

WAR-TORN CHILDREN

5 SEP - 29 NOV / 2018

Roe Valley Arts & Cultural Centre - Limavady

Exhibition Catalogue



Auf der Flucht 1945 / Fleeing in 1945
German arpillera, Mara Loytved-Hardegg, 2010
Photo Martin Melaugh © Conflict Textiles collection



War-Torn Children

Curated by Roberta Bacic

Assisted by Breege Doherty

<http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflicttextiles/>

Introduction

War-Torn Children is an exhibition of textiles, photographs and reproduced illustrations. Commissioned by [Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council \(CCGBC\) Museum Service](#), it bears witness to the devastating impact of war on children globally.

It was first exhibited at the [Linen Hall Library](#), Belfast, March - April 2017. Since then it has traversed the island of Ireland, journeying southwards in the summer to the [CB1 Gallery, Limerick](#) ; to the [Verbal Arts Centre](#), Derry/Londonderry, in Autumn 2017; and to the [Regional Cultural Centre](#) Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, Spring 2018. The [Roe Valley Arts & Cultural Centre](#) marks the final stage of its journey in 2018.

The textiles are from [Conflict Textiles](#) collection, the framed photographs from [Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc](#) (Catalonia) and the reproduced illustrations are from the book "Anne – An imagining of the life of Anne Frank". Partners to this initiative are [CAIN](#) (Conflict Archive on the INternet), at Ulster University and the [Linen Hall Library](#), Belfast.

The textiles, - arpilleras and wall hangings - are primarily drawn from South America and Europe. Together with the photographs, they confront us with a myriad of themes, both historical and current: genocide, landmines, incarceration, displacement and starvation. Conversely, resilience and courageous responses in the face of conflict also emerge as strong threads.

The power of this exhibition lies not just in its immediate impact on the viewer, but also in the various ripples, threads and far-flung connections it fosters. The primary school children from Donegal who created arpillera dolls after viewing the exhibition in the Linen Hall library is one such example. A year later, the dolls mounted on hessian, have made their way to a schoolroom in Scaramangas refugee camp in Greece.

Surely this show of solidarity, by children in rural Donegal with children in very different circumstances in refugee camps in Greece, challenges us all to positively respond rather than passively react, to ensure that our world becomes a safer place for our children.

Note: all web links accessed and reviewed on 17th August 2018.



Lost children of war

Northern Ireland arpillera, Irene MacWilliam, 2009

Photo Irene MacWilliam

Conflict Textiles collection

Irene MacWilliam was deeply moved by the posters being circulated at one time to help families find each other after being separated and displaced by war. She was particularly concerned about the lost and displaced children and created this, her first arpillera, to depict their desperation. The children are ghost like, devoid of nationality or race to express that they are living a half life. Irene chose to focus on children rather than adults: "since the image of a distressed child is very emotive."

Recent reports reveal that worldwide, almost 28 million children have been forcibly displaced; of these, 10 million are child refugees, approximately 1 million are asylum-seeking children and an estimated 17 million have been displaced within their own countries by violence and conflict.

<https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/displacement/>

Displacement poses real dangers for children, with unaccompanied children being the most likely to be killed, tortured, raped, robbed and recruited as child soldiers.

Much remains to be done to safeguard children affected by armed conflict so that they have an opportunity to live as children, instead of bearing the burdens of decisions and disasters far beyond their control.



