

CONNECTING TIES:

A TRANSATLANTIC FRIENDSHIP AND THE NORTHERN IRELAND PEACE PROCESS

This exhibition illustrates through textile language the human dimension to the relationship between the United States, Ireland, and the Northern Ireland peace process.

The Northern Ireland Conflict ("The Troubles", 1969 - 1994), which focused on the division of the island of Ireland, left more than 3,600 individuals dead, many more injured, and impacted all sectors of society. From the mid-1970s, key people from the United States, including Massachusetts Congressman Thomas "Tip" O'Neill, were involved in discussions and negotiations during the peace process, culminating in the Good Friday Agreement signed in April 1998. In supporting peace in Northern Ireland, Tip O'Neill worked closely with John Hume, the Nobel Peace Prize winner from Northern Ireland. This unique friendship and the contribution of John Hume's wife Pat are illustrated in the exhibition.

The exhibition showcases three specially commissioned textiles highlighting the interconnections and work of these essential people in the peace process. The three textiles entitled *Tip O'Neill*, *Pat Hume*, and *John Hume, Peacemaker* are accompanied by several Northern Ireland textiles depicting the conflict and search for peace in the late 20th century. Four of these pieces, on loan from Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Museum Collection, were created in workshops in Northern Ireland in 2012 and 2013, in which two Northern Ireland communities explored the legacy of the conflict through textile language.

These textiles and many others on display draw their inspiration from early Chilean *arpilleras*, which are appliquéd picture textiles, handsewn from scraps of fabric onto hessian or burlap. Three Chilean *arpilleras* from the 1980s and 1990s narrate ordinary peoples' experiences of the oppressive seventeen-year-long Pinochet dictatorship, which seized power in September 1973. An *arpillera* from neighboring Argentina articulates the human rights violations of the Videla regime (1976 - 1983) and the enduring, courageous protests by the Abuelas (Grandmothers) de Plaza de Mayo.

This exhibition is curated by Conflict Textiles, a unique transnational collection of textiles focused on conflict and human rights abuses, in partnership with John Hume & Thomas P. O'Neill Chair in Peace, INCORE, Ulster University, and the Joseph P. Healey Library at the University of Massachusetts Boston.

Learn more about Conflict Textiles and the pieces in this exhibition:

