



TRANSFORMING THREADS OF RESISTANCE:  
POLITICAL ARPILLERAS & TEXTILES BY WOMEN  
FROM CHILE AND AROUND THE WORLD





The Art of Conflict Transformation Event Series Presents

**Transforming threads of resistance: political arpilleras & textiles  
by women from Chile and around the world**

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**Foreword**

Since 2008 the interdisciplinary Art of Conflict Transformation Event Series has served as a platform, bringing to the University of Massachusetts Amherst scholars, artists, and conflict resolvers to explore the geography of conflict; the spaces in and on which conflict has been imprinted and expressed; and the terrains of resistance, resilience, and transformation. In 2012 we are proud to host events focusing on women's acts of resistance to state violence in conflict zones throughout the world through their creation of arpilleras and other political textiles.

The exhibition on display at the Student Union Art Gallery serves as the centerpiece of six weeks of activities interrogating women's critical engagement with state oppression and their crafting of visual narratives that have defied silencing. The Art of Conflict Transformation Art Gallery of the National Center for Technology and Dispute Resolution also hosts this exhibition online at <http://blogs.umass.edu/conflictart>.

The Art of Conflict Transformation Event Series is indebted to Dr. John Mullin, Dean of the Graduate School, whose visionary and steadfast support has been instrumental to its success. Outstanding administrative support has been provided for the 2012 activities by Michelle Goncalves from the Legal Studies and Political Science Programs. A very special thanks goes to internationally renowned curator Roberta Bacic, whose arpilleras exhibitions have been shown in museums and at universities throughout the globe. Professor Bacic, our faculty-in-residence, has spent close to a year providing scholarly and artistic expertise crafting this powerful exhibition, so beautifully displayed on these pages by Shaowei Wang.

We hope that this exhibition will contribute to a deeper appreciation of the role that artistic responses to conflict can play in its transformation; stimulating consideration of our roles as viewers, fellow humans who are connected to state violence wherever it is occurring or has occurred. Being included in this geography challenges us to consider what roles we might play in processes of remembering and of ensuring a more peaceful and just future.

Generous support for the 2012 events has been provided by:  
The Graduate School; the College of Humanities and Fine Arts; the College of Social and Behavioral Sciences; the Legal Studies Program; the Department of Political Science; and the Vice Chancellor for Research and Engagement. This program was made possible in part by a grant from the UMass Arts Council and additional support from the Center for Heritage and Society; the Center for Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies; the Center for Public Policy & Administration; the Center for Research on Families; the Commonwealth Honors College; the Department of History; Global Horizons; the Institute for Holocaust, Genocide, and Memory Studies; the Law and Society Initiative; the National Center for Technology and Dispute Resolution; the Psychology of Peace and Violence Program; the Public History Program; the Social Justice Mediation Institute; and the Women of Color Leadership Network-Everywoman's Center.

**Leah Wing**

Director, Art of Conflict Transformation Event Series  
Legal Studies Program  
Department of Political Science  
University of Massachusetts Amherst

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## Introduction

Arpilleras (pronounced “ar-pee-air-ahs”) are three-dimensional appliquéd textiles of Latin America, which originated in Chile. From the first, pieces of strong hessian fabric (arpillera in Spanish) were used as the backing and that word became the name for this particular type of tapestry. At a later stage, dolls and other little memorabilia started to be sewn onto these “cuadros” (pictures) which gives them a special personalized three dimensional quality.

This style of sewing developed into an act of political subversion and a way to raise international awareness of the violence and repression suffered under the Pinochet dictatorship. Stitching and sewing to express the experience of state violence and human rights violations through the arpillera then spread to other Latin American countries, Europe and Africa. The textiles and arpilleras in this exhibition are representative of the use of scraps of material, thread and needle for expressing resistance. These arpilleras have demonstrated resistance: resistance against poverty by creating a grassroots export; resistance against the regime by telling the story of daily life under Pinochet; resistance against the very idea of resistance by making sewing an act of subversion; and resistance against the expectations of the art world by being exhibited as works of art.

In the foreword to *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love: The Arpillera Movement in Chile 1974 – 1994* by Marjorie Agosín (1996), Isabel Allende says: “With leftovers of fabric and simple stitches, the women embroidered what could not be told in words, and thus the arpilleras became a powerful form of political resistance.” Marjorie Agosín herself says: “The arpilleras flourished in the midst of a silent nation, and from the inner patios of churches and poor neighbourhoods, stories made of cloth and yarn narrated what was forbidden.”

This collection specially curated for the University of Massachusetts, Amherst epitomizes some of the irruptions of state violence and human rights violations in everyday life and in civil society, both current and historical. It also focuses on the various ways women have responded to that violence by giving a sense of normality to life. In *Weavings of War, Fabrics of Memory* (2005), James Young says: “The women of these disparate cultures have turned to their textile arts as a means by which to live with war and its memory on a daily basis.” I would add that when we view them, we also come to see where we stand on all of these issues, what our social and political responsibilities are to act on them and how those translate into action.

I invite you to respond to this exhibit, so carefully put together, with your mind and your heart--and perhaps with stitches of your own. I give a special thanks to Breege Doherty in Donegal, Ireland, who, in writing the captions, patiently, skilfully and full heartedly worked for months researching, interviewing and following up each of the stories that are interwoven into these textiles.

**Roberta Bacic**  
Curator, January 2012  
[www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts](http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts)

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### Nuestro taller de arpilleras / Our arpilleras workshop

Mujeres Creativas Workshop, Peru, 2008

Photo Colin Peck

Arpilleras became prominent in Chile during the time of the Pinochet dictatorship (1973 to 1990) and portray women's struggles in their everyday lives. These tapestries are far from two-dimensional pictures. Scrap material and stitching create the simple, clear lines and forms of the figures and motifs depicted on these arpilleras. This gives the viewer an insight into the determination of these women. Women have used this traditional craft to stitch together their struggles, concerns and hopes for themselves and their communities and to engage new audiences. Their pieces travel to places they themselves would never dream of journeying.

This arpillera was made by the Mujeres Creativas workshop in Lima. This group supports women who have been displaced as a result of the war in Peru. The image of untidy industriousness depicts a world of creativity that provides a shelter from the chaos of war for the women involved. In the tumultuous world they have inhabited, the routine, the camaraderie and the sense of ownership of the workshop, allow these women a route to a kind of peace.

At present, many of the women who participated in this workshop are elderly and cannot make a living from their work. As the state has not provided reparations and minimal health care for their war affected and poor people, it is through Movimiento Manuela Ramos and the generosity of German Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and churches that they get their basic needs met.

The process of depicting women's stories through arpilleras has taken place far beyond Chile. In 2009, Breege Doherty, inspired by an arpillera exhibition in Donegal, Ireland, invited this exhibition's curator, Roberta Bacic, to introduce the process to a group of women participating in a women's cross-border/cross-community project. The hands on nature of the workshop allowed women to learn about the experience of trauma and conflict of another culture, whilst tentatively exploring its connection to their own experience, living in a post conflict society—all through the medium of cutting, stitching and conversing.

Courtesy of the curator



## Paz – Justicia - Libertad / Peace - Justice - Freedom

Chilean arpillera, anon., late 1970s

Photo Colin Peck

This is a traditional arpillera, made in the late 1970s, depicting a protest by women against the Pinochet dictatorship. Some of the women are boldly defiant as they clash cymbals in front of a police car. Others carry leaflets spreading word of a campaign to find their missing loved ones, who have disappeared without trace through the actions of the armed forces.

The material used makes this piece particularly poignant. The dark grey background material is from the trousers of a disappeared man and the road is made from the checked fabric shirt of another. Marjorie Agosin, in her book, *Tapestries of hope, threads of love: The Arpillera movement in Chile* (second edition, 2008) informs us that creating

arpilleras from the clothing of missing family members, as well as from their own clothing, was common practice for the early arpilleristas, who often had no other material available to them. Moved by the poignancy of this she states: "They have gathered from the most intimate and private of places a story that is both chilling and beautiful, horrifying and calming."

Working on arpilleras could be therapeutic. As the arpillerista Violeta Morales has said: "I put all my energy into the arpillera workshop. It was sometimes the only thing that kept me balanced emotionally."

Courtesy Alba Sanfeliú, Spain





## Cimarrón / Runaway slave

Colombian arpillera, Mujeres  
tejiendo sueños y sabores de paz,  
Mampuján, 2010

Photo Martin Melaugh

Juana Alicia Ruiz is a survivor of Mampuján, a small town in northwest Colombia that was the site of a massacre on 11 March 2000 by the now demobilised United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) a coalition of right-wing counter-insurgency paramilitary groups which was alleged to have links to the military and members of the government and congress, a number of whom were indicted before the courts for collusion. In that brutal attack, 12 people were killed, from nearby Las Brisas, and more than 1,400 civilians were displaced. Initially scattered, about half of the group settled in 2002 in Mampuján Nuevo, on small plots of land about eight kilometres away from their old community.

