

SEMINAR

To mark the 35th Anniversary of the Chilean Military Coup, you are invited to attend a special evening of discussion, music, recitals, book signing & screening of the film "Threads of hope" on 23rd September 2008 @ 6 – 9pm, at Regional Cultural Centre Letterkenny. Admission is FREE.



*Arpillera, Exilio II / Exile II
Woman mourning those who have been exiled
(In the exhibition from
Marjorie Agosin's private collection)*

The politics of Chilean "arpilleras"

A seminar in conjunction with the exhibition of Chilean Arpilleras (textiles), curated by Roberta Bacic originally from Chile at the Letterkenny Regional Cultural Centre from September 11 to October 11

Arpilleras (pronounced "ar-pee-air-ahs) are three-dimensional appliqué textiles of Latin America. "Arpilleras" is actually from the Chilean tradition, an old pictorial appliqué technique from Isla Negra on the coast of Chile, whereby rags were used to create images and then embroidered on large pieces of cloth.

Initially Hessian, or in Spanish "arpillera", was used as their backing, and that then became the name for this particular type of quilt. Generally they are known as quilts or wall hangings. They are considered contemporary craft. Sometimes small dolls are made and added to make the three-dimensional effect.

After the military coup in 1973, which introduced the Pinochet regime, the Association of Relatives of the Disappeared in Chile began to make arpilleras. They were handcrafted, using scraps of materials collected by women or donated by the churches in Chile. They tell their stories and support their families. They were also made by women political prisoners, either while inside prisons or when released. They used them to camouflage notes sent to the world outside, to people who would denounce what was happening at national or international levels or people who could act on their behalf to either assist them in their different needs or would be able to pass on messages to their dear ones. Even the most suspicious guards in jails did not think to check the appliqué pictures for messages, since sewing was seen as 'inconsequential women's work'. Nor did other people recognise the power they could have when denouncing what was really happening and was otherwise denied by the government authorities and ignore by most of society.

Chilean women found refuge in the Vicariate of Solidarity organized by the Catholic Church. In dark basements and other secret meeting rooms in churches, NGOs and other solidarity places, mothers, wives, lovers, friends, daughters and sisters began to design and sew together in order to capture their common tales of torture, of pain and love and save them from oblivion. Part of the church and a network of solidarity people smuggled 'arpilleras' out of Chile and so the world – and the ones who listened – came to know more about the oppressive, unjust and bloody life under the dictatorship. They were often bought as a way to support the struggle, including some of the ones you see in this display.

In the arpilleras are elements such as photos, images, and names of the missing and sewn words and expressions such as "¿Dónde están?" (Where are they?).

The tapestries often have a "relief" quality and are far from two-dimensional pictures. The scrap material and stitching that ultimately create the simple and clear lines and forms of the figures and motifs depicted on these arpilleras allow the viewer to perceive the determination of these Chilean craft women. Arpilleras have served as testimony to the tenacity and strength of these Chilean women in their determined struggle for truth and justice and to break the code of silence imposed upon the country.

At the time they were done they depicted what was actually happening, today they are witnesses to what can not be forgotten and are part of our present-past that needs to be dealt with.

Curator Roberta Bacic is a Chilean living in Northern Ireland and a world authority of 'Chilean Arpilleras'.

More about the SEMINAR

Martin McGinley the Editor of the Derry Journal, will moderate a discussion between curator Roberta Bacic, Professor Marjorie Agosín and local quilt makers on the subject of 'Chilean Arpilleras in the context of Art & Survival.'

*Writer and curator **Roberta Bacic** was born in Santiago de Chile. As an opponent of the military regime, she openly demonstrated, wrote reports and held workshops and seminars with relatives of people who had been 'disappeared' by the state and by going on speaking tours in the United States and Europe. For this she was fired from her job at the university and was once arrested.

After Chile's slow return to civilian rule, Roberta was a researcher at the National Corporation of Reparation and Reconciliation, the successor to the initial Truth Commission, which sought to find answers for those left behind about the fate of their loved ones. After many years, as a member of the peace group War Resisters' International, Roberta took a job as the Programme and Development Worker in London, leaving Chile in 1998. She now lives in Northern Ireland, and is still involved in human rights work as a guest speaker to many universities and organisations.

***Marjorie Agosín** is a well-known spokesperson for the plight and priorities of women in Third World countries. Her book, *Scraps of Life: Chilean Arpilleras* (Red Sea Press, 1987, translated by Cola Franzen) tells of Chilean women who make their struggles known to the world through the exposition of "arpilleras," folk tapestries which tell of their bravery and hardships in the face of oppression. Marjorie Agosín is a Professor of Spanish at Wellesley College, Boston, USA. She has received many awards including the *Letras de Oro* 1995 prize for poetry, presented by Spain's Ministry of Culture and the North-South Center of the University of Miami to a writer of Hispanic heritage living in the United States. She also won the 1995 Latino Literature Prize for Poetry, awarded by the Latin American Writers Institute.

Professor Marjorie Agosín will also officially launch her book *'Tapestries of hope, threads of love: The Arpillera Movement in Chile'* (Second edition). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 200

The seminar is presented in Conjunction with the Regional Cultural Centre Letterkenny, Donegal County Council, Heritage & Museum Service, Derry City Council, INCORE University of Ulster, Derry Journal & Women's Centre Derry.

Info & Bookings
Regional Cultural Centre,
Port Road,
Letterkenny,
County Donegal
Tel: 074 91 29186
E: rcc@donegalcoco.ie
Web: www.donegalculture.com