

Odyssey Quilt 3 Exhibition

'War time Memories'

Created by Frances Larder, Wilhelmina de Brey, Gerarda Baremans, Johanna Brinkhorst, Anne Dykman, and Vera Rado.



FULL QUILT IMAGE
LEFT: The quilt is in the shape of a Kimono to symbolise the invasion by the Japanese. The cross symbolizing all the war deaths; the wings of a dove symbolising the sought after peace. The shape of the images is to show their expression of war as fractured fragments (of memory).

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FRANCES LARDER, born in 1937 in Java, was four years old when war broke out. She recalls: The most traumatic experience for me was the departure of my father to join the Dutch army in Java. I cannot remember saying goodbye to him. He was taken prisoner by the Japanese, transported to Changi prison in Saigon, and from there, onto the infamous Thai-Burma Railway.



My mother was left with three children, and another on the way, and had to cope on her own. Life was not easy— we were under house arrest, and a sentry patrolled outside ensuring we did not break this rule. All the rooms except one were sealed off and clothes, bedding and furniture were not accessible. Fortunately, our mother was resourceful and was able to break the seal at night and obtain the items necessary to sustain us.

IMAGE LEFT: Frances Larder, war memories, Java, 1942–1945



Our *baboe*, nursemaid and friend, was allowed to stay with us and as she was able to return home to the *kampung* she would try to get food for us. This was not always possible.

IMAGE LEFT: Frances Larder, bowing to the Japanese, 1942–1945.

Looking back and remembering these experiences, I feel we were very fortunate to be alive and had come through this ordeal.

Even though we had lost our belongings and endured hunger, we had survived and come through as a family. I am very grateful for the sacrifices and strength my mother endured to get us through those black years.

We owned a small Maltese puppy called Mickey, who was both a pet and guard dog. One of the Japanese officers took a liking to him and therefore took him away to his house. To our surprise, the officer returned a few days later and handed Mickey back to us. He was most displeased that Mickey did not like him and had bitten him viciously causing him to have stitches and a tetanus injection.

IMAGE RIGHT: Frances Larder's dog Mickey, captured and released by a Japanese soldier.



IMAGE BELOW: Frances Larder, Liberation: food and medicines parachuted to civilians and internees in Java, August 1945.



When freedom and peace was declared on 15 August 1945, I remember the thrill of being able to go for a walk in our street, admiring the trees along the road. We saw a lot of American and Gurkha soldiers. We received food parcels consisting of chocolates, sweets, powdered milk, not to forget butter and jam on real bread. We were also invited to a party given by the Americans where we played games and sang. It was exciting when I was able to go to school and be part of a classroom with other children. My father survived his imprisonment, only to die of blood-poisoning several months after liberation before we could be reunited. After this, my mother and her four children moved to the Netherlands. A few years later we returned to Java and in the early 1950s from Java to Australia.

I never want to starve again,
I've gone through war, bombs, hunger, fear, want,
I know what it is to have no home, no anchor,
But by far the worst is hunger.
—One of the women in the prison camp

WILHELMINA DE BREY was married with a young son when war broke in the Netherlands East Indies in 1942. The quilting project holds very personal memories for Wilhelmina. She explained that:



Each piece was in memory of those I failed to help survive. I had hoped to save their lives. Through the betrayal of another person, to the Japanese secret police, the Kempeitai, our house was invaded. I had received a visit from a woman three weeks before the raid, and from this we had a premonition of danger ahead.

Most people in the area that we lived in had already been interned in prisoner of war or civilian internment camps. I was fortunate to not be interned. My son had a heart condition and my doctor told me that if my children and I went into a camp he would die. I decided to stay out of the camps at any cost.

IMAGE ABOVE: Wilhelmina's home with its blacked out windows. The Japanese planes would fly over at night and it was very frightening. Later, the Americans would drop supplies of peaches, chocolate and corned beef.

As I was still living in my house, it was only a short time until the underground found out and asked if I dared to take the risk of helping them. At the time, I was living with two other women and I could not make this decision alone. I had to consult the other women as the youngest of them had a small child too. We agreed to help by allowing people to stay in our home and we became a group of seven men, women and children.

It was soon apparent that we were all penniless, so we decided to start a craft group and I would go around and visit other Dutch people who were still working under the Japanese. But soon those people disappeared into the camps too. We had to rely on the help of Dutch-Indonesian people, and I received all the help that was possible. This was until a Dutch woman came to visit us and turned out to be a very close friend of a Japanese officer. We had an invasion at the house and the men and women were arrested, myself included. Only my youngest friend was allowed to stay in the house with her little girl and my children.

When I said goodbye to my children, my eldest son was so upset he got a high fever from fright. I asked my girlfriend to look after him. Not knowing that one of the Japanese officers understood Dutch, he asked my friend how many of the children were hers and she answered that she had only one but that I had four. Thankfully, the officer decided that I should stay imprisoned in the house as well.

