



## Stitched Voices: Knowing Conflict Through Textiles

### Exhibition Guide



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**Juan Pablo te esperamos / John Paul we are waiting for you**

Chilean arpillera, anon., 1986

Photo Martin Melaugh

Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Kinderhilfe arpillera collection, Chile/Bonn

In 1987 Pope John Paul II visited Chile, Argentina and Uruguay. For Chile, a Catholic country, this visit was highly significant, coming at a time when the oppressive Pinochet regime had pushed people to the limit of their endurance. Here, we see women carrying banners which proclaim: "Peace, Justice, come soon," and "John Paul we are waiting for you." They are making it clear that having had so much support from the local Church, they have high socio-political expectations from the pastoral visit of the Pope.

The Catholic Church established various support measures to assist those persecuted by the Pinochet dictatorship. The Vicarage of Solidarity / Vicaría de la Solidaridad established by the Archdiocese of Santiago in 1976, collected information on human rights violations and provided for the legal defence of prisoners. The Church also called repeatedly for the restoration of democracy.





**La Cueca Sola / Dancing Cueca alone**

Chilean arpillera, anon, 1989

Photo Tomomitsu Oshima

Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Oshima Hakko Museum collection, Japan

Here we see women solo dancing the Cueca, Chile's national dance, which represents the different emotions and stages of romance. Traditionally it is danced in pairs and is a colourful, joyful performance. These women dance alone, with sombre expression, dressed in severe black and white, wearing the image of their "disappeared" loved one over their heart. Performing the national dance in this manner was their way of denouncing the government's actions in a public space.

Their courage, defiance and creativity has inspired people all over the world. The Sting song "They dance alone" was based on it and has been performed by many other singers including Joan Baez and Holly Near. In June 1986 Amnesty International sponsored a tour of six benefit concerts which included the song and such famous performers as Sting, Bryan Adams, Peter Gabriel, Joan Baez and the Neville Brothers.

The arpillera, La Cueca Sola, of which there are many versions, remains an iconic symbol of Chilean women's resistance to the oppressive Pinochet regime.





**Hay Golpe de Estado / There is a Coup d'Etat**

Chilean arpillera, anon., 1989

Photo Martin Melaugh

Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Professor Masaaki Takahashi collection, Japan

This arpillera was made a year before the end of the 17 year Pinochet dictatorship, prompted by a question posed by the Japanese Solidarity Group when they visited a group of arpilleristas in Chile. They asked the women: *“What are the events you will never forget [about the Pinochet dictatorship]?”*

This anonymous arpillerista graphically depicts the shocked expression of the workers at the Comandari textile factory on the outskirts of Santiago. They gaze skyward, in disbelief, at the military planes flying overhead enroute to bomb the National Palace, La Moneda, the government headquarters, in Santiago, on 11<sup>th</sup> September 1973.

This key event deposed the democratically elected socialist government of President Salvador Allende, inaugurated in 1970. By loudly proclaiming in stitch: *“Hay Golpe de Estado 11-09-1973,”* this anonymous arpillerista ensures that this catastrophic event will not be forgotten.





**Verdulería en la población / Greengrocers in a población**

Chilean arpillera, anon., c1980

Photo Martin Melaugh

Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Arpillera collection, Kinderhilfe, Chile/Bonn

This arpillera is part of a series of three large arpilleras, the complete size of a flour sack, each with a specific focus. This particular piece depicts dwellers in a shantytown community of Santiago going about their daily routines, engaged in a myriad of family, community and economic activities.

Here, the market is the focal point, where goods are bought and sold, news is exchanged, plans are made and families, ever resourceful in this shantytown community, find a means to survive.

There is brightness, vibrancy and a sense of resilience in this arpillera, which belies the harsh economic, social and political repression people endured on a daily basis during the late 1970s/early 1980s, at the height of the Pinochet dictatorship.





**No a la impunidad / No to impunity**

Chilean arpillera, anon., 1980s Photo Tony Boyle

Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Lala & Austin Winkley, England

This classical arpillera highlights the struggle for justice that saw Chilean women in public protests chanting “we want democracy” and demanding “Truth, Justice and Reconciliation.” For these women, saying “No to impunity” was a core element of this struggle. For them, the Amnesty law (law 2191 - Amnesty to the perpetrators), was a retrograde step. It was enacted in 1978, five years after the start of the military coup, in order to avoid legal action in all cases of human rights violations from 1973-1978.

