

# Peruvian Arpilleras that tell a story, cry out, challenge and question

## Catalogue

Specially curated by Roberta Bacic for the Verbal Arts Centre,  
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*Photos of arpilleras by Martin Melaugh*

*Arpilleras (pronounced "ar-pee-air-ahs") are three-dimensional appliqué textiles of Latin America. "Arpilleras" is actually from the Chilean tradition, an old regional pictorial appliqué technique from Isla Negra on the coast of Chile, whereby rags were used to create images and then embroidered on large pieces of cloth. Initially hessian, or in Spanish "arpillera", was used as their backing, and that then became the name for this particular type of quilt. Generally they are known as quilts or wall hangings. They are considered contemporary craft. Sometimes small dolls were made and added to make the three dimensional effect. Most of them were done in especially hard political times, in a particular context, and they reveal to us now what the experience meant, since then. The technique was then passed to Peru where it is very much used.*

**The arpilleras are attached to an old Irish Paisley pattern quilt and were stitched onto it by Amelia Stewart**

## **La vida sencilla nos hace felices / The Simple life makes us happy**

This Peruvian arpillera was made in one of the well-known workshops of Lima. It was set up during the hard times of the war between government forces and Shining Path, though it still exists as a space created by and for women. It helps them to support their family income, sometimes being the only earner.

The action in this arpillera takes place mainly in the family garden. Everybody seems very busy doing domestic and garden chores. They look content and each member of the group is doing something. The textiles and embroidery are colourful.

The people also seem very friendly to each other. You can see it in their smiles. They have used little dolls to give life and perspective to the different characters they represent.

Courtesy of Gaby Franger and Rainer Huhle, Germany



## **Juntas podemos construir la paz / Together we can build peace**

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This is an arpillera that shows only women. They are symbolically standing around the globe, letting us know that they represent the voice of women from all over the world. They are holding hands and declare: **WE WANT PEACE** and they also express the way they think this can be achieved by saying: “**Let us hold hands**”.

The women have also embroidered peace symbols so as to make sure their message gets through.

Courtesy of Gaby Franger and Rainer Huhle, Germany



## Crear espacios para los derechos de la mujer / Create space for women's rights

This Peruvian arpillera was made in one of the well-known workshops of Lima. It was set up during the hard times of the war between government forces and Shining Path, though it still exists as a space created by and for women. It helps them to support their family income, sometimes as the only way.

The action in this arpillera takes place in an enclosed space. Women are having a workshop on women's rights and empowerment. On the back wall you can see two posters. One says: **Woman, value yourself!** The other says: **Should I be humble and submissive?** If you look at the women, they seem like they are downtrodden. They are sitting in a circle. Two are so bent that you can not see the faces. One is standing in a very awkward manner. Three are reading something that we can imagine relates to women's rights.

However, this arpillera shows women who have already made a space to deal with their issues, a preliminary step to dealing with those issues.

Courtesy of Gaby Franger & Rainer Huhle, Germany



## El alcalde no nos escucha / The Mayor does not listen

This Peruvian arpillera was made in one of the well-known workshops of Peru.

These Peruvian villagers have taken to the streets to demand that their local governing body guarantee their needs so as to be able to live a normal life.

These local people have not been listened to so they had to take to the streets. They have clearly decided to act as a group to solve their problems, in spite of the police trying to stop them. Their banners make it clear that they lack clean water, sewage and basic food. There is a marked contrast between the heavy dark back of the policeman and the light and cheerful appearance of the protestors.

This arpillera uses unusual colours, though it keeps the classical pattern of mountains at the back and a big shining sun that shines for all. In this case the sun resembles a star.

