

Arpillera Journeys

An exhibition of arpilleras & other textiles
from the Conflict Textiles collection

6th March – 2nd May 2015 | Tower Museum



What is an Arpillera

Arpilleras (pronounced “ar-pee-air-ahs”) are three-dimensional appliquéd textiles from Latin America, which originated in Chile in the late 1960s. The hessian backing fabric, known as arpillera in Spanish, became the name for this particular type of tapestry. In the early days, potato or flour bags were used for the arpillera backing, as well as hessian. The typical arpillera size is 30cm x 50cm; a quarter or a sixth the size of a flour or potato sack.



Roberta Bacic is a Chilean curator, researcher, activist and lecturer.

Foreword

The women came out at night and searched for the thread of dew but only found the footsteps of their sleepless, beloved deceased.

From Jaime Huenun’s poem, The Women Came Out At Night.

As we launch the **Arpillera Journeys** exhibition at the Tower Museum, the collection **Conflict Textiles** embarks on a new journey. It moves from its private humble home in the North Coast of Northern Ireland to the Tower Museum to become part of Derry City Council’s archive collection.

Many of the arpilleras on display are well travelled as they began in Chile, came to Europe, from here they have travelled to far away countries such as Japan, New Zealand,

returned to South America and came back again. The arpilleras who have created them, have made their own journeys; individually and as part of collectives. The arpilleras exhibited here have multiple layers of stories to tell, and as the curator I could share dozens of stories that go beyond what you can see exhibited. They relate to the process of communication with makers, owners and collectors of these pieces who generously have made them available for us to display and to now reside in the city.

It is significant to recognize the power of the stitched word, a testimony, a narrative as an accepted way to tell a personal story that goes beyond the oral and written word. As Marjorie Agosin, states in one of her books;

“With leftovers of fabric and simple stitches, the women embroidered what could not be told in words...”

This exhibition is drawn primarily from Chile and includes textile responses from local artists from Northern Ireland, England, Ireland, Argentina and Brazil. A Chilean Consul once said: “The arpilleras are real Ambassadors as they tell the recent history of our country as lived in everyday life and, at the same time, influence new communities of arpilleras to tell their own stories”.

I invite you all to be part of the journey.

Roberta Bacic | Curator | March 2015

www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts

Introduction

The journey of Conflict Textiles

Conflict Textiles is a collection of international textiles, currently owned by curator and researcher Roberta Bacic, which encompasses over 260 arpilleras, quilts and wall hangings. Arpilleras originated in Chile and became a powerful medium for women to denounce the human rights abuses and repression of the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990). From their humble beginnings, these textiles, together with their custodian Roberta, have travelled across continents; inspiring and challenging textile artists, the general public and academics.

Their journey to Northern Ireland commenced in 2006 when Roberta, at the request of Quaker House

Belfast, facilitated a series of cross community meetings on the legacy of “The Troubles” using arpilleras as a discussion catalyst. Building on this momentum the exhibition, **The Art of Survival: International and Irish Quilts** was launched at the Tower Museum on International Women’s Day 2008. This marked the start of a new journey for Derry City Council’s museum staff into the world of **Conflict Textiles**. Associated exhibition activities such as guided tours, film screenings and “hands on” workshops facilitated a great level of engagement.

Since 2008, further exhibitions in Derry, Northern Ireland and much further afield have followed, new textiles have been created, strong relationships have been developed locally and internationally, inspiring

conversations have taken place and innovative ideas have been fostered and shared. As this process has evolved and grown beyond all expectations it has become clear that sustaining this momentum; harnessing this energy is now best served by making **Conflict Textiles** available as a public resource. This will ensure that greater access to such a valuable collection is facilitated on an ongoing basis.

Marking another stage in this epic journey, **Conflict Textiles** will, on International Women’s Day 2015, move to its permanent home at the Tower Museum, within Derry City Council’s archive. For Bernadette Walsh, Archivist with Derry City Council Museum and Visitor Service this will make it possible to:

“promote, develop and raise awareness about the **Conflict Textiles** collection gathered together over a number of years by Roberta. [It] allows endless opportunities for interaction with schools, academics, historical groups, local visitors and tourists.”

Undoubtedly, **Conflict Textiles**, from its new home, will continue to bring us on challenging journeys, into the depths of the experiences which prompted women to take up needle, thread and fabric in different locations, over various decades, in diverse circumstances.

Breege Doherty | Roberta Bacic
March 2015



The Collection

The Stories Behind the Collection

The collection known as ‘Conflict Textiles’ was collected and curated by Roberta over many years. Since 2008 we have been working together. This exhibition has two stories, the journeys undertaken by all of those involved and the journey of the textiles. The collection has many stories. The new journey and what lies ahead is exciting for us all as this unique collection has found a new home here in the city as part of the archive collection of Derry City Council.

When writing about ‘A history of the World in 100 objects’, writer Fintan O’Toole neatly summed up the importance of objects as material things, that can be touched, that

are visible, physical and tangible. Objects have meaning and value but they can also touch on emotions. “Interesting objects tend to provoke more questions than they can answer.” This is certainly true of these very special textiles. Drawing on the rich resources of the collection, we seek to reveal hidden histories and stories of the makers, whose vision, creativity and skill, combined with a passionate belief for justice and equality, resonates across the decades.

Over the next few years we will endeavor to make the collection accessible, in temporary exhibitions, throughout the permanent galleries and through loans, culminating in the collection taking its place in the Archive centre planned for

Ebrington. Whilst one journey is complete we hope to make and learn from many more.

Bernadette Walsh | Archivist Derry City Council Museum & Visitor Service

Arpillera Journeys

An exhibition of arpilleras and other textiles hosted by the Tower Museum

Curated by Roberta Bacic
Assisted by Breege Doherty



Image Martin Melaugh

Police Tumbling Soup Kitchen

Chilean arpillera | Taller Vicaría de la Solidaridad | 1983

In this sombre, traditional arpillera, framed by a dull sky and monochrome hills, we see the poverty as a result of the economic policies of the Pinochet regime. Unable to pay for their electricity, these villagers are using wires to tap into the main power supply. Resilient in the face of such hardship, they have decided to set up a soup kitchen so that the worst affected are not left hungry.