This arpillera, exhibited for the first time at UMass, was made by a group of 15 women. Through this process they have found solace, a way to bear witness by sewing and a means of denouncing and sharing their dramatic experiences. They have exhibited in Geneva and several places in their own country.

Violence against communities in Colombia is not a recent phenomenon and a part of the powerful stories of these arpilleristas resides in seeing what happens today as something that is not isolated.

Juana, when asked what she would say about this arpillera which depicts state violence against her ancestors, replied: "Cimarrón means a black rebel, or slave who has escaped to the heights of the mountains. It is a textile account of the daily activities and human rights violations of our African ancestors. This happened in the big haciendas of Cartagena. They rebelled and escaped to the hills of Maria, setting up the palenques where we live now. The big man carries a punishment for a failed attempt to escape. It consists of a piece of tree tied to his shoulders."

Courtesy of the curator







## Desplazamiento / Displacement

Colombian arpillera, Mujeres tejiendo sueños y sabores de paz, Mampuján, 2010

Photo Martin Melaugh

Displacement is the theme of this arpillera. It was created by a group of 15 women who survived the massacre of Mampuján by the paramilitary coalition, United Self-Defence Forces of Colombia (AUC) on 11 March 2000. AUC was a coalition of right-wing counter-insurgency paramilitary groups which was alleged to have links to the military and members of the government and congress, a number of whom were indicted before the courts for collusion. The entire community of Mampuján Viejo, along with families from the nearby community of Las Brisas, more than 1,400 people, were displaced at this time. Villagers fled when the AUC accused them of cooperating with insurgent guerrillas and threatened to kill them if they didn't vacate within 24 hours.

In this arpillera we see the presence of the military, harassing people, some of whom appear distraught. A home has been set on fire. There is an air of urgency and frenzy depicted as people flee their homes, bringing with them few possessions, carrying children in their arms; those too frail to walk are carried in a hammock.

Juana Alicia Ruiz, one of the women who created this arpillera has this to say on the theme of displacement: "Displacement in Colombia is like any typical displacement as it happens at times during night. It includes violent rape, burning of houses, having to leave behind belongings, houses and animals. The lady who is being carried on a hammock is a sick person, very old and who cannot walk. She is like the soul of the village."

According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Colombia ranks third on the list of nations with displaced people. Unlike other large displaced populations, however, Colombia's half-million refugees are not technically classed as refugees, as the vast majority of them do not cross the border out of Colombia; in the language of international law, they remain internally displaced persons, or IDPs.

Courtesy of the curator



## Toma de terrenos en los barrios de Lima / Squatters in the shantytowns of Lima

Peruvian arpillera, Mujeres Creativas Workshop, 1986

Replica, Mujeres Creativas Workshop, 2008

Photo Martin Melaugh

Made by the Mujeres Creativas workshop in Lima, Peru, this piece portrays the arrival of families of displaced people in one of Lima's shantytowns. The poverty of their temporary homes is apparent from the wooden planks they are unloading from trucks. The instability of their lives is evoked by the figures of the women standing guard to resist the police from coming and wrecking the houses. This arpillera depicts the isolation and poverty of those displaced by the war and their tenuous link to a kind of peaceful normality.

Over 600,000 people were displaced within Peru during the 1980s and 1990s as a result of armed conflict between the government, self defence groups and insurgent forces of the Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru Resistance Movement.

Presently, the urban slums on the outskirts of Lima, are home to some 200,000 internally displaced peoples (IDPs). Although the majority of

them came to Lima over 15 years ago, they live in the same makeshift shacks that we see in this arpillera, constructed upon their arrival. The majority of IDPs endure constant hardship; they work on average more than 14 hours a day in informal street trade and temporary work to make ends meet.

A 2004 law on internal displacement helped to protect IDPs rights, as it incorporated the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement and created a division within the Ministry of Women and Social Development (MIMDES) to coordinate the response to internal displacement. This body has improved the situation of some IDPs by starting to register them for eventual reparations, and implementing some livelihood support programs. However, during 2010 as in 2009, the number of people registered remained at only 5,000.

Courtesy of the curator





## The day we will never forget

Zimbabwean arpillera, 2012

Collective work facilitated by Shari Eppel

Solidarity Peace Trust Zimbabwe, [www.solidaritypeacetrust.org](http://www.solidaritypeacetrust.org)

Photo Shari Eppel

This arpillera shows the total destruction of the Killarney informal settlement in Zimbabwe in May 2005, during Operation Murambatsvina in which the government of Zimbabwe, deploying the army and police, purposefully destroyed housing around the country. An estimated 500,000 people were evicted and displaced in the space of a month. Some have referred to this exercise as a crime against humanity. Murambatsvina means “get rid of the filth” and the poor of Zimbabwe were left with the clear message that they were the filth that should be forced out of urban areas.

The most devastating and immediate effect of this operation was the fact that hundreds of thousands of people were rendered homeless and left without any viable form of livelihood. People were told to return to their rural origins, but many simply did not have a rural home to go back to.

The girls who made this arpillera are all from the Killarney informal settlement; all lost their homes in 2005 and have been forced to move several times since then, before returning to the only area they know

as home. Some suffered deaths of their relatives, and one, the death of her baby, during the demolitions. Their quality of life now is severely reduced from that of a few years ago. All these girls are raising babies and children as single mothers, and most are HIV positive.

From conversations held while sewing, Shari recounts: “The girls have no comprehension of what the demolitions were about, and say they think the government was trying to kill people by taking everything away from them; not sure myself if I understand what it was all about.”

The process of creating this arpillera has enabled these women to share their stories, with confidence and purpose, to audiences far beyond the Killarney settlement. As Shari points out, these girls, similar to their arpillera, are at the start of a new journey: “Finishing a project has certainly given them an incentive, and they are all showing up for the group these days. We are on to our next project now.”

Courtesy Killarney girls, Zimbabwe







## The great Irish famine 1845 – 1852

Helen Heron, Northern Ireland, 2009

Photo Colin Peck

This piece illustrates a dark period of Ireland's past, the Great Famine of the 1840s, when one million people died from starvation and disease, and a further one million emigrated. The famine occurred after the repeated failure of the potato crops upon which the poor depended almost entirely for food. Its impact was exacerbated by the actions and inactions of the Whig government from 1846-1852.

The government did not prohibit the export of grain from Ireland, especially during the winter of 1846-47, when there was little food in the country. Nor did they take steps to ensure that imported grain was distributed to those in greatest need. The soup-kitchen scheme was terminated in September 1847 after only six months of operation despite the enormous harvest deficiency that year. The pitiful wages that the government paid on its short-lived public works scheme in the winter of 1846-47 did not provide people with the means to afford the greatly inflated price of food. In addition, the poor-law system of providing relief, either within workhouses or outside them, was very restrictive adding to the burden of additional sectarian policies placed by the government on those in need of food.

The government did nothing to restrain the ruthless mass eviction of families from their homes during the famine. Up to 500,000 people were evicted in the years from 1846 to 1854, as landlords sought to rid their estates of pauperized farmers and labourers.

The death of one million people in the midst of an absolute sufficiency of food and the violence, suffering and oppression inflicted on families through mass evictions stemmed partly from their perceived status as the cultural and social inferiors of those who governed them.

Alexander Somerville, in his *Letters from Ireland During the Famine of 1847* gives a first hand account of the devastating impact of the famine from his encounter with a father of six: "... We had nothing all yesterday, and this morning we had only a handful of yellow meal among us all, made into a stirabout (porridge consisting of oatmeal or cornmeal boiled on water or milk), before I came out to work—nothing more and nothing since. Sure this hunger will be the death of all of us" (Irish Academic Press, 1994, KDM Snell, editor).

Heron uses this arpillera to imaginatively voice her own connection to one of the areas worse affected by the famine—her ancestral home of Bantry in County Cork. The piece is made up of layers of fabric depicting a mountain and sea view superimposed onto a map including Bantry. A number of quintessential images of the famine are included—the workhouse (where many of the destitute died), the Coffin Ship (used to transport emigrants to the USA), the burning cabin with its evicted tenants, the woman scrambling for potatoes in the earth, and a funeral procession.