Landmines / Campos Minados

English arpillera, Linda Adams, 2015

Photo Martin Melaugh

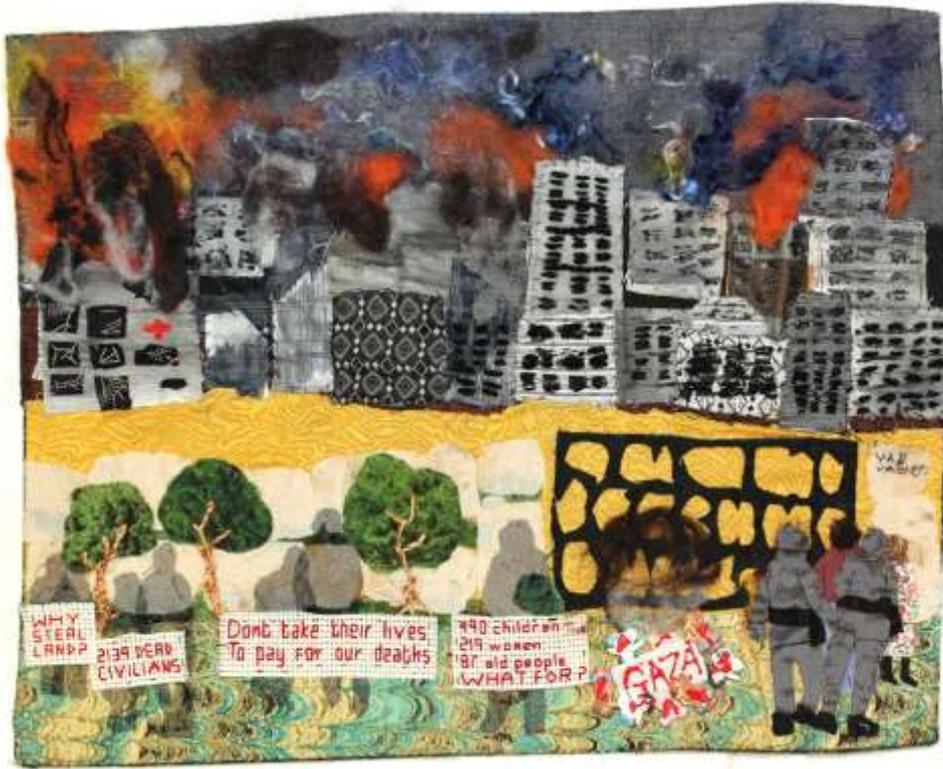
Conflict Textiles collection

Arpillera Linda Adams created this arpillera “as a response to the fact that even after a war is over the landmines stay and continue to kill.” Antipersonnel landmines can lie dormant for years until their detonating mechanism is accidentally triggered. Designed to maim rather than kill, they cause horrific injuries resulting in amputations, long hospital stays and extensive rehabilitation.

<http://www.icbl.org/index.php/icbl/problem/landmines/What-is-a-Landmine>

In this piece, Linda depicts a woman tending her crops, a routine task which is fraught with risk, as we can see from the sign: “Danger-Land Mines.” In the corner we see a child absorbed in play, bent over colourful objects, about to pick them up. These are “butterfly” mines, a type used during the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan.

Exploiting the natural, playful curiosity of children in this manner is particularly disturbing for Linda, who states that: “children need to explore and play without risking injury and often death from a conflict which finished some time ago.”



Gaza

English arpillera, Linda Adams, 2014
Photo Tony Boyle
Conflict Textiles collection

On 8th July 2014 the Israeli government launched a large military operation in the Gaza Strip, codenamed “Protective Edge”. Its stated objective was to stop Palestinian rocket firing at southern Israel and to destroy the military infrastructure of Hamas and other armed groups.

Fifty days later, when the ceasefire was declared on 26th August between Israel and Hamas, United Nations figures stated that 2,251 Palestinians, mainly civilians, including 551 children, had been killed in the conflict. Over 3,400 children were injured resulting in a permanent disability for almost one-third.

https://www.ochaopt.org/content/key-figures-2014-hostilities#_ftn1

The already overstretched Education sector was severely affected; 258 schools and kindergartens were damaged, including 26 schools beyond repair. https://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/oPt_74620.html

Linda was outraged at the scale of destruction and needless loss of life and responded via needle, thread and fabric. Through a letter tucked in a pocket at the back of her arpillera, she questions:

“...why a nation that has suffered ...feels it can justify killing ... and destroying hospitals, schools and mosques.” Further linking recent events to the destruction of the Holocaust she reflects: “... I felt that the spirits of those who died at the Holocaust would be desperately wishing they could say ‘why do this when you know how much it hurts’.”



