

The Silent Vocal Language of Textiles

An exhibition of arpilleras, quilts and wall hangings

18th September 2026 – 2nd October 2026

D Contemporary, 1 Birdcage Walk, London, SW1H 9JJ

MARKING THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

Twenty-six textiles, made in Chile, Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland, England, Germany, Catalonia, Iceland, Greece and the United States, hang together here for the first time. In cloth, thread and stitch, each asserts the same human right: to have what happened remembered accurately.

What is an arpillera?

An arpillera is a three-dimensional appliqué picture, hand sewn from scraps of cloth onto a backing of hessian. The form took its present shape in Chile after the military coup of 1973, when women in Santiago began stitching what could not safely be said aloud: arrests, disappearances, hunger, and the long search for the missing. Light and easily folded, arpilleras were carried out of the country when other channels had closed, and they were often the first news the wider world received. They are still being made today, and are now shown as works of art and recognised as heritage.

Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland occupies a significant place in the Conflict Textiles collection. Through quilting, embroidery, appliqué and arpillera, community participants and textile artists have documented the legacy of The Troubles, holding on to personal experiences of loss, imprisonment, separation and resilience. Several works here were made in facilitated workshops with groups in Coleraine, Ballymoney, Cushendall and on Rathlin Island. Others are the work of individual artists, among them Irene MacWilliam's Peace Dove of 1987 and Deborah Stockdale's portrait of John Hume, commissioned to mark twenty-five years of the Good Friday Agreement.

About Conflict Textiles

Conflict Textiles grew out of The Art of Survival, shown across Derry ~ Londonderry in 2008, and from the personal collection of its curator Roberta Bacic, a Chilean collector and human rights advocate long resident in Northern Ireland. The collection holds arpilleras, quilts and wall hangings from conflicts around the world, and has travelled to more than 130 exhibitions in museums, universities, galleries, embassies and community spaces. Its archive is hosted by CAIN, the Conflict Archive on the INternet, at Ulster University, where the full record of every piece in this exhibition can be read.

The International Day of Peace

Observed each year on 21 September, the International Day of Peace is the occasion for this exhibition. A full catalogue, giving a photograph and the complete record of each work — maker, date, materials, ownership and provenance — accompanies the show.

CURATED BY

Roberta Bacic and Irene Pouliassi

Facilitator: Irene Pouliassi

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