CultureCase

How people make and transform memory through art

This research was conducted by **Anna Reading** at **King's College London**

Summary

This paper is about how memories are transformed through the production and interpretation of art objects, specifically examining a participatory ceramics project called 'Moving Hearts', which explored the topic of migration. By reviewing all the documentation and artwork produced by the project, and by closely observing what people did and said, the research was able to demonstrate that there is an 'economic dimension' to the making and remaking of memories using art. In essence, people use 'mnemonic labour' (thinking, making) to transform 'mnemonic capital' (materials, expertise) into something of use and value.

Moving Hearts involved 21 workshops facilitated over 21 days in 2018 in various community contexts in different parts of London

The heart-making process was facilitated by an artist who taught 300 participants how to fashion a human heart from clay. The people were of all ages and backgrounds, although a majority were women. Around 1,000 clay hearts, inscribed with messages from their makers, were produced. The hearts were wrapped in cloth and transported to the UK's Museum of Migration where they were arranged into a giant installation on the gallery floor. In the following weeks museum visitors were invited to walk around the installation and to choose one heart to unwrap and to write a message on the cloth. In addition to the museum installation there was a silent procession of the hearts through central London and a public forum on the topic of 'reimagining migration for the 21st century'.

Migration has become a hot topic in recent years and many ‘museums of migration’ have been established worldwide

These institutions serve an audience which includes the four categories of participant in the Moving Hearts project: those who wanted to learn about working with clay and thought that the workshops would be enjoyable and entertaining; people who were concerned about the plight of migrants and ‘wanted to do something’; ‘migration activists’ involved in various community and NGO projects; and ‘self-identified migrants’ whose life-stories had motivated them to participate in the workshop.

Keywords

migrants **sculpture** **memory** **UK**

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