Auf der Flucht 1945 / Fleeing in 1945

German arpillera, Mara Loytved-Hardegg, 2010

Photo Martin Melaugh

Conflict Textiles collection

In this arpillera Mara vividly remembers fleeing in 1945 as a child from the Russians in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, in the Soviet zone north of Berlin.

“We were about three months running westwards during the nights and hiding in the woods during the days. I was not yet three and had to run with my bigger brother of five years old. My mother took the one year old sister in her arms. Finally my mother returned with us to Ulrichshusen where we had found shelter in 1943 when bombing in the cities became too hard. When we returned ... my mother had to work in the fields for the Russians. There was little food and a lot of people died of Typhus.”

More than sixty years after the event Mara reflects that “children are always the fragile ones” in such traumatic events “...mark[ing] their whole life.” She connects her experience to our present: “all these children suffering now in these new wars is deeply concerning.”

This arpillera was sewn by Mara in one of the workshops -EVACUATION- that took place as part of the associated activities during the exhibition The Human Cost of War at the Tower Museum, Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service, 2011.



Olla común en una población / Soup kitchen in a barrio

Chilean arpillera, anon., Taller Fundación Missio, Santiago, 1982

Photo Martin Melaugh

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

This arpillera, created during the Pinochet dictatorship, depicts the hunger and poverty that invariably accompanies conflict and social injustice. It unveils both the desperation of hunger among the poor, forced to seek food from church charities, and the resilience of those who find ways to ensure that the worst affected are not left hungry.

Soup kitchens, similar to the one portrayed in this arpillera, were a lifeline for the impoverished during the Pinochet regime. Church charities such as the Vicaría de la Solidaridad and later, the Fundación Solidaridad, were in the forefront in setting them up. María Madariaga, whose husband was unemployed and who wondered how she could provide food for her children, recalls what the soup kitchen meant for her family, even though not all of them could benefit from it: “There was an age limit to abide by...of my three children at the time, only one was able to eat...We thought it was better that one eats than none...” (Agosín, 2008).

The need was so great that difficult choices had to be made, both within the family and in the organization, which meant that for Maria and her husband: “the days were especially long...because there was nothing to eat.”



SMALL actions BIG Movements

English arpillera, Linda Adams, 2014

Photo Martin Melaugh

Roberta Bacic private collection

In the foreground of this piece, we see two groups of activists holding placards announcing the conference **SMALL Actions BIG Movements** in Capetown, South Africa, 2014, the event for which this arpillera was created. A third group display an image of a broken rifle, the powerful symbol adopted by War Resisters International (WRI) - the conference organisers - which represents the destruction of weapons and denounces the institution of war.

The face of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, well known for his work in the field of nonviolence, is a prominent image. For Linda the combination of: “his wisdom, courage and brilliant sense of humour make him one of the most well respected people of this and the last century.”

The convoy of three trucks, travelling left on the overhead highway, bearing the conference title, location and broken rifle image, convey a sense of energy, purpose and moving in a new direction. It makes it possible to imagine that a world without war is attainable.

Linda reminds us that: “we all have the responsibility to consider our actions and the results of them. We are never powerless and by doing even small things collectively we can produce big changes.”



Shannonwatch (Extraordinary rendition)

