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*An untitled sculpture by Rachel Hunt,
Cranbrook Academy of Art*



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Hilary Bower explores contrasting materials and repeating elements in her textile-based constructions.

ON THE COVER: Rachel Hunt, Untitled, 2006; iron, nickel, assorted fabric, thread; sewn; 54" x 14" x 13". Hunt, a MFA candidate at Cranbrook Academy of Art, is one of sixteen students included in our third annual student showcase on page 34. Photo by the artist. *ABOVE:* Lycia Trouton's The Linen Memorial, which commemorates the violent troubles of Northern Ireland, has taken many forms. Here, approximately 150 embroidered handkerchiefs are installed at the Faculty Gallery, University of Wollongong, Australia, in February 2005. Read more about the project on page 44. Photo: Sean Maguire. Model: Jo Ann (Bodie) O'Dell.

The Linen Memorial

In Lycia Trouton's evolving installation, printed and embroidered handkerchiefs are symbols of reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

by Jessica Hemmings

“My mobile counter-monument” is artist Lycia Trouton's description of *The Linen Memorial*. This large-scale textile installation was prompted by Trouton's reading of *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children Who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* by authors David McKittrick et al. The book details in chronological order the names of more than 3,700 people who died as a result of the forty-year conflict in Northern Ireland (1966–2007). Initial funding of the memorial was provided by the Canada Council of the Arts.

The conflict in Northern Ireland, between the country's Nationalist/Republican (Catholic) and Unionist (Protestant) communities, was marked by continual violence. Initial establishment of a power-sharing assembly took place in 1998. After various suspensions, arms decommissioning, and protracted negotiations in the intervening years, elections took place again in 2007. The resulting government now is made up of the two opposing parties, the Democratic Unionists and Sinn Féin.

In its structure, Trouton's *Linen Memorial* acts as a quilt of remembrance that represents, on a symbolic level, the beginning of recovery. But unlike the family narratives often presented by the quilting tradition, Trouton has unified—without homogenizing—the loss of strangers' lives. Each linen square is embroidered with names and attached lightly to the next, forcing individuals that in life never met eye to eye to now sit side by side. The format creates a new order that eloquently captures both the scale of life lost and the individual and isolated experience of grief each and every name represents.

The Linen Memorial has traveled from volunteer needleworker to artist and then into the public domain through exhibitions in the United States (where the work was first displayed on September 7, 2001, under its original title, *The Irish Linen Memorial*) and Australia, as well as Northern Ireland. This peripatetic realization closely echoes the artist's own life. Born in Belfast, Northern Ireland, Trouton emigrated to Canada in 1970 and, after undergraduate and graduate studies in the States, went on



TOP: Installation on June 21, 2007, at Corrymeela Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, Ballycastle, Northern Ireland. Photo: Christian Guevara. BOTTOM: Detail of linen handkerchief with chain-stitch embroidery by Margot Damon or Maureen Trouton and sewn hair by Edith Morriott. Photo: Wes Wickham, No Logo.

to complete her doctorate at the University of Wollongong in Australia in 2005.

Much as a team researched *Lost Lives*, construction of *The Linen Memorial* has also been a team effort. (The various installations too have involved many volunteers.) Trouton's mother, aunt, and sisters have all contributed to the embroidery. Another volunteer, Edith Morriott, has begun to tat and sew spots of hair onto the handkerchiefs' edges. Trouton suggests that these blemishes of stitched hair “act as a sign of mourning, marking the pure, white cloth and creating crisscross patterns that symbolize a new pattern of fragile and still difficult ‘kin-

ship' in Northern Irish society." The use of linen suggests links to Northern Ireland's colonial textile industry. Historically linen was used as material for bandages needed to staunch the flow of blood as well as for handkerchiefs to dry tears. Trouton adds that the shape of the handkerchief also alludes to the gesture of good-bye made by the countless individuals that, living across the globe, now make up the Irish diaspora.

Trouton situates her work in the genres of both performance art and large-scale sculptural installations made of earthworks and/or textiles. "There are important contemporary associations inherent in the sculptural use of textiles," she explains. "First, both textiles and performance art can represent common forms for expressing the contemporary migrant experience. Second, textiles may represent simultaneously both the sacred (in their historic, ceremonial, or religious use, for rituals of life's defining passages) as well as the profane (in the use of cloth to care for a body inflicted with wounds or debased by violent acts). Finally, textiles are symbolic of interconnectedness, as touch is an inherent component of cloth."

The Linen Memorial's most recent exhibition occupied the heart-shaped Croi building at the Corrymeela Centre for Peace and Reconciliation, near Belfast, in June in recognition of the first Private Day of Reflection on the conflict in Northern Ireland. Earlier versions of the work took on a multidisciplinary nature and included a soundscape by the Australian composer-violinist Thomas Fitzgerald and performance by the choreographer-dancer Elizabeth Cameron Dalman. In each version, the artwork marks a fundamental difference between the experience of reading a text, a private endeavor that allows the text to be closed when the pain becomes too personal, and viewing the memorial, a more public and in many ways inescapable collective experience. Wherever displayed, *The Linen Memorial* requires viewers from both sides of the conflict to confront the loss of life shoulder to shoulder in a public space. The work is testament to the social conscience contemporary textile art offers society today. 📍

To see more images, for an audio recording of names being read, and for exhibition updates, visit www.linenmemorial.org. The artist's website is www.lyciatroun.com.

TOP: Printed handkerchiefs installed in mourning ritual of inverse arches for Day of the Dead, 2002, *The Long Gallery*, Creative Arts Department, University of Wollongong, New South Wales, Australia. Speakers along the corridor played *The Seeming Insanity of Forgiveness*, a work by composer Thomas Fitzgerald. Photo: Sean Maguire. MIDDLE: Choreographer Elizabeth Cameron Dalman and *Mirramu Dance Company* perform within *The Linen Memorial* in February 2004 at *Craft ACT Gallery and Design Centre*, Canberra, Australia. The soundtrack is by Thomas Fitzgerald. Photo: Creative Image Photography, Canberra. RIGHT: Quiltlike installation of printed handkerchiefs in February 2005 at the *Faculty Gallery*, University of Wollongong. Photo: Sean Maguire. Model: Jo Ann (Bodie) O'Dell.

