

Pat Hume

A Conversation between Brandon Hamber and Linda Adams

March 2022



Pat Hume, English arpillera, Linda Adams, 2022. Photo Martin Melaugh, © Conflict Textiles

Brandon Hamber: Okay, well good afternoon, Linda, it's great to have this opportunity to discuss with you the piece that you produced on Pat Hume for Conflict Textiles, and so I look forward to our discussion this afternoon. I thought maybe, just by way of starting, you could just introduce yourself. Tell us a bit about who you are, and your work, and then we can talk about the piece specifically.

Linda Adams: I'm 74, I live in England. [Growing up] spent every moment I could with my aunt and grandmother who lived nearby. My grandmother was a tailor, and sewed for a living, and they did piecework for a local company. They did a lot of sewing using scraps. Because they were poor they recycled my clothes and I inherited by cousin's cast offs. They would make dolls for me, and they taught me everything I know about sewing. I've been sewing ever since.

BH: And when did you start to work on textiles, or were there other types of sewing that you did? How did you make that transition?

LA: The first textile I did like an arpillera, I went on a course with a needlewoman who was



very famous in the sewing world; I went on these courses and she set a topic and turned up with samples, and everybody copied them except me; I went off on a tangent and did my own thing and she encouraged that. Someone that I worked with got an arpillera and brought it in and said to me 'You like sewing, what would you do with this?' and I'd borrow it through weekends, and started copying it, and bought several online and copied bits of them, because that's the way to learn techniques involved in it.

I went to an exhibition, and went back, and back and [Roberta] asked me had I ever done one, and I said I'd just studied these ones and she said I should try it. So, I asked what she wanted on it, and she said 'Something to do with things where you live done by women.' So being me, I listed all the ones I could think of (which is still how I start an arpillera) and said 'Which ones do you want?' and she said 'All of them' and I said 'That's not going to all fit on one', so she said 'Well how many do you think?', and I plucked a number out of the air and said four, and so my first attempt for her was four [arpilleras] that showed things in different times where I live.

She asked me to post them off, but I very nearly didn't. A friend of mine caught me and asked what I was doing. 'I've got to post them by three o'clock, but I don't think I'm going to bother because I don't think she'll like them,' and she said, 'If you won't post them I will', then stormed up to the post office with them. For a while there was a period of silence - I thought that was because she'd not got them or really didn't like them, but in fact she did like them and now they're on Conflict Textiles.

BH: Thank you for that, the sound isn't hundred percent clear for me. Did you say Roberta had asked you to create something about women in your neighbourhood?

LA: Yeah, Roberta did.

BH: Ah right.

LA: It's how I started with Conflict Textiles.

BH: Right okay. And so this particular piece you did of Pat Hume, how did that come about? What was the process of that? I mean obviously I know a little bit about it but if you could just recap for the purposes of the recording?

LA: Roberta and I speak every week and have done for years, and I do tend to chuck things at her at times and say, 'What do you think about that?' and sometimes she says yes, and sometimes she says no. She'd not long met Pat Hume and I was fairly interested in Pat Hume, because being English, I've always been surrounded by what was happening in Ireland.

I've got two reasons to be interested in Ireland, because my grandmother is Irish, and she came from Northern Ireland and painted this picture; it was almost like the holy land: it was beautiful, it was green, everyone was always happy and singing. No matter how bad things were for her, because at the time they were difficult, she always dreamed of going back to Ireland where she felt she would've got a warm welcome. Then when I got married, I married a half Irish man and his mother was the one that was Irish and she was absolutely



anti anybody English. [She] was not happy with the fact that I married him and felt trapped in England and absolutely disliked it. So it was these totally different views that I got; that was interesting really. As to why it's me that got it [asked to do the Pat Hume arpillera], I think you'd have to ask Roberta that question because I was actually quite surprised that she did ask me to do it.

BH: Sure, well we will record something with Roberta and she'll talk a bit about that separately. But it is really interesting what you say about, I suppose, the two different perspectives; I don't know if I'm putting words in your mouth, a nostalgic view of Ireland and maybe a more hostile suspicious view of what was happening in Ireland?