Given that these soup kitchens were a lifeline for the poverty stricken during the Pinochet era, it is distressing to see an armed policeman, flanked by a police car, tumbling the entire contents of the soup pot onto the ground. The image of the young people approaching, with their soup plates in hand, adds to the sense of outrage; we know they will have no food today.

Kinderhilfe arpillera collection | Chile/Bonn

Facts about Chile

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 during the Pinochet dictatorship (1973-1990).



Image Martin Melaugh

Repression of Street Vendors

Chilean arpillera | anon. | c1985

This arpillera captures the constant oppression which poor people endured on a daily basis. Against the backdrop of apartment blocks, we see street vendors being forced off the streets as the state wants to remove them. These apolitical vendors are simply trying to make ends meet.

In the face of the large, hulk shaped, black water cannon, forcefully pumping powerful jets of water, made of tacked white thread, the vendors have no option but to flee. Clutching their newspapers and plastic bags they run, attempting to shield themselves and their goods from injury and destruction. The featureless water cannon is depicted as ominous and intimidating. It conveys the faceless brutality of the authorities, unleashed against the harmless, unthreatening street vendors.

Kinderhilfe arpillera collection | Chile/Bonn

“...the arpilleras were a special way to interpret my pain and at the same time communicate it to others...a denouncement...my protest through the arpilleras has been silent, strong, desperate, full of unending tears. I can't count the long nights I spent making arpilleras and soaked the cloth because I was crying so much.”

(p145)

Chilean arpillera Mireya Rivera Veliz
(Sepúlveda, 1996)



Image Martin Melaugh

Leafleting in Santiago in 1979

Chilean arpillera | anon. | 1979

This arpillera depicts campaigners distributing leaflets to pedestrians and drivers to raise awareness about the “Disappeared.” Chile’s fourth National Truth Commission Report on Torture and Political Imprisonment (Valech II), published in August 2011, informs us that there were a total of 3,216 cases of forced disappearance or political execution.

The mountains are represented in traditional style, using a host of colourful scraps of cloth. The sun is absent, perhaps symbolising the dangers that still prevailed. The large houses and trees indicate that the campaigners have brought their campaign out of the shantytowns - all part of their strategy to publicly denounce the human rights abuses of the Pinochet regime.

The unrelenting, public tactics employed here did eventually yield dividends and culminated in shifting public opinion against Pinochet, both at home and abroad.

Conflict Textiles collection | Donation from Jacquie Monty



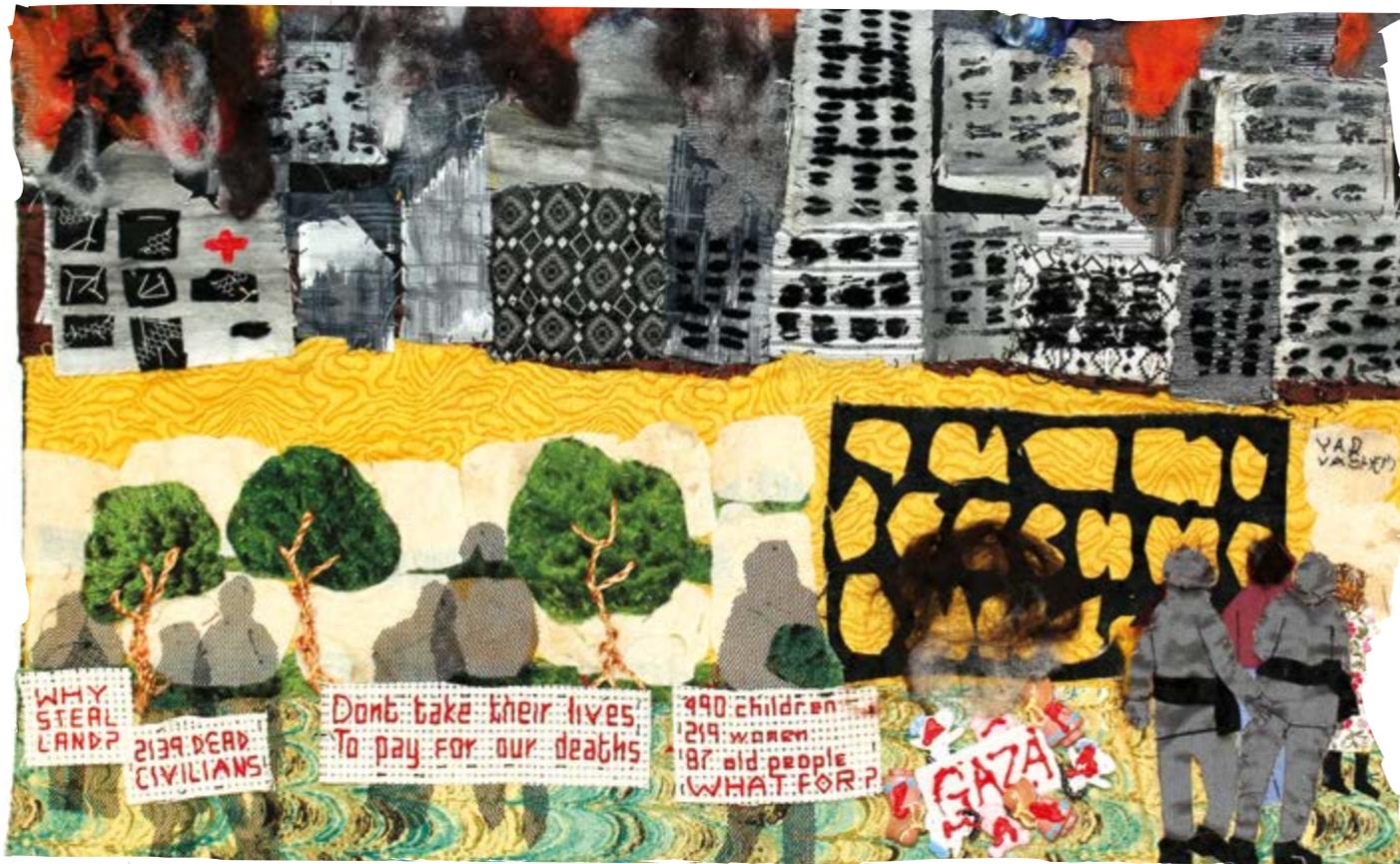


Image Tony Boyle

Gaza

English arpillera | Linda Adams | 2014

On 8 July 2014 the Israeli government commenced Operation Protective Edge, their latest military operation in the Gaza Strip. Fifty days later, when the ceasefire was declared on 26 August between Israel and Hamas, United Nations figures state that 2,131 Palestinians, mainly civilians, including 501 children, had been killed in the conflict. Approximately 108,000 people had been left homeless.