Courtesy of Gaby Franger & Rainer Huhle, Germany

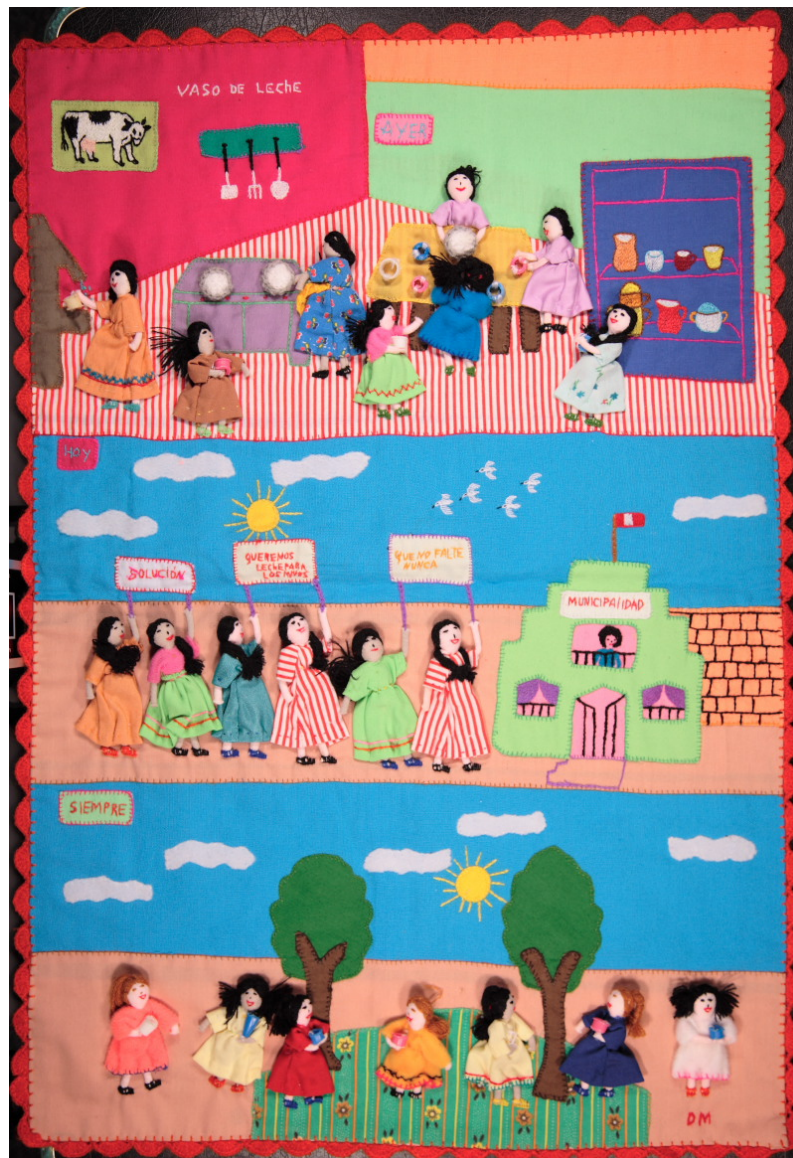


## Un vaso de leche para cada niña / A glass of milk for every child

This Peruvian arpillera is divided into three clear-cut periods of time. The top section – **yesterday** - shows women inside their homes, happy as their children enjoy drinking milk. It depicts content family life. The next picture – **today** – shows women out in the streets walking to the Council buildings. The children are not in the picture. The women have gone in pairs marching and carrying three different banners: **Solution – we want milk for our children; That we never are out of it.** They show a peaceful attitude by flying embroidered white doves above their march. The third section reads **Always** and shows the women walking with glasses of milk which they are bringing home to their children.

The women are stating that they will be happy at home and in their communities and supportive of policies as long as they are heard in their needs and they can get on with their lives. The demand they are making is very concrete and reasonable.

Courtesy of Gaby Franger & Rainer Huhle, Germany



Peruvian arpillera made by workshop “Mujeres Creativas” in the 1990s

## **Municipio: escúchanos! / Council: listen to us!**

These Peruvian villagers have taken to the streets to demand that their local governing body guarantee their needs so as to be able to live a normal life. The banner at the front says, Communal meeting: Live Peru! and the other banners say: The Mayor does not want to see us!

We demand solutions!

We have no sewage!

We want water!

We want electricity!

We have no mobility!

These indigenous people have not been listened or consulted so they had to take to the streets. They proudly identify as indigenous by wearing their traditional clothing and plaiting their hair as seen in books about Andean people. They also identify themselves as “Meeting Communal”, the name of their group. They have clearly decided to act as a group to solve their problems.

This arpillera uses unusual colours, though it keeps the classical pattern of mountains at the back and a big shining sun that shines for all.

Courtesy of Gaby Franger & Rainer Huhle, Germany



## Baile Puneño / Puno folk dance

This Peruvian arpillera was made in one of the well-known workshops of Lima. I found it at the house of a librarian friend in Cambridge in October 2008. This wall hanging was brought back to England about 20 years ago and has been in her home all that time. It represents the traditional folk dance “Baile Puneño” which is danced in Puno and other places of Peru.

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

The scene is centred on the dancers who are wearing festival clothes and hats, like those worn in Bolivia. *Bailes Puneños* is danced at the time of La Candelaria festivity which is a religious Catholic celebration marked by carnival. The couples dance in pairs on stage or on a specially prepared arena only for dancers and players. The public stands, looks, cheers and engages by watching from behind a fence.

Courtesy of Julie Coimbra, England





## **Exigimos libertad de expresión / We demand the right to free expression**

This Peruvian arpillera was made by the Micaela Bastidas group in Pamplona Alta, Lima in 1992.

The action in this arpillera takes place on the streets. A group of women and men are demonstrating to express their immediate needs. They are marching together and carry two banners. One says: **We demand secure work** and the other reads **Solution to our problems**. Instead of being listened to, they are being sprayed with water by a police car so that they disperse. Two policemen are pulling a person by the hair and beating him/her. Another group carries a banner saying: **No to repression**. We also see people looking at what is going on from the windows of the neighbouring flats.

Courtesy of Gaby Franger and Rainer Huhle, Germany



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

This Peruvian arpillera was made in one of the well-known workshops of Lima. It was set up during the hard times of the war between government forces and Shining Path, though it still exists as a space created by and for women. It helps them to support their family income, sometimes being the only earner.

The action in this arpillera takes place in the open air. A group of women, all with black hair are holding on their shoulders a very big bag which has on it the \$ sign and on each side the word **external** and **debt**. Another set of women, a bit below the first group, is outside their small neighbourhood homes. Each of them holds a handbag that, by the movement the women are making, seems to point out that they are empty. If you look carefully at these women they all seem annoyed or angry, expressed by the way the mouths are stitched.

In contrast, the right hand side of the arpillera shows a couple embracing each other. The woman is blond, the man red haired. They are in front of their big home, which has a car parked in front of it and they seem to be talking about holidays in Miami. They look relaxed, smiling and content.

Courtesy of Gaby Franger & Rainer Huhle, Germany