LA: And with the Troubles obviously, there were bombs over here and we had a lot of bomb scares. I got caught up on a couple of bomb scares on the tube and things like that. It was a frightening time to be living in England because we kept getting warnings; sometimes there was nothing, but there was one time a bomb warning was sent to a building so people in there were evacuated to a nearby car park which was where the bomb was placed, so it was quite frightening.

I meant.

BH: I'm sure it was.

LA: So, when Pat and John Hume started bringing sides together, it was a fascinating process to be watching, and I've got a lot of admiration for what they did.

BH: So in some ways, before we maybe get into talking about the piece, as I say I can speak to Roberta separately as to her reason for thinking of you, but to my mind it seems to make sense that John and Pat Hume represented this middle road, I suppose, towards peace. That might be one way to think about it, and in that sense might create those links between the suspicious hostile part and the nostalgic part. Is that how you thought of it yourself?

LA: Yes. If they were here today, they would be the people to go to, to sort out Russia and Ukraine.

BH: Yeah, certainly I think they would be people who would be able to provide some wise counsel in these difficult times. So Roberta approached you - we're assuming for, obviously, your skill for working with textiles - but then as we've touched on a little bit, your own position in relation to this, and your own interest as well in John and Pat Hume. How did the piece then start? I know there were several conversations, and Roberta sent you material; can you maybe just tell me a little bit about how did the piece begin to take shape?

LA: The first step is trying to piece the background and to work out how I was really doing it, and [Roberta] said that when Pat went near where [she] lived on holiday that she had this tremendous love for the country that I'd noticed in my grandmother; so I did a background. I looked at a lot of photographs of Northern Ireland, and started with the fact that it was green, and beautiful, and calm and then I started to collect the comments that were made. We'd agreed that there'd be a picture of Pat on there, but my first thought was this lovely lush, green background and the comments, because I collected, I think, ten the first time

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around, and it started with sewing them. That was something that I found slightly difficult, because I've got macular degeneration. You asked me about how long it took, how much actual sewing. That depends an awful lot on the day. If it was a bright sunny day I can do it, if it's not I struggle, in fact, if I do a lot of sewing in one day I get headaches that last days; and on top I've started going colour blind because of that, so that certainly added to the time it took to do it.

I sent Roberta a photograph, I hadn't really stitched the background, all I'd done was just lay it on, because I thought maybe they might need it changed. I'd done some of these quotes, and I said, 'This is what I'm thinking of putting on,' and Roberta says 'No that doesn't work, that's not Pat.' So, I went away and thought about it again, and she also came back suggesting that it needed more quotes from women. Because it was very difficult to decide which comments to include, and there are, I think, four different stages when we actually stopped and looked again at what was actually going to go on there. There was no point in including too much from the, sort of, heads-of-state formal stuff. She also wanted comments from the people that knew her personally when she was being herself, not in the political arena. Although John was the one who got the most acclaim for it, he could not have done what he did without Pat; that was what I wanted to get across, the importance that they were a team which is why I chose the two pictures; so there's her helping him on one of them and her when she got her degree, and he was very proud.



Background research by Linda. Photo Linda Adams, © Conflict Textiles

BH: Yeah. I mean that certainly is fascinating that you did choose two pictures where Pat and John were together. So what you're saying is, that was to actually demonstrate her central role in everything because people would know John a lot more as you said, but your



choice of the two of them was to demonstrate how powerful she was in that relationship, rather than the other way around. Someone could assume it's the other way around, but you were trying to do the opposite then?

LA: I was trying to show that she was his strength, because there must've been times when things were going wrong and he probably didn't want to get up the next day and face what he had to face, but she was always there for him in the middle of the night to pick him up and say, 'You can do it,' and I feel that is vital, and that's what I wanted to get across.