Courtesy of the artist



## Sala de torturas / Torture chamber

Chilean arpillera by Violeta Morales, 1996

Photo Colin Peck

This is one of the most visually startling pieces in the exhibition with its simple black background and stark white figures. It graphically shows people being tortured in various ways, portraying them in a dehumanised way with featureless faces, just as torture dehumanises individuals. The symbolic enclosure of the people held in captivity accurately describes life in Chile during those years.

Chile's second national Truth Commission Report on Torture and Political Imprisonment (Valech II) published in August 2011, states that the total number of people officially registered as torture victims, from the Pinochet era, is now 38,254.

In this arpillera, Violeta Morales is outspoken about Chile's infamous history of torture, which was long unknown in the wider world.

As co-ordinator of the group Sebastián Acevedo, which was primarily concerned with the issue of torture, she was relentless in ensuring that people everywhere were informed of the widespread use of torture in Chile. With other women, she founded the Folkloric Musical Ensemble of Relatives of the Detained-Disappeared, as: "...we also wished to sing our message of protest" Agosín, M., (2008).

Violeta Morales died in 2002, never having found her brother Newton, who disappeared in 1974.

Courtesy Marjorie Agosín, Chile / USA







### Violar es un crimen / Rape is a crime

Peruvian arpillera from Mujeres Creativas workshop, 1985

Replica by FCH, Mujeres Creativas workshop, Peru, 2008

Photo Martin Melaugh

It is remarkable that, in the midst of the destructive civil war in Peru from 1980 to 2000, a group of women living in Lima dared to publicise the plight of village women who had been raped and forced to resettle in the slums of the capital. This arpillera depicts the protest taken on their behalf.

Maria, who created this piece, said: "In October 1985 many people were killed in Ayacucho and women were raped, but nobody protested. Two groups of us decided to demonstrate in front of Comando Conjunto (Joint Military Command) in Lima, since the people actually living in Ayacucho felt too vulnerable to do so. We displayed a banner that read 'Rape is a crime' and we placed flowers shaped as a cross to make it known that so many had died. Five of us decided to make an arpillera of our action to show we do not condone such brutality."

War rape, which has until recently been a hidden element of war, and is seldom prosecuted, has a severe impact on victims. In addition to the

impact of traumatic injuries, sexually transmitted disease, and pregnancy, long-term psychological injuries may include depression, anxiety disorders, flashbacks and shame.

During the civil war in Peru in the 1980s, the National Reparations Council recorded 1,150 women reporting rape and sexually violent incidents. To date, not one of the perpetrators has been sentenced. Diana Portal, a lawyer with the Organization for the Defense of Women's Rights, (DEMUS) says that: "In general, the Peruvian state is not dealing effectively with these cases. The closure of the Reparations Council for the Victims of Violence is evidence of lack of political will, commitment and responsibility on the part of the government." ("Politics of Rape: Peruvian Women Want Justice." Gender Across Borders organization, 5 January, 2011).

Courtesy of the curator



## Blutspur / Blood trail

German textile, Heidi Drahota, Nuremberg, 2011

Photo Claus Sperr

On the first of July 2011 at the opening of Heidi's workshop in Nuremberg, the curator was moved, stunned, touched, shaken, and impressed by this textile work. "I stood in front of it for a few moments and had to come back again and again. From that very moment I could see it occupying a central place at the UMass exhibition." Asked how she got to conceive this piece, she said:

"In 2010 I took part in an art weekend in Fürth in Bavaria. The exhibitions were part of the 175 year's celebration of the first railway track from Nuremberg to Fürth.

"Railway—for me that is not only a technical revolution that changed the life of people to the positive, but is also for me connected with the bad association of many innocent people deported to the Nazi prison camps of the Third Reich.

"For my Blutspur work of art I once again used the technique of felting threads into wall pictures which I had developed in my previous one, *Gegossenes Blei/Cast Lead* in the exhibition *Threads of Destiny* and then *The Human Cost of War*, both in 2009.

I represent the tracks which spread out all over Europe and which brought human beings right to the entrance gates of the death camps, here represented by Auschwitz; tracks like threads of destiny saturated by blood trails which seem to drip down from the wall of the spectator. This to counteract the slight possibility of forgetting what has happened."

Courtesy of the artist





## Executed at dawn

Northern Ireland wall hanging, by Irene MacWilliam, 2009

Photo by Martin Melaugh and Irene MacWilliam

Irene made this wall hanging as a personal tribute to a group of soldiers who, in the First World War, were shot at dawn for alleged cowardice. They were pardoned and exonerated many years later, after much effort by their families and friends.

Irene said: "When I first read about the National Memorial Arboretum at Alrewas, I was shocked. I read the stories of these soldiers on the Internet and I was moved by them. Many were so very young; some had lied about their age so they could join up. They had no idea what war would be like."

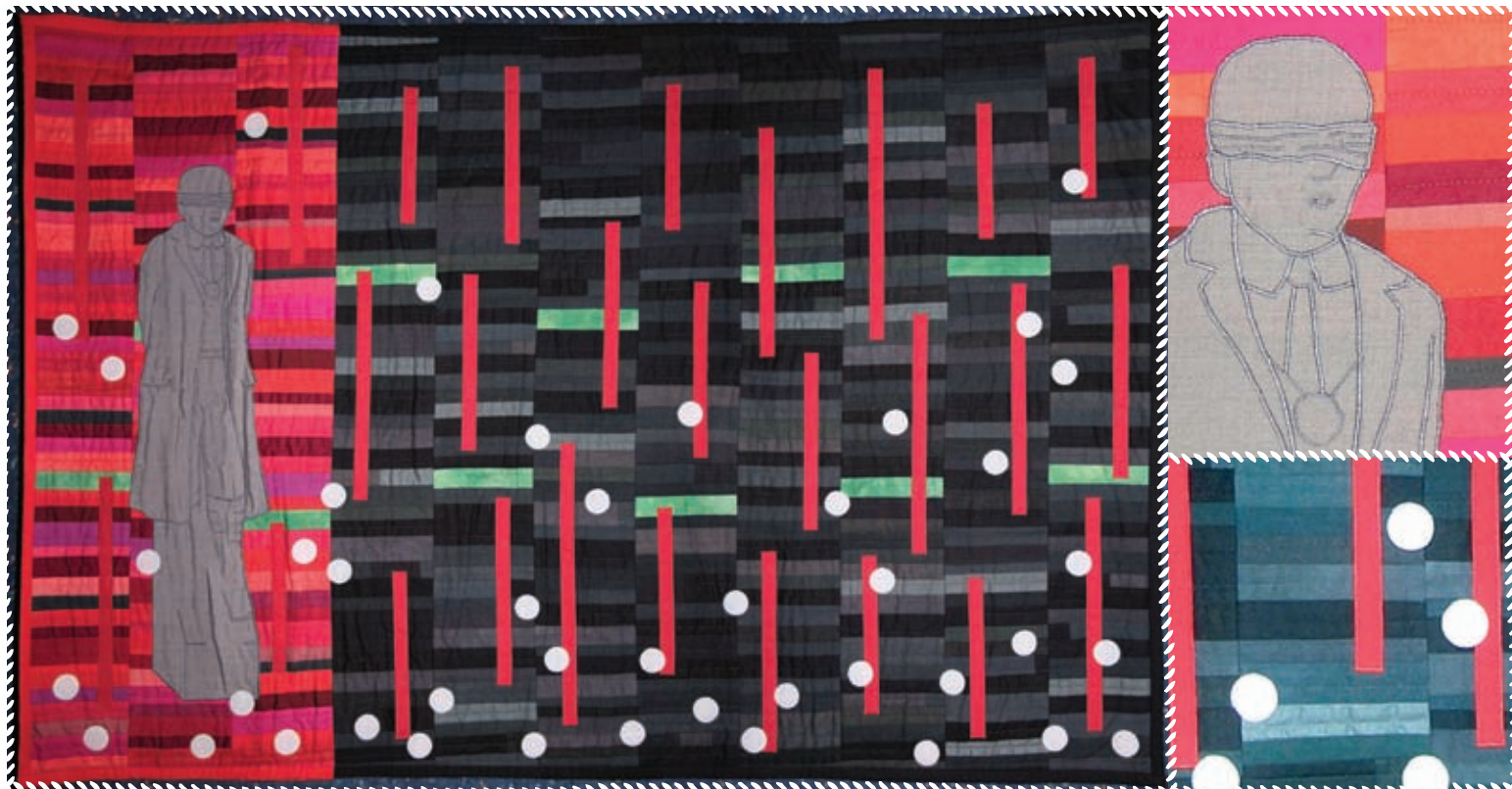
A campaign for justice was run for decades on behalf of the 306 soldiers shot at dawn, during the battle of the Somme in 1916. Relatives have long argued that many soldiers were suffering from post traumatic stress disorder, or shell-shock, as it was known in 1916. When initiating the process of granting a group pardon in 2006, 90 years after the event, the then defence secretary, Des Brown explained:

"...The circumstances [of the war] were terrible, and I believe it is better to acknowledge that injustices were clearly done in some cases...and to acknowledge that all these men were victims of war" *The Telegraph*, 16 Aug 2006).

