

Lindy Richardson

My name is Lindy Richardson and I am an honorary research fellow with the Centre for Research Collections which I have been for a year now. Having been programme director of textiles at ECA for twenty years, I've slightly changed roles. So I am working on all the lovely things I've been working from when I was trying to be a programme director and do lots of research. Now I'm just able to focus on the research which is fantastic. So thank you so much for inviting me along today, it's an absolute pleasure to talk about some of the things I love. And the thing I'm going to talk about today, I feel incredibly passionate about. My talk is going to flow on so nicely from Fran's because I'm going to talk about the legacy that the suffragettes left us and how we developed that a few years ago in what were called the Processions Banners. So I'm starting with this banner that I thought would be very interesting to kind of like see the scene a little bit.

So this was a banner that was made by Anne Mcbeth, who was the head of embroidery at Glasgow School of Art and she designed this banner, which shows the signatures of eighty hunger strikers between 1909 and 1910 who were held in the Holloway Prison. And Anne Mcbeth was actually a hunger striker herself and Glasgow School of Art supported her through her hunger strike. And she was still paid although she wasn't obviously teaching because she was imprisoned and she was on hunger strike. She was still paid by Glasgow School of Art, which I think shows the support for women which was there at that time. Who were fighting for their right to vote. And so um a hundred years later, the centenary of women well some women being given the vote. It wasn't all women, it was just some women that were given the vote in 1918. So 100 years later a group got together and decided that, they're called artichoke, decided that the what they would do would be set up this amazing national kind of event where they asked 100 people to work with different communities in order to create banners for what were going to be processions through out the UK. And I was one of the people who was lucky enough to be commissioned and the groups that I wanted to work with were the university themselves, where I was hoping that I'd be working with staff and students. So I was working with staff and students from Edinburgh College of Art, form the University of Edinburgh. And the other group, I'd done a little bit of work prior to this with the Scottish prison service. And so I approached the Scottish prison service and said look I'm wanting to do this project, would you like to be involved. And in actual fact, they jumped at the chance, thought this was going to be absolutely brilliant.

So this was at the very beginning where we were trying to encourage as many people as possible, and I imagine this audience here, had you all been around you'd have been scrambling to get there, and come and join with us, to work on this banner. There were artists up and down the country, so if you can imagine, from the very top of Scotland, right down to the tip of England and over in Ireland and in Wales who were all working together at the same time to create these banners. Now I, appealed to staff to start with, and I mean it was a strange kind of response because I had to really tease them out to come to join these workshops. And at the beginning, I thought there'd be lots of people who would respond to this really well and this thing is such a fantastic opportunity. Not only can I make a statement and be involved with all these other women and celebrate 100 years of women having the vote, but I can do embroidery, I can sit down quietly with a group of other people, I can have discussions. It was actually a little bit like drawing teeth sometimes. We set up workshops on Saturdays, we set up workshops in the evenings. And we were asking people to come and just

give a little bit of their time and to think about what the Suffragettes had done for us. To think about where we were now and to try and put that into cloth in some shape or form. And one of the ways that we did it was that we started with discussions about suffrage. We talked about how we felt now, now in the contemporary society as women, did we feel equal, did we feel that our voice was heard. Were we still fighting? And what we created were what we called responsive slogans. So we asked everyone to think about all of these things we had talked about, and then we asked them just to put it into a few words. And then encouraged everyone to begin to embroider these words almost like protest badges. So they were about twenty centimetres across, they were all circular, and we kept the same format for every single workshop that we did. So you can see on the right here, where some of these badges are beginning to take shape. So they were as I said about twenty centimetres. People had lots of different things to say, and you'll see in the centre there's a 'Dump Trump' one that, this was actually being done at the same time as Trump was doing all of his amazing work to try and encourage everyone to vote for him. When we made this, we never believed for a minute that he would actually be elected. There's also one at the bottom right, to vote and repeal, this was the Irish repeal laws, where they were looking at abortion and women's right to abortion laws as well. It is definitely, definitely of its own period as well, which I think is really lovely. It's got a lot of things that were happening as this was all going on. And one of the central themes that always keeps seeming to come up in all of the discussions that we were having was about equality. So we kept talking about equality, we kept talking about the divisions between genders. We talked about what these women a hundred years ago had been fighting for and we talked about whether we felt that they had made, that we'd made what, what headway had we made in these a hundred years.

And I was also going up and working in the women's prison and Cornton Vale so up in Stirlingshire and the discussions that we had in the prison were and they were very, very powerful because prisoners are not allowed to vote. Prisoners don't have the right to vote and the discussions that we had there also involved, one of the women who was in the prison, she was from Lithuania, and was, was explaining that in Lithuania prisoners can actually vote. So they do have a right to vote. And the prisoners were saying to me that well, we think that if we are going to be liberated within the next few years at a time when that government is going to be in power, we should be allowed to vote. So it opened up a lot of questions and I took these questions back to the students and the staff at the university and we discussed them, discussed them again. And these have all come up in what we eventually did show as our main banner.

