

# Communities Connect & Dundalk Institute of Technology

*Presents*

## **finding our voices –the power of *arpilleras***

### CATALOGUE

Exhibition: 29th September—8th October 2009  
Dundalk Institute of Technology

Curator Roberta Bacic

#### **Vida en Nuestra Población/Life in our Poor Neighbourhood**

Chilean three dimensional arpillera. Women are not alone in this arpillera. Men and children play prominent roles. A Man and Woman are getting married which reflects hope for the future. Children's activities dominate the centre of the arpillera—skipping, jumping on a trampoline, and playing on the swings. It reflects busy, simple and enjoyable everyday life. If you look beyond this striking detail, other scenes are taking place, some not that happy, just look beyond and enjoy. Courtesy of Jurgen & Marta Schaffer (Germany)



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# **Finding our voices - the power of arpilleras and other forms of expression**

**Specially curated by Roberta Bacic for Communities Connect  
29<sup>th</sup> September until the 8<sup>th</sup> October 2009**

## **Foreword**

It is a privilege for all of us at Communities Connect to host the **finding our voices** *arpillera* exhibition. We are honoured to share with you these vivid examples of work which have been the only vehicle through which many people have been able to tell their stories of injustice, violence, repression, loss and trauma. Some of the *arpilleras* portray outrage at the system; others speak of symbolic ways to protest, while others offer creative solutions to social problems. But all depict common themes which tap into the collective humanity of every one of us. This exhibition is a testimony to the Women who stitched their life-affirming messages often under life-changing and life-threatening conditions.

The **finding our voices** exhibition is an invitation for individuals, groups and communities to bear witness to the stories of individuals and groups from grass roots communities across the world which they have woven in the tapestry of their *arpilleras*. For some time this form of story telling has drawn my attention and when I thought about the emphasis in the Communities Connect project on finding our voices and sharing our stories I was very aware of the powerful role which the *arpilleras* could play in this process. We had already worked with the curator and I am delighted that we could host these *arpilleras* as the focal point for a series of events and activities. May these *arpilleras* provoke and inspire us into hearing others' stories as well as searching for a form of expression that most resonates with us as individuals and communities to tell our stories.

May we hear others' voices and find our voices.

**Johdi Quinn, manager of Communities Connect, September 2009**

## Introduction

When asked to curate the present exhibition for Communities Connect, I was pleased to be able to do so. A fundamental reason to think that an exhibition of this kind should be central to this project is the fact that the pieces here on exhibition all come from grassroots groups and women who have found the need to express themselves as individuals, as members of a family, a group, and a community. They have felt compelled to share their experiences and feelings and to reach out so as to be heard and also to hear what others have to say.

Arpilleras (pronounced "ar-pee-**air**-ahs") are three-dimensional appliqué textiles of Latin America. The term "Arpillera" 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 made in especially hard political times, in a particular context, and they reveal to us now what the experience meant, at that time. The technique was then passed to Peru where it is very much used to date.

Some of these arpilleras depict daily scenes of life and give us an insight into what the maker's life is like. There are others that go further in using traditional textile crafts to depict repression, violence, pain, trauma and misery, and this tendency is growing. Also it is giving women the chance to say NO to this continued eruption of violence into our lives. Handmade cloth works such as these convey experiences that are difficult or impossible to express in words and cross the barriers of language and culture to communicate with other people. Most of the images speak for themselves.

They do not only tell a story, a life experience, they also trigger a reaction in the viewer. It brings out in "the other" a need to respond, be that by an action or just engaging.

***"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"***

This quote comes from Marjorie Agosín's book: ["Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love, The Arpillera movement in Chile 1974-1994"](#) with a foreword by Isabel Allende, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, USA, 2008.

I invite you to submerge yourself in these pieces, look into their stories and **listen** to what they tell us. Let us explore where we are in relation to them and the world they represent and ask ourselves: what can we do about this?

Last but not least, let us look at them as contemporary art as they have been exhibited around the world not only in museums, but also by NGOs, Church institutions, art galleries, schools, universities, libraries, women's organizations and more. They are no longer a set of women's crafts only accessible in the circles of those who know their stories and feel

compassion and solidarity. They have gone beyond. Wherever they are shown, these arpilleras and quilts make themselves accessible to us, to do more, to move beyond.

Enjoy them in all their inspiring aspects.

**Roberta Bacic, curator of this exhibition, September 2009**

**Photos by Colin Peck and Martin Melaugh**

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**For an extensive archive on this subject, visit [www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts](http://www.cain.ulst.ac.uk/quilts)**

## Community Quilt

2.40 X 2.40 meters

This quilt was made by 25 women's groups from the West of Ireland and presented to Women Together in response to an invitation made by Mary Robinson at the time she was the president of Ireland (1990-1997). Pat Campbell, who is the coordinator of Northern Ireland's Peace Quilts that belong to Women Together, has written a brief piece for this exhibition so that we can relate better to it. We are privileged to include it here by the quilt.

