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The Consulate General of Chile in New York
Presents

Arpilleras: Embajadoras para el Bicentenario

Quilts / Arpilleras: Ambassadors for the Bicentennial



Exhibition
from April 14th through April 30th, 2010

Curated by Roberta Bacic



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FOREWORD

Patricio Damm van der Valk, Consul General of Chile in New York

Cuando Roberta abrió una bolsa plástica y de ella sacó un rollo de telas que cuidadosa y amorosamente desempacó en mi oficina en Londres hace ya algunos años, sus ojos brillaban al ritmo de sus manos. Esa telas, tan simples, tan rústicas, aunque irradiaban frescura, olían a rancio y a humedad guardada. No eran muchas, todas, una vivencia, una historia.

Allí empezó el camino de esta muestra que, con el apoyo del Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Chile, Roberta Bacic, chilena residente en los páramos del norte de Irlanda, hoy nos trae a Nueva York, quizás la ciudad más diametralmente distinta y opuesta a Isla Negra, la cuna de las arpilleras. La primera toda grande, toda gris, toda cemento, toda gente, todo rápido, la otra pequeña, lenta, lejana y silenciosa.

Si alguien que concurra a esta muestra al ver las telas se siente conmovido, se transporta al silencio o al tiempo, si siente el olor a pasto y a campo lindo, escucha el ruido de una población o de los pájaros sobrevolando un basural, nuestra tarea estará cumplida. Nuestro objetivo de traer humanidad y que esas mujeres sin voz sean escuchadas tanto en sus lamentos así como también en sus cantos de esperanza, también se habrá logrado.

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Some years ago, when Roberta opened a plastic bag from which carefully and lovingly pulled out a roll of fabric in my office in London, her eyes were shining at the rhythm of her hands. Although these simple and rustic quilts radiated freshness, they also smelled musty and dampness. The quilts were not many, but still, all of them carried an experience, a story.

This is how this exhibit began and today, with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Chile, Roberta Bacic, a Chilean living in the wilderness of Northern Ireland, is able to bring us to New York - perhaps the most different and diametrically opposite city from Isla Negra- the crib of these Arpilleras. While New York is all big, grey, fast, cement and crowded, Isla Negra is small, slow, distant and silent. If anyone attending this exhibition is touched after seeing these quilts, feels transported to silence and time, is able to smell grass and beautiful countryside, hear the noise of a flock of birds flying over a landfill, our task is accomplished. Our goal of bringing humanity, and letting these women without a voice to be heard, express their lamentations as well as their songs of hope will also be fullfield.

21

**Will there be poppies, daisies and apples when I grow up?,
Irene MacWilliam, Northern Ireland**



Irene MacWilliam's work includes a quilt made up of 3161 different pieces of red material from around the world, representing all of those killed between 1969 and 1994 in the Northern Irish conflict. This piece expresses the maker's own worries for her grandchildren and the burden of anxiety and responsibility they bear for climate change and an ever-changing environment. In this arpillera, she reflects the concerns affecting us

globally via the language and world of a child – will there still be flowers and apples in the future? MacWilliam's detailed stitching symbols of passing time and carbon footprints, make this piece a vivid and hard-to-forget work of art.

22

**The great famine 1845 -1847 through my paternal DNA, Helen
Heron, Northern Ireland**



This final piece, specially made for this exhibition, illustrates a dark period of Ireland's past, the Great Famine of the 1840s. During this catastrophe, 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. 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.

19

The pride of our new barns, Linda Adams, UK



This quilt-style arpillera was created especially for the Guinness Liverpool Irish festival 2009. It is made from the material of old clothes belonging to a girl who had just left home for college. Her mother, distraught at her leaving, couldn't bear to throw them out or give them away and asked Adams to incorporate them into a piece of work.

As well as the story of the 'rebirth' of this young woman's old clothes, this arpillera is a tribute to the rebirth of a suburban area through a community coming together to create a place of productivity and greenery. New Barns allotments are depicted here as a hub of fecund activity in the middle of a built up area. The piece has a number of beautiful details including the bonfire and rows of painstakingly made vegetables.

