

THE JOURNEY

Conflict Textiles



Recuerdos de Guadalupe / 'Guadalupe's Longings', Peruvian arpillera, 1989

Image: Martin Melaugh



Detail of Vida en Nuestra Población / 'Life in Our Poor Neighbourhood', Chilean arpillera, 1982

Image: Colin Peck

The exhibition **'The Art of Survival: International and Irish Quilts'**, launched on International Women's Day 2008, marks the start of our journey into the world of **"conflict textiles"**. Collector and Curator, Roberta Bacic, along with the museum staff, exhibited twenty six textile pieces from Zimbabwe, India, Peru and other countries at the Tower Museum. Eighteen Chilean arpilleras (ar-pee-air-ahs) were displayed at the Harbour Museum and twenty six Irish quilts were displayed across the city.

This journey, which started in Chile, has travelled beyond Ireland, sharing the universality of being a woman dealing with difficult situations such as conflict, poverty, political repression, or human rights violations.

The collection known as 'Conflict Textiles' will now find a new home within Derry City Council's archive.

CONFLICT
TEXTILES 

THE MESSAGES

Conflict Textiles



Violencia en las calles de Santiago de Chile durante toque de queda /
'Violence in the streets of Santiago de Chile during curfew', Chilean arpillera, 1979



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Quilt making, textiles and fabric have long been entwined in the history of this city. The task of collecting, preserving and making our textile collections accessible is vitally important for any city's memory bank.

This collection of unique textile pieces can be summarised with a quote from a catalogue titled "Weavings of war, fabrics of memory" (2005, Michigan State University), "Textile artists, mostly women, have broken their traditions of non figurative work to use pictorial imagery to communicate their personal experiences of war".

Women have often used these textile pieces as a way to communicate messages about their life. Using colorful fabrics and a simple design, they can illustrate what happened to them and their families during periods of conflict. The pieces show scenes in villages and cities, scenes of conflict, actual events and the aftermath. Some of the pieces have a hidden pocket which includes a written note or letter.

CONFLICT
TEXTILES 

CHILEAN ARPILLERAS

Conflict Textiles



Tenemos que vivir bajo llaves / 'We have to live behind closed doors', Chilean arpillera, c.1980



Detail of letter from Tenemos que vivir bajo llaves / 'We have to live behind closed doors', Chilean arpillera, c.1980 Image: Martin Melaugh

Folk art? Messages of protest? Historical records? Chilean arpilleras (ar-pee-air-ahs) are all of these. The brightly-colored pieces stitched onto sackings are chronicles of the life of the poor and oppressed in Chile in the 1970s and 1980s during the military regime of General Augusto Pinochet Ugarte.

Poor women and women whose husbands, sons, or brothers were killed, disappeared or imprisoned by the government met each week in workshops on the outskirts of Santiago. Here they shared their burdens and through sewing and companionship were able to record their personal stories of survival. Their handiwork told the world of their hunger, fear, lack of housing, and their missing men folk who are still referred to in Chile as the "disappeared" or "detained disappeared."

Arpilleras served to document, denounce and resist oppression in a country where all normal channels of free expression were closed. To the women, making arpilleras was a way to share their concerns. Today, arpilleras are a testament to the women's extraordinary resilience and survival through tremendous suffering and loss.

It should be said that not every arpillera depicts soup kitchens, demonstrations, arrests, or candlelight vigils. Some show life as the women wished; with markets, happy children, and a peaceful countryside.

CONFLICT TEXTILES