In 1998 Chile’s Supreme Court ruled that the law should not apply to cases of human rights violations, paving the way for investigations to proceed. This resulted in prosecutions and prison sentences for former agents of Pinochet’s secret police (Dirección de Inteligencia Nacional, DINA), representing positive steps in progressing the Truth, Justice and Reconciliation process. However, the 1978 Amnesty Law is still valid and a bill to nullify it was only brought to parliament in 2010; a bill still under debate. Declaring it void “*would force Chile to come face-to-face with its troubled past and finally send the message that the abuses of the Pinochet era will not be tolerated again*”, claims Guadalupe Marengo, Americas Deputy Director at Amnesty International.





**Queremos Democracia / We want democracy**

Chilean arpillera, Vicaría de la Solidaridad, 1988

Photo Martin Melaugh

Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Seán Carroll, USA

Here we see women demanding their rights to a peaceful, non violent society. Their banner proclaims “democracy” and they insist on being part of the democratic process. However, the presence of the police car reminds us of the challenges and resistance they will face. Agosín maintains that women were not given due recognition in the new democracy, which, she argues, has not “...acknowledged the significance of the arpilleristas and other women’s groups...who had a fundamental role to play in the return of democracy.” (Agosín, 2008)

Globally, despite the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in 2000, the meaningful participation of women in peace talks and post conflict democracies is never a given.





### **Cacerolazo / Women banging their pots**

Chilean arpillera, Felicia, 1988

Photo Martin Melaugh

Oshima Hakko Museum collection, Japan

In this arpillera, we see a group of women in the streets, resolute and defiant, banging their cooking pots with sticks. They are publicly denouncing the impoverishment they are forced to endure as a result of the economic policies of the Pinochet regime. Their cooking pots, normally confined to their kitchens, have now become implements of public protest. We can assume that there is little food to cook in these pots.

Agosín details the impact of the economic and political policies of the Pinochet regime when she states: *"They produced the conditions for economic growth on the backs of the underprivileged [...]...poor women ... were the main victims ...Thousands of them became the only providers in their homes, as their husbands, fathers and sons disappeared ...."* (Agosín, 2008)







### **Ayuno / Fasting**

Chilean arpillera, María López, 1990

Photo Martin Melaugh

Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Oshima Hakko Museum collection, Japan

During the Pinochet dictatorship, group fasting, supported by Church movements, was used as a strategic community action. Its purpose was to highlight the human rights violations perpetrated by the Pinochet regime, build community and prompt discourse and action at local, national and international level.

Here we see three people, stretched on camp beds during their fasting period, in the “capilla” (community chapel) in the very heart of a bustling neighbourhood. A calm, unhurried atmosphere pervades this arpillera. Perhaps this is indicative of the state of clarity and focus achieved by the three individuals fasting. It appears that passers-by regard this action as part of their everyday lives.

Hunger strikes organised by the Association of the Detained and Disappeared became strategic acts of civil disobedience during the dictatorship.





### **The Side of the Wall**

Northern Ireland arpillera, Michele Connor, Fab Femmes, Ballymoney, 2013

Photo Deborah Stockdale

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Museum Collection

The balaclava covered face, framed by a gun is the stark image portrayed in this arpillera, half of which is bordered by the Union Jack flag and half by the Tricolour flag. "No Surrender" is used by the Unionist/Loyalist community in Northern Ireland to demonstrate their opposition to any change in the country's position within the United Kingdom. The slogan was first used by Protestant defenders during the Siege of Derry in 1689.

"Tiocfaidh ár lá" is an Irish phrase which translates as "our day will come". It refers to the potential of a future united Ireland. Michelle reflects: *"With the Troubles we just saw men in balaclavas. Sometimes it was hard to know which side was which. I'm glad there's peace now."*





### Untitled

Northern Ireland arpillera, Sandra Pendon, 2013

Photo Deborah Stockdale

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Museum Collection

In this arpillera we are drawn into a scene all too familiar during The Troubles; a vehicle in flames surrounded by soldiers with an army helicopter hovering overhead.

