The Train Track and the Basket

Claire Barber

From April to June, an installation by Claire Barber at Hull Paragon Railway station will explore the 19th and 2Oth century "Transmigration" phenomenon in Hull. Between 1848 and 1914, more than 2 million people arrived into the city by ship from mainland Europe, and left by train for the transatlantic ports of Liverpool and Southampton, to catch ships to the New World and a new life. A dedicated platform at the station was created to keep the migrants separate from residents, as it was feared they might bring disease. Special hotels offering a brief rest and a meal sprung up around the city. This mass movement of people through and across Hull, many staying in the city only for a few hours, ended abruptly with the outbreak of WW1.

Dr Claire Barber is a Senior Lecturer in Textile Practice at the University of Huddersfield, and her work often creates a conceptual approach to textiles, with wide ranging results ranging from detailed, interactive artworks to large scale architectural interventions.

For The Train Track and the Basket, Claire has explored the notion that skills and belongings “migrate” along the transport routes as well as people. Many of the migrants used large, traditional baskets to take their belongings on their journey, and there are a number of basket weaving patterns and skills now present in North America that can be traced back to northern Europe. In addition she has also researched the other elements that move along the train tracks – in particular plants and seeds, with the spread of many species mirroring the increased travel and use of train tracks in the UK.

Claire’s large scale installation is located in the station, the site where all of Hull’s transmigrants passed through in hope of a new life. She also sees it as a place where the constant movement of people mirrors the weaving process which creates textiles and baskets – the action of double weaving, layers crossing over layers ,as countless patterns are created every time people enter and exit the building.