The curator adds:

Asking yourself the following questions can increase your appreciation of the quilt, which has layer upon layer of meaning.

What does this quilt tell **YOU**?

Were you familiar with story quilts?

Have you been in any of the communities who participated? If so, what brought you there?

What would you like to tell the women who made the pieces?

Choose two panels and reflect on what made you select them from the rest.

Have you quilted or met quilters before?

Have you been involved in any storytelling workshop/residential?

## **Vida en Nuestra Población / Life in our Poor Neighbourhood**

Chilean arpillera, Taller Recoleta, Santiago, 1989, Courtesy of Jürgen and Marta Schaffer, Germany

1.20 X 1.90 meters

This arpillera was made as a result of a workshop run by a nun, Sister Carolina. Created towards the end of the dictatorship, it portrays life in the community—both the good and bad parts.

The scene is happier than those created earlier in the dictatorship. Though the people are still poor and unable to afford their own electricity (note the wires tapping into the main power line), they are happier, celebrating all the comings and goings of life. In one scene, a couple is being wed. In another, mothers hug their children.

Women are not alone in this arpillera. Men and children play prominent roles. Children's activities dominate the whole of the centre of the arpillera - skipping, jumping on a trampoline, and playing on the swings; a complete contrast to nearly all the quilts produced during the dictatorship. The left side shows women undertaking household chores and people cultivating their food crops. Women are also seen gardening (top right). The rodeo on the right shows us the enjoyment of communal and leisure activity and the wedding scene is a sign of hope for the future.



## **La cueca sola / Dancing cueca alone**

Chilean arpillera, anon, late 1980s, courtesy Gaby Franger and Rainer Huhle, Germany

0.50 x 0.40 cm

This Chilean arpillera was made by one of the workshops of the Association of Detained and Disappeared and acquired in Santiago in 1991. It was probably made in the late 1980s, shortly before the end of the dictatorship.

In this arpillera we can see women dancing "Cueca" the traditional Chilean dance. Cueca, is danced in pairs - an important fact considering the dance is meant to represent the different emotions and stages of romance.

Here the women dance alone as their husbands, sons, brothers, or lovers have been disappeared or exiled, so they continue the dance, wearing the image of their loved ones over their hearts. "The dance represents a denunciation of a society that makes the bodies of victims of political violence disappear, denying them a proper burial and silencing their mourners. Through *la cueca sola*, the dancers tell a story with their solitary feet, the story of the mutilated body of a loved one. Through their movements and the guitar music, the women also recreate the pleasure of dancing with the missing person." Their courage and determination has inspired people all over the world, including musician Sting, whose song has been taken up by many other artists including Joan Baez and Holly Near.



## ¡ Adiós Pinochet! / Good bye Pinochet!

Chilean arpillera, anon, mid 1980s, Courtesy of Heidi and Peter Gessler, Switzerland

0.40 X 0.50 cm

Women have gathered in the streets of a modest neighbourhood to express their opinion and confront the situation that they see is keeping them, and their community, from having a better life. We can see that they are impoverished as they have to no electricity supply in their small houses and have to steal it by attaching electrical cables to the source. In spite of this they depict their homes with bright colours and the classical mountains and sun are there.

They are divided into two groups, each carrying a banner. One says: **OUT PINOCHET!** The other reads: **Good bye Pinochet!**

This arpillera was made by one of the workshops run and supported by Vicaría de la Solidaridad. It was acquired in the context of international solidarity to end Pinochet's dictatorship.

You can still get arpilleras from [www.fundacionsolidaridad.cl](http://www.fundacionsolidaridad.cl) and other groups.