Janet Booth, granddaughter of Private Harry Farr, one of the men shot at dawn in 1916, at 23 years of age, speaks of the impact this had on her grandmother: "My grandmother had to live with the shame and stigma of how her husband died, keeping the secret to herself for 80 years. It was only when I was tracing the Farr family tree that she confided in me that he had been executed." She describes her involvement in the campaign: "With the help of the Shot at Dawn organisation (SAD), MPs, historians and eventually the Farr family taking the Ministry Of Defence to the High Courts we were able to secure a pardon. It had taken 14 years of campaigning but in 2006 all 306 executed soldiers were granted a Conditional Pardon" (Personal interview).

Reflecting on the positive outcome Janet said: "I feel honoured to have played a part in the campaign which I started on behalf of my grandmother, who always maintained Harry Farr was no coward but suffered with shell-shock."

Courtesy of the artist







## Gegossenes Blei / Cast lead

German wall hanging, Heidi Drahota, 2009

Photo Claus Sperr

The name Operation Cast Lead was taken from a poem *For Hanukkah* by the national poet of Israel, Haim Nachman Bialik who died in 1934. It is ironic, and rather macabre, that the name of a military operation which killed so many children in Gaza, should be taken from a poem about a children's traditional toy: a spinning top made from solid or cast lead (ofert yetzuka) traditionally played with on the joyous holiday of Hanukkah.

Teacher bought a big top for me,  
Solid lead, the finest known.  
In whose honor, for whose glory?  
For Hanukkah alone.

This arpillera was titled Cast Lead to express horror about the Israeli war in Gaza, which began on the last day of Hanukkah.

Heidi Drahota, the German artist who made this textile, said: "Women and children suffered most during the military offensive Operation Cast Lead...No protection, no escape place, no bunker, closed borders. Many fled into schools or public buildings. In the Gaza strip 760 people were killed between 27 December 2008 and 8 January 2009. According to the Palestinian Health Ministry, 42 per cent of the victims were children and women; this means more than 300."

Cast Lead was first shown at the international exhibition *Threads of Destiny: Testimonies of Violence, Hope and Survival*, in Fürth, Germany, in 2009.

Courtesy of the artist





## Cesantía / Unemployment

Chilean arpillera, unknown male prisoner, c1980

Photo Martin Melaugh

This remarkable arpillera stands out from the rest of this exhibition as the techniques employed are quite different. The method used, which may not be noticed at first glance, can best be described as the glue technique. Instead of stitching the pieces together to convey the story, glue is used to attach them to the backing. Another remarkable technical difference stands out in relation to the border of the arpillera; instead of crochet, a piece of an old sweater is used and machine sewn onto it.

Through interviews and conversations with ex-political prisoners and arpilleristas, Roberta Bacic, curator of this exhibition, has found out that this type of arpillera was made by men while imprisoned. They used techniques that were closer to other artisan work they engaged in while in captivity, be that working with leather, bone or wood. This method of expression seemed to best suit the messages, thoughts and feelings they wanted to convey.

In this arpillera, we can see that the man depicted is either still imprisoned or has just been released. He is certainly troubled by the prospect of no work and the fact that he will not be able to pay for food and basic utilities such as water and electricity. In his mind the words "No Vacancies" are haunting.

The strong image of the large clenched fist, raised up in defiance, grasping a hammer gives us an indication of his political background.

Courtesy of Lala & Austin Winkley, London, UK







Detail  
**Al servicio de la vida / Servicing life**  
Chilean arpillera, anon., c1978  
Photo Martin Melaugh









### ¿Quién carga con la deuda externa? / Who carries the external debt?

Peruvian arpillera, Mujeres Creativas Workshop, 1986

Replica, Mujeres Creativas Workshop, 2008

Photo Martin Melaugh

This Peruvian arpillera, from the Mujeres Creativas workshop in Peru, depicts the inequities between rich and poor in that society. The arpillera asks "Who carries the debt?" and we see that it is the poor who shoulder the burden of debt and those with plenty are oblivious to their plight.

It was the poor indeed who shouldered the debt in Peru in the 1980s. Servicing the foreign debt, secured from the International Monetary Fund (IMF), impacted on the daily lives of poor people through reduced services and a general decline in already abysmal living standards.

Furthermore, the violent conflict in Peru at this time resulted in further devastation for those who were already scraping by, and their lives of grinding poverty became ever more desperate. The extent to which conceptions of peace in Peru have addressed the violence of poverty, considered where responsibility lies and how the burden might be shouldered more fairly is questionable.

Courtesy of the curator



## Hogar dulce hogar / Home sweet home

Peruvian arpillera, Mujeres Creativas workshop, 1985

Replica by T.L., Mujeres Creativas workshop, Peru, 2008

Photo Colin Peck

This Peruvian arpillera is a contemporary replica of one made in 1985 in the workshops of the Mujeres Creativas group, made up of women displaced from the Andes during the Peruvian conflict, who came to live in the poor neighbourhoods of Lima.

During the 1980s and 1990s, as a result of armed conflict between the government, self defence groups and insurgent forces of the Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru Resistance Movement, over 600,000 people were displaced within Peru.

Reflecting issues of concerns for women throughout Peru, this piece is an imaginative slant on the traditional style of the Chilean arpillera, which inspired the Peruvian arpilleristas.

The tongue-in-cheek title of this arpillera highlights and questions the woman's daily grind as being anything but sweet as she toils through the shopping, cleaning and cooking, and worries whether there will ever be enough money. At the centre of the piece, she is seen serving her husband, as is her duty as a Peruvian wife. While representing important issues for women in Peru and worldwide, it is done with humour and irony. In essence, the women depicted in this arpillera resiliently bear the burden of Peruvian economic policies in the 1980s—policies which negatively impacted their daily lives.

Courtesy of the curator







## Los precios están por los nubes / Prices are sky high

LCC, Mujeres Creativas, Peru, 1980s

Photo Colin Peck

Returning to issues of poverty, this arpillera from the 1980s illustrates the Spanish saying “Los precios están por los nubes,” literally meaning “the prices are in the clouds” or “prices are sky high.”

In its colourful depiction of economic woe, we see queues of women, with angry, frustrated expressions, waiting for their ticket at the shops and holding empty bags. Those who get a turn at shopping buy only meagre amounts, as illustrated by the small bags that do not bulge with purchases.

In the skies above this scene, we see the basic commodities of flour, sugar, rice, corn and oil, the prices of which are out of reach for these women. As always, it is the poor who endure the consequences of state policies, actions and inactions regarding development and poverty.

Living standards for Peruvian people, as depicted in this arpillera, were extremely difficult in the late 1980s due to an unmanageable foreign debt and high inflation. The economic policies of successive government administrations under Belaunde, Garcia and Fujimori did nothing to improve distribution of wealth for the poor. The war between the government and two insurgent groups, (Shining Path in rural areas and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement (MRTA) in Lima) in addition to a series of natural disasters and a drop in the world price of Peru's major export commodities created a severe economic crisis. Inflation for consumer products increased by 52 percent from 1981 to 1983, further worsening the already difficult lives of those experiencing the daily grind of poverty.

Courtesy of Rebecca Dudley, USA / Northern Ireland



## Violencia doméstica / Domestic violence

Peruvian arpillera, Mujeres  
Creativas workshop, 1985  
Replica by FCH, Mujeres  
Creativas workshop, Peru, 2008  
Photo Colin Peck

This replica arpillera, produced originally in 1985 by Mujeres Creativas, portrays the issue of domestic violence.

In striking detail, this arpillera depicts the travails of a victim of domestic violence and her attempts to get justice. First, we see a pregnant women being brutally attacked. The room is in disarray, a child cries, and neighbours peer through the window (notice the traditional arpillera on the wall).

The next scene shows the women's neighbours dragging the violent husband to the local police to have him charged. However, not receiving justice, they enact their own punishment. Finally, we see the man tied to a tree with a sign saying "I will not beat again," while the women appear relaxed, happy that justice has been served.