Car bombs were used throughout The Troubles period and caused death and destruction. In 1973 a car bomb on Railway Road in Coleraine killed six pensioners and injured thirty three others. In 1992 a van bomb exploded in Coleraine Town Centre; although no one was killed, it caused vast damage. Other car or van bombs were exploded in this area including in Ballymoney and Garvagh.

Sandra stitched this arpillera during workshops linked to the exhibition ***Stitching and Unstitching the Troubles I and II, 2012/2013.***

<http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/search-quilts/fullevent/?id=89>

In these weekly workshops, women had the opportunity through the medium of textile, to explore and record their memories of this tumultuous period in Northern Ireland; The Troubles.





#### **Pub Bombing, Waterfoot, Cushendall**

Northern Ireland arpillera, Anne McLaughlin, Glenmona Resource Centre, Cushendall, 2013

Photo Deborah Stockdale

Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Museum Collection

Here Anne depicts the devastation which ensued when a bomb left beside a lamp post outside a pub in Cushendall exploded. She recalls being both fearful and mindful of what other communities in similar situations were enduring: *“It was so scary seeing such devastation in the sleepy village. It brought home to us what other people were going through.”*

This arpillera was sewn by Anne during a series of workshops that were facilitated as part of the associated activities during the exhibition ***Stitching and Unstitching the Troubles I and II, 2012/2013.***

<http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/search-quilts/fullevent/?id=89>

As the women stitched their arpilleras they uncovered and brought to light their recollection of events during The Troubles.





### **Landmines**

German arpillera by Heidi Drahota, 2014

Photo Heidi Drahota

Heidi Drahota collection, Germany

Antipersonnel landmines, when detonated, cause horrific injuries such as burns, blindness, destroyed limbs and shrapnel wounds, resulting in amputations, long hospital stays and extensive rehabilitation.

Their devastating impact prompted Heidi to create this arpillera. Through her connections with women in Afghanistan, one of the most mined countries in the world, she was deeply affected by the impact on children who are: *"...innocent victims of the actions of adults and governments."*

Many of these Afghani children would have unwittingly picked up a "butterfly" mine during the Soviet occupation, which resembled a butterfly or toy. The image of a playful child about to pick up a fluttering butterfly, which will have life-shattering consequences, is a grim testament to the futility of war and combat. <http://www.afghan-network.net/Landmines/>

Cognisant of the fact that the use of landmines extends to many conflict zones far beyond Afghanistan, Heidi adds her voice to the global network of groups demanding a ban on the use of landmines and calls on the world: *"to work up the courage to solve conflicts differently."*



### **The People make the city**

English arpillera by Janet Wilkinson and Susan Beck, 2011

Photo Susan Beck

Janet Wilkinson & Susan Beck collection

In 2009/2010, as part of the *Threads of Life* exhibition hosted by the Liverpool World museum, a series of community textile workshops on the theme of heritage were hosted, resulting in the creation of several textile pieces. **The People make the city** is a reflective piece by Janet Wilkinson and Susan Beck on the workshop process and subsequent exhibitions.

In this piece the iconic buildings of Liverpool, a seafaring port on the river Mersey, are depicted. However, as the artists acknowledge: *“it is the people who live in it that make the city and are at its heart”*. Thus the “heart” of Liverpool, based on the diverse origins of workshop attendees, is made up of people who settled in this seafaring port, throughout the ages, from all over the world.

The value of fostering connections between diverse groups is emphasised by Susan: *“In any city when the people meet together to talk and share their lives then we move closer to understanding, compassion and peace in the community.”*





### **Digital Death**

Irish arpillera by Deborah Stockdale, 2014

Photo Deborah Stockdale

Deborah Stockdale collection

Drone warfare has escalated in recent years and under the US Obama administration the use of drones to assassinate "terrorist leaders" has increased. It is estimated that for every militant leader killed, 10 civilians have also died. <http://dronewars.net/aboutdrone/>

In this arpillera, Deborah presents the chilling reality of drone warfare. She depicts drone operators in a control room, monitoring the drone flight, oblivious to the carnage they wreak in a country unknown to them, side by side with areas devastated by their actions.

