KensingtonNarrators.org Announces Expansion and Rebranding of the Kensington Narrators Arts & Heritage Archive

Thursday 10 October, 2019

Originally launched to preserve the outpouring of local artwork produced in response to the Grenfell tragedy, the Kensington Narrators' digital and physical Archive continues to document life, art, and the cultural heritage of the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea.

Kensington, 10 October 2019 – In the aftermath of a heartbreaking loss of life in June 2017, and in response to the challenges of adjusting to a new reality faced by the local community (Golborne, Ladbroke Grove, Latimer, and Westbourne Park), a grassroots team formed the Kensington Narrators. Now in October 2019, they launch a groundbreaking digital archive website, featuring much of the art and creative work stemming from that period.

Ladbroke Grove native Christina Sealy, a local arts project coordinator of 22 years (and now a 2019-2020 London Civic Futures leader), along with other local arts leaders and Kensington residents, created the Archive to protect, and eventually exhibit, this creative work. Now permanently housed at Bishopsgate Institute, a beautiful fit-for-purpose and self-funded building next to Liverpool Street station, the Kensington Narrators Arts & Heritage Archive preserves both physical and digital items. Each item is categorized and owned by its contributor.

For 2019, a stylish new website exhibition platform has been designed by local youths, the creation of which has enhanced their training in modern digital archiving. It allows the public direct access to a selection of archived works. Through a first-of-its-kind online archival contribution process, a self-curated creative legacy of Kensington & Chelsea can be uploaded and cataloged securely online.

In Christina's words: "Our communities have come to understand that the media cannot be the only voice telling our stories. The preservation of our local heritage is a creative, educative and empowering response to tragedy. The Archive documents, preserves, and exhibits our experiences of recent historical events, while also celebrating our community in all its diversity, resilience and creativity. This Archive is a catalyst to preserve all our stories of historical value, to create new work, and to self-represent our rich identities."

Archiving is critical to individuals and communities for many reasons. It is a human right to archive — to contribute to art history, to amplify individual voices, and for diverse cultures to represent themselves. Archiving allows for collective storytelling, and preserves first hand knowledge of a particular time and place. On a practical level, secure and permanent physical space is hard to come by; locals — especially those who have been displaced, want somewhere safe to preserve items that they value and which should be shared. Thanks to partnerships with local organizations including Birkbeck University of London, Bishopsgate Institute, Talent Rich CIC, and FerArts, these things have been made possible.

Building on hundreds of hours of voluntary work committed by local organizers in the first 18 months of the project, in 2018 the Heritage Lottery Fund generously provided financial support to ensure the local community could enjoy long-term use of this Archive.

With that funding, the Kensington Narrators have purchased recording equipment, hosted a series of free workshops and events, developed national curriculum archive workshops for local schools, created an exhibition website, trained local young people in modern digital archiving, and continued to engage local artists and creatives to contribute to the Archive. By making archiving simple and accessible, the Narrators expect the Archive to be a vibrant and engaging resource for decades to come.

Junior Tomlin, a local artist who has produced a body of digital artworks and has made multiple contributions to the Archive, says he archives in order "to time capsule an item…it is preserved for future generations to look back on an era that has come and gone."

After contributing a banner to the Archive, local mother Tamsin Wright said, "A weight has been lifted. I felt a responsibility holding onto this item, and now I feel lighter."

Dr. Julia Laite, Lecturer in History at Birkbeck, has been a key collaborator. "The important part of this project is that it will build capacity to continue to document, preserve, and interpret the culture, art and

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heritage of the Kensington community, in a format that can be widely accessed for many generations to come."

On 12 October, a special archiving and networking event showcasing the website will be held at The Tabernacle W11; for details and to register attendance, visit bit.ly/KNWorkshopReg. Those interested in contributing relevant work to the Archive may use bit.ly/KNArchiveContributionForm.

For more information, please contact Christina Sealy, Director of Strategy & Engagement at Talent Rich CIC.

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About Birkbeck, University of London (bbk.ac.uk)

Founded in 1823, Birkbeck, University of London, is a world-class research and teaching institution, a vibrant centre of academic excellence and London's only specialist provider of evening higher education. Its evening teaching allows students to progress their life goals during the day, through work, volunteering or internships.

About Bishopsgate Institute (bishopsgate.org.uk)

Bishopsgate's mission is to provide welcoming and inspiring spaces for people with a thirst for knowledge to learn and flourish. Through its library, historic collections, courses and cultural events, they enrich, entertain, and stimulate independent thought in a vibrant city environment.

About FerArts (FerArts.org)

FerArts is an artist-led nonprofit arts organization curating collaborative exhibitions, developing community projects, and supporting young artists and emerging arts from diverse communities.

About Kensington Narrators (kensingtonnarrators.org)

KensingtonNarrators.org is a community-led, multimedia archival platform where creative works of historical value are collected, digitised, displayed, and preserved. Composed of filmmakers, media professionals, artists, and local creatives, the Narrators record and preserve the stories and creativity of life in RBKC and collaborate with partners to pioneer in the digital archiving sector and to empower themselves through sharing stories on advanced platforms.

About Talent Rich CIC (talentrich.org)

Talent Rich meets the infrastructure needs of grassroots projects, and bridges the gap between community groups and the evidencing and documentation requirements of funders. By managing applications, insurance, GDPR compliance, monitoring, evaluations, financing, and accounting, they free community leaders to do what they do best; inspire, mentor, engage, and interact locally.

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