

Edinburgh artist collects the next part of the Cancer Tapestry from Mexico

An Edinburgh artist who was invited to speak at a TEDx event in Mexico told them all about his mum. But then his mum was a special woman.

Andrew Crummy is an artist who needs little introduction in Scotland, and Edinburgh in particular.

He was born and brought up in Craigmillar, and his family story is famously told. His mother, Helen, who was the driving force behind The Craigmillar Festival, persuaded the headmaster at the local primary school to offer music lessons to the pupils. This included Andrew's brother who wanted to play violin and was achieved by organising community arts events along with the local mother's group.

Helen Crummy received an MBE for her work as the organising secretary, and her son Andrew was later honoured with an MBE for his creative work. There is a statue of Mrs Crummy outside Craigmillar Library – one of the few statues of named women in the capital.



TEDx

In his introduction to the talk he delivered at TedX in Ajijic, Mexico, Andrew related his family's story and he held the audience in the palm of his hand. He also told them of his own work in producing tapestries – the biggest of which is the Great Tapestry of Scotland which now has its own purpose-built home in Galashiels. He explained that when he worked as a muralist and illustrator he had lived in Mexico for a time, and used his art when he returned to Scotland to create the panels about his homeland.

He said that his role is only to design the tapestries, and confessed that he continues to marvel at the creativity of the stitchers who are mainly women. He said: "I cannot emphasise

enough the creativity of these women. They bring such love and attention to detail. The way they work together is truly extraordinary. When you see a large scale artwork hand stitched by thousands upon thousands of stitches and all containing personal stories it is really moving."

But the most poignant and personal tapestry he has designed is the Cancer Tapestry, which he began during his diagnosis and treatment for throat cancer. From this work, and with all the community arts knowledge which he has accumulated during his lifetime, firstly at his mother's side as she directed a festival – which by 1969 involved around 18,000 people in Craigmillar – he has encouraged the artwork to grow in other communities around the world.

The Cancer tapestry is being used to tell the human story behind cancer treatment – and there is more than just the work designed by Andrew. There are more than a dozen panels in Scotland and England. The aim is to create a Cancer Tapestry that will show a 1000 stories of cancer – the human side of treatment and the compassion and care of medical teams, family and friends.

The cancer tapestry is based around cells – the units that make up the human body. Andrew explained: "Each cell contains a story of what it means to have Cancer. Each Cell is telling a unique and moving story. The aim of the tapestry is to share these stories of cancer. What does it mean to have cancer? To tell the impact cancer can have on individuals, families and communities."

Andrew agreed with his consultant, Rod Mountain, that he would tell the story of his own cancer treatment by bringing people together to create something even bigger than the Great Tapestry of Scotland. Many panels have now been created sharing the moving stories behind them, of the people who have designed and stitched them. Some of the stitchers have themselves had cancer, and some have since died.

Andrew said: "The TEDx was an amazing experience. The warmth of those involved was exceptional. The stitchers created a beautiful panel which I have now brought to Scotland. They are all so keen now to visit Scotland, and share their cancer stories."

"The Tedx talk itself was in Ajijic, Mexico which is a rather beautiful town, and I also went to another venue at Cultural Centro Breton in the Centre of Guadalajara."

"The talk itself was a sellout audience of about 300. There were eight speakers including a fellow Scot, Fraser McLean, who is originally from Edinburgh. He is an animator/teacher who now lives in Guadalajara, and it was he who recommended me for the talk."



Visit to Mexico

The second YouTube link is to a film featuring Andrew meeting a group of women who have stitched the seventh panel for the Cancer tapestry which he has brought back to Scotland.

Fraser McLean explained: "The documentary involves some of the stitchers of Red Apoyo Rosa, Onco & Vita, at Centro Cultural Breton, in Guadalajara. This is the seventh completed panel for The Cancer Tapestry. This amazing panel shows that sharing stories of cancer can bring people together and tell the human side of treatment. This panel is now in Scotland, helping to share these stories. Mexican stitchers (starting at the left): Maria Yolanda Pardo Daniel, Martha Leticia Zapata Jimenez, Patricia Araceli Cano, Maria Guadalupe (Lupita) Martinez, Isabel Valencia Chavez, Sara Alicia Casillas Villegas."

Andrew said to the women he would take the panel back to Scotland and share it with the other stitchers.