20

Life as we know it, Deborah Stockdale, Ireland



This piece reflects the ongoing development of the arpillera style. With its strong references to quilt-making, it absorbs the arpillera tradition of telling a story.

As a continuation of the theme of the women-centered pieces represented in the Peruvian arpilleras, this piece depicts the cycle of a woman's life from infancy to old age. The maker uses the image of the spiral, recognized globally and through time as a symbol of

continuation; to illustrate the ongoing pathway we all follow (women and men) from birth to death and the evolutions this entails physically and emotionally. Stockdale's imaginative use of textile painting, as well as quilting styles, makes this a rich and colorful development of the arpillera style. It was on display at the Tower Museum in Derry for International Women's Day in 2009.

ABOUT THE ARPILLERAS



Arpilleras ("ar-pee-air-ahs") are three-dimensional appliqué textiles from Latin America originated in Isla Negra, an area on the Chilean west coast where rags were used to create images of daily life and then embroidered on large pieces of cloth which, sometimes, attached small dolls and objects in order to give the textiles a three-dimensional effect. Originally Hessian fabric (or 'arpillera' in Spanish) was used, as the textile's support hence, that word became the name for this particular type of tapestry.

The Chilean cultural tradition of the arpillera is celebrated in this collection, in its traditional and politicized form, and in its evolution beyond boundaries going from Chile to Peru and Ecuador, where people used this craft to sew together their own concerns and hopes of their communities by engaging new audiences. Also we show its most recent incarnations in Europe, where traditional quilting styles have absorbed the arpillera style and made it into something fresh and unique.

The arpilleras of this exhibition can be considered on a number of levels. They might be considered as merely colorful craftwork exercises, or as examples of a tradition that began in Chile, which has now stretched and evolved across other Latin American countries and Europe. Another reading is that they are symbols of sisterhood, created by groups of women working together and producing something they could then sell, to help provide for themselves, their families, and communities. Alternatively, one can see them as missives from campaigners whose message was otherwise stifled from being heard in any other way as examples of subversion against a repressive regime. Finally, these pieces may also be viewed as simple reflections of daily life anywhere; reflections of happiness, anxiety, hope, grief, and courage.

The wonderful thing about this collection is that these pieces are one and all of these things. If the viewer wishes they could simply engage with the basic beauty of the interwoven colors and rags of cloth, which produce vivid mosaics of lives unfurled across old flour sacks and bright textiles. Choosing to look a little closer will reveal the stories, which these pieces endeavor to relate to us. Taking the time to focus on the apparently

innocuous brightly colored three-dimensional dolls dancing across some of these pieces, you see that they are not simply puppets but marching campaigners; victims of domestic violence seeking justice; the impoverished seeking food, shelter, and water; relatives calling for information on the whereabouts of their 'disappeared' loved one; a community working to improve their area. Likewise you may at first only see multicolored pastoral landscapes but on closer inspection recognize the layers of daily life which are sewn onto these rags and strips of cloth, scraps of material which themselves carry stories of former lives and histories. Whatever strikes one first glancing across these beautiful works of art, be sure to look again, and then again, and even again to unearth the layer upon layer of meaning, symbolism, and stories which these arpilleras have to share.

**Roberta Bacic, curator,
New York, April 2010**

For extensive information on arpilleras and quilts exhibitions, visit www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts

17

**Escuelita de Otavalo / Otavalo primary school
Anonymous, Ecuador.**



This contemporary arpillera from Ecuador represents an imaginative take on the traditional style using indigenous Ecuadorian weaving techniques. This piece depicts the primary school at Otavalo in the North of Ecuador. Otavalo is famous for its Saturday textile market where the local indigenous people sell their brightly colored hand crafted textiles. This arpillera was bought in 2009 by the Chilean filmmaker Vivienne Barry, who is known for her award-

winning animated short film about the arpillera movement in Chile. The largest image is that of a girl with braided hair carrying a bag. She may be the teacher of the school, or perhaps the school child who made the arpillera. We also see a row of children and a blackboard with the words: "My little house is the most beautiful in the world".

