



PRESS RELEASE

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New exhibition at Humber Street Gallery highlights the effects of war on women and girls

A moving new exhibition that highlights the effects of war and conflict on women and girls around the world is set to open at Humber Street Gallery next month.

The installation, called *Torn*, will be on display from Monday 6 November until Sunday 31 December and features photographs of wild poppies that have been picked, dried and torn apart by Hull-based photographer Lee Karen Stow.

Having initially been drawn to Hull's sister city of Freetown in Sierra Leone in 2007 to capture images of women who had lived through civil war, Stow returned numerous times before eventually displaying her work in an international touring exhibition called *42*, in response to the average life expectancy of women in the country.

This initial exhibition was the first step in a journey that saw Lee travelling around the world to meet with women and girls who have lived through conflict and been left to pick up the pieces of lives torn apart. She visited and photographed women in Hiroshima, Vietnam, Cambodia, the West Bank through to Holocaust survivors and listened to their stories of being torn from their families, their homes and their lives. She also began documenting the stories of women from Somalia, Syria, Ethiopia, Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo, etc, who had arrived in Hull and the US as refugees.

Lee said: "These intimate encounters revealed an untold story that I really wanted to tell and show. These stories I have told from the perspective of the women who were there. Remembering these stories is not to negate the impact of war on men, but to acknowledge the suffering of women, and to recognise that it is often women, who are the ones left to pick up the pieces."

Inspired to find out more about the flowers and their symbolism, she began researching their significance and discovered the often-forgotten story of the birth of the red poppy as a symbol of remembrance.

Lee continued: "It was conceived by American woman Moïna Belle Michael and French woman Madame Anna E Guérin in 1918 as a symbol of grief and a declaration of hope, for peace and an end to war. A century on and the poppy remembrance symbol, although giving comfort to the bereaved, has wandered from its original purpose. Likewise, each November, Michael and Guérin are forgotten, as are many women affected by war, whose stories are lost behind the bigger headlines and the politics surrounding the symbol."

While unpacking some poppies she had set aside to dry in 2016, Lee heard the story on the news of the bombing of a hospital in Syria and in sheer frustration tore the poppy in her hand and threw it down on the table.

She said: "TORN represents my own personal frustration and anger, as I watched war and conflict happening again, and again, with women and girls being disproportionately affected. I thought nothing has changed in the decade that I have been documenting this. But when I looked again at the shredded petals I picked them up and tried to reconstruct them and make something beautiful out of the damage. Suddenly I was reminded of the strength, resilience and resourcefulness demonstrated by women. Women who somehow manage to pick up the pieces and carry on, providing for their families and often becoming active advocates for peace."

David Sinclair, Curator at Humber Street Gallery, said: "Lee's work really highlights the hidden impacts of war and conflict in a really beautiful way. It forces us to think more broadly about the ripple effect on those who aren't on the front line, but on those who deal with different, but equally devastating, consequences."

Lee said: "Not only do the impacts of war ripple through families, but through time too. There are many men who have served in wars who are still feeling the effects and there are many women who are still trying to rebuild their lives, their families, their homes and their communities.

"Remembrance shouldn't be for just for one day in November or just about looking back, because it's every day now that war and conflict are ruining the lives of thousands of women and girls. I hope this opens up a conversation, but that talk turns into greater awareness and action, because women and girls' lives are being torn apart. Women and girls are dying; experiencing sexual exploitation, harassment and trafficking; abuse and torture; and being torn displaced from everything they've known."

Torn is open at Humber Street Gallery from 6 November - 31 December, admission is free.

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NOTES TO EDITORS

About the Artist

Lee Karen Stow was born in Hull in 1966 and grew up on the Greatfield Estate in the east of the city.