## Homenaje a los caídos / *Homage to the fallen Ones*

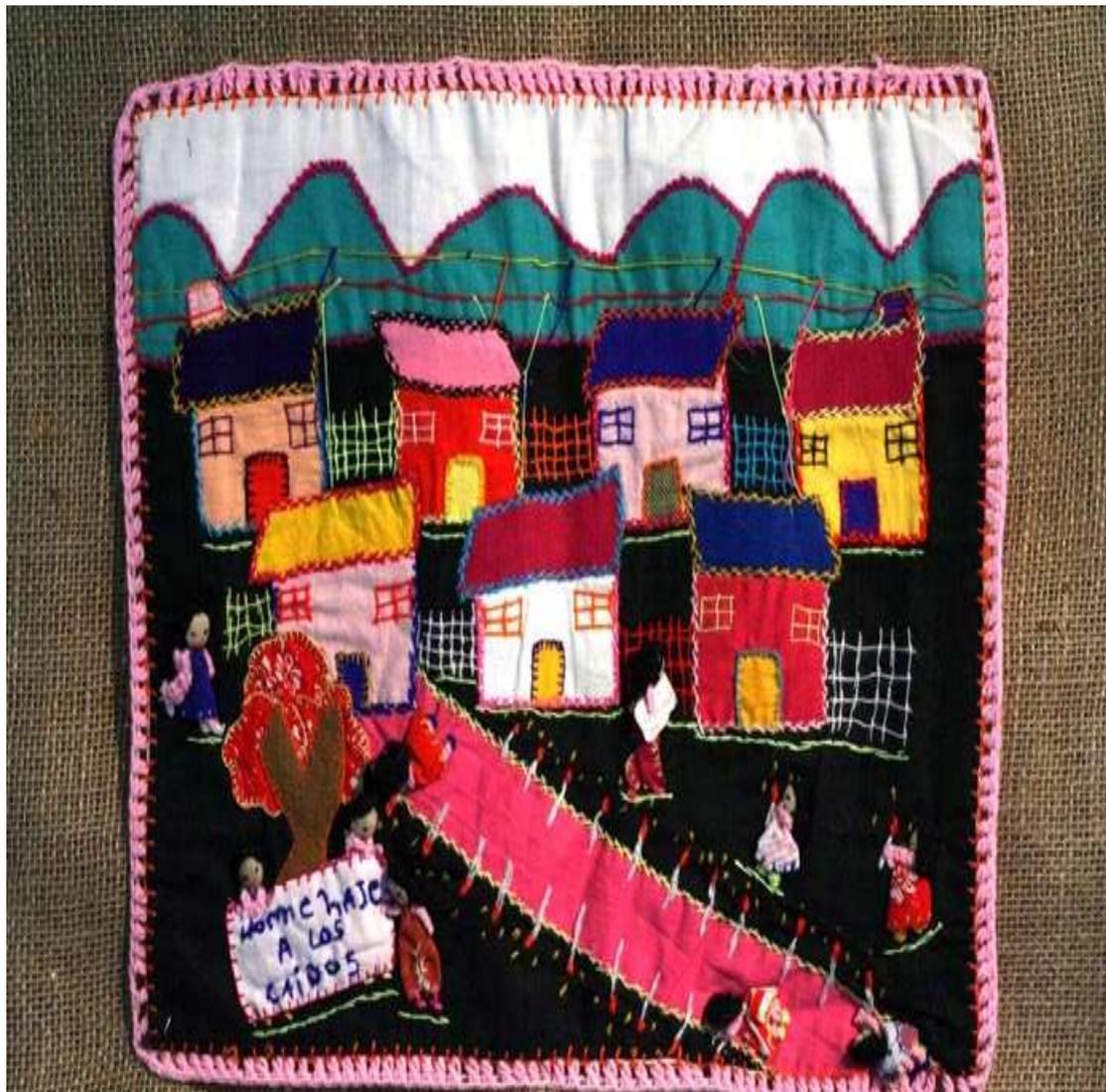
Chilean arpillera, anon, late 1970s, courtesy Fátima Miralles, Spain

0.40 X 0.50 cm

In this sombre traditional arpillera there is no sun in the sky and the hills are made in one flat colour. Black material dominates the foreground. In the background, poor villagers use wires to tap into the main power supply. Racked with poverty, these villagers cannot afford to pay for their electricity.

The road in this poor neighbourhood is lined with candles, lit in remembrance of those who have disappeared. The central figure in this arpillera carries pages campaigning against torture. The women on the road are lying down as part of the protest, while others carry a banner bearing the words, "Homage to the fallen ones."

This arpillera gives voice to the sorrow and loss felt by so many. *...this work utilises the feminine by articulating the most intimate gestures, such as the long hours of dedication to manual work in order to create textiles that, from the universal and feminine perspectives, tell a story of the war, horror, and violence created by men.*



## Corte de Agua / Water Cut

Chilean arpillera, late 1970s, anon, courtesy Roberta Bacic, Chile/Northern Ireland

0.40 X 0.50 cm

This is a traditional arpillera with the mountains of Chile and the sky and sun colourfully depicted in the background. Is this an indication of the arpilleras' sense of courage and empowerment that underlies many of the messages in the quilts?

To stop them from protesting, the government cut off the water supply to this poor community, saying, in effect, "We don't care about you!" In order to survive, these women took their buckets to the homes of their middle-class neighbours to ask for water. Regardless of the government's water cut, not one woman went without water that day. The water they gathered from their neighbours was put into tanks to be shared by the community.

Such situations recurred often during the regime and poor women were forced to find their voice. They realized that it was not enough to write complaints to the local newspapers, which were censored against such things. Rather, they learned they must find different outlets, different ways to make their voices heard. Indeed, "women have not forgotten the empowerment they gained when they learned they could change things by taking to the streets and protesting the dictatorship, and this confidence inspires them as they face Chile's contemporary problems."



## No tenemos acceso a los servicios públicos / We have no access to public services

Chilean arpillera, late 1970s, anon., courtesy of Heidi and Peter Gessler, Switzerland

0.40 X 0.50 cm

This Chilean arpillera was made by a community workshop set up by a Protestant Church in the shanty towns of Santiago. It was done in the late 1970s and acquired by a Swiss couple involved in solidarity work with Chile. They also bought other pieces which they brought to Europe and gave as presents to friends. In this way they also created awareness of what was going on.