Irish arpillera, Deborah Stockdale, 2011

Photo Deborah Stockdale

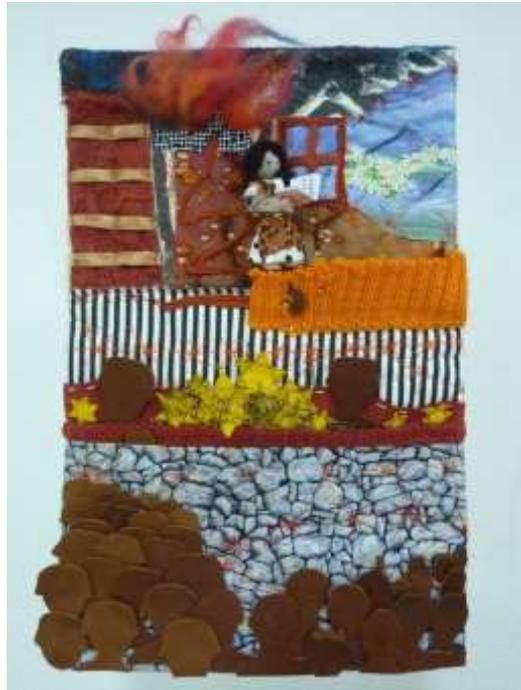
Conflict Textiles collection

Extraordinary rendition, the international transfer of individuals from the custody of one state to another, without following proper extradition procedures, is against international law. Yet this practice was admitted to in 2006 by then US President George W. Bush, when he referred to a programme implemented by the CIA to arrest, detain and interrogate terrorist suspects outside of US jurisdiction. The use of planes masquerading as civilian aircraft is a deceit practised by the US since the mid-1990s, as civilian status bypasses restrictions placed on military aircraft.

Shannonwatch, a small group of peace and human rights activists based in the mid west of Ireland, has played an important role in monitoring Shannon airport's links with renditions. Their documented evidence indicts Shannon as a stopover for CIA rendition planes and by the US military.

Here, artist Deborah Stockdale depicts the actions of the Women's Peace Camp at Shannon, set up in 2010. In support of the numerous Afghani women who were innocent victims of the conflict there, they demonstrated in white burkas at the airport gates. As Deborah comments: "this arpillera reflects an ongoing dialogue about a contentious international 'arrangement'...."

The Irish government consistently denies that Irish airports have been used by US rendition flights, insisting that US assurances are its guarantee against violation of international law. Shannonwatch contests this narrative and continue their monthly peace vigils at the airport, calling for an end to the US military use of Shannon.



Any time and everywhere - Anna Frank's universality

German arpillera, Heidi Drahota, 2011

Photo Heidi Drahota

Heidi Drahota collection

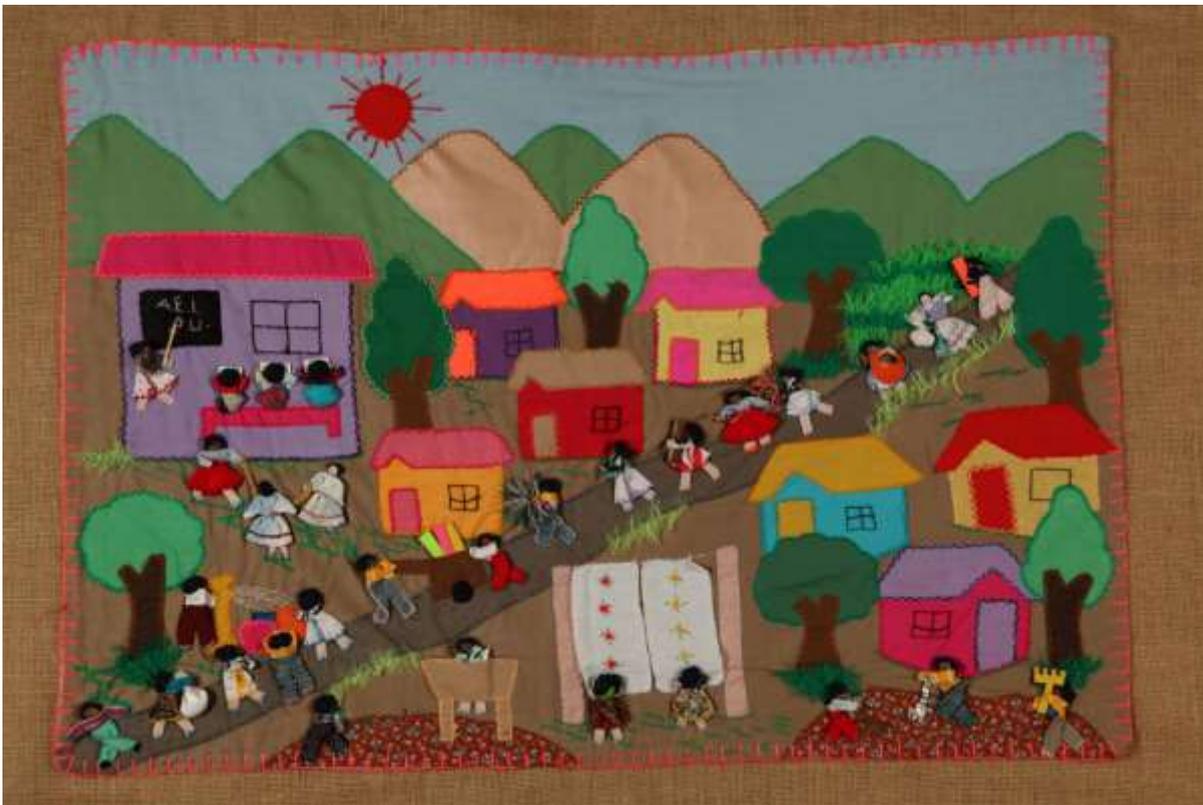
This is the first arpillera by textile artist Heidi Drahota. She created it after participating in several arpillera workshops linked to International arpillera exhibitions, 2009 – 2011. For Heidi "Arpilleras are like a diary. ... and like every diary they are personal documents."