BH: Yeah, that's certainly, well from my reading of it, it comes across, and then you were talking a little bit about the background. So your initial idea was that the background would be green to represent that nature and you also talked about how that connected with your grandmother, which is interesting, then you changed that, you went for a more neutral background; is that right? And that was through your working with Roberta and through your discussions with her?

LA: Yeah.

BH: So why in the end did you move away from that? Was it just from an aesthetic perspective or other reasons?

LA: No, just when Roberta said that doesn't work, I was quite happy to just drop it and go away and think about it and try again.

BH: I suppose from looking at a lot of arpilleras, I know it's not exactly the same tradition, but it has elements to it - that more neutral background maybe fits a bit more with that tradition, I don't know if you would see it in the same way?

LA: Yeah, I can, yeah. I think that certainly this was the piece Roberta had the most say in, of all the ones I've done. There's been points in all of the other ones, apart from the first four that she didn't see until they'd been completed, where she's looked at it and said 'Can you move that? That's not quite what I want', or just tweaked a little bit, but in this one there was a lot more of that, she actually went and showed it to one other person or two to try and get it right. We'd determined it was important that people were included, but also that it was balanced, and not favouring one side over the other. We needed a balanced view that could show as many features of Pat's character as I could.

BH: And I suppose as you said, also the balance between the well-known person: Mary McAleese or Hilary Clinton, compared to people who knew her with more of a personal - well, they both knew her personally as well - but sort of more ordinary quotes, is also what you were trying to get to?

LA: Yeah, because I mean somebody like Clinton you could find a whole book about her the comments she's made about people, but this was taking it down to an individual level, so it included the women in the street that knew Pat, not just on a political level.

BH: I mean yeah, the quotes really are fascinating, and every time I'm looking at them now you sort of notice, obviously, different words, but also it seems like your choice of how to put them across: some of them are red, some are in different colours, some are sort of long,

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and sort of single words, and some are a bit more dense. Did you think about each of those, or did it just, sort of, flow naturally for you, or was there a design idea in some of that?

LA: There was no design idea to it, because the placement; also, they were cropped there were big discussions about that 'Do they go right, or left? Do they go in the middle? Do they go on the edge? What about the side?' I did some top to bottom so that it's balanced. It got complicated at times -

BH: Sorry. You chose the two photographs, the one, as you said, of Pat getting an honorary degree from Ulster University, and the other, I presume, is John working with papers in a constituency office or at home.

LA: Yeah, that also had someone else on it which we decided wasn't a good idea; so it's kind of a hybrid from several photos. They weren't specifically photographed like that.

BH: But it's sort of demonstrating her - she's looking over him and over his shoulder, but also, I assume with one of her children in front of her, so to my mind represents the work and the family all being somewhat unified. It sort of challenges that idea of Pat simply looking after the home and John looking after the work.

LA: It's all one.

BH: And is that how you looked at it when you were creating it? That's fascinating.

LA: I could imagine when he was sitting there writing, she would be looking at what he's writing, sitting there making suggestions.



Working on the images. Photo Linda Adams, © Conflict Textiles.



BH: Yeah, and I mean probably, what for me as an outsider looking at it, what's absolutely incredible about what you've done is that you can literally see that image of Pat looking over his shoulder, scrutinising what he's done, ready to give some feedback. That's how it looks to me, but at the same time, which I suppose, one of the most striking parts of the images, is you then chose not to represent their faces. Could you just tell me a little bit more about that choice?

LA: If you look at all my arpilleras, there are no faces on any of them. I don't think even in the early ones. That was a decision that I made, I wanted to let their bodies and what they're doing talk for them, not facial expressions; that's something all of mine include.

BH: So that's sort of part of your own technique?

LA: Yeah, that's me.

BH: No, that's great. As an outsider, certainly that image of Pat looking over the shoulder, as you say the body is doing the talking. To be able to capture that in a textile is quite phenomenal, I think.

LA: Thank you. It leaves it open to interpretation, you don't know whether she's smiling at you, or she's going to say, 'I'm not sure about that.'

BH: So it allows the observer to project their own perspective into it?