Outraged at the scale of destruction and needless loss of life, Linda has responded through this arpillera. Through a letter tucked in a pocket at the back of her arpillera, she questions:

“...why a nation that has suffered ...feels it can justify killing ... and destroying hospitals, schools and mosques.” Further linking recent events to the destruction of the Holocaust she reflects: “... I felt that the spirits of those who died at the Holocaust would be desperately wishing they could say ‘why do this when you know how much it hurts.’”

Conflict Textiles collection

“Creating arpilleras gave me the chance to suggest an alternative way of looking at events.”

English arpillera Linda Adams commenting on the power of arpilleras



Image Martin Melaugh

We Have to Live Behind Closed Doors

Chilean arpillera | anon. | c1985

This arpillera, made in a community workshop in the shanty towns of Santiago, brings us into Campamento San Jeronimo, one of the many settlements established by poor families in the outskirts of Santiago.

It graphically exposes the multitude of problems faced by these people where everything was borne in silence, behind closed doors. A letter from the arpillera, hidden at the back of the arpillera, speaks of: “Problems amongst the married couple because the husband is unemployed, a widow cries [at] the death of her husband. A few sick children are affected by the lack [of] beds. The main thing ...is the children’s soup kitchen as each day the soup is not enough.”

Specifically, this piece highlights the invisible, voiceless and marginalised status of shantytown dwellers during the dictatorship.

Conflict Textiles collection | Donation from Heidi and Peter Gessler



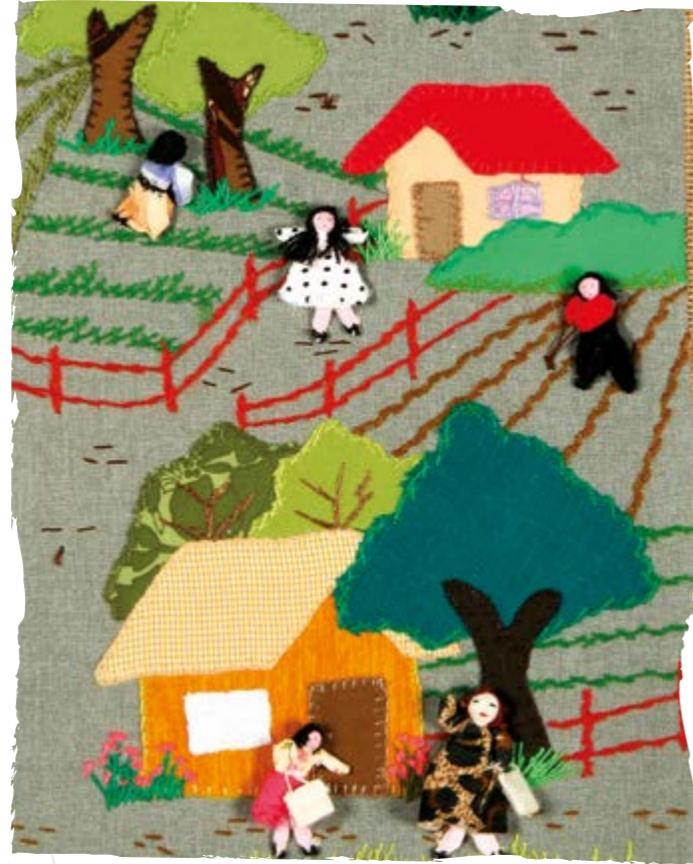
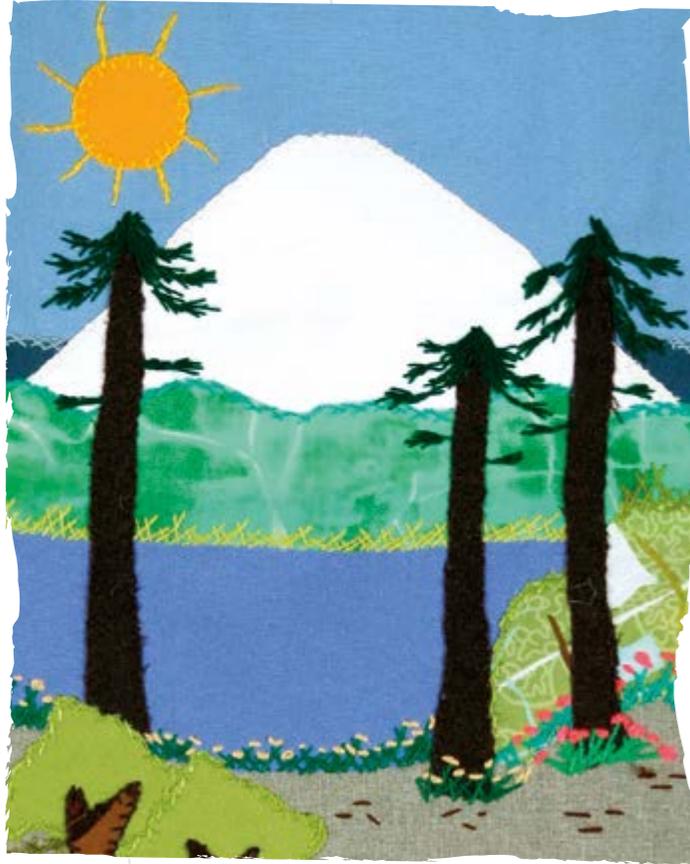


Image Colin Peck

Osorno Volcano

Chilean arpillera | Taller Fundación Solidaridad | 2007

This arpillera returns to the classical pre-political tradition and depicts daily life under the Osorno Volcano in the Los Lagos region of Chile. As with the earlier pre-political arpilleras of the late 1960s, rural life is represented as simple and idyllic. Under a bright sun, farmers are tilling their crops and neighbours are chatting. A letter concealed in a pocket on the reverse side of the arpillera, reinforces this rural idyll: **“See how beautiful our volcanoes are! I invite you to visit them”** This contrasts starkly with the political messages of the arpilleras that followed this work and tempts one to ascribe political meaning here, where none exists.

