

About “La Valija de la Memoria de Hernán / Hernan's Memory box” de Ana Zlatkes. As part of the seminar: **The Search for the Disappeared: Textile and art expressions**

By Jaime Nuguer, Buenos Aires, 31st August.2020

*General greeting:*

*I'm grateful:*

*To Ana who is the author of this piece of art.*

*To Roberta who included “La Valija de la Memoria” as part of the exhibition and because she invited me to take part in this seminar and helped me out all along*

*To Brandon I am grateful for his patience and understanding to let me share at this great event my contribution in spite of the technical glitches and have no image.*

Dear friends

As you know, when the Europeans arrived in the American continent, we brought large social and economic inequalities; at that point these were part of the colonialism regime, that today -in some way- we still experience.

Since then, peoples have been fighting for their complete independence and social justice.

Our history is one of rebellions against injustice and of resistance to crimes that the powerful groups have carried out to silence the voices of dignity and justice of the people.

For the last fifty years we, now Latin American peoples, have been fighting together so that the crimes against humanity that were committed by the dictatorial governments of the Seventies never happen again: NUNCA MÁS, as we say in Spanish - NEVER MORE.

We sustain this fight under three principles: MEMORY, TRUTH, and JUSTICE. MEMORY comes first because it is the main antidote against the repetition of

those events, calling us to never forget the horror we experienced: NUNCA MÁS.

Tens of thousands of people were tortured, killed, and disappeared, without even having the possibility of a trial to defend themselves - if there was anything to be accused of.

Those dictatorial governments were trying to destroy the will to build a world more socially fair.

In Latin America we have a long tradition of artists reflecting the values and aspirations of society.

It is part of the will that I was just referring to.

Today, art continues being a valuable instrument in the construction of the MEMORY of that -not so distant- past.

The art, committed to the History, allows us to bring the consciousness of the people closer to the events that took place, with a particularly penetrating eye.

This brings us to today's exhibition.

Using traditional Chilean arpilleras and other textile materials, the artists convey a message through a special language of human sensitivity, and dimensions that only art can deliver.

The artist's point of view and the technique used, which is translated into beauty, also delivers a message.

The viewer is invited to get closer to the historical MEMORY, reconnecting to their feelings and bringing up deep thoughts.

Gazing at the artwork also brings up a sense of scent; the scent penetrates all the way to the consciousness of those who have the privilege of appreciating the piece.

The broad toolkit of the artist incentivizes our MEMORY and is the product of a very special talent.

This is part of the sensibility of the artistic endeavour; to not only bring admiration and pleasure, but also to find a commitment on their part with keeping the MEMORY alive.

“La Valija de la Memoria” is part of today’s art exhibition.

Ana Zlatkes, an Argentinean artist, is the creator, and with her unique talent and sensitivity, translates the history of my youngest brother, Hernán.

In 1977, the military dictatorship in Argentina disappeared Hernán.

My brother loved our country with passion and he was committed to transform it into an equal society for the life of our people.

In pursuit of this vision, he was studying architecture, a career that he was planning on pursuing with the intention of ending the housing deficit for the million that still do not have a decent place where to live in Argentina.

He was also part of the leadership of the student union.

That was his vocation and his struggle.

He was fighting to match the curriculum for the degree with the necessity of the people, instead of thinking of architects as serving those who are wealthier.

In 1974, when he was only 23 years old, Hernán had an accident while working on the construction site of a building.

Hernán fractured his spine and could no longer move his legs.

With great determination to overcome his disability, he learned to walk with crutches and to drive an adapted car.

The textiles that are contained in La Valija are bandages that were placed on his legs.

By using them, the crutches would not hurt Hernan's body parts that had no sensitivity.

His strong and determined nature allowed him to continue working, studying architecture, and participating in the political activities of the student union at the public university in Buenos Aires.

In 1976, the Argentine military carried out a coup, and installed a military dictatorship, expelling the constitutional authorities.

This prompted a fierce repression against their political opponents.

The military invoked the pretext of national security, making their opponents potentially the entire population of the country.

The trials, that we still carry out since recent years in Argentina to judge the military responsible for crimes against humanity, showed that, among many other groups, they were cruel to students that were pursuing an architecture degree.

The prosecution demonstrated that the public debates held during the '70s at the university, in Buenos Aires, about the role of architects in society and the training they should have as such, was considered a danger to national security.

The repressive techniques consisted of jail without trial, torture, rape, murder and the disappearance of the mortal remains.

Also the theft of babies born in captivity.

They denied all information about their crimes to the relatives of those persecuted, to the judges and to society as a whole, including a mafia pact of silence that still remains today.

On October 28, 1977, with only a few weeks left to finish his architectural studies, Hernán was kidnapped by navy personnel.

Our mother, who is now 96 years old, was present and testified as the first witness that he has been abducted.

We have been looking for him unceasingly from that very morning and for the following years.

He continues to be missing; until today we have not obtained a response from the State regarding his final destination.

The enforced disappearance of the victims of this political repression constitutes a particular type of crime against humanity, which still continues to be committed even today, because those responsible keep hiding the truth.

The suffering of family and friends due to the absence of their loved one, and mainly the emptiness that occurs in families, produces a very special and deep pain, which does not fade with the passage of time.

We discovered that this is the product of denying not only the disappeared' natural destiny/life, but also the right to mourn a lost family member.

We cannot totally overcome the pain caused by the ignorance of what happened, and the absence of the mortal remains, more than forty years ago.

An artistic work such as “La Valija de la Memoria”, made by Ana Zlatkes, a creative artist specialized in textile art, has the double virtue of contributing to the collective memory of those atrocious events through a work of great artistic value.

At the same time, we, the relatives, are comforted by the sensitive tribute to the memory of our beloved Hernán.

To finish, let me congratulate all the artists that are part of this extraordinary production, and special thanks to Roberta, Brandon and all the organizers, which made possible this meeting even under the constraints that lockdowns and geographic distancing imposes on us.

Thank you