KensingtonNarrators.org reveals expansion and rebranding of the Kensington Narrators Arts & Heritage Archive

Friday 20 September, 2019

Originally launched in response to the Grenfell tragedy, the Archive will document life, art, and the cultural heritage of the Royal Borough of Kensington & Chelsea.

Kensington, 20 September 2019 – In the aftermath of the Grenfell Tower fire of June 2017, Christina Sealy and a group of North Kensington residents created an archive to permanently document the local art and imagery that had emerged in the outpouring of grief, anger, trauma, and loss which followed the disaster. Two years later, as many of these archived works are being prepared for exhibition, Kensington Narrators is formally expanding the Archive's focus past the time of tragedy; it will include all creative works about life in the RBKC — including the stories of the diverse individuals who have made their lives here, past and present.

In September 2018, the Heritage Lottery Foundation generously provided funding to expand and enhance the Archive. Building on hundreds of hours of voluntary work already committed by local organisers, and with the partnership of local organisations including Birkbeck University of London, Bishopsgate Institute, Talent Rich CIC, and FERARTS, Kensington Narrators has obtained specialized equipment, hosted multiple workshops and events, and continued to engage local artists and creatives to support the project.

Christina Sealy, a lifelong resident of North Kensington (and now a 2019 London Civic Futures leader), spent a year in consultation with local residents and community leaders, seeking ways to help her community deal with their new reality — a burnt tower on the skyline as a constant reminder of loss. What emerged from her research was that there were many artistic and creative responses to Grenfell, but that the only public record — if any existed — was owned or controlled by media interests. Christina and others feared that these works would be lost to time, and that the media lens of events would be the only interpretation visible to history. The Archive was born.

In Christina's words: "Since Grenfell, our community's young people have come to understand that the media cannot be the only voice telling our story. The preservation of our local heritage is a creative, educative and empowering response to the tragedy. The Archive will document, preserve and exhibit our experience of the fire, while also celebrating our community in all its diversity, resilience and collaboration."

After transferring 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."

At Archive project workshops and events, local residents are provided access to training, equipment, tools, and education to frame and preserve their own heritage. Birkbeck historians have led workshops aimed at young people, showing them how to use archives to learn about the history of their community, to create inspiring art, video, and written projects, to be showcased in a permanent digital exhibition which represents their unique, diverse identities and artistic abilities.

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 heritage of Grenfell's community in a format that can be widely accessed for many generations to come."

The Kensington Narrators Arts & Heritage Archive is physically held at Bishopsgate Institute, and managed by trustees made up of RBKC residents.

On 12 October, a special archiving, networking, and exhibition event will be held at The Tabernacle W11; for details, and to register attendance, visit http://bit.ly/KNWorkshopReg. Those interested in contributing work to the Archive may use http://bit.ly/KNArchiveContributionForm; early contributors may have their work exhibited during the October event.

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 emerging creatives. It promotes urban art and photography from artists influenced by UK street culture.

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 other community members, the Narrators record and preserve the stories and creativity of life in RBKC.

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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