

# Following the footsteps of the disappeared

Ulster Museum, Belfast

30th August 2020 – 30th August 2021

Presentation about my quilt “stitching the search”



Good afternoon, I am Nicole Drouilly, and I would like to talk about my quilt "stitching the search", (hilvanando la busqueda).

My dear older sister Jacqueline Drouilly Yurich, 24 years old, three months pregnant, and my brother in law, Marcelo Salinas Eytel, 27 years old, were taken from their home by the security police of Pinochet in Chile, in the middle of the night.

They were taken to clandestine torture centres where they were subject to brutal treatment. We never saw them again.



*Marcelo Salinas and  
Jacqueline Drouilly*

This happened in 1974, more than 45 years ago. This is a long time, but these traumatic events have shaped the life of my family and mine.

We have been since, incessantly, campaigning for the full truth and justice that Jacqueline, Marcelo and us, deserve. It is a continuous, never ending search. At the same time, we have been sharing stories about them, memories, scraps of their presence in this world.

My quilt is an expression of that process, by which I try to preserve Jacqueline and Marcelo's dignity.

This quilt is dedicated to my mother, Norma Yurich Costagliola, *"who loved the written word, the needle and the thread, but above all, she loved Jacqueline"*, and to my sisters, Michele and Viviane, with who we have walked the infinite and hard road, of giving meaning to our loss.



*Birthday card from Marcelo and Jacqueline to my mother, 6 months before their detention.*

I decided to do this quilt, and to give it to Roberta Bacic, for the Conflict Textiles collection, as a way to get the public at the exhibitions, to know and think about Jacqueline.





*Jacqueline Drouilly*

I was seventeen when they disappeared, and with my mother and my sisters, we would meet other relatives while walking the painful daily path of visiting the government and military offices, enquiring about our loved ones, with the hope that we will receive one day, a positive response. But that never happened. Jacqueline and Marcelo's detention was denied over and over again and our hearts would sink each and every time when that happened.

We would comfort each other and in the church's offices, we would have a space to exchange information between the relatives and find the community and compassion that was denied to us outside.

I assisted many times, to the workshop of arpilleras, where the relatives were embroidering textile panels to sell so they could get some economic help during these horrible moments.

It was calming, to be there, with those women who would not stop talking about their loved ones, and I was feeling so much distress: refusing to accept that things would not change for the better, while sewing and helping in silence. The whole reality was impossible for me to process, I was experiencing the pain and living from day to day trying not to think about tomorrow.

**Letter from my mother to Marcelo, 17 years after his disappearance.**

Se Marcelo Salinas Eytel  
en su cumpleaños  
Detenido Desaparecido el  
31 Oct de 1974. Mi gerno.

Se me trizan los dedos, flaco.  
Al escribir tu nombre en el aire.

Marcelo,

You are a book that unfinished on one of your pages.

Bravery and good intentions were yours,

And I cannot find you yet.

May be that so pure soul of yours,

Is why my daughter always admired so much.

And maybe because of that

We will never find you,

Because the jackals they never forgive

The goodness or, the solidarity.

And these years that you and my daughter are being missed

Have been counted in hours, minutes, one by one,

Both backwards and forwards.

Everything is alive boy

And we are all living for the two of you.

I choose the patchwork and quilt craft, to honour those women, around the world, that for hundreds of years have been sewing in their few spare moments, recycling textile materials, talking

with their women friends, teaching, learning and creating pieces that not only were useful but beautiful and long lasting.

The patchwork is a laborious work, slow and precise. It allows me to think and reflect, to imagine and invent, to feel sadness for what is lost, and experience happiness for my life. To be enraged for the injustice and the impunity but nevertheless optimistic about the opportunity to contribute some sense of understanding and human connection in this society.

And during all the hours I spent on this quilt, Jacqueline was an over present entity.

Jacqueline has been violently torn from our lives, and trying to preserve her existence in this dimension: (perhaps attempting to stitch a patchwork repair across our lives?), is one of my enduring purposes . As any relative of a disappeared will tell, we have a parallel struggle, to that of the search for justice. Is the daily effort to stop time and the effects of fading memory, is the extraordinary quest to remember their voices, their faces.

Not all of our efforts has been successful as time takes a toll, but as an archivist, I know that natural fibres, like cotton, if properly cared for, can last hundreds of years. That prospect for my quilt, fills me with happiness and relief.

I am drawn to the technique of patchwork.

Mainly because to me it is a jigsaw, it is order out of the chaos, small units that became a bigger collective unit. I put in my quilt ladders and mazes, which illustrate our long, never ending journey, and mandalas that draw our attention to that perfection and peace we want to reach.

But as important as the meaningful geometry of the quilt, so are the writings.

It took very long to select pieces written by Jacqueline, by my dad and my mum. I needed to fix them in that space.

I traced the writing to show not only the text but also the human writing hand. I selected a birthday card sent by Jacqueline and

Marcelo to my dad. A beautiful poem by my mother about her daughter. A letter from my mother to Marcelo for his birthday, 17 years after he disappeared.

Because the memory, must also be explicit, is not just memory, it is also history.

This quilt is one of many other efforts, to rebel against the ever fading of my sister Jacqueline.

Jacqueline taught me how to use the sewing machine, how to do cross stitch embroidery on top of knitted cardigans, how to style my clothes. She was very skilled with her hands. My sister Michele still have the embroidery tin box that belonged to Jacqueline, where on top it use to read: "No Tocar" (Don't Touch).

You will not be surprised therefore, that I have an excessive attachment to this quilt. I think about it frequently, I have it on my computer as a desktop image. In my office, a photograph of it, is framed. Throughout the years its importance has grown.

Its colours, shapes and configuration are very familiar. It has become a symbol for me.

And I think it is because it was done for Jacqueline, but now I feel that Jacqueline herself has somehow participated in it. This is one example of the distorted and magical reality that we, the relatives of the disappeared, lived on.

And I thank you all, each of you, all those who will look at my quilt, and will think about my sister and Marcelo, even for a second. For that I am grateful.