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Chilean Arpilleras Exhibition

February 8th until April 19th 2008

Guest Curator, Roberta Bacic

Assistant, Karen Duhai

Venue: Harbour Museum

From the 8 February the Harbour Museum will host an unusual exhibition of Arpilleras (pronounced 'ar-pee-air-ahs'). Arpilleras are three dimensional appliqué textiles of Latin America. They would be more commonly known as 'quilts' or 'wall hangings'.

Sewing, knitting and weaving cloth has been one of women's activities from earliest times and in most civilizations. These arpilleras were handcrafted by women in Chile as a way of telling their stories of a struggle for truth and justice during the Pinochet's dictatorship from 1973 to 1990. The arpilleras were often used to camouflage notes to prisoners and to send messages to the international press.

Nuestra Carnicería / Our Butcher's.



Women shopping at their local butcher's.

This exhibition highlights the ins and outs of everyday life for Chilean women during the Pinochet dictatorship. The arpilleras are about life in the midst of death, and the struggle to maintain normality when our lives are turned upside down.

Courtesy of Marjorie Agosín

Photo by Colin Peck, copyright of this image, guest curator Roberta Bacic

Paz Justicia Libertad / Peace Justice Freedom.



People demonstrating for peace, justice, and freedom.
During the Pinochet regime, many people in Chile lost loved ones to government sanctioned “disappearances” or to exile. The theme of missing loved ones is carried through a large number of the pieces, including this one, which is made from the clothing of a disappeared man.

Courtesy of Alba Sanfeliu

Photo by Colin Peck, copyright of this image, guest curator Roberta Bacic

La Cueca Sola / They Dance Alone.



Women dancing the national dance alone.

Women play the predominant role in most of these arpilleras, though it is the lack of men that makes these pieces so striking. In this piece, women whose husbands, sons, fathers, or lovers, have been disappeared dance alone as a form of protest and remembrance.

Courtesy of Marjorie Agosín

Photo by Colin Peck, copyright of this image, guest curator Roberta Bacic

Homenaje a los caidos / Homage to the fallen ones.



Women remembering those who have died.

In the arpilleras, we get to see many different sides of Chilean women. In this piece, we see the women holding together the community, bringing together their friends and family to remember those they have lost.

Courtesy of Fátima Miralles

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¿Dónde están? / Where are They?



Woman weeping for those who are missing.

In this piece, we get a much more intimate view of the women. Though many of the arpilleras present the Chilean women as strong promoters of human rights, it is important to remember the pain they felt in their struggles.

Courtesy of Marjorie Agosín

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