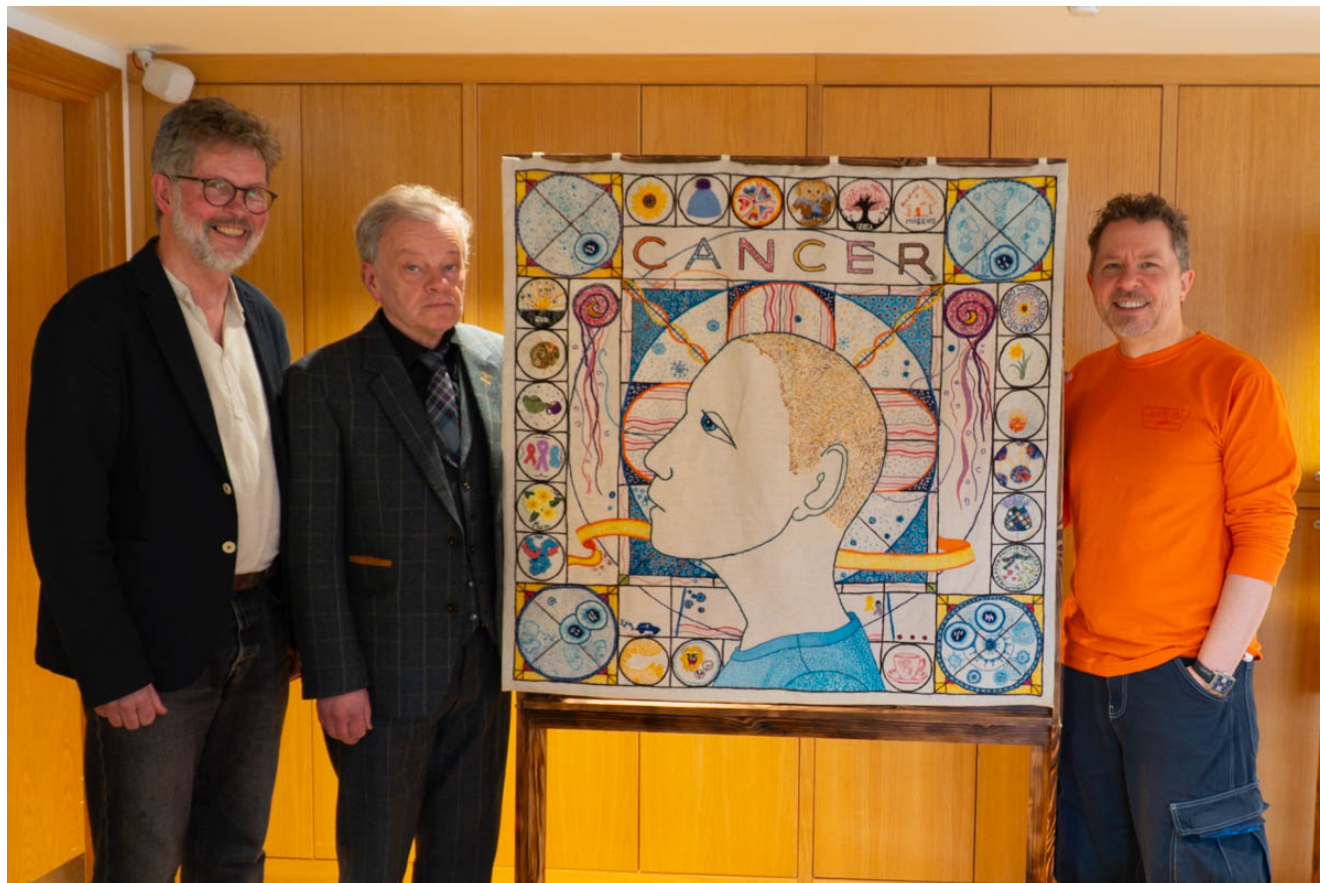
He told the Mexican creators: "I have found the whole experience of coming here and seeing what you have produced very overpowering. It is very powerful seeing what you have produced."

"This is the seventh panel of the cancer tapestry and this is an amazing new panel which I will take back to Scotland and I will share with all the other stitchers who have gone through cancer treatment. They have their own stories of cancer and wanted also to produce a beautiful artwork to tell the stories of what cancer means, the human side of the story."

"I think what is so interesting is how as a group you work in a similar way to the groups in Scotland and the other tapestries I am involved with. It works the same way. It is all about friendship, coming together, caring for each other and sharing. I think it is an experience for me as a man who had to learn how this works. Out of it comes this very

powerful artwork with many layers.”

The women point out their own panels and tell the story of why they designed and stitched each one. (The dialogue in the video below is in their native Spanish).



The first showing of the Jon Gill documentary about the Cancer Tapestry made by Andrew Crummy MBE, centre photographed with cancer specialist Rod Mountain left and Jon Gill right. PHOTO The Edinburgh Reporter



PHOTO Jon Gill

Filmmaker Jon Gill made a film about Andrew and the Cancer Tapestry which was premiered in Edinburgh in February last year.

The film was supported by Macmillan Cancer Support and won a Mobile Motion Award in 2024.



Dr Andrew Crummy, MBE, with Mexican panel for the cancer tapestry
Picture Alan Simpson 14/4/2024



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