Summary of Exhibition Feedback and Responses

This leaflet is a brief summary of the written responses to the Everyday Objects Exhibition from 2012 – 2104. Most of the feedback was written on ‘luggage tags’ offered in the exhibition and then displayed in the feedback area. Some people completed more detailed feedback forms. The exhibition venues included a tour round Northern Ireland and the border counties; Dundalk County Museum; the Gernika/Guernica Peace Museum and the House of Aiete in the Basque Country (a panel version); an empty shop unit in Belfast City Centre (advertised in the Visit Belfast Centre). When not in these venues it was displayed in the HTR offices.
Visitors’ Impressions:

“Excellent. Especially liked that 1/2 was on Shankill and 1/2 on Falls. Also liked that owner of piece wrote their own text. Powerful, Inclusive, Forward-thinking, while looking back.”
(Spectrum Centre, Shankill Road, Belfast)

“Imaginative, Innovative, Transformative, Humanising!”
(HTR offices, Belfast)

“I think many people of my generation have a very limited or no concept at all of what it is to live constantly in the presence of widespread social conflict. We are insulated by our things, our social media - and we forget that others have had to live through so much. This exhibit hits home because of its mundane simplicity.”
(HTR offices, Belfast)

“This taught me that we have to do more in my country in order to understand that coexistence is possible.”
(Queen Street, Belfast)

“Thought-provoking … Wonderful to see stories and memories from all sides co-exist, with each as significant and real as the other. Excellent concept.”
(First Derry Presbyterian Church, Derry-Londonderry)

“This is an incredibly thought-provoking exhibition, not only because most of the objects are ones I haven’t seen anywhere, but also because of how personal they are - in conjunction with the personally written passages - to those who donated them. This is the most up-close and personal, real museum experience I have ever had.”
(HTR offices, Belfast)

“Powerful reminder of the impact on all the people of N.I. - illustrated perfectly by the bus tickets: a casual reference to great horrors.”
(Queen Street, Belfast)

“Very well put together exhibition - adds the personal aspect to a history that affected a lot of people and doesn’t always get told.”
(Bell Architects Studio, Ballymoney)

“Great idea - this could grow with a large project that never ends and helps so many people to better understand the past and live in the future.”
(HTR offices, Belfast)

“These reminders reinforce the fact that we NEVER want those days to return. Well done! Great exhibition.”
(Public Library, Clones)
Visitors’ Emotions:

“Makes me feel? Still trying to figure out why everything happened as it did.” (First Derry Presbyterian Church, Derry-Londonderry)

“13/08/13. Very moving. Peace can only be possible when you can tell the story of the “other” and walk in their shoes. Mary, England” (Peace Museum, Guernica, Spain)

“The items are evocative in themselves but as significant were the conversations.” (Saint Mary’s College, Falls Road, Belfast)

“Bin lids. Bullet holes in walls. Army. We used to count the bullet holes in our walls in 1970s. I remember bin lids being used and army sitting on guard in our garden.” (Spectrum Centre, Shankill Road, Belfast)

“The exhibition evoked many memories for me. Some unpleasant, some amusing. I started my primary school teaching career in Derry at the beginning of the Troubles. I smile at the memory of a P1 child drawing a picture of one man in a boat because “All the people are shouting ‘One man, one boat!’” (Strule Arts Centre, Omagh)

“Looking at this exhibition, we realise that we have come a long way. It gives great hope for the future. A great exhibition.” (First Derry Presbyterian Church, Derry-Londonderry)

“I feel everyone should see this, it makes it all more need and not just stories of the past. It is a fantastic exhibition, and very, very moving for both sides.” (County Museum, Dundalk)

“I feel the exhibition just encapsulated the diversity of the media that was used to make the conflict “normal” as if we carried on normally, when really it was abnormal. That’s why it’s difficult now to embrace the transition out of conflict because we’re not conditioned to recognise “normality”.” (Strule Arts Centre, Omagh)