We can also date it by the direct reference to Monica Madariaga, Justice Minister from April 1977 to February 1983, who personally drafted the Amnesty Law. It exculpated from criminal responsibility all persons who committed crimes, were accomplices in crimes or covered up crimes committed between the day of the military coup, September 11, 1973 and March 10, 1978, when the state of siege was lifted.

Though it does not refer to the amnesty law as such, it clearly shows the day to day situation of disadvantaged people and also makes direct references to the causes of the situation. The crosses stitched on the doors of health facilities, university, the Supreme Court, building sites, and others show that ordinary people do not have access to these services. The woman minister is shown at her desk, next to it the words: **Minister of Education, betrayal to the fatherland**. It also says: **What is this?** The only other characters are people having to dig with their spades to survive.



## Lost Children of War

Northern Ireland arpillera, 2009, made by Irene MacWilliam

0.30 X 0.50 cm

Over the years Irene has been very moved by the stories of children and indeed adults who have been displaced from their homes and villages due to conflict. Families are split up, sometimes male members are taken away in trucks and they disappear often without trace. In the confusion, children and adults flee or are taken to camps or even imprisoned. It may be years before they are reunited, if ever. Trying to reunite families or find information about the relatives is such a difficult job. Irene was moved by the photos on posters that are circulated in an effort to help people locate loved ones. Some of the lost children are so young that they cannot give any information to help with these searches.

Irene expressed she made the children white so as not to indicate any nationality. She added: "They are almost transparent so as to indicate their vulnerability and the fact they are living a half life, not knowing if they have family or not or for how long they will be unclaimed. They are like 'ghost children'. I chose to focus on the children rather than adults as the image of a distressed child is very emotive.

To learn more about Irene's work, visit her website: [www.macwilliam.f9.co.uk](http://www.macwilliam.f9.co.uk) or e-mail her at [irenemacwilliam@hotmail.com](mailto:irenemacwilliam@hotmail.com)



## No going back

Northern Ireland arpillera/quilt, 2009, made by Sonia Copeland

0.45 X 0.56 cm

Sonia has made quilts for a long time and this is her first arpillera. She made it specially when invited to do a piece for the June/July exhibition at Flowerfield, Northern Ireland, **Arpilleras that cry out**. Sonia had been involved in other exhibitions and had seen arpilleras on numerous occasions.

More than ten years after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement that paved the way to peace after 30 years of The Troubles in Northern Ireland, people wanted the past times never to return. However, early in 2009 two events in which three deaths occurred made people take to the streets to protest about them and to express their rejection of these attacks.

This is what Sonia herself says when asked to talk about her arpillera:

“My piece of work shows the Belfast City Hall, and in the foreground a representation of one of the cross-community demonstrations, which followed the murders of Constable Stephen Carroll and Sapper Mark Quinsy and Patrick Asimkar, by so called republican terrorists. This demonstration of support and solidarity for the victims and their families was important to me personally, as I had served in the Royal Ulster Constabulary during the worst years of the troubles, and had suffered as a result of terrorists attacks on four occasions. It seemed to me that the peace that was won, as a result of so much pain and suffering, within the police and security force family, was once again to be snatched away by certain sections of our society. At the demonstration I resolved that nothing and no-one would steal from my children the right to a peaceful life, which was stolen from me and my generation”.



## A special place in our hearts

English arpillera, 2009, made by Linda Adams, Ely, Cambridge

In October 2008 Linda attended the exhibition *The politics of Chilean arpillera* at the Centre for Latin American Studies at Cambridge University. It was displayed in the context of the Festival of Ideas. Her genuine interest in arpilleras made me invite her to participate in International Women's Day 2009 in Derry, Northern Ireland. The call was under the name: *Women's real lives*. It was exhibited in March at the Tower Museum



together with other pieces submitted by individual women and women's groups. This collection of four pieces shows the park nearest to her home in summer, winter spring and autumn. This is what she tells us about this arpillera:

"The park has a special place in the snapshots of women's lives. From the first faltering steps supported by a proud mother, to giggling teenagers experimenting with make-up and drink, lovers carving their initials on a tree, bridal photos, to elderly couples on a bench.

"These textiles, inspired by Roberta Bacic's collection of Latin American Arpilleras, are an attempt to express my feelings about the park and the women who go there. The fabrics I used are scraps from years of dressmaking and embroidery which remind me of my children and women I met on an embroidery course".

With these arpilleras Linda clearly shows she has paid attention to what is going on in her community and what characterises each season and that she is willing to share her feelings and experiences with us. Her work could also inspire viewers to express their observations and insights into community life in any form that appeals to them.

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

Peruvian arpillera, August 1987, made by Elizabeth Basilio from Meeting Comunal, Courtesy of Gaby Franger & Rainer Huhle, Germany

50 X 55 cm

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: Long 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 to or consulted so they had to demonstrate in the streets. They proudly identify themselves as indigenous by wearing their traditional clothing and plaiting their hair in the characteristic way of the 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 sun that shines for all.