The psychological detachment of drone operators from their actual living targets deeply concerns Deborah: *"Warfare has turned into nameless operatives working under remote leadership, from undisclosed locations... inured to the fact that their*

*targets are ... often, women, children and elderly who cannot escape or take cover quickly.”*

When creating this arpillera, Deborah drew inspiration from the work of an artist collective in the Pukhtoonkhwa region of Pakistan, an area which has suffered high civilian drone casualties, 200 of whom were children. To combat the insensitivity of American predator drone operators who refer to civilian casualties as “bug splats” alluding to the killing of an insect, the collective installed an enormous portrait of a little girl who lost two siblings and both parents in a drone attack.

<https://notabugsplat.com/2014/04/06/a-giant-art-installation-targets-predator-drone-operators/>

Such creativity is testimony to the powerful potential of civil society groups to expose and confront the reality of drone warfare and to effect change towards a society where warfare, whatever its nature, is not tolerated.







### **Cimarrón / Runaway slave**

Colombian arpillera, *Mujeres tejiendo sueños y sabores de paz*, 2010

Photo Martin Melaugh

Conflict Textiles collection

This piece by Mampuján women is rooted in their present and ancestral experience of forced displacement. In a brutal massacre on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2000, 12 people were killed by the now demobilised United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC), a coalition of right-wing counter-insurgency paramilitary groups. More than 1,400 civilians, including these 15 arpilleristas were displaced.

Juana Alicia Ruiz is a survivor of Mampuján. Commenting on this arpillera which depicts state violence against her ancestors, she reflects: *“Cimarrón means a black ... slave. It is a textile account of the daily activities and human rights violations of our African ancestors...They rebelled and escaped to the hills of Maria, setting up the palenques where we live now. The big man carries a punishment for a failed attempt to escape. It consists of a piece of tree tied to his shoulders.”*

Through their sewing, these women have found solace, a way to bear witness and a means of denouncing and sharing their dramatic experiences, both past and present.



**Long wait of the mourning women**

Colombian textile installation, Group Artesanías Choibá and Ursula Holzapfel, Life, Justice and Peace Committee, Quibdó diocese, 2016

Photo Michael Paetau

Artesanías Choibá Group and Ursula Holzapfel, Life, Justice and Peace Committee collection

The Artesanías Choibá group is comprised of women who are relatives of the victims of the armed conflict in Colombia. They sought refuge in the Coliseum de Quibdó after the violent massive displacement of Afro-Colombian communities in the Department of Chocó, by paramilitary and military troops, in 1996/97. Here, the women are depicted in front of Quibdó cathedral, where they have been gathering each month for a number of years. Bearing signs with the names of their assassinated and disappeared relatives, they publicly denounce these actions, the displacement of whole communities and the unfair treatment of the victims' families. The child dolls symbolise that a generation of children is now orphaned, abandoned and forgotten.

The women believe that history can only be prevented from repeating itself if it is understood well, and feel a burning obligation through this, their second installation: *“to tell our children and grandchildren ... what happened... We do not only show what happened, but also visualize how as mothers, companions and partners we disagree with the abuse we receive. ... we are ‘in mourning’ and we keep the memory alive.”*





### En el lado “bueno” de la valla 2 / On the “Good” Side of the Fence 2

Spanish Arpillera, Antonia Amador, 2014/2015

Replica, 2016

Photo Roser Corbera

Conflict Textiles collection

This arpillera depicts the perilous sea journey undertaken by people fleeing their homelands in Africa to escape war and persecution, in search of a better life in Europe. Crossing treacherous straits of water, in overcrowded, unseaworthy boats, they may eventually reach the shores of the Iberian Peninsula. Not all survive the journey.

Antonia expresses her outrage through a letter tucked at the back of her arpillera: *“On the “good” side of the fence [shows] that ...while on the boat they never thought they would find their death.”*

For these asylum seekers and migrants who *“believed they [were coming] to paradise...it was the Police that awaited them on the shore of the peninsula.”*

On the next stage of their journey they are transported to detention centres, which are often overcrowded. Here, they can be held indefinitely, while the courts decide if they will be granted refugee status or deported. Adobeker\* from Darfur, who was detained in Campsfield House, Britain for two years, describes the mental anguish of

the interminable wait: *“People get stressed because there’s no answer...If I knew it would be a day, a week, even a year... The problem is not knowing.”* (Foreigners behind bars, *New Internationalist* 469, January/February 2014).

\*Not his real name.