Domestic violence is still a significant problem in Peru. Statistics from the Department of Women and Social Development (Ministerio de la Mujer y Desarrollo Social, MIMDES), indicate that, in Peru, 4 out of 10 women have been victims of domestic violence. The Centro de la Mujer Peruana Flora Tristán (Center of the Peruvian Women Flora Tristán) notes that it takes an average of two to three years to process a case of domestic violence and for punishments to be imposed on the perpetrator. They also state that in Lima, victims of family violence have difficulty in accessing justice (similar to the woman depicted in this arpillera). They report that the situation is even more pronounced in cities located in the country's interior, where services are even more rare.

Courtesy of the curator





## Encadenamiento / Women chained to Parliament gates

Chilean arpillera, anon., late 1980s

Photo Martin Melaugh

In any war, truth is its first casualty. From 1973 to 1990 Chile lived through a bloody dictatorship, which was brought about by a junta presided over by General Augusto Pinochet. In the early months of the dictatorship, up to seven thousand people were detained by the junta. And so, women began checking the jails and detention centres, seeking news of their disappeared loved ones, frequently being told that the people in question did not exist.

In this arpillera, we see that the women have chained themselves to the gates in front of the congress in protest at the actions of the Pinochet regime. It is a powerful symbol of social disobedience. These women wished to act and react to what was going on in their lives and in the country, while others seemed to go on with life as if nothing was happening. All of the women who took part in this protest were detained for five days.

Encadenamiento was made in one of the workshops run by Vicaría de la Solidaridad. Many of the women had never sewn before and found solace in learning the skill and working together. Moreover, supporters

encouraged them by selling their work at home and abroad. This gave them badly needed income and, at the same time, made public their plight and actions. For Anita Rojas, one of the women depicted in this arpillera, finding expression and solidarity through arpilleras was a lifeline: "I reflected on my moments of happiness when I was with my son and my moments of anguish when they took him away from me and these things I put in images in the arpilleras...we also denounced other problems...we wanted people living outside Chile to see how we live here."

Women, with their lives in turmoil as a result of the dictatorship, were thrust into the public sphere: "The military dictatorship obligated these women to confront public life, to make their pain and grief visible. They not only created tapestries, but also initiated street protests, obtaining through their own initiative, a power that had been previously denied to women" (Agosin 2008).

Courtesy Seán Carroll, USA / Spain







### ¿Dónde están los desaparecidos? / Where are the 'disappeared'?

Chilean arpillera, anon., late 1980s

Replica by English textile artist, Linda Adams, 2010

Photo Martin Melaugh

In this traditional arpillera, a group of women in colourful dresses are protesting in front of the Courts of Justice. They hold a banner reading: 'Where are the detained-disappeared?' At the bottom right-hand corner are silhouettes of two armed police, identified by their green clothes and their car. They are faceless to show that the protest is against the dictatorship and not the individual officers. Typically, the sun is in the sky, so the two large clouds are unusual.

The original arpillera was made in the late 1980s in one of the workshops of the Vicaría de Solidaridad.

The Chilean Truth Commission of the post-Pinochet regime was mandated to find out what happened to the disappeared and also to determine where their remains had been disposed. According to Chile's second national Truth Commission Report on Torture and Political Imprisonment (Valech II), published in August 2011, there were a total of 3,216 cases of forced disappearance or political execution.

Courtesy of the curator





### **Queremos Democracia / We want democracy**

Chilean arpillera, Vicaría de la Solidaridad, 1988

Photo Martin Melaugh

This arpillera, from a Chilean church community workshop, depicts the “people’s power” in insisting on their rights to a peaceful, nonviolent society. The bright colours of the houses and the women’s clothes convey hope. However, the presence of the police car reminds us that overcoming the barriers to poverty and peace are not easy. In this difficult context they carry a banner that reads “democracy” hoping that if this is achieved, things will change. They want to be part of the process.

However, Agosin (2008) maintains that women were not given due recognition in the new democracy: “...democracy has not acknowledged the significance of the arpilleristas and other women’s groups...who had a fundamental role to play in the return of democracy.”

Courtesy of Seán Carroll, USA



The next four arpilleras, recently brought back from Chile, are an account by a Chilean arpillerista of recent events in the country. Direct confrontation between the indigenous Mapuche people, who consider themselves a separate people, and the Chilean State, who consider them Chileans, is the overarching theme depicted.

## Hermanos Mapuche en huelga de hambre / Mapuche people on hunger strike

Chilean arpillera, Aurora Ortiz, 2011

Photo Martin Melaugh

This poignant arpillera is the testimony of a recent historical (2010) episode experienced by the Mapuche people, who have suffered colonisation for over 500 years. The scene is set in the south of Chile, where the Mapuche territory is located.

Thirty-four peasant Mapuche prisoners went on hunger strike in protest against being imprisoned for defending their land. They were seeking a fair trial and contested the state's argument that they were terrorists. They demanded that in their case, the antiterrorist law should not be applied.

In this arpillera, we are brought inside one of the prisons where the hunger strike took place. Women supporters in their cultural dress surround the 10 men languishing on the floor covered by blankets provided by their relatives and friends. On one of the tables, a sign informs us that these men have been 81 days on hunger strike. The date it started and ended is also given.

Through the window, memories of their native homes are visible, volcanoes, monkey-puzzle trees and flowers; the land and home they defend to death.

The Mapuche flag is placed in a prominent place to reinforce their identity. The artist has added her support by embroidering a banner that reads: "Strength Compañeros."

### *Poesía desde la Cárcel de Temuco*

En mi niñez el hambre era una voccecita que  
Robaba el pan de mis compañeros de curso. . .  
La conciencia me la despertó el hambre de otros. . .

### *Poem from Temuco's prison*

In my childhood hunger was a soft voice  
that stole the bread of my classmates . . .  
My awareness grew from the hunger of others.

Poem by Mauricio Waikilao, one of the imprisoned hunger strikers, who at this moment, September 2011, is free and back in his community, *Lof Sitiado* (Besieged group of families living in a determined piece of land) Chile, LOM Ediciones, July 2011 (p. 172).

Courtesy of the curator





## Carabineros desaloja comunidad Mapuche / Police entering Mapuche territory

Chilean arpillera, Aurora Ortiz, 2011

Photo Martin Melaugh

The second arpillera of this series portrays the carabineros (police) violently evicting the Mapuche people from their land. At the time the police entered their land, the community was harvesting the wheat and storing it in bags for use in the months ahead. We can see a tractor being driven by a Mapuche woman. The men are holding their trutruca towards the sky (a wind instrument used in their ceremonies), beseeching their God—Ngenechén—for help.

The artist has portrayed the Mapuche flag as the sun, prominent in the sky along with the Andes. This iconic mountain range and the sun are common design features of Chilean arpilleras.

The artist has described how she and her husband have been closely involved in the Mapuche struggle since the early 1980s. "When El Consejo de Todas las Tierras (The Council of all the Land) leadership was being persecuted by Pinochet's dictatorship, we as a family helped bring them undercover to Santiago and sheltered one of them in our home. We had insightful conversations and we took on their struggle."

Courtesy of the curator







### Libertad a nuestros hermanos Mapuche / Freedom to our Mapuche brothers

Chilean arpillera, Aurora Ortiz, 2011

Photo Martin Melaugh

The scene for this third arpillera is also set in the south of Chile. We see Mapuche women carrying a banner that reads, "Freedom to our Mapuche Brothers." Demonstrations of this kind, expressing solidarity, took place in and around the communities affected by the imprisonment of their community members. Similar to the preceding arpillera, strong symbols of their cultural identity are depicted; we see the national climbing flower called copihue (co-pee-way / Mapudungun kopiwe) or Chilean bellflower. This has been adopted as the national flower of Chile and it grows in the forests of the south of the country and blooms in the late summer, early autumn.

Jaime Huenún, a Mapuche poet, who compiled and edited the book *Lof Sitiado* (Besieged group of families living in a determined piece of land),

(Chile, LOM Ediciones, July 2011) comments on the solidarity extended to these Mapuche political prisoners from far beyond Chile: "This book is a testimony and offers its readers the genuine literary solidarity of the 105 authors of Chile, Latin America and Spain who were moved and reacted poetically in connection to the long hunger strike that 34 Mapuche political prisoners started on the 12th of July 2010."

Roberta Bacic, curator of this exhibition, adds: "I also extend solidarity through the textile language of these arpilleras, as they too have been born from hard and painful experiences of human rights violations."