Overall, this arpillera represents a move towards commercialism in the arpillera style.

In returning to the pre-political tradition, it connects past, present and future and illustrates the power and scope of arpilleras to reflect daily life, political or otherwise.

Conflict Textiles collection

Facts about Chile

In Chile there are over 1300 volcanoes some of which can still be active.

Chile has one of the longest coastlines in the world being 6500 km long, but also one of the narrowest being only 200 km wide in some parts of the country.

Violencia en Las Calles de Santiago de Chile Durante Toque de Queda



Violence in the Streets of Santiago de Chile During Curfew

Chilean arpillera | anon. | 1979

In this arpillera the dark background colour and the presence of the moon and stars signify that this is a night scene and that the area is most likely under curfew. We see an injured person lying in a pool of blood, being assisted by people from the neighbourhood. We are left to ponder if the heavy handed actions of the police, leaving the scene, have resulted in this person's injuries.

Overall, this arpillera chillingly portrays the hardship and repression experienced by the people in this impoverished community. It powerfully bears witness to and publicly denounces yet another violent incident of the Pinochet regime.

Conflict Textiles collection | Donation from Jacquie Monty

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. (p74)

Marjorie Agosin | 2008

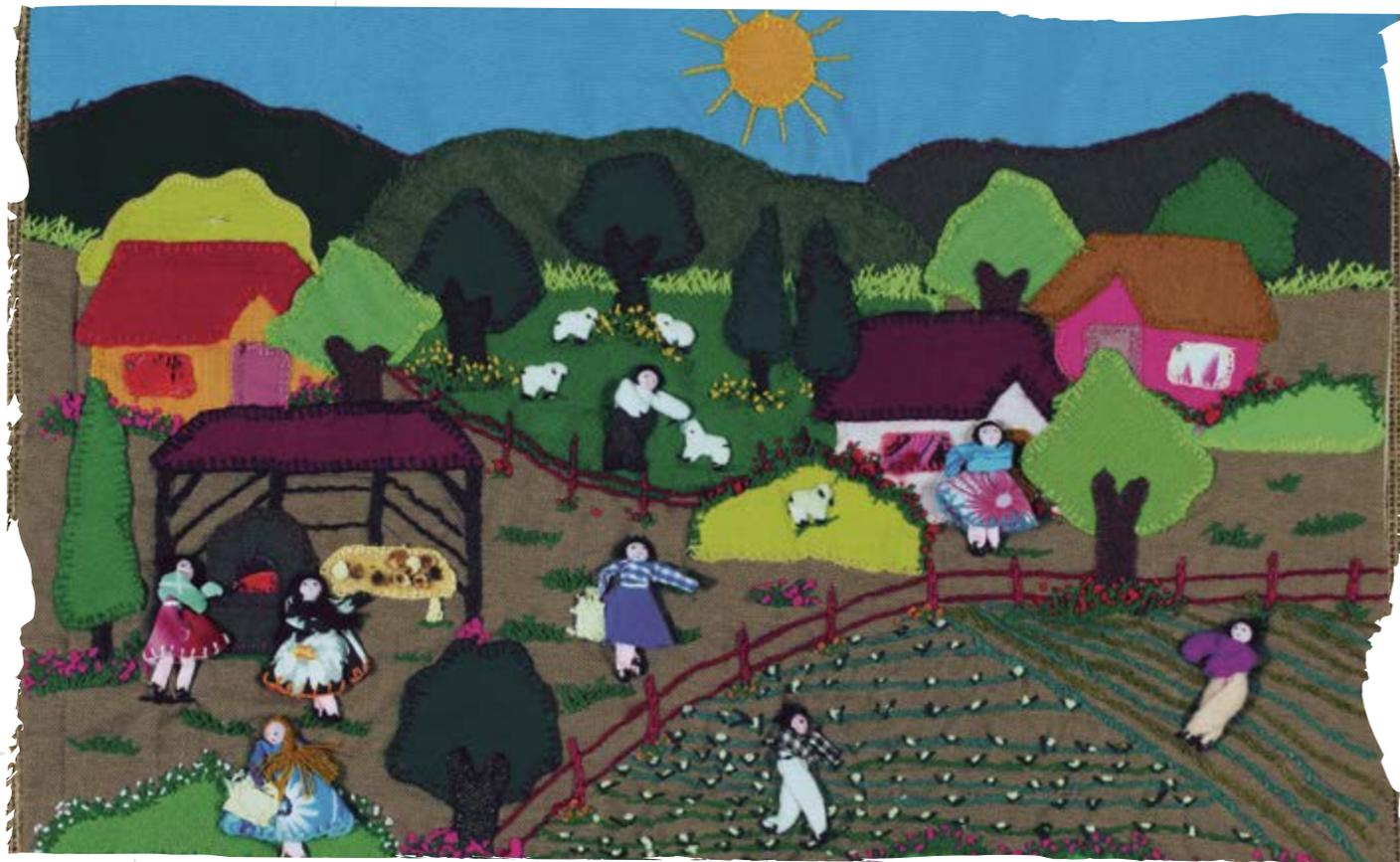


Image Martin Melaugh

Bucolic Country Life

Chilean arpillera | Taller Fundación Solidaridad | 2008

This arpillera journeys back to the classical pre-political tradition brought to prominence by **Las Bordadoras de Isla Negra** (the Embroiders of Isla Negra) who exhibited in the National Museum of Art in Chile in 1970.