## Baile Puneño / Puno folk dance

Peruvian arpillera, Cuzco/Perú, no date, anon, courtesy Julie Coimbra, Cambridge/England, approx

0.40 X 0.50 cm

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 on the country.

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. At an altitude of 3,827m, 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 the La Candelaria festivity which is a religious Catholic celebration marked by carnival. The couples dance in pairs on stage or in a specially prepared arena only 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 to keep community bonds and assert their identity.



## Reflections on violence

English arpillera, 2009, made by Linda Adams

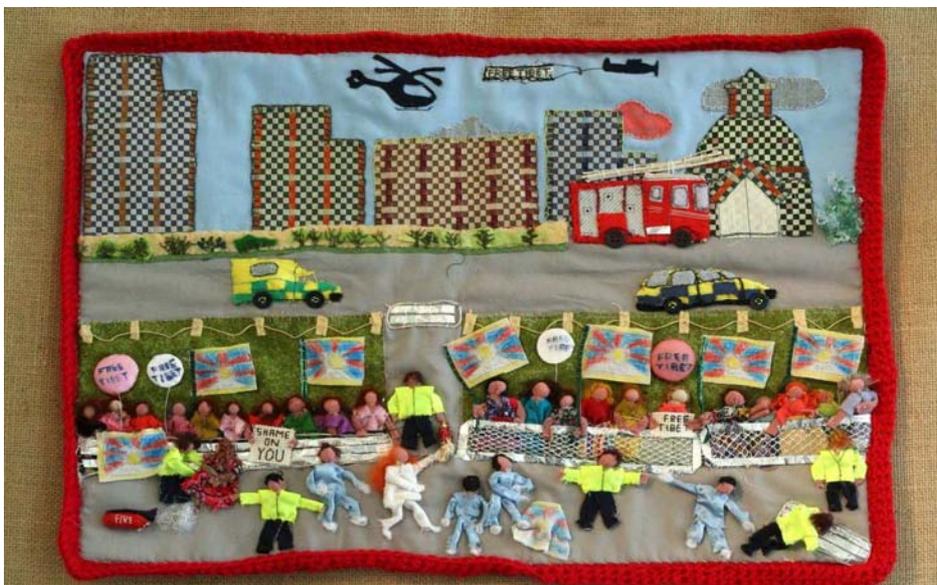
0.33 X 0.46 cm

Linda Adams is a recently retired woman from near Cambridge, England who attended the exhibition of arpilleras in Cambridge in October 2008 as part of the Festival of Ideas. Since then she has made a number of arpilleras in which she has had the means and opportunity to express her concerns and feelings about current issues in different parts of the world. She has said "I knew how to sew with my hands but seeing the exhibition and listening to the presentation taught me how to sow with my heart". Her style captures the spirit of the Chilean arpilleras and is marked by very fine details and the innovative use of materials. **Reflections on violence** is a good example of her work.

It shows the Free Tibet protest in London when the Olympic torch was carried through the city on its way to the Beijing games. The event demonstrated how states use and abuse sport, like every other aspect of life, for propaganda purposes to present themselves with a good image. At the same time these events provide an occasion at which people can express their opposition to what China is doing in Tibet and to the British Government's decision to allow the torch to come to London in this way. The torch carrier in white is running in the middle foreground surrounded by the Chinese security personnel in blue. Beyond them are the police in Day-Glo jackets. Behind the barrier the protestors are making their views clear and one has climbed into the route of the torch. In the background the emergency services are standing by.

"The helicopter was police photographing the protesters. They took movies of us on the ground too; I was proud to stand alongside the group against the oppression and was prepared to be arrested to bring attention to the campaign. . . China only got the games by promising changes in their attitude to civil rights but the promises were just hot air".

Linda was struck by the fact that repression against protestors was used in London at the time people were trying to raise awareness of repression somewhere else. She commented: "Where is our free expression?"



## Retorno de los exiliados / Return of the exiles

Chilean Arpillera, Santiago 1992, Victoria Díaz Caro, courtesy Silvia Caspers, Germany

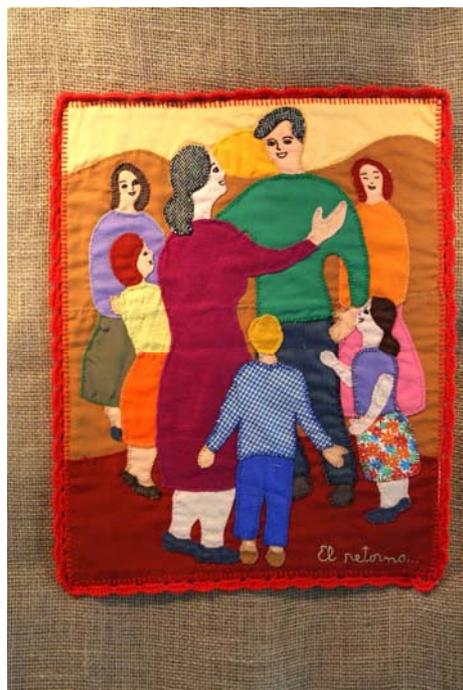
0.50 X 0.40 cm

This colourful arpillera was made in 1992, at the time Chilean's dictatorship had ended. It belongs to *Arpillera – Sammlung der Kinderhilfe Chile Bonn* (Arpillera collection of a Bonn, German solidarity group with Chilean children).