This piece is: "[my] personal expression as a German profoundly affected by the Second World War." In the top section, Heidi, inspired by the arpillera doll technique, depicts teenager Anna Frank writing in her diary during the period 1942 - 1944, when she and her family lived in hiding in Amsterdam, during the German occupation of the Netherlands.

Directly below she portrays the historical context in which this happened. Her vivid images of peoples' glasses, the presence of guards and dishevelled yellow stars reminds us of the genocide inflicted by the Nazi regime on Jews during World War II. This fate also befell Anna Frank and several family members.

The third section links the historical and current context. The end of World War II and the decline in Nazism is symbolised by brown helmets, whilst the grey brickwork portrays the emergence of the UN declaration of human rights, the building blocks for a more equal world.

Worryingly, on the bottom right we see a gradual rise in Neo Nazism, reminding us that the issues of discrimination, denial of human rights and genocide faced by Anna in the 1940s, is still a threat for children and young people 80 years later.



Escuela en la población / School in a población

Chilean arpillera, anon., c 1980

Photo Martin Melaugh

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

This arpillera belongs to a series of three big arpilleras, the complete size of a flour sack, with a specific focus on each. This particular piece titled: "Vida cotidiana poblacional; vamos a la escuela." depicts dwellers in a shantytown community of Santiago going about their daily routines, engaged in a myriad of family, community and economic activities.

On the left hand side we see a very small school where children are engrossed in their lessons and play activities. Here in this neighbourhood, where life is a daily struggle for the majority, education remains at the heart of the community, highlighting the resilience of families in finding local solutions during the dictatorship. Attending classes in these small schools also protected children from being involved in riots or detained for breaking curfew.



Violencia en Ayacucho / Violence in Ayacucho

Peruvian arpillera, FCH Mujeres Creativas workshop, 2009

Photo Martin Melaugh

Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Rebecca Dudley, USA/ Northern Ireland

This piece, a replica of the 1985 original arpillera, was made by the Mujeres Creativas workshop in Lima. It takes its inspiration from a child's drawing, portraying his memories of the military arriving in the city of Ayacucho in south-central Peru. His mother, through the Mujeres Creativas workshop, created this arpillera depicting the harshness, violence and repression of this era.

Over 600,000 people were displaced within Peru during the 1980s and 1990s as a result of an armed conflict between the government, self defence groups and insurgent forces of the Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru Resistance Movement. In 1980, the Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) used Ayacucho as its base for its campaign against the Peruvian government.

The Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission estimates that over 69,000 died as a result of this violent conflict, with more than 40 percent of the reported deaths and disappearances concentrated in the Ayacucho department.

<http://www.cverdad.org.pe/ingles/ifinal/conclusiones.php>



Welches Kind lass ich zurück? / Which Child do I leave behind?