She began her career as a freelance journalist and features writer in 1989, winning the Prince's Youth Trust/Reader's Digest regional winner for Humberside. She joined the Hull Daily Mail as features writer for five years. In 1995 she returned to freelancing, writing and photographing for national newspapers, magazines and books. Travelling to more than 60 countries she has documented people and places for The Times, The Daily Telegraph, The Scotsman, The Express on Sunday, CNN Traveler, BBC In Pictures, AA Publishing/Frommer's, Geographical and more.

In 2007 she visited Freetown in Sierra Leone and returned several times. Since then she has concentrated on long-term documentary photographic, written and recorded projects on women's historical and contemporary issues including:

42 (Women of Sierra Leone) shown at the International Slavery Museum Liverpool; Royal Commonwealth Society of London; Horniman Museum London; and The Ferens, Hull. **Girls in the Ring**, part of the Cultural Olympiad 2012.

TORN is the culmination of the documentary project and exhibition **Poppies: Women, War, Peace**, sponsored by Arts Council England, which launched at the University of Cambridge as part of the 2014 First World War Centenary. It then toured to the Museum of Liverpool; Brynmor Jones

University of Hull; York Army Museum, Ropewalk Gallery. Selections were shown at UN Headquarters New York, on the 15th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325; The Senedd: Welsh National Assembly and currently at the Center for Civil and Human Rights, Atlanta, USA.

In 2012 she was awarded Honorary Degree for photojournalism by the University of Hull. She is currently studying MA Journalism by Research at Lincoln University's School of Journalism. Two images are held in the New Hall Art Collection, University of Cambridge.

About Hull UK City of Culture

Hull UK City of Culture 2017 is a 365 day programme of cultural events and creativity inspired by the city and told to the world. Hull secured the title of UK City of Culture 2017 in November 2013. It is only the second city to hold the title and the first in England.

Divided into four seasons, starting with **Made in Hull**, this nationally significant event draws on the distinctive spirit of the city and the artists, writers, directors, musicians, revolutionaries and thinkers that have made such a significant contribution to the development of art and ideas.

Hull 2017's second season, **Roots and Routes**, runs from April to June and explore Hull's unique place as a gateway to Europe and one of the world's busiest ports. Its maritime history and global connections inspire the stories of the city; this season of work will also celebrate Hull's international links, including Rotterdam, Reykjavik and Freetown.

Freedom runs from July to September. Building on the legacy of Hull-born anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce MP, *Freedom* will explore the concept of freedom in all its many forms. The final season, **Tell the World** will run from October to December.

The Culture Company was set up to deliver the Hull 2017 programme and is an independent organisation with charitable status. It has raised £32 million, with over 70 partners supporting the project, including public bodies, trusts and foundations and local and national businesses.

Key contributions are coming from: **Host City** - Hull City Council; **Principal Partners** - Arts Council England, BBC, Big Lottery Fund, East Riding of Yorkshire Council, Heritage Lottery Fund, KCOM, KWL, Spirit of 2012, Yorkshire Water and the University of Hull; **Major Partners** - Associated British Ports, Arco, BP, the British Council, British Film Institute, Green Port Hull, Hull Clinical Commissioning Group, MKM Building Supplies, P&O Ferries, Paul Hamlyn Foundation, Sewell Group, Siemens, Smith & Nephew and Wykeland Group. The National Lottery has contributed more than £10m of this funding, making it the largest single funding body for Hull 2017.

68 per cent of the funding is dedicated to public facing activities, including the widest range of cultural events in every corner of the city, with a further 11 per cent for legacy and contingency. More than £5 million is being invested in volunteering, learning and community engagement. £1.6 million is being invested to ensure a legacy after 2017. This includes capacity building, such as supporting existing events so they can grow, staging curtain-raiser events, developing future programming for after 2017 and building a new platform to support a unified ticketing system for the city.

Hull 2017's International Partners are: Aarhus, Denmark, which is European Capital of Culture 2017; Reykjavik, Iceland; Rotterdam, The Netherlands; and Freetown, Sierra Leone (twinned with Hull). These relationships are reflected in a number of events throughout the year.

For information go to www.hull2017.co.uk

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