(Courtesy of curator's collection)

18

**Cruce de caminos / Crossing pathways,
Mary Ann O' Neil, Esther Vidal, Marta Moya and Elisa Covelo;
Spain**



This piece was created by a group of women who took part in the 'Women's real lives' event for International Women's Day in March 2009. It reflects how this diverse group of women were inspired, provoked, and encouraged by their experiences in Derry in 2008 where, as well as seeing quilts and arpilleras from all over the world, they crossed paths with each other in the group as well as those they met at the

event. This piece combines the traditional use of three-dimensional dolls made from scraps of fabric to represent the women with the innovative printing of photographs of a mural and arpillera onto fabric, which was then incorporated into the piece

15

Violencia doméstica / Domestic violence F.C.H., Peru



This is the second of the replica arpilleras produced originally in 1985 by Mujeres Creativas, illustrating another significant issue of International Women's Day – domestic violence. This arpillera in striking detail depicts the travails of a victim of violence and her attempts to get justice. First, we see a brutal attack on the pregnant victim. The room is in disarray, a child cries, and neighbors peer through the window (notice the traditional arpillera on the wall). The next scene shows the women neighbors dragging the violent husband to the local police to have him charged.

However, not receiving justices, they enact their own. Finally, we see the man tied to a tree with a sign saying, "I will not beat again", while the women are seen to be relaxed, happy that justice has been served.

(Courtesy of the curator's collection)

16

Los precios están por las nubes / Prices are sky high, Peru



Returning to issues of poverty, this arpillera from the 1980s, illustrates the Spanish saying 'Los precios están por las nubes', literally meaning 'prices are sky high'. In its colorful depiction of economic woe, we see queues of women waiting for their ticket at the shops, holding empty bags and wearing angry, frustrated expressions on their faces.

Those who get a turn at shopping buy only meager amounts, as illustrated by the small bags that do not bulge with purchases. In the skies above this scene, we see the basic condiments, the prices of which are out of reach for these women – flour, sugar, rice, corn, oil, and so on.

(Courtest of Rebecca Dudley, USA/Northern Ireland)

WORKS IN EXHIBITION

1

Armonía entre la vida y el medio ambiente / Harmony between life and environment, Anonymous, Chile



This vibrantly colorful piece was made in one of the Isla Negra workshops in Chile. In the classical style it depicts the Chilean mountains and a bright sun in the background shining down on the events below. Bought in a craft shop in Edinburgh, Scotland in 2000, it is a beautiful example of the pre-political traditional arpillera style. Unlike the political arpilleras, which grew from this folk tradition, some of which are exhibited here, this piece seems to depict a less anxious, and less complicated time.

The lively scenes reflect the multiple layers of daily life, from the birds in the sky, the animals herded in the hills, the bustling streets and houses, the playground, and the fields of crops being tended; all of these layers are then also shown to be interconnected, sharing the one space.

2

La gente necesita trabajar/ People need work, Anonymous, Chile



In this first of the political arpilleras of the exhibition, we can see how an important element of daily life is being portrayed: the shortage of work. The men and women depicted appear to be discussing their worries about unemployment, perhaps having come to the municipality building to seek work and seen the 'no vacancies' sign hung on its door. In keeping with the arpillera tradition, the sun still shines from behind the mountains, reflecting, perhaps, that there is still hope. This arpillera has had an adventurous history. Made in Chile c.1975, then brought to Ireland by a Spanish priest who had received it from a priest in Chile, the priest bestowed it to his sister, an activist with Chilean women's solidarity groups, who later acquired more arpilleras in the late 1970s.

(Courtesy of Rosario Miralles, Spain)

3

**Vicaría de la Solidaridad / The Vicarage of Solidarity
Anonymous, Chile**



This detailed arpillera depicts an important human rights association born from the repressive tactics of the dictatorship (the “Vicarage of Solidarity”) founded by Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez soon after Pinochet’s 1973 coup to work to support human rights issues, provide first-aid, space to meet and helping the poor and isolated and also to set up arpilleras workshops. The arpillera itself was made in a workshop run by the vicarage and illustrates a number of the activities which took place there: actions regarding legal defence, exile, political prisoners, the disappeared, and the presentation of habeas corpus to the courts. This piece does not contain the mountains and sun of the traditional arpillera, but instead uses the art to focus on the depiction of a particular movement which was, as the banner proclaims, “In the Service of Life”.(Courtesy of Kinderhilfe Chile-Bonn, Germany)