Courtesy of the curator



## NO a la ley antirrerorista / NO to the antiterrorist law

Chilean arpillera, Aurora Ortiz, 2011

Photo Martin Melaugh

In the final arpillera of this series the artist depicts one of the many actions that took place in Santiago, the Chilean capital, during the time of the hunger strike. A large number of Mapuche have been forced to leave their land and live in the capital, generally doing menial jobs. Living without land is in itself a denial of their identity, as Mapuche means People of the Land.

The Mapuche who live in Santiago publicly demand that the rights of their people imprisoned and on hunger strike are respected and upheld. They demand that the antiterrorist law should not be applied.

We can see that everyday people have joined the nonviolent action taking place in the centre of the capital. Leading the march are Mapuche women, dressed in their indigenous clothes, and men wearing ponchos, carrying their flag. The police have violently disrupted the march. They are dragging one of the Mapuche women by her hair and are also taking away their flag. Some men are also being dragged away and two police cars, guarded by armed police, are ominously visible in the background. There is no sun in the sky but it is in the flag itself. Aurora, the artist, is one of the participants in this action.

Courtesy of the curator







**Marcha de las mujeres de los mineros / March of the miners' wives, daughters and sisters**

María Herrera, Mujeres Creativas workshop, Peru, 1985

Photo Martin Melaugh

We can clearly see in this piece that the maker, like other arpilleristas from Peru, adopted much from the Chilean tradition. As Ariel Zetlin Cooke observes in the *Weavings of War* exhibition catalogue: "The Peruvian artists borrowed much from the Chilean arpilleristas: the idea of using pictorial patchwork as a vehicle for political activism, the use of church parishes for workshops, and even the use of the same overseas trading relationships with human rights organisations and international arts groups...They made an unfamiliar textile form their own, contributing boldly graphic compositions and new techniques" (p. 21).

A few months ago, María Herrera, in the course of a phone call about her work, stated that marching was one of the ways Peruvian men and women protested against appalling working conditions and human rights violations within the mines. With regard to this arpillera, she said: "Many men, women and children did these sacrifice marches, walking for many days from where they come from and heading to Lima so as to protest against the shameful working conditions in the mining camps. Once in Lima they collected money and organised soup kitchens in order to survive. They also had to face repression. I felt the need to document this."

Today the struggle continues. Mirian Ramirez, from the Andean community in Peru, has been actively involved in protests against mining. She states: "People say we are mad to resist mining, that mines will make our lives better. But we know they just want us to work for them as labourers; they will get rid of us when they have finished. The mines come, they extract and then they go, leaving a desert" (Meet the Defenders, *New Internationalist* 446, October 2011).

Courtesy of the curator





## Rescate de niños judíos / Rescue of Jewish children

Argentinean arpillera, Ana Zlatkes, 2011

Photo Ana Zlatkes

Ana Zlatkes, a well known and prize winning textile artist who has exhibited internationally, first encountered arpilleras at an international exhibition at the Women's Museum in Fürth, Germany in May 2009. She subsequently attended two arpillera workshops facilitated by the curator and has become a passionate proponent of the arpillera mode of expression.

Working on this arpillera uncovered many different emotions and questions for Ana: "I felt the need to be honest and situate myself on the side of the wire fence of my roots. I wasn't on the other side and I can't imagine what it was like. Even presently people keep giving explanations, responses. They cannot find them, because there are none."

While her arpillera depicts the genocide inflicted by the Nazi regime on Jews during the Second World War, in her view the theme is universal and current: "Genocide continues, changes in form and geographical location, but it is still a reality and it is the responsibility of all of us to try to prevent it."

This arpillera, as well as honouring those who resisted the repressive regime, has undoubtedly changed the artist: "...this is my first homage to all the men and women who have had the courage to fight defending the lives of children. Today after making this arpillera I am not the same, something has happened in me and my life."

Irena Sendler, a social worker, was one such woman who resisted the regime. Between 1942 and 1943, working through the Polish underground, she led hundreds of Jewish children out of the Ghetto to safe hiding places.

Nicholas Winton, who worked on the London stock exchange, was instrumental in arranging for 669 children to leave Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the war. Vera Gissing, one of the children saved by Winton later commented: "He rescued the greater part of the Jewish children of my generation in Czechoslovakia. Very few of us met our parents again: they perished in concentration camps. Had we not been spirited away, we would have been murdered alongside them."

Courtesy of the artist



## Reflections on violence

English arpillera by Linda Adams, England, 2009

Photo Colin Peck

This arpillera, made by Linda Adams, is a good example of her work, in which she expresses her concerns and feelings about repression in various parts of the world. It depicts the Free Tibet protest in London when the Olympic torch was carried through the city on the way to Beijing. The protestors, displaying their placards against Chinese oppression in Tibet, are kept behind a barrier, and can only watch the Chinese security personnel and British police.

Taking part in the protest with her daughter, Linda was amazed at the repression of protesters in London trying to raise awareness of repression elsewhere. She describes the actions of those guarding the flame: "... anything in the way was violently pushed to one side...The violence was

sickening...we have the right to protest but I felt it was taken from us." Because this event was portrayed as an insignificant news item, Linda decided to create this arpillera: "I was eager to make the arpillera to add my voice to the protests, to say 'This is what I saw.'"

For Linda, creating arpilleras is a powerful mode of expression: "Making arpilleras gave me a powerful voice and the confidence to stand up and use it." She is mindful that this can have repercussions: "By using this voice I leave myself and my friends and family open to retaliation by those who disagree with my views."

Courtesy of the artist







### Shannon watch (Extraordinary rendition)

Irish arpillera by Deborah Stockdale, 2011

Photo Deborah Stockdale

Extraordinary rendition, the international transfer of individuals from the custody of one state to another, in the absence of following procedures for extradition agreements, is against international law. Yet this practice was admitted to in 2006 by then US President George W. Bush, when he referred to a programme implemented by the CIA to arrest, detain and interrogate terrorist suspects outside of US jurisdiction. The use of planes masquerading as civilian aircraft is a deceit practised by the US since the mid-1990s, as civilian status bypasses restrictions placed on military aircraft.

Shannonwatch, the work of a small group of peace and human rights activists based in the mid west of Ireland, has played an important role in monitoring Shannon airport's links with renditions. Their documented evidence indicts Shannon as a stopover for CIA rendition planes and by the US military on their way to and from Iraq and Afghanistan.

In 2010 a group of women set up a Peace Camp at the entrance to Shannon. In support of the numerous Afghani women who were innocent victims of the conflict there, they demonstrated in white burkas

at the airport gates. This image is depicted in the arpillera. Deborah, in making this arpillera, explains: "Doing research into extraordinary rendition of military prisoners, I learned that Shannon and Dublin airports were centres where prisoners were funnelled to points across Europe and beyond. The long standing arrangement between the supposedly neutral Irish government and the American military forces enabled this."

The Irish government consistently denies that Irish airports and airspace have been used by US rendition flights, insisting that US assurances are its guarantee against violation of international law. The news broke in August 2011 that, following nonviolent actions on US military aircraft at Shannon Airport in 2003, the US military would have left if requested to do so by the Irish government. Interestingly, it has emerged that the Irish government rejected this course of action, which they perceived would give the impression of victory for the protesters, despite the fact that it was quite clear that the considerable majority of Irish people were opposed to US military use of Shannon, travelling to and from Iraq.

Courtesy of the artist



## No contaminar / Do not pollute

Chilean arpillera, Workshop, Vicaría de Solidaridad, c1980

Photo Martin Melaugh

The effects of pollution on the inhabitants of a shantytown in the suburbs of Santiago are depicted in this arpillera. We see people, under a darkened sky, going about their daily activities, choking on the smog and fumes from cars. Clearly they are frustrated by this. The cars speed by, oblivious to their impact on the shantytown dwellers and the environment. In the bottom corner, we see that the community has come together to protest in the street and are carrying a banner that says "Do Not Pollute."

Clearly, in this arpillera, it is the poor who bear the brunt of pollution and who stand to be most severely impacted by it, whilst being largely

excluded from political decision making. The government at this time viewed environmental protection as detrimental to economic growth.

Santiago's air pollution, primarily from heavy industry and also from a rapidly increasing population, represents a huge challenge for the authorities responsible for reducing the damage caused during the years of environmental negligence. Air pollution levels in Santiago have had significant effects on human health, including premature death and respiratory diseases such as chronic bronchitis, pneumonia, and asthma.

Courtesy of Kinderhilfe Chile / Bonn











Detail

**Gegossenes Blei / Cast lead**

German wall hanging, Heidi Drahota, 2009

Photo Claus Sperr



## Homenaje a los caídos / Homage to fallen ones

Chilean arpillera, anon., late 1970s

Photo Colin Peck

In this sombre traditional arpillera, there is no sun in the sky and the Andes are one flat colour. Black dominates the foreground. In the background, poor villagers tap into the main power supply because they cannot afford to pay. The road is lined with candles in remembrance of the disappeared. The central figure carries leaflets protesting against torture. Some women lie on the road. In all, this arpillera gives voice to the sorrow and loss felt by so many.