Now some of you will know about the Edinburgh Seven. The Edinburgh Seven were the first seven female matriculated students in the whole of the UK. And one of our staff members decided that what she wanted to put on the banner, she wants to honour the Edinburgh Seven themselves. And so she went back and got their signatures in their matriculation documents and she's restitched each of these seven members to honour these seven, the Edinburgh Seven. And if you've never heard of the Edinburgh Seven and especially if you're a student at the university please, please please guys go and look them up, even if it's just through Wikipedia. So as I said we also went into the prison and we worked with a group of women prisoners embroidering what their responses were to the discussion and many of these women had never ever stitched before. So for them, this was a really, really big deal. The first one on the left you can see she didn't even actually manage to make it circular, however, what she

wanted to say is that prisoners are barred from voting. The middle one prisoners are powerless and the one on the right you will see in one of the close ups a little bit um further into my talk which says My Opinions Matters Wherever I am which I thought was quite moving. The other thing that we encouraged people to do was to think about significant women and why they should appear on our banner. So the first one was actually the second badge that was made by the women in the previous slides so she'd done barred from voting and then she said I want to stitch that wee girl, that wee girl that got shot because she wanted to go to school. And that Wee girl happened to be Malala Yousafzai so this was her own drawing, and she spent hours and hours stitching the Sari, it was just amazing. She just kept asking for more red thread. And then this woman in the middle, so this woman in the middle is, and I don't know whether I've got the spelling right of this or not, but Jayaben Desai who in the summer of '76 was protesting about the workers rights and in the, the Grunwick protests and again she's worth going and looking at because she said we shouldn't be having to work in these circumstances, Mr. Manager we are Lions we are going to come and fight you back. Which I thought was brilliant, that was one of our evening class students that came along and contributed. And then the person on the right is a portrait of Crystal Macmillan and many of you at the university will have passed the Cyrtal Macmillan building and never had actually wondered who Crystal Macmillan was. And she was one of the very first science and maths graduates from Edinburgh University.

So we'd amassed all of these amazing badges and the students had worked really hard and the students had created what you can see here, they're walking in their own banners so they'd made these huge garments which were making a statement for the to walk in. And this is us on the way to the march. And you can see that's me in the centre I was more than pretty excited, I was absolutely beyond myself. And what I'm carrying is a little tiny, little orange flag and that orange flag was to represent the women from the Scottish prison because obviously the staff and the students were all welcome to come along. There were thousands of women across the UK marching with their banners celebrating 100 years of equality. And thee women in prison obviously couldn't join the march. So that's me marching with my little Scottish prison service badge, and my pennant just to try to kind of make them feel as though they were included in the march in one way. And it was the most incredible, incredible day. It was sunny, there were thousands of people there, there were women marching, there were men walking along the sides and clapping. There were older women who had you know known the Suffragettes and the known the suffrage movement weeping at the sides of the road. And it was just so moving and we had this wonderful Scottish piper in front of us. And as you can see everyone was given a sash to wear and the sashes were in these colours that we, we so, so nicely have been introduced to. So the green and the white and the purple. And we made this wonderful sea. If you can imagine walking down the Mile and with thousands of women behind you, with a piper in the front of you and all wearing these incredible colours you can see why we are so, so excited, and so enlivened by the whole experience.

This is coming down, we're coming down the Royal Mile now. And our banner was honoured to be asked to lead the way. So not only was this an amazing thing, but it was just so incredible to be at the front of that march and the, the noise and the bagpipes etc, etc. Now the people that weren't included were these women in the prison so we'd done that amazing march in June. I'd raved on and on about it, we'd all been so excited we'd all had our badges like shown to the world. It had been on the television. I mean, you know I can't I can't rave

about this enough, but these women in the prison had not been able to be there. So in August of the same year we took the banner to the prison. And this is us outside in the grounds outside Cornton Vale prison, well, but obviously we're still inside guys don't worry we weren't going to let the prisoners out. We were in the, in the gardening kind of area. And we, we talked to the women about their banner, we talked about, about what had happened. We explained the march to them and then we marched with the woman. We had a woman piper that came in and marched with us. We all the prison guards walked behind, we invited different members of the community from different faiths who came and walked behind us and we had just such a fantastic day. The women then got together and they created this amazing meal. So they had a chef that came in a local chef that came and worked with a group of them in the kitchen. And we had this fantastic celebration with the banner in the room after we had done it in this huge big hall. We were all served this incredible, incredible meal to celebrate the 100 years of women having the vote. To celebrate these women there having their voice heard and seen in that amazing march despite the fact that they weren't there. And it was a wonderful, wonderful day. And as wonderful as that Day marching down the Royal Mile. So there's the two banners everyone is equal. I think we should really have had a question mark on our banner that said everyone is equal, Everyone is nearly equal, but maybe not quite yet. Thank you everyone and thank you for tolerating my lack of expertise in my IT skills today. That's our Instagram @embroideredvotesforwomen which will show you the kind of journey along the way and the @embroiderednds one is kind of the project that I'm working on now. So thank you very much, I will stop sharing my screen and hopefully we will all go back to normal, Thank you.