German Wall hanging, Heidi Drahota, 2015

Photo Heidi Drahota

Heidi Drahota collection

As textile artist Heidi Drahota skimmed the “Nürnberger Nachrichten / Nuremberg News” newspaper over Sunday morning breakfast at her home in Nuremberg in 2011, the headline “Which of the Children Shall Survive?” claimed her attention. Reading on, she absorbed the stark choices facing parents in the East African famine region, fleeing conflict, famine and drought, on their long trek to the refugee camp in Dadaab, eastern Kenya, home to approximately 340,000 refugees, the majority of whom are Somalians.

When Wardo Mohammud Yusuf’s four year old son collapsed just before they reached the Kenyan border she eventually left him behind to die, in order to at least save her daughter, a decision that continues to haunt

her. When Faduma Sakow Abdullah's two eldest children collapsed, she had to save the little remaining water for her three younger children, leaving the two eldest to their fate under a tree.

Faqid Nur Eimi's three year old son died from dehydration on the long journey. Too weak to dig a grave she put a few dry branches around his body and then resumed her journey "I only thought of how I could possibly save my other children", she says.

The stark news story which, for Heidi, epitomises "the endless suffering that wars, terror, and hunger inflict on individuals and entire peoples..." impelled her to create this piece.

Creating such a piece "is a slow process of development" comments Heidi. "I feel the needle stitches, the pain of the story I am telling ... the individual decisions, how do I express this situation, with which material in which technique, needs and gets my special attention." For her this creates "a very intense relationship with the story and these people."

As the shadowy figures trudge forward on their arduous journey from Somalia - a country where almost one third of the population of 12.3 million are dependent on humanitarian aid, where more than 300,000 children under the age of five are acutely malnourished, where over a quarter million died in the 2011 famine, half of whom were under five – Heidi "confront[s] the viewer with these cruel truths.. Innocent children have to leave their lives in a terrible way."

<https://www.unicef.org/somalia/children.html>



Aleppo school

English arpillera, Linda Adams, 2016

Photo Linda Adams

Conflict Textiles collection

In March 2011, inspired by the Arab Spring, Syrians took to the streets, demanding reform of the oppressive Assad regime. Repression of these nonviolent protests by Syrian Armed Forces & Allied militia was immediate and brutal. Soon the conflict escalated into civil war between government and rebel forces, with both sides aided by a proliferation of armed groups and powerful external players. Seven years later, the country's infrastructure is in ruins; over 400,000 Syrians have been killed; more than 11 million people have been displaced, with 5 million displaced internally and 6 million seeking refuge abroad. Up to 13.1 million people, 3.5 of whom are children, require humanitarian assistance

<https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2018/country-chapters/syria>

<https://www.unicef.org/appeals/syria.html>

Thousands of miles away in England, arpillera Linda Adams was shocked at the images of Syrian children caught in the chaos of war and “watched newsreel film and read first hand reports for days”. With needle and thread she stepped into their world. As the barrel bombing continues relentlessly overhead she brings us into an underground school, where teachers, at great risk to their own safety, persist in educating their students.

Absent children and adults, killed during the war “are represented . . . as shadows in the spaces where they would have been.” Children's drawings from Aleppo cover the walls, a common sight in schools worldwide. Linda reminds us that these images “show things children shouldn't have to see.”

Mindful of the fact that “new news [items] . . . push stories like this away from the front pages” Linda hopes that her work will bring “some attention and understanding” to the ongoing war in Syria, where people continue to suffer bombardment, displacement and gross human rights' violations.



La Maternidad del Elna

Catalonian / Spanish arpillera, Arpilleras Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc, 2012

Photo Roser Corbera

Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc collection, Catalonia / Spain

In the closing days of January 1939, with the Spanish civil war in its third year, Nationalist troops captured Barcelona. As the whole of Catalonia soon fell to Franco, an estimated 500,000 Republican supporters began their exodus across the border into refugee camps in Roussillon, France.