Based on direct testimonies from relatives of the disappeared in Chile, Elizabeth Lira, in *Mujeres Historias chilenas del siglo XX*, (Chile, LOM Ediciones, April 2011) describes the struggle of families of the disappeared and brings us closer to such an unbearable and difficult to imagine experience: "The wives (mothers, daughters, wives, partners, sisters) in different parts of the world and in Chile have kept their pleas

demanding their need to know what happened to them, organizing themselves around associations of relatives, postponing their own needs and placing in the centre of their lives the activities of denouncing and looking for their missing relative, hoping to find them alive. Hope is the fuel of their search that does not end."

This arpillera was created in the late 1970s and given as a gift to Professor Miralles, a university lecturer in Madrid, in honour of her work with child soldiers in Angola and other parts of the world. She has facilitated the exhibition of this poignant arpillera on numerous occasions and travelled to Derry in the north/Northern Ireland to see it exhibited for the first time for International Women's Day in 2008.

Courtesy Fátima Miralles, Spain





## La mano que les cuidó / The hand that cared for them

Spanish arpillera by María Bonilla Armada,  
Women Sewing History Workshop, Badalona, Spain, 2009

Photo Roser Corbera

María, now 86, grew up during the Spanish Civil War (1936-1939). During the war she moved to Cuenca, in Eastern Spain. Here she lost many family members: her father died, her brothers were killed fighting on the front, and her mother emigrated to France for a better life. María describes the period after the war ended, when she returned to the village of her birth: "We found that we had no home, no furniture, nothing. We had nowhere to sleep or eat; we had absolutely nothing until we found it ourselves."

This experience was common countrywide in the post war era. The lack of food and basic necessities meant that working class women had to find many different ways to survive. Alexia Rahona, who currently works with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR)/La Agencia de la ONU para los Refugiados (ACNUR) Spanish Section, comments on the hardships of this era: "The post war years were terrible both for the ones who fled into exile and for the ones who remained at home; the struggle for survival and for rebuilding their lives required great resilience."

Despite the difficulties of the Franco era, María and her husband were able to build a home and raise their family. The effort and sacrifice required is reflected in her arpillera which shows her home and three children. Her own hand—the hand which cared for them—is dominant.

In the economic crisis of the 1950s and 1960s many people moved to the cities in search of a better life. María and her family moved from Cordoba to Barcelona where she has remained ever since. The rural house, depicted in the arpillera, reflects a nostalgic memory of her previous home in Cordoba. Making arpilleras has provided María and her companions with the artistic means to recount their experiences. It has also given them the confidence to continue telling their stories.

Courtesy Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc, Spain







## Recuerdos de trabajo y guerra / Memories of work and war

Spanish arpillera by Rosa Cortés García,  
Women Sewing History Workshop, Badalona, Spain, 2009  
Photo Roser Corbera

Inspired by her father's memories of the terrible hardship he suffered during the Spanish Civil War, Rosa's arpillera, in the lower section, shows the moment when he was imprisoned in a concentration camp in the Andalusia city of Seville. She recounts: "My father told us how he would hear the clunk of the bolts of cell doors in the middle of the night, knowing that when the guards took prisoners away, they wouldn't return; that they would be taken to the fields and shot. He was scared. He was behind bars for two years working in the camp without food until eventually his hair and teeth fell out."

In the upper part of the arpillera, Rosa portrays her personal experiences from the post-war period. Like many poor and illiterate women, she endured very harsh working conditions: "I had been working since I was a child. I remember that when I was 12, I worked wrapping oranges in paper for export. When we weren't doing that, they made us peel the bitter ones and put the skins out in the sun to dry. They were used to make gunpowder. I was paid hardly anything; I earned hardly anything."

Through these stories and personal experiences we see the human cost of war. On the one hand, via stories passed down from one generation to another, there is the violation of human rights of those who resisted; and, on the other, via the experiences of the maker, the consequences suffered by women in their daily lives in an oppressive state.

Alexia Rahona, from the ACNUR/UNHCR Spanish Section, speaking on the repressive nature of the post-war era, reflects on the ongoing struggle for justice, especially for families who lost loved ones during this time: "The silence imposed as well as the threat of repression still remains, but the struggle for truth, justice and dignity has endured and gone further and deeper."

Courtesy Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc, Spain



## Mis memorias de la guerra / My memories of the war

Spanish arpillera by Rosalía Rodríguez Hernández,  
Women Sewing History Workshop, Badalona, Spain, 2009

Photo Roser Corbera

Rosalía Rodríguez Hernández said that making this arpillera was a kind of therapy for her. It represents the arrest of her mother during the Spanish Civil War when women were imprisoned and tortured for no other reason than being an anarchist's wife. Rosalía had been beaten by the police, who came to drag her mother away, and had to watch as they cut off her hair and forced her to drink castor oil. Her saddest memories arose from knowing that her mother had suffered torture and, before her arrest, had had an exhausting struggle to maintain and care for her family.

Rosalía said that stitching the arpillera by hand was like writing the words of her story and sharing her sorrow with the rest of the group in the Women Sewing History Workshop.

Similar to Rosalía's mother, many women were persecuted at this time for resisting the dictatorship. Julia Conesa, in a letter to her mother, a few hours before being executed at the age of 19 in 1939 said: "Do not allow my name to vanish in history."

Keeping their stories alive has achieved results for those whose relatives were victims of reprisals and/or were buried in unidentified mass graves during the civil war and dictatorship. Civil society pressure groups, relatives and individuals have played an important role in pressuring the government to recognize, extend rights and establish reparation measures for those who suffered persecution and violence during the civil war and dictatorship.

Courtesy Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc, Spain







### El recuerdo de esta historia / The memory of this story

Spanish arpillera by Ángela Matamoros Vázquez and Ángela Vázquez González.  
Women Sewing History Workshop, Badalona, Spain, 2009

Photo Roser Corbera

Ángela Matamoros Vázquez and her daughter show here how our memories and experiences can be passed down from generation to generation. The arpillera represents the stories told by Ángela's parents. In this way, 72-year-old Ángela can share with her daughter the things that happened in her hometown during the Spanish Civil War.

She remembers: "The truck travelling along the road is carrying men on their way to be executed. The crosses show the graves where they were buried. When the men were rounded up and put on trucks, the women would come against the odds to say goodbye to sons and husbands. They would be in tears because they knew they would never see them again."

The Spanish Asociación para la Recuperación de la Memoria Histórica (ARMH)/Association for the Historical Memory Recovery estimates that there are 113,000 people who are still in unidentified mass graves.

Alexia Rahona, from the ACNUR/UNHCR Spanish Section, comments on how relatives seek to reconcile such a traumatic past and what they now request: "People who had or still have relatives in mass graves ask for verdad/truth, justicia/justice and reparación/reparation. It isn't a question of revenge, it is a question of memory and dignity...reconciliation and peace...Social peace and personal peace; as in other parts of the world with similar circumstances."

With this arpillera, the makers were able to contribute to the retrieval of these untold stories from a female perspective, allowing future generations to better understand what happened during this violent period of Spanish history.

Courtesy Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc, Spain





## Al servicio de la vida / Servicing life

Chilean arpillera, anon., c1978

Photo Martin Melaugh

This arpillera depicts the kind of activities and areas of support the Catholic Church undertook to assist a substantial part of the population persecuted and abandoned by the Pinochet dictatorship. Initially, the Catholic Church responded through the Pro-Paz (For Peace) committee, an ecumenical group of religious leaders, formed in 1974, to support those whose human rights were violated. After two years, this organisation was closed down by order of the junta. Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez, archbishop of Santiago, immediately formed a new organisation called the Vicaría de la Solidaridad, which could not be dismantled as it was under the exclusive auspices of the Catholic Church.

In this arpillera, we see the headquarters of the church where problems such as legal defence, exile, political imprisonment, the detained-disappeared, and the presentation of habeas corpus to the courts are being dealt with, on behalf of and with affected people.

This arpillera was made in one of the handicraft workshops run by the Vicaría de la Solidaridad. Marjorie Agosin, (2008) describes these first workshops: "At the height of despair, approximately fourteen women arrived at the Vicariate...they met as a group, fearfully and for the first time, in an inner patio of the Vicariate, away from the dark corridors of death...they began to tell their stories on pieces of cloth...."

