

Olla común al interior de una dependencia de iglesia / Soup Kitchen in a Room Inside the Church /

教会の中での共同なべ

Chilean arpillera, Irma Müller, 1988

Photo Tomoko Sakai

Oshima Hakko Museum collection



As the financial situation worsened in poor neighbourhoods after the coup, people increasingly found it difficult to provide food for the family. Some church-related groups reacted to this situation by organising dining halls for children (*comedor infantil*), which provided lunch for children in the community. This was basically a charitable service with a firm structure between the giver and the given. Nevertheless, many residents in the neighbourhoods, as they helped in the running of dining halls, developed the skills and networks necessary for organising activities by themselves. This resulted in soup kitchens, which provided meals not only for children but for everybody in the community including adults, in some areas.

Irma Muller, the maker of this arpillera, was one of those who founded the earliest arpillera workshops. Her son, Jorge, disappeared with his fiancé in 1974. Irma made many arpilleras about street actions and demonstrations by the Association of Relatives of the Detained Disappeared (AFDD), in which she also took part. Nevertheless in this arpillera, her theme is the everyday scene of the soup kitchen, a lifeline for the impoverished during the Pinochet era.

Colgándose de la luz / Getting Electricity by Tapping / 電気を拝借

Chilean arpillera, anon., c1990

Photo Tomoko Sakai

Oshima Hakko Museum collection



There are some features that are commonly seen in many *arpilleras* depicting everyday life in a *población* (shantytowns in Chile). One of them is electronic wires that connect each house with the main power supply. By tapping into the main supply, residents obtained electricity by stealth. Diverged electronic wires are thus a symbolic landscape element that indicates the setting of the piece is a *población*.

This arpillera shows a tapping work being done by one of the *población* dwellers. As he carries out his work from a ladder a vehicle passes by with a sign "CHILECTRA," a Chilean electric company, patrolling the area to prevent the theft of electricity. They remove the equipment for tapping wires, which form like mice, and thus residents call the CHILECTRA people "cats" that go after mice. Residents would start putting on the "mice" immediately after the patrol had left. A "rat race."

In the foreground children are seen playing with a skipping rope. Poverty that affected the lives of many is nevertheless portrayed here in a gentle, humorous tone, which shows people's ability to adapt to, and survive in, severely changed circumstances.

Comprando juntos / Buying together / 共同購入

Chilean arpillera, anonymous, 1990c

Photo Tomoko Sakai

Oshima Hakko Museum collection



This arpillera depicts one of the activities organised in poblaciones (poor neighbourhoods) in order to deal with the poverty and hardship which was a direct result of the neo-liberal economic policies of the Pinochet regime. Many households in poblaciones found it difficult to secure daily food for the family because of prolonged unemployment. Facing this situation, people started to buy food and daily necessities together, as this meant less expense for each household.

In this arpillera, we see a sign "COMPRANDO JUNTOS (Buying together)" on the roof of the building at the front; this is where people divide and share the stuff purchased co-operatively. The use of real rice, pasta and clothes, in plastic bags sewn on to the tapestry, is notable. In the background, there are not only houses that tap into the main electric supply but also houses with an electric wire connected to another house, which testifies to the spirit of sharing among poblacion residents that was maintained, even in the midst of poverty.

Taller de arpilleras FASIC / FASIC Arpillera Workshop / FASIC のアルピジェラ作業所

Chilean arpillera, María Meneses, 1991

Photo Tomoko Sakai

Oshima Hakko Museum collection



This piece was made in a workshop facilitated by FASIC (Fundación de Ayuda Social de las Iglesias Cristianas), a human-rights organisation that supported arpillera-making activities as well as the Vicariate of Solidarity. It depicts women making arpilleras in a workshop. We observe women sitting inside the workshop room holding small arpilleras that have the sun and mountains embroidered on them. This arpillera also clearly shows the sun and the Andes mountain range in the background.

Many arpillera workshops were closed down after the end of the military dictatorship. The scene of women who gather in the church or community hall stitching scraps together, sometimes chatting about family issues or politics, and sometimes in silence, has become a memory of the past in some areas. Meanwhile, some poblaciones (poor neighbourhoods) have arpillera workshops active even today; there are also women who make arpilleras at home. Their activities pass memoryscapes of the dictatorship era, the craft of arpillera making and the means to deal with ongoing social problems, onto the next generation.

La cueca sola / Cueca Sola / 孤独なクエカ

Chilean arpillera, Violeta Morales, 1990

Photo Tomoko Sakai

Oshima Hakko Museum collection



This arpillera shows women solo dancing the traditional Cueca. It is Chile's national dance representing different emotions and stages of romance, and is usually danced in pairs wearing colourful clothing. Here the women dance alone, sombre and unsmiling, dressed in black and white, wearing the image of their disappeared loved one over their heart. Performing the national dance in this manner was their way of denouncing the government's actions in a public space.

The boldness, determination and creativity of the women dancing Cueca Sola has inspired people all over the world. The song "They Dance Alone" by the British singer-songwriter Sting, for instance, was based on it and has been performed by many other musicians.

Cueca Sola is a significant and popular arpillera theme and many pieces have been made on this topic. This particular work was done by Violeta Morales, a prominent member of the Association of Detained and Disappeared (AFDD) and a co-founder of the Folkloric Musical Ensemble of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared, a folk group created by arpilleristas to collectively compose and sing songs about their lives as women alone. Violeta Morales died in 2001, never having found her brother Newton, who disappeared in 1974.