As with other post political arpilleras using the pre-political style, simple, heart-warming images of country life are portrayed. We see people sowing and tilling crops, tending animals and baking bread in a huge outdoor oven. All are brightly dressed, the houses are well maintained and the sun shines brightly on this lush, green peaceful countryside.

A letter in a pocket on the reverse side of the arpillera adds to this bucolic depiction of rural life: “**See how beautiful our Chilean countryside is.**” It also alludes to a move towards commercialism in these post political pieces.

Courtesy of Sally Rose





Image Martin Melaugh

From Far Away Come Their Stories

Irish arpillera | Deborah Stockdale | 2010

This arpillera epitomises the layers of journeys undertaken by arpilleras and arpilleristas, from their humble origins in Chile, to far flung corners of the earth. It was made for the 2010 Chilean Embassy exhibition in Berlin, **Arpilleras from yesterday and today**, in response to the theme of ambassadorial arpilleras.

Reflecting on her own journey of creating this piece Deborah comments: “**The design developed as I thought of the long path that the traditional arpilleras from Chile and other countries have travelled to reach us in Western Europe. The stories that these arpilleras told about repressive conditions... were often challenging.**”

For Deborah, it was also important to depict the more philosophical journey of arpilleras.

Conflict Textiles collection

“This other journey, through symbols and imagery, has enabled many people to connect on a human level through arpilleras to other people from far away and in perhaps far differing and challenging circumstances, but in all cases emphasising the human conditions we all live in.”

Irish-American textile artist Deborah Stockdale, referring to her arpillera **From Far away come their stories** | 2012



Image Colin Peck

We Have no Access to Public Services

Chilean arpillera, anon. | 1984

Through this arpillera, made in a community workshop in Santiago, we journey back to the past and witness the daily hardships faced by this community during the Pinochet regime. The crosses stitched on the doors of public services show that ordinary people do not have access to these facilities. Two signs beside the minister's desk proclaim: "Minister of Education, betrayal to the fatherland," and "What is this?" They refer to former Justice Minister Monica Madariaga, who drafted the 1978 Amnesty Law (Amnesty to the perpetrators) to avoid legal action in the cases of human rights violation from 1973-1978.

Through a Swiss couple this arpillera journeyed to Europe, where it helped to highlight the grimness of life in Chile during the Pinochet dictatorship.

Today it invites us to connect with marginalised communities in various jurisdictions that, in the face of repressive regimes and times of conflict, are denied basic services.

Conflict Textiles collection | Donation from Heidi and Peter Gessler





Image Colin Peck

Water Cut

Chilean arpillera | anon. | c1980

This arpillera returns to the traditional style with the depiction of mountains and a flaming red sun. The poor people depicted here have had their water supply cut off by the government as a tactic to stop their anti-government protests.

The vibrant colours mirror the courage and resilience of these women, who, undaunted, carried buckets to their middle-class neighbours and asked them for water. The water tanks are visible in the bottom right hand corner, which the women filled that day in order to journey back to their communities victoriously bearing water.

The arpillera typifies the creativity and sheer determination of these women, working collectively, to provide a basic need for their families and communities,

a need denied to them by the dictatorship. In the words of Marjorie Agosin (2008): “They participated in all kinds of demonstrations against the dictatorship”

Conflict Textiles collection | Donation from Traude Rebman

Facts about Chile

Chile has had 2 Literature Nobel Prize Winners; Gabriela Mistral, Chilean poet, diplomat, educator and feminist who was the 1st woman to receive this prize in 1945. In 1971 the world acclaimed poet Pablo Neruda got the Nobel Prize. During his lifetime, Neruda also occupied many diplomatic positions and served a term as a Senator for the Communist Party.



Image Colin Peck

Arpillera Women and Cardboard Collectors

Chilean arpillera | anon. | c1980

This arpillera, upbeat and hopeful against the backdrop of poverty and political repression, depicts scenes from everyday life in a Santiago “población” (poor area). Industrious arpilleristas are at work, streets are being swept and neighbours chat at their doors. The cartoneros (people who collect cardboard to sell) struggling up the hill with their trailers full remind us of the harsh poverty of the area, a poverty heightened by the policies of the Pinochet dictatorship.

In the midst of this, these women in their variety of roles, ever resilient, not only found a way to survive but as arpilleristas found a way to narrate their stories to a global audience. Through this arpillera we journey into the work space of these women, absorbed in the process of creating their collective arpillera, ensuring that their experiences are known in the outside world.

Kinderhilfe arpillera collection | Chile/Bonn





Image Ana Zlatkes

XX1 Century Goddess

Argentinean arpillera | Ana Zlatkes & Mirta Zak | 2014

This arpillera, created specifically for the Verbal Arts Centre International Women's day 2014 initiative **Women 31** gives us an insight into the lives of contemporary professional woman.

We see a woman juggling the demands of family and professional life. Her ironing board doubles as a computer table and with her other hand she manoeuvres her hair dryer while balancing her phone. The stethoscope slung around her neck indicates that she is in the medical profession. The toddler wrapped around her legs, demanding immediate attention, is a quintessential image of motherhood, which resonates in all cultures. For this woman and for women globally, negotiating their multi-layered roles is a delicate, ever shifting, act of balance.

Through these images, Ana and Mirta prompt us to consider the global journeys of women, and to reflect on how and where women's experiences are at odds with our vision for women in the twenty first century.

Conflict Textiles collection

Did you Know?

Since 2008, arpilleras, quilts and wall hangings have been exhibited in museums, universities, art galleries, embassies and community spaces worldwide; accompanied by associated activities such as film screenings, workshops, and roundtable discussions. Over 120 such events have taken place.



Image Martin Melaugh

NO to the Antiterrorist Law

Chilean arpillera | Aurora Ortiz | 2011

A large number of the indigenous Mapuche (People of the Land) in Southern Chile have been forcibly displaced from their land and now live in the capital Santiago. Here we see one of the many public actions that took place in Santiago, during a hunger strike by 34 Mapuche prisoners, imprisoned in 2010 for defending their land.