The Vicaría also established other types of craft shops, first-aid centres, training in human rights and the production of bulletins. It was active from 1976 to 1992, continuing its work for two years after Pinochet was deposed in 1990.

Courtesy arpillera collection Kinderhilfe, Chile / Bonn



## Olla común en una población / Soup kitchen in a barrio

Chilean arpillera, Taller Fundación Missio, Santiago, 1982

Photo Martin Melaugh

This arpillera depicts the hunger and poverty that is wrought by conflict and social injustice. Created during the Pinochet dictatorship, it depicts both the desperation of hunger among the poor, forced to seek food from church charities, and also the resilience of those who create routes to ensure that the worst affected are not left hungry.

The soup kitchens portrayed in this arpillera were a lifeline for the impoverished during the Pinochet regime. Church charities such as the Vicaría de la Solidaridad and later, the Fundación Solidaridad, were in

the forefront in setting them up. Maria Madariaga recalls what the soup kitchen meant for her family, even though not all of them could avail of it; the need was so great that "there was an age limit to abide by...of my three children at the time, only one was able to eat...We thought it was better that one eats than none...the days were especially long for myself and my husband because there was nothing to eat" (Agosin 2008).

Courtesy of Kinderhilfe Chile / Bonn





## Recuerdos de Guadalupe / Guadalupe's Longings

Peruvian arpillera by Guadalupe Ccallocunto, 1989

Photo Martin Melaugh

This arpillera was made by Guadalupe, a Peruvian woman, while learning the art of the arpillera in Chile. She became active in human rights after the disappearance of her husband and had travelled to Chile from her home in Ayacucho, Peru, to escape death threats. At the time there was a war between the Peruvian government and the Shining Path movement, which lasted from 1980 until 2000.

Guadalupe did not have much fabric to work with. One day she asked her friend Roberta Bacic, with whom she was staying in Chile, for fabric scraps suitable for arpillera making. Being an academic, Roberta did not have much fabric lying around, but she asked her daughters if she could have the dresses from their dolls. She put those with some old socks and tea towels into a basket, which the artist used when creating this arpillera.

Her quilt portrays Peru, her home, which she desperately missed while in Chile. Women and children are occupied in traditional activities such as cooking (top left) and preparing vegetables (centre). At the bottom right some spools of thread and other needlework materials are sitting on boxes, in preparation for the workshop that the artist dreamed of creating when she returned home to Peru. Shortly afterwards she did return home and knew that in returning she risked everything, including her life, but she simply could not bear to be away from her children and her homeland any longer. Within a few months of returning to Peru, on 10 June 1990, she disappeared after being abducted from her home by the military in the presence of her children. Three arpilleras, including this one, are her textile legacy.

Courtesy of the curator







## Baile Puneño / Puno folk dance

Peruvian arpillera, anon., no date

Photo Colin Peck

This arpillera was made in one of the well known workshops of Lima. It was brought back to England about 20 years ago. Roberta Bacic, curator of this exhibition, found it at the house of a librarian friend in Cambridge in October 2008. In this arpillera, we are shown the traditional folk dance Baile Puneño which is danced in Puño and other places around the country.

The city of Puño is located in the southeast corner of Peru, on the shores of the magnificent Lake Titicaca and only 126km from the border with Bolivia. At an altitude of 3,827m, Puño is a melting pot of Indian cultures, including the Aymara from the south and the Quechua from the north. This has earned Puño the title of Folklore Capital of Peru, famous for its huge number and variety of traditional fiestas, dances and music.

The scene is focused on the dancers who are wearing festival clothes and hats, similar to those worn in Bolivia. Baile Puneño is danced at the time of the La Candelaria festivities, a religious Catholic celebration marked by carnival. The couples dance in pairs on stage or in a specially prepared arena reserved for dancers and players. Everyone else stands behind a fence, watching and cheering on the performers.

Indigenous people in Peru, as well as many other Peruvians, keep their traditions alive as a way of strengthening community bonds and asserting their identity, an identity often threatened by state policies of repression.

Estimates of the number of indigenous Peruvians vary widely. Out of a national population of 29 million, an estimated 31 percent (8.7 million) are indigenous, according to Peru's Commission for Truth and Reconciliation. Many of these indigenous communities, are involved in an ongoing struggle to protect their natural resources in the face of increasing pressure by industry and government to penetrate the remote areas in their quest for yet more energy resources. During 17 days of protests in the southern region of Arequipa in early 2011, hundreds were injured and three people died as police opened fire on locals trying to stop Southern Peru Copper Corporation from opening a new mine. In the end, the protestors won and the government, which had approved the scheme, withdrew permission.

Courtesy of Julie Coimbra, Cambridge, England



## Escuelita de Otavalo / Otavalo Primary School

Chilean arpillera, anon., c2008

Photo Colin Peck

This contemporary arpillera is from Otavalo, a largely indigenous town in the Imbabura province of Ecuador. It illustrates, through an imaginative take on traditional indigenous Ecuadorian weaving techniques, a classroom scene. The indigenous Otavaleños are famous for weaving textiles, which are sold at the Saturday market.

This arpillera was bought in 2009 by the Chilean filmmaker Vivienne Barry, who is known for her award winning animated short film about the arpillerista movement in Chile. The largest image is that of a female with braided hair carrying a bag. She may be the teacher of the school,

or perhaps the schoolchild who made the arpillera; in either case it depicts a simple peaceful image. We also see a row of children and a blackboard with the words: "My little house is the most beautiful in the world."

During the Pinochet regime, schooling was often disrupted and education interrupted. It is a reminder that the children also suffered by losing out on basic needs of education.

Courtesy of the curator





## Vida cotidiana en nuestra población II / Daily life in our neighbourhood II

Chilean arpillera, Taller Fundación Missio, Santiago, c1983

Photo Martin Melaugh

This unusually large Chilean arpillera is a window into the life of a poor community depicting their daily joys and struggles for survival. Immense effort is required to eke out a living as well as maintain their community way of life. The viewer can rejoice in colour and movement as well as gaining an understanding of how far removed the inhabitants are from the capital, Santiago, with all its modernity.

Keeping the community together and alive is crucial to the survival of this community, living under a repressive military dictatorship. Thus, in this arpillera we see that the school is placed in the community itself, so children can walk to it easily. Water is not available in each home and people have to gather at the street stand, collect it in buckets and carry it to their homes.

What makes this arpillera very different from the others in terms of technique, is the fact that it is not the labour of an individual woman working together with other women in a workshop, but actually a piece done in a collective way, where each participant seems to account for their own way of living and their role in the community. The other difference is that the burlap backing is the full size of a flour sack, normally cut so as to have material available for several arpilleras.

Truly this is a multilayered community with a lot to say to us.

Courtesy of Kinderhilfe Chile / Bonn





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## **THE WOMEN SEW by Sue Gilmurray**

This song was specially written, composed and sung by Sue at the Imperial War Museum for Armistice Day, November 2009.

When the times are hard and the going's tough,  
when you work all day and it's not enough,  
when there is no bread, and the children cry,  
and the menfolk curse, and the women sigh,

then the women sew,  
and their stitches speak  
of a spirit strong  
though the body's weak;  
with a grip on love  
that they won't let go,  
see their fingers care  
as the women sew.

When you live your life in the grip of fear  
of the bomb and gun that are always near,  
when they come at night to disturb your sleep,  
when they take the men, and the women weep,

then the women sew,  
and their stitches shout  
against violent power  
shutting justice out;  
with a grip on rage  
that they won't let go,  
see their fingers fight  
as the women sew.

When you live aware of a bloodstained past,  
and it's peaceful now, but it may not last,  
when suspicions lurk, on which hatreds feed,  
when the children doubt, and the women plead,

then the women sew,  
and their stitches sing  
of the fairer world  
only peace can bring;  
with a grip on hope  
that they won't let go,  
see their fingers build  
as the women sew.

Yes, the women sew, and their stitches hold,  
till the picture's made and their story's told;  
with a grip on life that they won't let go,  
see their fingers heal as the women sew.

Yes, the women sew,  
and their stitches hold,  
till the picture's made  
and their story's told;  
with a grip on life  
that they won't let go,  
see their fingers care,  
see their fingers fight,  
see their fingers build,  
see their fingers heal  
as the women sew.

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**Front cover**

Queremos Democracia / We want democracy  
Chilean arpillera, Vicaría de la Solidaridad, 1988  
Photo Martin Melaugh

**Back cover**

Libertad a nuestros hermanos Mapuche / Freedom to our Mapuche brothers  
Chilean arpillera, Aurora Ortiz, 2011  
Photo Martin Melaugh





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