“La paix est un grand lac où tout le monde se baigne, pas une oasis, dans le désert, qui s’assèche et que l’on remplit. Antoine “Peace is a great lake where everyone can bathe, not an oasis in the desert that dries up and has to be filled again. Antoine” (Peace Museum, Guernica, Spain)
Background to the Everyday Objects Exhibition

A Living Memorial Museum (LMM) was one of the five mechanisms for dealing with the past that Healing Through Remembering (HTR) identified in its initial 2002 report. Like the other remembering processes, it was about recognition and acknowledgement, promoting better understanding of the causes and impact of the conflict, challenging set views and empowering people by enabling them to reflect on their own experience and that of others.

In 2004 HTR launched an Open Call for Ideas and gathered the numerous community and individual contributions about the idea in the Without Walls Report (November 2007). In parallel, HTR in collaboration with the Institute of Irish Studies at Queen’s University commissioned an audit into private and public collections to chart the existing material related with the conflict. The Artefacts Audit (2008) identified nearly half a million conflict-related artefacts, available in 79 private and public collections. To further the debate HTR also made several visits to existing collections to inform its reflection.

The Everyday Objects Transformed by the Conflict Exhibition (EOE) is the natural continuation of the previous projects, as a practical implementation building on the suggestions and observations - could the walk be done, not just the talk? The theme was one that most people could relate to and therefore appropriate to prompt memories and reflection. Its mundane simplicity also made it less intimidating than a traditional museum exhibition and, as shown in the visitors’ feedback, all the more efficient. Collectors expressed their interest in the project and the details of the exhibition were decided during joint meetings between HTR and the collectors throughout 2011, when a curator/coordination of the exhibition was also recruited.

The temporary exhibition toured Northern Ireland and the border counties between March and August 2012. From September 2012 it was largely based in the HTR offices, from February to April 2013 it was in Dundalk County Museum and from May to November 2014 it was in an empty shop unit on Queen St, Belfast. Between March and November 2013 a panel version of the exhibition was shown in the Gernika Peace Museum, and then in the Cultural Centre Aiete in San Sebastian in the Basque Country.

The exhibition presented unusual curatorial specificities. In particular, HTR exerted limited curatorial control over the exhibition, as the choice of objects and the wording of the corresponding labels were left to the collectors. HTR had control over the display including the grouping of objects and the introductory panel. The exhibition was deliberately multi-perspective in several ways: by displaying artefacts that belonged to different collections representing different backgrounds and interest groups; by engaging the collectors into the curating process; by trying to reach out to the widest possible audience by selecting mostly non-museum venues; by including visitor feedback as part of the exhibition. In short, the purpose of the exhibition was as much about facilitating social interaction between visitors and collections, between collectors and between venues as it was about informing people about the conflict. The exhibition was to enable further dialogue about the conflict; as part of a wider process rather than an end in itself. HTR also offered workshops to any group of people requesting to view the exhibition.

Two reports, the first evaluating the process and the second the feedback or response from the touring exhibition were published in 2013 – they show the collaborative decision-making at work around the exhibition and how successful it was with visitors as a shared place and a catalyst for further conversations about the conflict.

As well as the website for the exhibition HTR also developed a series of short films with Disruptive Media entitled Ordinary Objects Extraordinary Times. These films show individuals discussing personal memories relating to objects - some from the exhibition and some prompted by the exhibition.

Sample feedback for all the venues are overleaf.

Further information and links

Reports [all available as pdfs from www.healingthroughrememering.org/resources]
Artefact Audit
Without Walls report
Evaluation of Process of EOE
Evaluation of Response to EOE report
Summary of Exhibition Feedback and Response

Websites
Exhibition website: http://www.healingthroughrememering.org/everydayobjects/
Ordinary Objects, Extraordinary Times films http://www.healingthroughrememering.org/ooet/
Artefacts Database http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/htr/

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Photo credits: Mark Pearce and HTR.