4

**Encadenamiento / Women chained to parliament gates,
Anonymous, Chile**



This striking piece from the late 1980s reflects one of the great tragedies of Chile’s history – the Disappeared. The women depicted have chained themselves to the parliament gates to draw attention to their plight, their need to know where their ‘disappeared’ loved ones are, and to protest at the government’s denial of any knowledge of their whereabouts.

This underlines the divisions in Chilean society which saw many turn their eyes from the truth rather than recognize what was happening. Unlike most other Chilean examples, the mountains and bright sun is not depicted. An international monitor of Chile’s 1988 plebiscite, which saw the end of the dictatorship, purchased this piece. (Courtesy of Seán Carroll, USA/Spain)

13

**Volcán Osorno/ Osorno volcano
Fundación Solidaridad Workshop, Chile**



This final Chilean arpillera from 2007 returns to the classical pre-political tradition as represented by the first arpillera of this exhibition (Harmony, Life, Environment). It depicts daily life under the Osorno Volcano in the Los Lagos region of Chile. As with the earlier pre-political arpillera exhibited here, this piece represents the daily life of its protagonists as simple and idyllic. Farmers are seen tilling their crops, and neighbors chatting. The stark contrast with the political messages of earlier arpilleras is almost unsettling: one finds oneself searching for political meaning among the lakeside flowers! This arpillera represents the change in direction towards commercialism in the arpillera style but stays true to the art’s mission to reflect daily life, political or otherwise.

14

Hogar dulce hogar / Home sweet home, Peru



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

Reflecting some of the concerns of International Women’s Day, this piece is an imaginative slant on the traditional style of the Chilean arpillera, which inspired the Peruvian arpilleras. The tongue-in-cheek title of this work 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. While representing important issues for women in Peru and worldwide, it is done with humor.

11

Arpilleristas y cartoneros / Arpillerista women and cardboard collectors. Anonymous, Chile



A detail of this arpillera, made in 1978 and later acquired by the German Kinderhilfe child support charity, was chosen as the illustration for the invitation to this exhibition. The arpillera depicts very upbeat, busy, and hopeful scenes in the midst of the poverty of the “población” (poor area) and ongoing political repression. While the sun does not shine over these

Chilean mountains, the scenes acted out below them remain bright. In the first house, we see a group of industrious arpilleristas busily at work. Outside, streets are being swept and neighbors chat at their doors. As a reminder of the area’s poverty, we see cartoneros (people who collect cardboard to sell) struggling up the hill with their trailers full. Unusually, silk is used in this piece. Overall, this piece reflects hope and continued shared community against the odds. (Courtesy of Kinderhilfe Chile-Bonn, Germany)

12

**Fin de semana en una población/Weekend in a población
Anonymous, Chile**



This piece, from the Kinderhilfe collection, again depicts the mountains and wide open blue skies of Chile with a bright sun shining down. This large arpillera reflects the daily life within a población (poor neighborhood). The vibrant energy is beautifully illustrated here as a hive of activity. To the right of the foreground, we

see people around a table preparing the traditional Chilean food of empanadas, which are cooked in the clay oven beside it. We also see children playing and boys fishing at the river; women are washing their clothes and beating the dust from blankets. We see a busy soup kitchen providing for the very poor – indicating the divisions of need among the poor. However, the sun still shines down on all of them equally. (Courtesy of Kinderhilfe Chile-Bonn, Germany)

5

**Vida bajo llaves / We have to live indoors
Anonymous, Chile**



This arpillera, purchased by a Swiss couple involved in Solidarity work in Chile, was created in the late 1970s as part of a workshop formed by a Protestant church group in the shantytowns of Santiago. This piece depicts the harsh reality of daily life for those involved in its making. Poverty and its stresses are reflected across the scenes portrayed, but importantly, these anxieties

are hidden behind doors, and are only revealed when the viewer lifts the doors to look inside. In one house, women making soup lament its frugality, knowing there is not enough; elsewhere, three sick children are crammed into one bed; an elderly lady says she misses her husband; others worry about the lack of work. The colors here are duller, and, while there are mountains, there is no sun.