We can see that everyday people have joined the nonviolent action in solidarity with the Mapuche in Santiago. Leading the march are Mapuche women, dressed in their indigenous clothes, and men wearing ponchos, carrying their flag, portraying a bright sun. They demand that the rights of their people imprisoned and on hunger strike are respected and upheld and that the anti-terrorist law is not enforced. The police have violently disrupted the march. Aurora, the artist, is one of the participants in this action.

Conflict Textiles collection





Image Martin Melaugh

Freedom to our Mapuche Brothers

Chilean arpillera | Aurora Ortiz | 2011

This arpillera, set in southern Chile, depicts Mapuche women protesting against the imprisonment of their community members for defending their land. Their banner demands: “Freedom to our Mapuche Brothers.” Strong symbols of their cultural identity are visible; we see the national climbing flower copihue, (co-pee-way / Mapudungun kopiwe) or Chilean bellflower, which grows in the Southern forests and blooms in early autumn.

Mapuche poet Jaime Huenún, who compiled and edited *Lof Sitiado* (Chile, LOM Ediciones, July 2011) comments on the global solidarity extended to these Mapuche political prisoners: “This book ...offers ...the genuine literary solidarity of the 105 authors of Chile, Latin America and Spain who ...reacted poetically ... to the long hunger strike that 34 Mapuche political prisoners started [in] 2010.”

Aurora, similar to Huenún, but through the medium of scraps, thread and needle, ensures that the story of the Mapuche land struggles journeys far beyond the Mapuche homeland.

Conflict Textiles collection

Facts about Chile

The Mapuche (people of the land) are the largest ethnic group in Chile, approximately 10% of the Chilean population. Half of them live in the south of Chile from the river Bío Bío until the Chiloé Island. The other half is found in and around the capital, Santiago. There are also around 300.000 Mapuches living in Argentina.

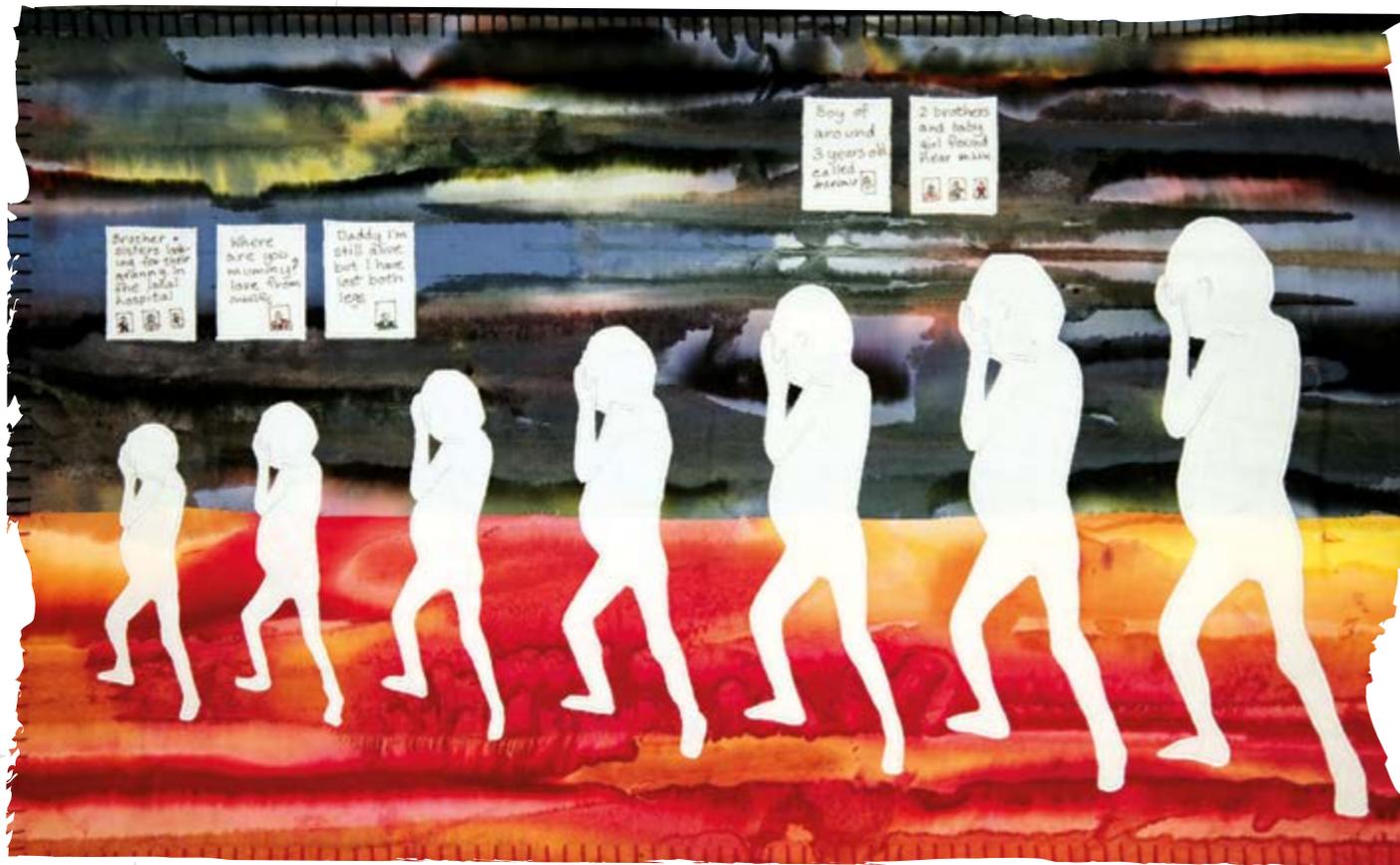


Image Martin Melaugh

Lost Children of War

Northern Ireland arpillera | Irene MacWilliam | 2009

Irene MacWilliam was deeply moved by the posters being circulated at one time to help families find each other after being separated and displaced by war. Especially concerned about the lost and displaced children, she created this piece, her first arpillera, to depict their desperation, making the children ghost like, devoid of nationality or race to express that they are living a half life. Irene chose to focus on children rather than adults: **“since the image of a distressed child is very emotive.”**

Displacement poses real dangers for children. Of the millions of children displaced by war, unaccompanied children are the most likely to be killed, tortured, raped, robbed and recruited as child soldiers.