LA: That's my idea, yes.

BH: That's really interesting and I know you talked about the background and negotiation with Roberta, and again I'll speak separately to Roberta, but there were two pieces here so presumably Roberta was trying to get them very different but imagining them together. Did you at the same time still feel you had the freedom to choose how you approached this? How would you describe it? Was it a negotiation? Was it a co-creation?

LA: I'd say cocreation definitely. I couldn't have done what I did without Roberta.

BH: So how did you sort of feel about that? I don't know, some artists might feel that they want their own piece and want someone out of the picture; others might feel differently. Just tell me a little bit about that.

LA: It got prickly at times, that was the only time where at one point, when we were going through this and still working on quotes I think, around the time where I'd nearly got them on and she said 'I'm going to have a word with someone, and the deadline's looming', I said 'I will just pack it all as it is, I'll send it over and then they can put it on.' I got this message from Roberta saying 'I'm going to send you a piece of John Hume's tie, can you put it on there?' and I phoned up Roberta and said 'No, I don't want it. I don't want it in my house. I don't want anything at all to do with it.' Because there's a superstition near where I live that the spirit of a person follows their possessions, like clothes or anything that's intimate, and the last thing I wanted was to be haunted by the ghosts of John and Pat Hume, because when I'm doing [arpilleras] I get very, very emotionally involved with things, and I wanted to finish it and be able to walk away from it and not live with it after that. I certainly didn't



want to put a piece of John Hume's tie in the middle of it, and I already had it all together, more or less. I just couldn't think of a place to put it. I didn't want it in the house. I didn't want anything to do with it.

BH: I mean that's an incredible story about the creation of the piece, but it also talks to your own emotional investment in the piece. It's not like a commission where someone says 'Create this thing to represent something', you're deeply invested in what you make.

LA: Yeah, yeah, I do tend to go too far with it. Actually after the Gaza one I had a breakdown and ended up being counselled. I got so inside it, sitting down watching hours and hours of news and listening to personal accounts and it absolutely got to me.

BH: I can understand that.

LA: It all got too much.

BH: I think for many people, who are outside the artistic process, they don't always understand this sort of relationship between the material and its emotional content. They maybe see the product rather than the process, and what it means to the artist in creating it.

LA: When you're doing it, you're living it you feel like you're one of the people. In Aleppo, there was a school, a classroom that was buried underground and some children had passed away and the teacher as well. I did them as just shadows, they were people to me although they weren't actually existing people, to me they were people and that's the same as how it was with Pat and John when I was doing that; I was living with Pat and John Hume and sort of taking the emotions connected with it and all these very, very touching comments that were being made about Pat and trying to put that onto a textile.

BH: Which also helps explain not wanting any of John's clothing or artefacts in your home because it sort of intensifies, that sort of living with a person I suppose. So none of the material then is on the textile because I know with one of the others that were commissioned, John's ties were part of that textile, but with your one this is your own material?

LA: Yeah. I did say I was happy if she wanted to get someone else to add it after. I was completely fine with that, but not while it was here.

BH: I suppose also what was interesting with both of these textiles is, initially we commissioned the piece of John Hume and a little bit of time had passed since he had died, but Pat died quite close to the time of this commission and, was that a part of it? Were you so much more aware of that working on this piece, or would the length of time not necessarily make any difference to you because it was, sort of, the people?

LA: No, not really, no.

BH: I'm going to just change track little bit, and ask you, you know, we talked a little bit about the imagery. Could you tell me a little bit more? I have to confess it's not exactly my own expertise, but tell me a little bit about the techniques that you used in making the

piece, or the specific sewing techniques that you use? Anything you wanted to maybe say about that?

LA: Well, there's nothing sort of fancy about it. I printed photos and then kind of cut around it to get the shapes, or traced it but that was mainly because my eyesight, because I can't see straight lines. So when I do figures I normally do flat figures because I can't get them vertical, when they're standing up they tend to be a bit skewed, so it's better to get photographs of somebody in the position I want and then mess around with it.