The home invasion happened only six months before the end of the Japanese rule, but I failed to save the lives of those people. Six months later, the war would have been behind us. The hate and hopelessness that we felt during the invasion of our home by the Japanese officers is hard to imagine. Time has softened those feelings but they will never be forgotten.

IMAGE RIGHT: Wilhelmina de Brey, the leaf of the plant *Cascore*. The seeds were supplied to the Japanese who would then press them and use the oil.





IMAGE LEFT: Wilhelmina de Brey, the wheels of my bike.

This is how I would travel to the different houses to sell our craft works. Later I would ride to the prison camps to take food to the people who had been taken prisoner from our house.

I only definitely know that one of these people died at the hands of the Japanese, but I'm sure some of the others were killed as well.

I never found out what happened to them, but I know that one of them listened to news, which was forbidden. I would deliver the news on my bike to all our friends.

The news was written on paper, which was folded up and hidden inside a beautiful Chinese ring, which I still have. It has a large red stone and the top opens, hiding a small compartment.

IMAGE RIGHT: Wilhelmina de Brey, images of war and survival.



IMAGE BELOW: Vera Rado, German invasion, Holland, 1939.



VERA RADO was born at Purwokerto, Java, in July 1926 and 15 or 16 years of age when war broke out. She recalls that:

It was a black day, 8 March 1942, in more than one sense. The oil tanks on the south-western edge of the city were blown up by the Dutch to prevent the precious fuel from falling into the hands of the enemy. From early morning there was a huge pall of black smoke hanging over the city, and against this ominous backdrop we watched the occupying army's progress through our streets. First the tanks with their red and white flags then armoured carrier, trucks, then masses of Japanese soldiers on foot,

and on bicycles. They looked triumphant, but we were trembling with apprehension peeking through the louvres of our front door and windows. What would happen to us? We were totally at their mercy, with no laws, no constitution, no army or police to protect us. Immediately after the occupation we had to register at the Town Hall and obtain an identity card, which we had to carry on us at all times. Cars were confiscated, radios had to be handed in to be sealed so that only local stations could be received, and very soon all public servants from the Governor General down to the most junior clerk were rounded up and imprisoned. This included all male teachers, so school ceased altogether.

Some school buildings were used as internment camps, and some continued with Indonesian teachers teaching their own children. Whenever I passed my old school I could hear the kids singing 'Asia Raya' (the song of Free Asia), and there were posters everywhere proclaiming 'Asia for the Asians'. The Japanese set out to extinguish all European influence in Asia and to establish their own 'Greater Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere' with Japan as supreme leader. It was part of their ideal to establish Japan as the dominant power in our part of the world and to eradicate all white colonialism; ironically, to be replaced by Japanese colonialism.



IMAGE ABOVE LEFT: Vera Rado, captivity.



IMAGE ABOVE RIGHT: Vera Rado, camp life.

IMAGE RIGHT: Vera Rado, Holland after the war.



IMAGE BELOW: Anna Dijkman, bunker, Holland, 1939–1945.



ANNA DIJKMAN was a teenager when Germany invaded Holland in 1939. She has a number of memories that are displayed on the Odyssey quilts:

A few things I remember of the last year of the war. There was a great shortage of footwear and of fuel. My eldest brother had large feet and my father had to cut off the topfront of the shoe so that my brother could still wear them. I had very old ladies boots and later only wooden soles with straps on the top. It was very uncomfortable.

I went twice a week with my girlfriend Willy to the Scheveningen Forest to cut wood. We were only 13

years old but we managed to get thin trees down and we had a small cart to transport the wood.

At the edge of the forest were the launching ramps of the V2's, the Flying Bombs, which were fired by the Germans to bombard Britain and later the harbour city of Antwerp. It was very scary when the noise did not fade away in the distance for we then knew that the shot had failed and the V2 was coming back to the place where it was let off. We had to dive for cover. But we both found it a big adventure and we continued to gather wood until the end of the war.

IMAGE RIGHT: Vera Rado, Allied planes over Holland, WW11.

In September 1944, Operation Market garden took place with the landing of three airborne divisions of British and American troops in the vicinity of Arnhem. We thought it would be the end of the war. However, it proved to be a failure, and in the month of November 1944, many razzias took place where the men would be rounded up by the Germans and sent to work in Nazi ammunition factories.

The winter of 1944 was very cold with severe food shortages in the larger cities. We had coupons for sugar, butter and many other household items but had to queue for hours at the stores. There were food kitchens where we could get soup. We called it Goudvissensoep (Goldfish soup) as it was mostly water with a few slivers of carrots in it. My mother made pancakes from the pulp of sugarbeet and tulipbulbs. Not surprisingly, many elderly people and children died of malnutrition.

Just before the end of the war we were all in the streets with Dutch flags to welcome the food drops. I will never forget that small loaf of Swedish white bread—I ate the whole loaf at once!