Much remains to be done to safeguard children affected by armed conflict so that they have an opportunity to live as children, grow to adulthood and contribute to their communities.

Conflict Textiles collection

“I have had to make many of my pieces because something inside me compelled me. I showed them to Roberta and she wished to exhibit them.”

Northern Ireland textile artist Irene Mac William reflecting on what “compels” her to create textiles that show her concerns for people affected by violence and adversity.

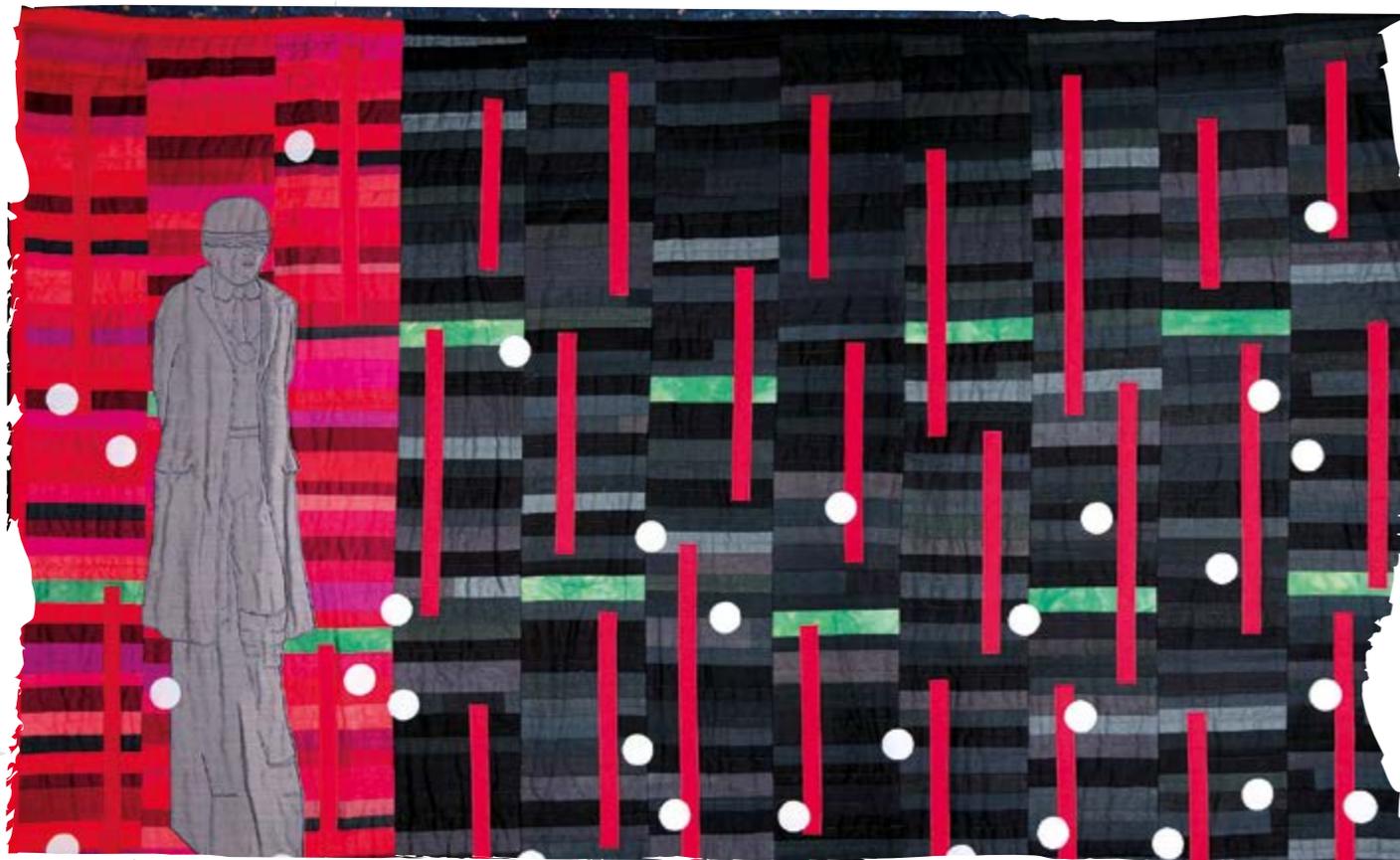


Image Martin Melaugh

Executed at Dawn

Northern Ireland wall hanging | Irene MacWilliam | 2009

Irene made this wall hanging as a tribute to a group of 306 soldiers who, in 1916, during the battle of the Somme in the First World War, were shot at dawn for alleged cowardice. A campaign for justice was run for decades on behalf of the soldiers' relatives, who argued that many soldiers were suffering from post traumatic stress disorder or shell shock. When initiating the process of granting a group pardon in 2006, the then Defense secretary, Des Brown explained: "... **The circumstances [of the war] were terrible... it is better to acknowledge that injustices were clearly done ... all these men were victims of war**" ([The Telegraph](#), 16 Aug 2006).

For Janet Booth, granddaughter of Private Harry Farr, shot at 23 years of age, Irene's wall hanging captures the reality of war: "[It] represented not only the needless killing of men but also the horrors of subsequent wars."

Conflict Textiles collection

Through working on exhibitions about the arpilleras I have been on my own journey of discovery, finding out about how women from across the world share their personal stories in such a powerful but simple manner.

Margaret Edwards | Education Officer | Derry City Council, Museum & Visitor Service



Image Martin Melaugh

Guadalupe's Longings

Peruvian arpillera | Guadalupe Ccallocunto | 1989

This arpillera was made by Guadalupe, from Ayacucho, Perú, while learning the art of making arpilleras in Chile in 1990, having journeyed there to escape death threats. Guadalupe became active in human rights after the disappearance of her husband during the war between the Peruvian government and the Shining Path movement, (1980 - 2000).