In these overcrowded camps, where infant mortality exceeded 90%, the Elne Maternity Home was set up nearby by Swiss National Elizabeth Eidenbenz. Arpilleras from Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc remember it as: “the only refuge and space for pregnant women who endured misery for their babies and themselves in the camps.”

Here, the arpilleristas pay tribute to this remarkable centre where, between 1939 and 1944, almost 600 babies were born to women fleeing the Spanish civil war and later, Jewish refugees and gypsies fleeing the Nazi invasion. We see women about to give birth, the new babies in the nursery and women engaged in the general running of the centre; women of so many different origins sharing the experience of motherhood. Overall, a sense of dignity, calm, care and welcome pervades this arpillera, a far cry from the chaos and disorder of camp life.

In the words of its founder Elizabeth Eidenbenz, the centre was as “an island of peace amongst an ocean of destruction.” For the arpilleristas reconnecting with their memories of it through their stitching, almost 80 years later, the centre was a respite from “their [experience] of suffering, human rights’ violations and fears” endured during the Nationalist occupation and their journey into exile.

Memorial Democratic (2011): “ELNE Maternity Home – Homage to Elizabeth Eidenbenz (12th June 1913 – 23rd May 2011)” Available from Conflict Textiles Archive.



Her Pillow, the Earth

Welsh arpillera, Eileen Harrisson, 2017

Photo Arthur Harrisson and Eileen Harrisson

Eileen Harrisson collection

This piece expresses Eileen's grief at the terrible suffering in Aleppo; of people enduring relentless bombings, of the tragedy of children caught up in the conflicts of adults, in which over 400,000 Syrians have been killed and an estimated 13.1 million people, including over 5.3 million children, are in need of humanitarian assistance.

An article in the UK Independent newspaper "Massacre of innocents" (28th October 2016), touched Eileen to the core of her being and impelled her to respond via textile.

In his report, journalist Robert Fisk described how three children were playing on their balcony adjacent to a school in Aleppo when it was hit by shell fire one day at break time. All three died; a little girl, Khanom Fallaha, just two years old and her two older brothers. In death, she lay with her head turned to the right as if sleeping and the article read, "Tonight, she will be in the earth".

These words and photograph of the classroom with its overturned chairs, little desks and trail of blood flowing over floor and books, haunted Eileen; so she made this work in which a swathe of earth-coloured muslin sweeps round a small girl like a shroud and red stitches flow like blood. On the other side, ruined buildings gaping with black, empty shells that should have been homes filled with laughter, light and love, threaten to topple onto her.

Tents on hard ground offer scant shelter for the 5 million Syrian refugees in winter's freezing cold but, trapped like the little girl drawn in thread, for far too many, the earth gives its pillow for the dead.



Puntadas de Vida / Stitches of Life

Argentinean arpillera, Ana Zlatkes, 2015

Photo Ana Zlatkes

Conflict Textiles collection

Textile artist Ana Zlatkes first encountered arpilleras at an international exhibition at the Women's Museum in Fürth, Germany in May 2009. She subsequently attended arpillera workshops and became a passionate proponent of the arpillera mode of expression.

Here, Ana depicts both the genocide inflicted by the Nazi regime on Jews during the Second World War and the courageous work of those who led children to safety, in effect "stitching" a new life for them. In her view the theme of genocide is universal and current: "Genocide continues, changes in form and geographical location, but it is still a reality and it is the responsibility of all of us to try to prevent it."

This arpillera, as well as honouring those who resisted the regime, has undoubtedly changed the artist: "... this is my first homage to all the men and women who had the courage to fight defending the lives of children. Today after making this arpillera I am not the same, something has happened in me and my life."

Irena Sendler, a social worker, was one such courageous woman. Between 1942 and 1943, working through the Polish underground, she led hundreds of Jewish children out of the Ghetto to safe hiding places.

Nicholas Winton, who worked on the London stock exchange, was instrumental in arranging for 669 children to leave Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the war. Vera Gissing, one of those children later commented: "He rescued the greater part of the Jewish children of my generation in Czechoslovakia. Very few of us met our parents again: they perished in concentration camps. Had we not been spirited away, we would have been murdered alongside them."