BH: Yeah, so that's part of the technique you used to sort of create using the images and then sort of tracing them onto the textile, and then sewing around it.

LA: Yeah, yeah.

BH: I mean, the detail's incredible. I'm just looking at it again sitting here and noticing the logo on the scroll that Pat's holding from the university, John's hand on her shoulder. Actually I've looked at this so many times, but I hadn't actually noticed the fingers of his hand up on her shoulder, when you're working on it are you-

LA: Well, that's something on the photo that I used because I looked at a lot of photographs of that day and that's one that I picked because of that.



A work in progress. Photo Linda Adams, © Conflict Textiles

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BH: Oh! Interesting, because you could see the hand on the shoulder.

LA: Yeah, because it just symbolised the affection where he's saying 'I'm proud of you'. He wasn't just standing next to her, he was really part of it. It was just quite [an] emotional moment I thought and that was the one I chose.

BH: Yeah, that's really interesting and I suppose that's what's great about art, every time you look at it you see something different and when you say that it's very striking that Pat's hand is on the child's shoulder as well, so there's some sort of continuity between that. That's really interesting. I mean do you think, certainly with hand on the shoulder you looked at a lot of photos and you chose that one for that reason, so there's a very deliberate process for you in terms of how you're choosing that material?

LA: Yeah, always yeah.



Nearing the final stages. Photo Linda Adams, © Conflict Textiles

BH: And that's for all of your work, is that something you use? I mean you mentioned a little bit about some of your pieces that are in Conflict Textiles. How do you feel this piece and those relate? Do they relate, are they different? I know you said this was a much more co-created piece than some of the others, do you see them as a package of work or something completely different? I'm just wondering about the interrelation between them and Conflict Textiles' nearly 400 textiles. Any thought on that?

LA: I see them as individual pieces and I'm very grateful that they go to Conflict Textiles and that people can see them, but I'd rather not be around when they're seeing them.

BH: Yeah, because you described a really interesting thing to me, which was that you'd said you're very intimate and involved with the piece emotionally, but when it's done you feel



like you want it away from you?

LA: Almost, yeah.

BH: Which is interesting, I mean, how do you understand that, because you know, I would almost imagine that if I made something there'd be this push and pull where you'd want to keep it because it represents something, but you feel the opposite.

LA: Yeah, I think I need to let go emotionally, and I think if they were still here the emotions would build and still be here as well. Once it's been done it's time to be letting go.

BH: You're sort of giving them to others in a way, whoever comes to see it.

LA: Yeah, yeah.

BH: And you say you wouldn't even want to be there when other people are looking at it?

LA: No.

BH: And why's that? From a judgement perspective, or just because you want it to be something else.

LA: I don't know, I'm more comfortable out of the limelight.

BH: I mean that's fascinating, you know, through Conflict Textiles I've gotten to speak to different people about their work and I think everyone really approaches it differently, so I completely understand that, maybe once its finished, when you're so emotionally invested you want it to be out there - it's not exactly the words you said I don't want to put words in your mouth - but let it have a life of its own rather than staying with you.

LA: Yeah.

BH: Which, I think, this piece will most certainly have a life of its own once the exhibition is finished at the university. It'll move elsewhere as your other pieces have. I know you weren't at the launch which took place but you know there obviously, and I can speak for myself on that, it's an incredible piece and it is an emotive piece for people who are looking at it, and the chancellor of the university, Colin Davidson (who is an artist himself, he's a very accomplished portrait artist), he was very moved by the piece and spoke very eloquently about it. Is it significant to you that other people see it like that? Are you more invested in the piece and its emotions?

LA: I'm glad that they can see what I was trying to get across really, that's how I would view it, because I've got so much emotion in it, I would then want them to see it the way I see it, so that's great. I'm proud of it. I'm proud of that.

BH: Well certainly it was very clear for people there. Can I maybe ask you - and we'll start to wrap up I don't want to keep you here all day - and taking you back into the piece when you've so clearly said you want to give it away and put it out in the world. So how many hours would you say you invested in this piece, in a very practical way?