11 de septiembre 1973 en Santiago de Chile / 11th September 1973, Santiago in Chile /

1973 年 9 月 11 日のサンチアゴ

Chilean arpillera, Norma Torres, c1990

Photo Tomoko Sakai

Oshima Hakko Museum collection



This arpillera graphically depicts the bombing of the National Palace, La Moneda, in Santiago Chile, on 11 September 1973. This key event of the US backed military coup left La Moneda, the government headquarters, aflame and deposed the democratically elected socialist government of President Salvador Allende, inaugurated in 1970. It paved the way for the installation of the repressive Pinochet dictatorship, which lasted 17 years.

Whilst the background depicts the sun, sky and mountains-classical features of Chilean arpilleras- it is the chilling images of the National Palace aflame, tanks and armed personnel which dominate the foreground. The message attached to this piece states: "The bombing of La Moneda shows what happened on 11/9/1973 when the military of Chile bombarded the palace with the fires inside. It's a sad fact that marks our history."

Undoubtedly this is one of the most important historical memoryscapes to many Chileans, for both the generation who witnessed the event first-hand and those born later.

Estadio Nacional / National Stadium / 国立競技場

Chilean arpillera, Rosario Concha, 1990

Photo Tomoko Sakai

Oshima Hakko Museum collection



In the aftermath of the vicious coup in 1973, the Pinochet military forces transformed the National Stadium into one of many detention centres created in Santiago. It is estimated that twelve thousand people were detained in the stadium between 11 September and 7 November 1973. Some were taken to other detention centres from here while others were tortured, and sometimes executed here. Among those killed in the National Stadium was Victor Jara, a folk singer whose name and music is globally respected today.

In this arpillera, against the background of sun, sky and mountains-classical features of Chilean arpilleras-armed soldiers surround the National Stadium, alerting us to the human rights' abuses perpetrated within. The message on the back of this arpillera bears witness to the many atrocities committed: "September in 1990, Rosario Concha tells us this story. We saw it and we experienced it. People were sacrificed in the National Stadium, after the fall of our President Allende who was killed in La Moneda, and Pinochet took power to kill them as rats during the dictatorship."

No a la pena de muerte / No to Death Penalty / 死刑反対

Chilean arpillera, anon., 1990

Photo Tomoko Sakai

Oshima Hakko Museum collection



This arpillera depicts a street demonstration against the death penalty. The banner held by the marchers reads "NO A LA PENA DE MUERTE (No to the Death Penalty)." We see many women in the demonstration, probably family members and relatives of the disappeared/detained. During the Pinochet dictatorship, many political prisoners were executed or killed by the military without trial.

Facing the demonstration are three police officers in khaki uniforms with weapons in their arms. Two of the marchers are being taken to the police vehicle with their arms raised. Violent interrogations, and perhaps torture too, would be waiting for them. A man in the centre looks as if he is crying.

The dark blue fabric used for the ground is in sharp contrast with the unusual vermilion coloured mountains. These colours and the absence of sun – a classical feature in Chilean arpilleras – convey a sense of much disorder in the normal order of things. The images of defiant protesters and of people forced to source electricity by tapping into the central grid adds to the sense of unease evident in this arpillera.

Triunfo del NO / Triumph of No / NO の勝利

Chilean arpillera, Mercedes Contreras Reyes, c1990

Photo Tomoko Sakai

Oshima Hakko Museum collection



A handwritten note tucked in a little pocket at the back of the arpillera states: "This arpillera represents the triumph of NO, because it was a great joy for all of us Chileans, and because the winning of the NO campaign brought democracy, which all of us Chileans were waiting for". The plebiscite in Chile on the 5th of October, 1988, determined that the Pinochet presidency would cease in a year, with the NO campaign winning with nearly 56% of the vote.

In this arpillera, a man is hanging a banner on a tree that reads "5 OCTOBER TRIUNFO DEL NO (5 October, the triumph of NO)." People are celebrating the historical triumph with colourful flags; cars on the street are flying Chilean flags. At the top-left is embroidered a rainbow, the symbol used in the NO-campaign. In this arpillera it represents hope that the era of a dark violent past will turn towards a bright future.

Cuerpos desenterrados en Pisagua / Unburied Bodies of the Concentration Camp Pisagua /

ピサグア強制収容所で掘り起こされた遺体

Chilean arpillera, anon., c1990

Photo Tomoko Sakai

Oshima Hakko Museum collection



Pisagua is a port in northern Chile facing the Pacific Ocean. The place had been used as a concentration camp several times in Chilean history, and the military led by Pinochet used the site as a detention camp for political prisoners. In 1990, the Vicariate of Solidarity presented a claim of illegal burial in Pisagua, which resulted in an investigation excavation taking place there. A mass grave that contained 20 bodies was found. These were later identified as some of the people who “disappeared” during the dictatorship.

In this arpillera, a forensic investigation team visits the site of Pisagua Prison Camp. There are also people looking at the excavation going on, presumably family members of the disappeared, which includes a couple who are holding each other tightly. One man bends down closely beside one of the bodies. Did he recognise a known face?

The representation of excavated bodies in this arpillera, such as the use of real sand and burlap, is striking. The description of the scene, embroidered with black thread on a white cloth, reads: “Facing the sea and with natural walls of mountains, a place with no possibility of escape, however they executed them for the reason of attempting to run away.”