

AHRC Next Generation Design Research Workshop, 23 April 2018

Clay and commemoration: exploring the role creative clay work may play in promoting the wellbeing of NI veterans

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- According to the Northern Ireland Veterans' Health and Wellbeing Study, Psychology Research Institute, Ulster University, there are an estimated 110-150,000 veterans living in Northern Ireland (Armour et al, 2017a).
- Preliminary results of this study suggest that this population is at risk of high incidence of mental health issues, including post-traumatic stress disorder (Armour et al, 2017b).
- The important role creativity, social interaction and learning new skills plays in wellbeing is increasingly recognised, as shown by the Government's recent Culture White Paper (DCMS 2016) and the NHS's 'Five steps to mental wellbeing' (NHS 2016).



A Sunderland 'lustreware' mug at Durham Light Infantry Museum commemorating 'Thomas Brown 68th Reg.,1842'

The lineage of Third Battalion, The Rifles (3 RIFLES) can be traced back to the Durham Light Infantry. County Durham soldiers have a long history of serving in Afghanistan.



Objects from the 3 RIFLES Focus Group where soldiers discussed how their tour in Afghanistan (Operation Herrick 11, 2009-10) might be commemorated in ceramic.



Left: Rifleman Hiles' IED clearing ('barma') brush inscribed with a tally of the improvised explosive devices he found.

Right: khukuri excavated by Rifleman Hiles and described as "a special find".



Rifleman Hiles' IED Brush, a ceramic interpretation of the original used in Afghanistan. Porcelain, stains, decals, pink lustre, mixed media. Photo: Jo Howell



Almost all the soldiers had tattoos relating to their service and commemorating fallen comrades.

'These men have seen hell and now gone to heaven'

'When the rich wage war it's the poor who die'

'Lest we forget'





Swift and Bold Jug, surface decoration based on tattoos and lucky charms. Photo: Jo Howell





Ceramics workshops with military veterans developed in collaboration with the National Glass Centre, University of Sunderland, and charity Forward Assist as part of my AHRC Cultural Engagement Fellowship, 2016.

Impact



Work exhibited as part of *Created in Conflict: British Soldier Art from the Crimean War to Today*, Compton Verney Art Gallery & Park, 17 March-10 June 2018, curated by Prof Holly Furneaux, Cardiff University, and Dr Amy Orrock, Curator, Compton Verney



In Conversation: Making, Collecting and Curating Soldier Art, 12 April 2018. Dissemination event bringing together curators, artists, soldiers and collectors.

Installation view of Created in Conflict: British Soldier Art from the Crimean War to Today, Compton Verney



Swift and Bold Jug on display with trench art and other items of soldier art

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Ash Barikana

Coverage of Created in Conflict in Art Quarterly, Spring 2018





Coverage on ITV News at 10, 16 March, 2018.

Pilot Project

- Secured £4000 from Strategic Research Fund to undertake scaled-down version of UU Research Challenge Fund proposal (£19000)
- Statistically significant number of veteran participants (60 participants in 4 groups of 15)
- Initial focus groups, ceramics taster sessions and possible exhibition
- Robust tracking and feedback collection in association with Northern Ireland Veterans' Health and Wellbeing Study

Aims and Objectives

- To assess the effectiveness of clay work in promoting wellbeing amongst NI veterans.
- To investigate the role of objects and embodied practices relating to conflict within the veterans' home context.
- To gather data which may be used to design a clay work tool kit for therapeutic use in the veteran context.
- To ascertain the feasibility and efficacy of developing a larger study as part of an AHRC ECR Grant which will examine cross-country (NI, UK, ROI) differences in the utilisation of clay work tool kit for therapeutic gain.

Challenges

- Heavy teaching commitment (18 hours a week)
- First year in job spent developing new materials and a syllabus
- Will managing a large-scale project distract me from my own creative practice?
- How can I make the pilot as effective as possible in terms of preparing an AHRC ECR Grant application?

References

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