Such a system, where the odds are stacked against those fleeing persecution and journeying forth in the hope of a better life, prompts Antonia to conclude: *“... in the XXI century human rights are not respected....We all have the right to a dignified life, no matter where you come from.”*





### **The Africa Quilt**

Nigerian quilt, Roland Agbage (Nigeria) and Polly Eaton, 2009  
Photo Julian Eaton Conflict Textiles collection

This quilt was made by Roland Agbage, a young quilt-maker from Kogi State in Nigeria and designed with Polly Eaton from Britain, who lived in Abuja Nigeria for many years.

In this piece the devastating impact of the exploitation of Africa's natural resources, on both her people and landscape, is depicted. Congo and Liberia have both suffered from the West's dependence on rubber, and the forests of Africa continue to be exported for making furniture and housing abroad. Sierra Leone's wars were fuelled by diamond money. The wars in the eastern Democratic Republic of Congo continue because of the profits to be made from stripping the land of coltan (essential in mobile phones), copper, gold, tin and diamonds.

Probably the single resource that has done more to cripple fragile democracies is oil, particularly in Nigeria, where its extraction has caused immeasurable environmental damage. The quilt shows us that the abundance of Africa's primary resources has gone a long way to support the lifestyles of those in the wealthier nations of the world.



### **Waiting for Food**

Zimbabwean arpillera, Martha Moyo, 2016

Photo Ukuthula Trust

Enyandeni Peace Centre collection, Zimbabwe

Currently in Zimbabwe, 72 percent of the population live below the national poverty line (existing on less than USD 1.25 per day), whilst 30 percent of the rural poor are considered to be food insecure. Fragile at the best of times, food security has become increasingly precarious in the face of natural disasters, economic and political instability and recurrent droughts. As a result, large-scale humanitarian food relief operations have been put in place.

<https://www.wfp.org/countries/zimbabwe>

Here, Martha brings us face to face with the reality of life for the rural poor in Zimbabwe at the present time. In her own words this arpillera: *“shows hungry people in rural Zimbabwe waiting for food aid to come from the World Food Programme. They are hoping to get oranges and bread and bananas.”* Alluding to corruption and implying that not all food aid gets to those who need it, she adds: *“[the people] are hoping that greedy politicians will not simply take off all the food before the truck gets to their village.”*





### **Daily life in Zambia II**

Zambian wall hanging, 2010

Photo Martin Melaugh Conflict Textiles collection

This six-panel wall hanging appliqué illustrates daily life in a rural village in Zambia, Africa. Reflecting on this piece, Marjorie Agosín, (author of "Tapestries of hope, threads of love: The arpillera Movement in Chile 1974-1994") commented: "Each piece is profoundly individual and universal at the same time". It is important to note the connection between arpilleras and these textiles, as the women who stitched them return to their sewing traditions to portray their daily lives.

A folded scrap of handwritten paper found in a pot of one of the six scenes, shares with us elements of the maker's life . "Timue and wife Tsala relaxing at home. She is going to the market. Tsala is receiving the herbs from the African doctor. Seated outside the hut, cooking food. They are on the way to visit friends. They are heading home carrying pots of water."





### **The day we will never forget**

Zimbabwean arpillera, Collective work by Killarney girls, facilitated by Shari Eppel, Solidarity Peace Trust Zimbabwe, 2012; Photo Shari Eppel; Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Solidarity Peace Trust, Zimbabwe

This arpillera graphically portrays the destruction of the Killarney informal settlement in Zimbabwe in May 2005 during Operation Murambatsvina in which the government, deploying the army and police, purposefully destroyed housing around the country. An estimated 500,000 people were evicted and displaced in the space of a month. Murambatsvina means “get rid of the filth’ and the poor of Zimbabwe were left with the clear message that they were the filth that should be forced out of urban areas.

The girls from Killarney informal settlement who created this arpillera all lost their homes in 2005. Some suffered deaths of their relatives, and one, the death of her baby, during the demolitions. From conversations held while sewing, Shari recounts: *“The girls have no comprehension of what the demolitions were about, and say they think the government was trying to kill people by taking everything away from them....”*

Following resettlement by the International Organisation for Migration and the Bulawayo City Council, they are now re-housed. However, the location -10km out of town- severely limits their employment opportunities. The process of creating this arpillera has enabled these women to portray this violent event, with confidence and purpose, to audiences far beyond the Killarney settlement, illustrating the power of arpilleras in denouncing repressive actions globally.

