

[ARK / Conflict Textiles](#) launch: its third edition.

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With the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women fast approaching, the third edition of the ARK / Conflict Textiles installation in the McClay Library at Queen's University Belfast aims to add to the conversation on the topic through the language of textiles. It displays five pieces that illustrate the experiences of women with gendered violence from Syria, Afghanistan, the USA, Chile and Northern Ireland. The launch of the installation was carried out on 18 November 2024, led by Roberta Bacic, curator with Conflict Textiles.

Other members of the team present at the event include Gillian Robinson and Clem McCartney, trustees of Conflict Textiles, as well as volunteer Keli Harrington. As partners in the project a delegation from ARK was also present at the launch that included co-director, Paula Devine; survey manager, Martina McKnight; Jonny Hanson, Assistant Survey Manager; and Katrina Lloyd, director of the Kids' Life and Times survey.

Our hosts at McClay Library @ Queen's University; Jane O'Neill, University Librarian & Christine Carrothers from Library Services were also in attendance.

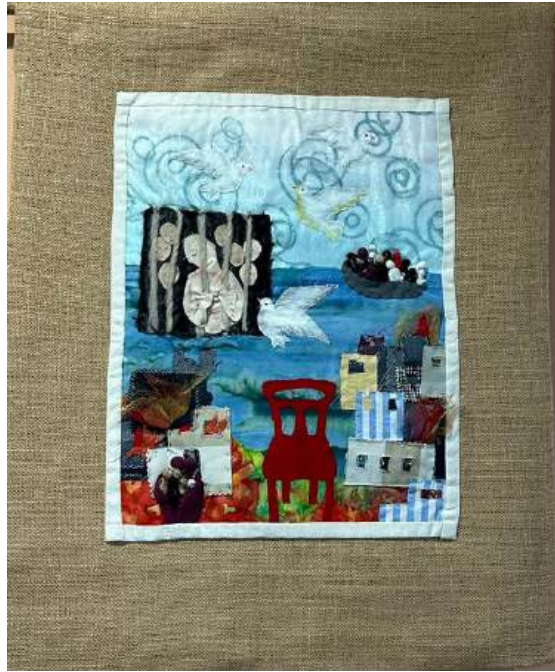
The artwork is presented in the style that has come to characterise the work of Conflict Textiles, the arpillera. This Chilean artform was born out of the 1973 dictatorship in the country as a way to denounce the abuses of the regime. As a way to honour its roots the organisation makes an effort to include at least one of the original arpilleras in every exhibition. In this case the chosen piece, "*John Paul we are waiting for you*", showcases how women seized the opportunity presented by the visit of the pope in 1987 to present social demands.



This is not the only instance where the themes of faith are interwoven with the denouncing of violence in the arpilleras that were showcased. As Basic explains, different countries and regions can present similar subjects in dramatically different ways that reflect personal and local contexts. The Northern Irish work of *“Praying for Peace”* presents the dichotomy between actors that look for peace and those that intend to pursue violence. Not only that but the first are presented as engaged in worship highlighting the religious dimension of the Troubles not as an element for division but as unifying through the common goal of peace and the action of prayer.



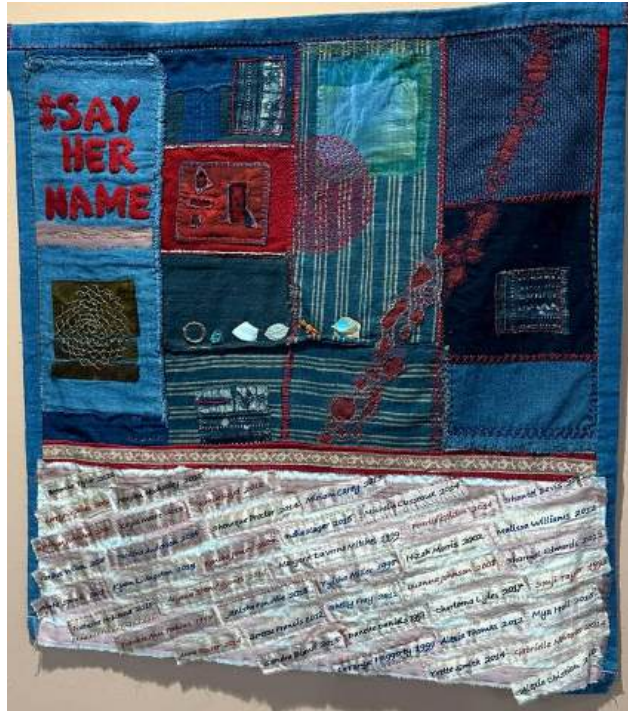
An additional piece on display was the work of Bassmaa Alkteefan and reflects her personal experience as a Syrian refugee living in Germany. It constitutes a direct indictment to the government of Bashar Al-Assad which is done framing a red chair, Al-Assad's chair, with the abuses suffered by Syrian people from forced displacement, violence and unlawful arrests or torture.



Furthermore, the “100 steps of freedom” textile portrays Afghan women’s restricted lives under the Taliban regime of 1996 – 2001. The blue silhouettes representing the women allude to the easily recognisable veils that women in the country wear, a weaponization of their faith by the Taliban used also by western countries to both infantilize them and spread islamophobia.



Finally, the arpillera titled #SAY HER NAME makes reference to the homonymous campaign started by Kimberlé Crenshaw, best known for the introduction of the concept of intersectionality. Both the piece and the campaign aim to bring attention to police brutality against black women whose experiences were underrepresented or absent altogether from the recent outrage and mobilizations on the issue in the USA.



After presenting the installation Paula Divine introduced the work of ARK as a social research hub product of the collaboration between Ulster and Queen's University. In particular, she highlighted the three public attitude surveys carried out by the organisation. They are constituted by the Northern Ireland, the Young and the Kid's Life and Times Survey. Through them ARK has been able to present the most accurate picture available in the region on the perceptions of the citizenry in a large range of issues that help shape academic research, policy, legislation, etc.

In line with the objective of the event, to combat the spread of gender violence, Divine highlighted the inclusion of a section on the topic within the surveys as well as a specific publication dedicated to this type of violence. The resulting report, *"Every Voice Matters! Violence Against Women in Northern Ireland"*, sheds light on the heavy lifting that still needs to be done in the region with 98% of surveyed women affirming they have experienced at least one form of violence or abuse in their lifetime. Some actions mentioned to address this problem is to reduce mistrust in institutions, working on changing public perceptions and accelerate the implementation of legislation and policy on the subject.

The closing remarks of the event were given by both Robinson and Bacic. Robinson thanked the longstanding collaboration with ARK and emphasised that what brought them together was a shared interest in social issues such as the prevention and denouncing of gender violence. It is the existence of a common cause that they can work towards that has allowed for vastly different organisations to come together. Bacic also echoed the importance of interconnections while also advocating for the integration of the language of textiles in multiple academic disciplines.