LA: I've got no idea, an awful lot, an awful lot; a lot of headaches.



BH: Yeah, I know you talked about the emotion of the material, what sort of other headaches - like technical headaches when something doesn't work?

LA: Physical headaches because of eye strain.

BH: Ah alright so physical issues that you're dealing with, I mean you've also mentioned those.

LA: If I do it all day, I get headaches for a couple of days after so it's nice to get a break and that's what makes it take so long.

BH: I mean that makes it even more challenging that it's having a physical toll on you not just an emotional toll.

LA: If you couple that with the nightmares brought on by the content, it's quite taxing.

BH: Yeah, it sounds like it. I mean it's just an incredible investment from yourself into the work, you know emotional and physically. Is there anything else then you might want to add or share with us about the work?

LA: I'd just like to say I'm extremely grateful that I met Roberta and she gave me the chance to do it, because without her I wouldn't have done, and I'm really grateful for that.

BH: Well, I'm sure she'd be really thankful to hear that. I feel the same way, I've ended up working with Roberta in different ways with these textiles over the years, and it's not in the way you have in terms of creating them, but it's been a very enriching experience, as it is talking to yourself today so I want to thank you for that. I know you had mentioned your grandmother and your husband and different family members and some of those challenges. Do you feel that in the end creating this work has helped resolve some of that for you in some ways, or is that stating things too strongly?

LA: Well, I'm not with my husband anymore. I've been divorced about twenty years, and I live on my own and my grandmother's obviously been gone a long time.

BH: I mean, more on an emotional level do you think it's created some bridges for you inside, or am I overstating things?

LA: Not especially. I love Ireland; I always have. I've been there several times and I've always felt at home there and I'm very, very grateful to watch what [Pat and John Hume] have done. If they hadn't done what they did I cannot imagine what life would be like now and just like we said I wish they'd been here to sort out Russia and Ukraine.

BH: Yeah absolutely, and look we're very, very grateful for you creating this piece and at the launch of the piece, similar to what you said earlier, I couldn't actually be there because I had to be dealing with a Covid situation but I'd written a little piece and I'd spoken about how not having Pat and John Hume around sort of, created a gap, a silence, a lack, a disappearance in some way, and that it felt to me a bit like the piece you'd created helped fill that gap and in a creative way keep some of those issues alive. I know they're not here to necessarily deal with the dramatic conflicts in the world as you mentioned, but it feels like



certainly at least some physical representation.

LA: The thing is they did what they did without anybody being fazed, and that is what is missing, I think.

BH: Yeah, just doing it because it feels like it's the right thing to do.

BH: Do you feel everyone's trying to score a point, rather than necessarily just do it -

LA: Yeah.

BH: - negotiate or address the issues of peace?

LA: At least if you're going to negotiate, mean it

BH: No, absolutely, and it just talks to how, you know - although this is now a piece that'll be displayed - that it's not just history. It's about the present; it's not just about the past.

LA: It's almost like Shakespeare, isn't it, because Shakespeare talks of all situations and all times and Pat and John's life is the same. It's going to be remembered in centuries time, what they did and how they did it is going to live on.

BH: Yeah, I mean that's a very profound thing to say and probably it'd be a really good place to end because what we're talking about is something that will last forever, in terms of their work, as well as what you've created - as long as we can keep the textiles protected of course - will also have a very long life, and lots of different lives, I suppose. It now is at the university, but it'll move somewhere else and it will keep those conversations going.

LA: I hope that'll happen

BH: I think it certainly will, so I just want to thank you very much for the piece -

LA: You're very welcome.

BH: - and for just taking the time to speak to me today, and just for me to learn a little bit more about the way it came about and your process. It's just absolutely fascinating. Thanks very much, I really appreciate it.

LA: You're welcome.

BH: Thank you.

LA: Okay, bye.

Transcription: Helen Maguire, Conflict Textiles Intern
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