In her arpillera, made from dolls' dresses procured from her friend Roberta Bacic with whom she was staying, she portrays women and children engaged in the traditional activities of preparing food. Spools of thread and other materials are gathered in preparation for the workshop she dreamed of creating on her return to Peru.

Shortly afterwards, risking everything, she returned to her homeland and soon after, 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.

Conflict Textiles collection





Image Tony Boyle

My Memories of the Dictatorship

Brazilian arpillera | Fátima da Costa | 2012

This piece was created during a workshop as part of a Chilean arpillera exhibition commissioned by **Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo** in Brazil, 2011.

Fátima, now in her sixties, recalls a turbulent event in her home town of Recife, following the 1964 Brazilian coup d'état, which culminated in the overthrow of President João Goulart, ushering in a military regime which lasted until 1985.

Through her stitching, she revisits what she witnessed as a nine year old:

“Suddenly, around 9 AM, my parents closed ... their little shop. Lorries loaded with military ... ordered people to lock themselves and be silent. They surrounded the house of Mr. Popô, a neighbour who talked a lot with people in his home... Mr Popô disappeared...”

Reflecting on the arpillera workshop, facilitator Esther Vital Garcia recalls Fátima being fascinated with the power of arpilleras: “**to connect her with her own past**” and “**to create spaces in which individual stories and experiences could be connected.**”

Conflict Textiles collection

“She was fascinated [by] the power of arpilleras to connect her with [her] own past, to remember these episodes of [her] own childhood and to understand the political context that was going on at that time.”

Facilitator Esther Vital Garcia recalling Fátima da Costa connecting deeply with the arpillera process, during a workshop as part of a Chilean arpillera exhibition, commissioned by Memorial da Resistência de São Paulo in Brazil | 2011



Image Martin Melaugh

Recovering the Disappeared in 1990

Chilean arpillera | Taller Fundación Solidaridad | 1990

Startling in its graphic depiction of recovered bodies, this sombre arpillera challenges us to face the truth of the scale of disappearances and human rights abuses perpetrated by the violent Pinochet regime.

A letter in 1990 from Maria Hermosina Donoso to her Japanese comrades is tucked in a small pocket at the back of the arpillera. It chillingly informs us: “We are just emerging from the punishment of the dictatorship that started in 1973. There have been found many dead bodies, with their hands tied up to their back, close to the places they were buried alive.”

Creating this arpillera enabled these women to publicly highlight the truth of the fate of their disappeared loved ones, a truth long denied by the authorities.

Only now can these women, having finally had their truth vindicated, begin their journey forward with hope and dignity.

Professor Masaaki Takahashi collection | Japan





Image Colin Peck

Life in our Poor Neighbourhood

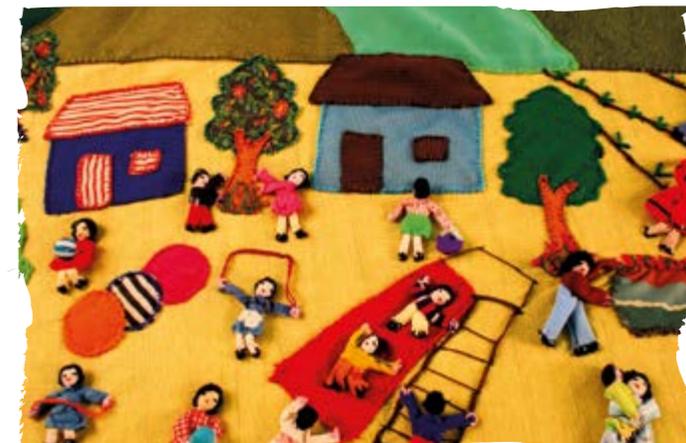
Chilean arpillera | Taller Recoleta | 1982

Created in the second half of the dictatorship, this arpillera portrays daily life in this bustling community. Though the people are still poor and can only source electricity by tapping into the main power supply, they are celebrating all the comings and goings of life. We see a wedding, a rodeo, children at play, a woman crying in front of her house, women undertaking household chores, baking empanadas in the park, gardening and people cultivating their food crops; all part of the fabric of life in this community, journeying forward with hope.

Since its creation, this arpillera has crossed continents; from Chile to Germany, then to Northern Ireland, for exhibition in **The Art of Survival: International and Irish Quilts**, launched on International Women's Day

2008. Since then it has inspired and challenged viewers in Brazil, Japan and Argentine. It now revisits Derry, marking another stage in its epic journey.

Conflict Textiles collection | Donation from Marta and Jürgen Schaffer



Collaborative Work

International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE)

Textile Accounts of Conflicts, an exhibition of textiles and associated memorabilia, was exhibited as part of the two day International Conference **Accounts of the Conflict: Digitally Archiving Stories for Peacebuilding**, hosted by the International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE), Ulster University in November 2014. It was open to the public at the Linen Hall Library, Belfast from 6th February until 7th March. Professor Gillian Robinson from INCORE, spoke of the power of textiles in articulating experiences of conflict: **“These textiles tell stories of hurt, pain, loss and suffering. In many cases they tell a story that cannot be articulated in words.”**

Electronic Archive of Textiles

A digital archive houses information on all events and exhibitions since 2008, www.cain.ulster.ac.uk/quilts Maintained by Martin Melaugh, Archivist with the International Conflict Research Institute (INCORE), University of Ulster, it is currently in the process of being upgraded and rebranded as **Conflict Textiles**. It has become a valuable resource for human rights activists, researchers, academics, curators, community workers and textile artists.

References

Agosin, Marjorie, (2008) *Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love, The Arpillera Movement in Chile 1974 – 1994*; 2nd Edition, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland, USA

Sepúlveda, Emma (1996) *We Chile- Personal Testimonies of the Chilean Arpilleras*, Azul Editions, 7804 Sycamore Drive, Falls Church, VA 22042, USA



When I first encountered this work, I told Roberta that it was the beginning of a journey, a journey that would build an unbreakable bond of solidarity between the women who contributed to it internationally and the women of this city. It has achieved this and much more.

I am absolutely proud that this collection, after all its journeys and given all the lives it has touched, has finally “come home” to Derry.

Helen Quigley | Mayor in 2008 when the collection first visited the city.



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