JOHANNA (JO) BRINKHORST was born in 1918 to a Dutch father and German mother. She was educated in Germany, where the family lived and enjoyed a comfortable family life until the depression began. Due to political unrest, her father decided to take the family to Holland, not an easy transition to make for a family with four children.

IMAGE LEFT: Jo Brinkhorst, arrival of the Germans in Holland.

When Germany declared war on the Netherlands on 10 May 1940, Johanna Brinkhorst had been married for three days. She was 22 years of age and anticipating beautiful and happy times ahead.

Instead, she survived five years of German occupation, 8pm curfews with windows blocked off with black paper, rationing of food and other essential items, and boredom, sorrow and frustration.

She lived in Groningen where the food shortages were not as bad as other parts of the country. The family could get milk and wheat from the farmers, mill the wheat in a coffee grinder, and take it to the baker who, for a small fee, would turn it into bread.

They could hear the English planes fly over the city at night on their way to Germany. The sirens would sound, they would dress hurriedly, papers in hand and ready to flee, in case the bombs fell into their city by mistake. During the five long years of war, she experienced much heartache, tragedy and sadness, which she would prefer to forget.

Jo recalls that:

“The winter of 1944-45 was the hardest, as it was an exceptionally cold winter. There was not much fuel to warm our houses, gas was only available for a few short hours a day and the food situation had become critical. During the occupation we were forced to surrender our wireless, meaning that we were then unable to listen to the English news. Our Queen was in England and messages of hope and strength would regularly be broadcast, sometimes in code. People who had defied the wireless ban would listen in secret and these messages would be relayed around the neighbourhood, giving much hope and strength.

We all tried very hard to help one another and to make the best of a very difficult situation. We had to make do with surrogate tea and coffee and clothes would be recycled, with a continuous effort to make new out of old. Nothing was wasted. Ingenuity and imagination were the flavour of the day. Pushbike tyres were made of rubber garden hose and worn shoes would be repaired with wooden soles.

When finally the much longed for liberation came in May 1945, our red, white and blue flags appeared everywhere. People, who had gone underground returned from their hiding place and many street parties took place, celebrating our longed for freedom.

As I was writing this short story of my wartime experience, I reflect with much sadness upon current troubled times and I wonder, “when will we ever learn”.

IMAGE RIGHT: Jo Brinkhorst, food and clothing package parachuted by Allied forces.



GERARDA BAREMANS was born in Holland in 1937 and was only two years old, when war broke out.

In telling her story, she explains:

My childhood was not free and easy as my mother had three girls between 1937 and 1940. She would constantly remind me that I was the eldest of the family and had to be an example for my siblings. Times were hard we didn't have many toys and I remember my mother making dolls for us out of material and using papier-mâché for their faces. She also made dolls houses from cardboard boxes with the furniture made from match boxes. Those were the days.

The war was a time I would rather forget. There was no food. It must have been extraordinarily difficult for my parents. Often, my father went out in the night to steal food for our family, and to try to get coal, wood or old shoes and, in fact, anything that he could get his hands on that he could burn to keep us warm. I recall my mother and us children feeling intense fear when he left on these missions. We were



terribly scared that he might get picked up and detained by the German Occupation forces. They would allow no one out after dark. Mine was a very resourceful mother. I particularly remember the clothes she made for me from the Parachute silk that my father also brought home. However, most memorable was a green army coat. She used every inch of that material to make a warm coat for one of my sisters. Another strong memory is the excitement I felt when planes flew overhead and began dropping food parcels with all sorts of goodies in them. Oh, the joy of it. Among other things the parcels contained bread and chocolate. We thought the bread was cake and the chocolate was heavenly. One night my father came home late with the lining of his coat slashed and the bottom of it was filled with something. He just turned his coat upside down and to our surprise, large potatoes rolled out all over the floor. It was as if Christmas and New Year had come at once. On the other hand I also recall having to hide my father under the floorboards because the Germans were invading every house to pick up young men to take them to Germany to work in factories. Two of my uncles were picked up. However, they were among the lucky ones that made it back home after war ended. Many others did not. The sound of sirens so frightened all of us, even now I can hear the sound. I associate that sound with pieces of shrapnel flying everywhere from the bombs the sirens were warning us about. I always dove under the table or hid behind the toilet as soon as the sirens started. My father had a radio behind his chair from the beginning of war and would listen to the English broadcasts. However, if the Germans found this out he would have been shot. Can you imagine how my mother felt? One evening I found the radio and joyfully told my father, He took an axe and smashed it to pieces. For us they were all very traumatic times that we are all very lucky to have survived. They made us appreciate life as it is now.

IMAGES:

TOP LEFT: Gerarda Baremans, searching for food.

MIDDLE: Bunkers for safety from the bombs.

LEFT: Scene of devastation.

The Odyssey Collection is on display at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, NSW.