(Courtesy of Heidi and Peter Gessler, Switzerland)

6

**Panfleteando en el 1979 en Santiago / Leafleting in Santiago
in 1979 . Anonymous, Chile**



This colorful and somewhat childlike arpillera sewn on a piece of Hessian flour sacking, from the late 1970s, depicts a scene where campaigners are distributing pamphlets to pedestrians and drivers to raise awareness of the relatives of the Disappeared.

Again, the traditional style of the mountains is represented, here using a myriad of colorful scraps of cloth. The

sun, however, is not yet seen to be shining – perhaps representing the dangers that still prevailed. The large houses and trees indicate that the campaigners have been emboldened to go into middle-class areas to carry their message. This is not the shantytown of the previous arpillera. It illustrates the relentless attempts made to reveal the unsavory hidden truths, which plagued certain groups within the society, truths which others often chose to remain ignorant of. (Courtesy of Jacqui Monty, England)

7

**Paz, justicia, libertad / Peace, justice, freedom
Anonymous, Chile**



This arpillera, from the late 1970s, returns to the classical style of mountains and bright sunshine in the background but is very much politically charged. Once again it depicts the campaigns by the loved ones of the Disappeared. Protesters call for “Peace, Justice, Freedom”, more carry leaflets with campaign information, while others clash cymbals in front of police cars to get attention to their message. The plight of the Disappeared is also literally sewn into this piece, with the dark grey background being made from the trousers of a disappeared man, and the checked fabric of the road from the shirt of another one of the disappeared. The vibrant colors and the personalization of the representation of the Disappeared in this piece make it a particularly defiant expression against the political repression, which inspired it.

(Courtesy of Alba Sanfeliú, Spain)

8

**La cueca sola / Dancing cueca alone
Anonymous, Chile**



Made by one of the Association of the Detained and Disappeared workshops, and obtained in Santiago in 1991, this arpillera was probably made sometime in the late 1980s before the dictatorship ended. The absence of those who had been disappeared is portrayed poignantly here in the figures of the women dancing the traditional Chilean dance, “la cueca”, without partners. In the place of their loved ones, the women have pinned photos of them to their clothes. Even with these absences the women sing and dance, symbolizing their fortitude and

hope. This piece again does not follow the traditional style and takes the scene indoors away from the mountains and sun. While this arpillera lacks some of the flamboyant colors of many of the other pieces, its defiant message is no less striking.

(Courtesy of Gaby Franger and Rainer Huhle, Germany)

9

**Homenaje a los caídos / Homage to the fallen ones
Anonymous, Chile**



This arpillera from the late 1970s was one of those sold by NGOs and church organization to support the arpilleristas (the makers of arpilleras).

The piece’s bright colors belie the grave tone of the story that is being told of poverty, grief, and protest. Again, this political arpillera lacks the mountains and sun of the traditional style and instead has the contrast of a mainly

black foreground to the bright houses.

In the background, poor villagers are tapping electricity from the overhead wires to their homes; in the front of the picture the pathway is lined by candles marking the disappeared; women are thrown on the road in protest; others carry candles and hand out pamphlets with information, while the group under the tree carry a placard saying “Homage to the Fallen”. (Courtesy of Fátima Miralles, Spain)

10

Corte de agua / Water cut. Anonymous, Chile



This arpillera returns to the traditional style with the depiction of mountains and a bright shining red sun. The optimism of this style is reflected in the scene, which portrays the courage and resilience of those who protested against the dictatorship.

The piece represents the response of the poor who had their water supply cut off by the government in order to bully them into stopping their anti-government protests. In defiance, the women from these poor areas carried buckets to their middle-class neighbors and asked them for water. In the bottom right hand corner you can see the water tanks, which the women filled that day in order to carry water back to their communities. The scene reflected in this arpillera illustrates the sense of empowerment, which the arpilleras gave to their creators.

(Courtesy of curator’s collection)