It shows a happy encounter of a family group that has been separated by exile. Like in most wars and conflicts, exile or displacement are immediate consequences that affect the core of social life, be that a family or the larger society.

Exile took place in different ways. At the moment of the military coup in 1973 many people who were part of Salvador Allende's government took refuge in sympathetic embassies to escape persecution and human rights violations. Some escaped by crossing the Andes or other routes that they could take. Others, after being imprisoned and most of the time also tortured, were expelled and had to leave the country to wherever they were received. Still others had to take what was called "economic exile" as they had been fired from work and had no way to survive in their homeland with their families. Some were even deprived of their Chilean nationality.

After the dictatorship the return brought new problems. The magnitude of the problem meant that in 1990, on the establishment of what is called "transitional democracy", the newly elected president Patricio Aylwin tackled the issue. A law was passed through parliament (18.1994) that created the "Oficina Nacional del Retorno" (National Office for the Return). It worked until 1994 and the number of people who were considered by this office reached 52 557. The people who registered in this office had been living in 70 different countries. The highest numbers came from Sweden, Argentina, Canada, France and Germany. (Source: Reparation policies in Chile, 1990-2004 by Elizabeth Lira and Brian Loveman).



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

Chilean arpillera, anon, Santiago 1980's, courtesy Sivia Caspers, Germany  
0.37 X 0.48 cm

This arpillera was made in the late 1980s in Santiago de Chile by one of the Workshops at the Vicaria de la Solidaridad. It belongs to *Arpillera – Sammlung der Kinderhilfe Chile /Bonn* (Arpillera collection of a Bonn, Germany solidarity group with Chilean children).

In this traditional arpillera the sun is in the sky and also we can see two large clouds in what is normally a clear blue sky. We can not see the hills as the scene takes place in the midst of busy Santiago, the capital of Chile. A group of women dressed in colourful dresses are protesting in front of the Courts of Justice. They are holding a banner that reads: *Where are the detained disappeared?* We can not see many passers by, though the action is aimed at creating awareness of this reality as well as to denounce it.

On the right hand side we can see two green silhouettes. The green corresponds to the colour of Chilean police uniforms. They are armed and standing next to a police car. We can not see their features as what is emphasized is not the men who are acting, but the institution that represses the protestors.

The total number of officially recognized disappeared and executed people amounts to 3197 according to the official statistics issued by the National Corporation of Reparation and Reconciliation at the end of 1996.

The Chilean Truth Commission and follow-up bodies had as their core mission to find out what happened to each disappeared person and to try to find the remains of the bodies when possible, or at least be able to tell their next of kin what happened to the missing person. Reparations have been put in place for directly related relatives of the acknowledged victims.



## Violar es un crimen /Raping is a crime

Peruvian Arpillera by M.H. from Mujeres Creativas workshop, courtesy Roberta Bacic, Chile/Northern Ireland

0.42 X 0.47 cm

From 1980 until 2000 Peru was wracked by an internal war. The main actors were Government Forces and Shining Path .The fundamental factors that were the cause and consequence of the war were poverty and fear. After the defeat of Shining Path a Truth Commission was put in place in 2001 to investigate these two decades of horror. It ended its mandate in 2003.

Part of what the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was called upon to do was to write the history of the war years, bringing together all the evidence available. Some of its most striking findings were: 69 280 dead/disappeared, 40 per cent of whom were from Ayacucho; 85 per cent were from the poorest districts; 68 per cent had no secondary education; 79 per cent were from rural areas, mostly indigenous Quechuans, amounting to 16 per cent of the total population; 4000 burial sites were identified. For more information look into <http://www.cverdad.org.pe/ingles/ifinal/index.php>

It is admirable that in the midst of this context a group of women living in the poor areas of Lima, many displaced from other areas, dared to raise their voices and act. María H. who made this piece says: "In October 1985 there was a killing of people in Ayacucho and nobody protested. Women were raped and many people were killed. Two groups of women decided to demonstrate in front of *Comando Conjunto* [the Joint Military Command] in Lima as the people up in the mountains had not been able to express themselves about what was happening. We took a banner that read "rape is a crime" and we also put flowers shaped as a cross to highlight so many deaths that were in vain. The same night that we protested there was a brutal and massive killing of political prisoners in Lurigancho. Between five of us, we decided to make an arpillera of our action to show we are not in agreement with those actions".



