the sampling, stitching or discussing with other groups methods that can be used. Adding up the hours working with all none present, the time spent was 18 hours (I have allowed for tea breaks) On occasions the panel was taken home to be worked on but I have not added in these hours.

There were some moments of trepidation also. In the Bloody Sunday panel the policemen were constructed in sections and put back together like a jigsaw. It took some time for one of us to be brave enough to cut out the individual pieces. Thankfully there were no hitches and when they were applied to the background the panel came alive.

When the President launched this project in Liberty Hall on November 6th 2013, the Bloody Sunday panel, although not quite finished, was one of a number of panels shown. For all of us there was a great sense of pride and achievement when we heard the very positive reaction to it and watched it being photographed. There were also a number of meetings in Liberty hall as all the groups got together to show their work and it was here that became evident the extent to which the tapestry community had grown. This was a big project!

When we had finished to Bloody Sunday Panel we were reluctant to leave and were hoping to remain until the end so we gladly agreed to tackle the Church Street panel when asked.

