

Regional Cultural Centre, Letterkenny



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CHILEAN ARPILLERAS 11th September - 11th October 2008

'The Arpilleras are story tellers, for it is through them that these women have recorded and preserved the memory of a period of Chilean History that many others have chosen to forget.'

Quoted from 'Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love, The Arpilleras movement in Chile 1974 – 1994' by Marjorie Agosín. Foreword by Isabel Allende. University of Mexico Press 1994.

To commemorate the 35th anniversary of the military coup in Chile, the Regional Cultural Centre Letterkenny presents an amazing collection of Chilean Arpilleras (textiles), curated by Chilean native Roberta Bacic.

Arpilleras (pronounced "ar-pee-air-ahs) are three-dimensional appliqué textiles of Latin America. "Arpilleras" is actually from the Chilean tradition, an old regional pictorial appliqué technique from Isla Negra on the coast of Chile, whereby rags were used to create images and then embroidered on large pieces of cloth.

Initially Hessian, or in Spanish "arpillera", was used as their backing, and that then became the name for this particular type of quilt. Generally they are known as quilts or wall hangings. They are considered contemporary craft. Sometimes small dolls were made and added to make the three-dimensional effect.

After the military coup in 1973, which introduced the Pinochet regime, the Association of Relatives of the Disappeared in Chile began to make arpilleras. They were handcrafted, using scraps of materials collected by women or donated by the churches in Chile. They tell their stories and support their families. They were also made by women political prisoners,

either while inside prisons or when released. They used them to camouflage notes sent to the world outside, to people who would denounce what was happening at national or international levels or people who could act on their behalf to either assist them in their different needs or would be able to pass on messages to their dear ones. Even the most suspicious guards in jails did not think to check the appliqué pictures for messages, since sewing was seen as 'inconsequential women's work'. Nor did other people recognise the power they could have when denouncing what was really happening and was otherwise denied by the government authorities and ignore by most of society.

Chilean women found refuge in the Vicariate of Solidarity organized by the Catholic Church. In dark basements and other secret meeting rooms in churches, NGOs and other solidarity places, mothers, wives, lovers, friends, daughters and sisters began to design and sew together in order to capture their common tales of torture, of pain and love and save them from oblivion. Part of the church and a network of solidarity people smuggled 'arpilleras' out of Chile and so the world – and the ones who listened – came to know more about the oppressive, unjust and bloody life under the dictatorship. They were often bought as a way to support the struggle, including some of the ones you see in this display.

<http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts/index.html>

CHILEAN ARPILLERAS SEMINAR

23rd of September 2008 @ 6 – 9pm, Regional Cultural Centre Letterkenny FREE

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