## Overdue, Overdrawn, Over-extended: Rural Poverty in Ireland

2009, made by Deborah Stockdale, Donegal/Ireland

0.50 X 0.60 cm

Deborah is a well known textile artist who has had solo and group exhibitions. She also facilitates workshops and acts as an arts advisor to community projects. This is her second arpillera. She made it specially when invited to do a piece for the June/July exhibition at Flowerfield, Northern Ireland, *Arpilleras that cry out*. Deborah had been involved in other exhibitions and had seen arpilleras on numerous occasions.

When asked for what brought her to this very present and topical issue that affects all of us, she said:

“The inspiration behind this piece stems from the entire economic shutdown we see around us. This affects people in rural areas in specific and not always obvious ways. Many farming families are feeling incredible economic pressure as subsidies are being withdrawn, the market is contracting and cash flow is drying up. A lot of farmers are over extended financially to banks and institutions.

“During boom times they spent heavily on new machinery, or expanding their farms, but now they are facing crippling debts with no means of repayment, except by the sale of land, which also is a very depressed market. Although from an outsiders view, they seem prosperous enough on their farms, they can be quite without the means to continue their lives in the former way, and it is likely many will not be able to continue on the land, nor pass that land to their families later.

“Thus a whole lifestyle and an important segment of society is lost. Many are living lives of quiet desperation, with foreclosures and bankruptcies more and more common. Many farming families see no way forward”.



## **Una mirada a mi tierra desde el barco/ A look to my homeland from the boat**

made by Francisca Báez Avila, Barcelona, Spain, for International Women's Day 2009, Fundacio Ateneu San Roc, facilitated by María Viñolo and Alba Pérez

0.47 X 0. 50 cm

Francisca is 67 years old. She told the facilitators the story behind her piece and this is what Alba and María wrote in the Spanish version of the catalogue published by Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc, Badalona, on page 22.

“This is the story of the time I came from Tangiers. I was 21 at the time and had already had my daughter. My parents lived in Tangiers as they had emigrated when they were young. I lived happy there my childhood and youth. At the times the Arabs wanted their independence, by 1957, things changed. Spaniards preferred to leave to misery. My husband and I wanted to stay and adapt, though my parents were very old and did not want to die there. They wanted to come back to Spain as they had nothing.

“This is what I saw from the ship that came to Spain. I could see the Mosque, the Church, the school. Churches and mosques were very beautiful. They are emblematic buildings of different styles. It is all rather run down now as there is no money, there is misery, and it is not like it was.

“In my representation of the boat I tell the story of how I crossed the strait, with my daughter clinging to me as she was about seven months old. I have also depicted some small men that are drowning or dieing. This to show the situation some Arabs were undergoing at the time they crossed the strait, sometimes, dieing.

“The first time I arrived here, as I left the train station in France, saw the sky so dark and grey that I was shocked. That is why I have depicted the sky so bright, as I remember it from Tangiers and with its beautiful sea.”



## **En las ramblas de las flores/*In the market of the flowers***

made by Teresa Amaya Amaya, Barcelona, Spain, for International Women's Day 2009 during a 12 sessions' course at Fundacio Ateneu San Roc, facilitated by María Viñolo and Alba Pérez

0.47 X 0.54 cm

Teresa Amaya is at present 50 years old. She told the facilitators the story behind her piece and this is what Alba and María wrote in the Spanish version of the catalogue published by Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc, Badalona on page 16.

"When I was a child we were five brothers and sisters, from which I am the oldest. In those times they were all young and they were all brought up at home. The only one who has travelled around is me. I have carried the burden of looking after my siblings. When I was about 12, I used to go and look for iron and sold it afterwards at the thrift store. I also helped my mother begging and I have also struggled for food, as there was lots of hunger around in those times.

"I was just a child when I went down to Barcelona to beg, to the market of the flowers. Foreigners used to come, sailors from a ship and they all gave you some money. I did not sing or give them rosemary, which would have been fooling them. I just stretched my hand, was barefooted, without clothes or anything.

"Sometimes the police would come, and then took us to the police station. It was me and many other gypsies that they arrested. To be released I paid with the many I had received or, if my mother had some, she paid it. "



## Como hacer una arpillera/ How to make an arpillera

Chilean arpillera, Santiago 2007, Taller Fundación Solidaridad, courtesy Roberta Bacic

0.40 X 0.50 cm

This fairly new arpillera made in 2007 was made by one of the workshops supported by Fundación Solidaridad in Chile. It was given to me by a Chilean friend as a way to be present in spirit at the launch of the exhibition "*The politics of Chilean arpilleras*" in 2008 at the Harbour Museum in Derry, Northern Ireland. The arpilleras workshops of today are a testimony and follow up of the ones started during the harsh times of the dictatorship. Today they use different topics, they are sold as crafts and souvenirs and they also use more standardized materials.

A bit of history about the Vicaría arpilleras workshops. The Chilean Catholic Cardinal Raúl Silva Henríquez asked Pope Paul VI to be allowed to create the Vicariate of Solidarity due to the urgent need to assist a substantial part of the Chilean population that was under total neglect since the start of the military coup on 11 September 1973. His first task was the defence of human rights violations against those persecuted by the regime. It worked from January 1976 and continued until 31 December 1992, at the time Chile had a transition to democracy government and a Truth Commission had been put in place by the Chilean government and its outcome had been made public. It is in this scenario that the arpilleras' workshops started to operate.

What does this arpillera show us? It wants us to focus on the arpilleras as a craft, art and working activity of women. It shows us the different stages and elements of how to make an arpillera. They do not compare to the ones that told us the stories of repression, hardship and human rights violations, they want us to value arpilleras in their own right.

You can buy new arpilleras at <http://www.fundacionsolidaridad.cl/>



## Queremos solución para los mineros/ We want solution for

Peruvian arpillera, 1984, M. H. from Mujeres Creativas, courtesy Gaby Franger, Germany

0.40 X 0.50 cm

This striking and colourful arpillera was made by Mujeres Creativas (Creative Women) workshop which is located in the suburbs of Lima, Peru. Most of the women were displaced during the years of the war between Government forces and Shining Path (1980-2000). They had to escape slaughter from both sides, impoverishment, marginalisation, isolation, and still other hardships.

The women who participate in this workshop currently meet every Thursday from 2pm to 8 pm in their organization's headquarters to sew different types of crafts which they sell to friendly organizations within Peru, but mostly overseas, specially to Europe and the USA.

During the war years they depicted scenes of what was affecting them most in their lives. In 1995, Alicia Villanueva, a psychologist and expert in women and enterprise activities, wrote a book that recounts the motives and stories behind the pieces these women had made over the years. The stories are given together in the women's own words. On page 40 she complies with regards to this topic:

### Mining and women

"Many men, women and children do sacrifice marches, walking for days without end from where they live to Lima, to protest because of the dreadful living conditions in the mining industry. In Lima they organise soup kitchens and take solidarity collections to survive, confronting and facing repression on a daily basis."



## No al plebiscito/ No to the plebiscite

Chilean Arpillera, anon, Santiago 1980, courtesy Roberta Bacic, Chile/Northern Ireland

0.38 X 0.48 cm

I acquired this arpillera in July 2009 in Germany. It belonged to a retired crafts schoolteacher who had got it as a present around 27 years ago. I had spread the word of my interest in being able to get hold of pieces that would benefit from exposure and in this way; I was put in touch with her.

It is a very striking image that recalls a political momentum which I have not seen recorded before in the arpilleras literature. In 1973, when the military dictatorship took over the country, Chile lived under a state of emergency. General Pinochet ordered a new Constitution which was to be ratified by a plebiscite in 1980. Government propaganda said that a yes vote would bring about full democracy. Many people were not fooled by this propaganda, but even thinking people often argued that it was better to have a constitution than to continue under the state of emergency, which had already lasted seven years.

The scene in the arpillera vividly describes what happened to people who opposed it. They were confronted with violence by the police, arrested and cruelly beaten. But many voted NO none the less.



## Hands on workshops put together arpilleras

Both of the pieces on display were created in workshops I have run in the context of arpilleras exhibitions. The workshops are aimed at using the energy and motivation brought out by viewing the arpilleras and quilts on show.

These pieces are an account of one or two half days of work. The interest behind these workshops is also to give women the chance to explore new ways of expressing how they feel and see their personal circumstances -- and doing it with other women so as to be able to share ideas, experiences, hopes and results and see different points of view exposed as part of a whole.

Once it has been requested, planned and discussed between a project coordinator and facilitator, and a suitable venue found, the workshop proceeds in the following steps.

- Exposure to an exhibition of arpilleras and quilts exhibition or pieces specially displayed
- Screening of many pieces on power point that show textiles and details of different topics and techniques
- Large selection of scraps of materials are displayed on working desks for both visual and tactile contact with the materials
- A motivation activity to focus on broad contexts, based on the objectives of the project
- A short warm up activity to motivate and stimulate creativity
- Groups of two to three women form and agree – in not more than 15 minutes – on the topic of their piece; this must be done in not more than 15 minutes
- The groups design and complete their work as one piece of any size; the time allowed for this is 90 minutes
- Background music sets an easy atmosphere and women talk, laugh, discuss, compare and altogether enter into the spirit of working together
- The facilitator goes round the groups listening, encouraging, and advising.
- The facilitator keeps the time and 10 minutes before the end, tells everyone to finish off; no extension of time is allowed
- The facilitator invites each group to attach their piece to a Hessian backing and refer to the messages but focus mainly on the process they have followed
- Each piece is sewn or pinned to the backing
- Groups are asked to write the message they wanted to convey in a few sentences
- On some occasions a group has a skilled quilter among them who volunteers to machine sew the edges. When this happens, the work is easier to display, as the two on display demonstrate.
- A beginners arpillera or quilt is born!