



'WE ARPILLERISTAS  
PORTRAY OUR OWN  
TRUTH'

Arpillera by Linda Adams,  
local 'arpillerista', 2017

# ARPILLERAS SPEAK TRUTH

Exhibition catalogue

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**Centre of Latin American Studies  
7 West Road, University of Cambridge, CB3 9DT**

<http://cain.ulster.ac.uk/conflictextiles/>



**'¿Dónde están nuestros hijos? / Where are our children?' Anonymous.  
(Photo: Martin Melaugh)**

<b>Title of Textile:</b>	¿Dónde están nuestros hijos? / Where are our children?
<b>Maker:</b>	Anonymous
<b>Country of Origin:</b>	Chile
<b>Year Produced:</b>	1979
<b>Size (cm):</b>	68cm x 63cm
<b>Materials:</b>	Scraps of material hand sewn onto burlap
<b>Type of Textile:</b>	Arpillera

**Description:** This arpillera, made in 1979, in one of the Vicaria de la Solidaridad workshops in Santiago, depicts the despair of a mother whose children are missing. A handwritten note hidden in a small pocket at the back of the arpillera gives us a glimpse of the depth of this mother's grief. Her message, penned from her personal despair, is on behalf of all Chilean women who endured the repression and human rights violations of the Pinochet regime at that time. In this note, the writing is extremely poignant:

"This represents our children ...where they are now..., under the eye of the 'dina' [political secret police]; while we, the mothers, cry to one day hear about them".

An anguished mother in pain, Chile, 1979.

In this arpillera, the mountains and sun, characteristic features of all arpilleras, are missing. Against a stark, desolate background we see a crying mother kneeling with another woman. Above, the manifold hands as imagined by her are framed in a heart shape, flanked by two police men and watched over by two large interrogating eyes. In keeping with the sense of anguish and hopelessness in this arpillera, the peace doves are not flying up to the sky; they seem to be falling to the ground.

**Owner:** Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Jacquie Monty, England



**'Ganó la gente/People have won', Anonymous. (Photo: Martin Melaugh)**

<b>Title of Textile:</b>	Ganó la gente / People have won
<b>Maker:</b>	Anonymous
<b>Country of Origin:</b>	Chile
<b>Year Produced:</b>	1990s
<b>Size (cm):</b>	46cm x 39cm
<b>Materials:</b>	Scraps of material hand sewn onto burlap
<b>Type of Textile:</b>	Arpillera

**Description:** There is a sense of jubilation in this arpillera which depicts the outcome of the Chilean national plebiscite (referendum) held on October 5, 1988, to determine whether or not dictator Augusto Pinochet would extend his rule for another eight-year term. "La democracia ya viene (democracy is coming)" and "Ganara la gente (the people will win)," was the slogan from the No campaign. Pinochet renounced office after the No vote was carried by 55.99%, putting an end to the 16½ year military dictatorship.

This arpillera, clearly made in the aftermath of the referendum announces that: "The people have won" and "Democracy has arrived."

Instead of seeing police cars as in many arpilleras, one can see the name of the newly elected president Patricio AYLWIN on the black cars. People are cheering and waving their handkerchiefs, expressing their excitement at this new phase in Chilean politics, brought about in no small way through the political participation of grassroots people in the poor neighbourhoods of Santiago and elsewhere in Chile. One can almost hear the deafening noise of car horns loudly proclaiming this new era.

Exercising ones right to vote has always been of paramount importance in Chilean culture, with at least 90% of the electorate voting in elections. Socialism came to power by the way of elections and, as depicted in this arpillera; Pinochet was defeated through the mechanism of elections.

**Owner:** Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Kinderhilfe arpillera collection, Chile/Bonn



**'AUSENCIAS – PRESENCIAS Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo/Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo'. by Ana Zlatkes and Mirta Zak. (Photo: Ana Zlates)**

<b>Title of Textile:</b>	AUSENCIAS – PRESENCIAS Abuelas de Plaza de Mayo/ Grandmothers of Plaza de Mayo
<b>Maker:</b>	Ana Zlatkes and Mirta Zak
<b>Country of Origin:</b>	Argentina
<b>Year Produced:</b>	2014
<b>Size (cm):</b>	40cm x 49cm
<b>Materials:</b>	Collage of images transferred to canvas, small pieces of discarded fabrics, sewing and embroidery threads.threads
<b>Type of Textile:</b>	Arpillera

**Description:** The military junta led by Lieutenant General Jorge Rafael Videla seized power in Argentina in 1976 and heralded an era of human rights violations, forced disappearances and illegal arrests.

The Nunca Más (Never Again) report (1984) by the National Commission on the Disappearance of Persons estimate that up to 9000 cases of forced disappearance and other human rights violations were perpetrated and conclude the real figure to be much higher. Approximately 30% of victims were women with children under the age of 15 numbering 200.

[http://www.desaparecidos.org/nuncamas/web/english/library/neveragain/neveragain\\_001.htm](http://www.desaparecidos.org/nuncamas/web/english/library/neveragain/neveragain_001.htm)

Pregnant women, who gave birth under abysmal circumstances in detention centres were then generally killed whilst many of their babies were illegally adopted by military or political families affiliated with the administration.

Such atrocities seeded the beginnings of the Abuelas (Grandmothers) de Plaza de Mayo in 1977, a non-governmental organization dedicated specifically to highlighting and investigating the disappearances of their children and grandchildren.

<http://www.abuelas.org.ar>

Here, Ana Zlates and Mirta Zak capture the anguish and determination of these grandmothers, who every Thursday for over forty years have continued to march around the obelisk in front of the government buildings in Plaza de Mayo, protesting at the disappearance of their loved ones, denouncing the actions of the military junta and demanding answers. The white stitches in circular format mark their weekly walk, whilst the bleak swirling nature of the arpillera alludes to this dark period of history in Argentine and portrays that their walk is seemingly never ending.

Commenting on the creation of this piece, Ana and Mirta remark: "As artists we would like to give a testimony of the story lived in our country.." Whilst the numbers who maintain the weekly nonviolent protest have declined due to ill health, time and death, their sense of purpose and determination in walking together to denounce these atrocities is captured by the artists who reflect through a poem.

Huellas marcadas por miles de pisadas.

Una Plaza nunca más abandonada.

Un largo camino recorrido.

Mujeres luchadoras por la verdad y la justicia.

Mujeres hacedoras de historia.

Mujeres cuidadoras de la memoria,

reivindicadoras de vida.

Dignidad verdadera.

Memoria encendida.

Traces marked by thousands of footsteps.

Square never again abandoned.

A long road walked.

Women who have struggled for truth and justice.

Women who make history.

Women who look after the memory.

Claiming for life.

True dignity.

Poem by Ana Zlatkes and Mirta Zak written to accompany their arpillera made for the exhibition "SMALL Actions BIG Movements" in South Africa

**Owner:** Conflict Textiles collection



'¿Dónde están? / Where are they?' Anonymous. (Photo: Martin Melaugh)

<b>Title of Textile:</b>	¿Dónde están / Where are they?
<b>Maker:</b>	Anonymous
<b>Country of Origin:</b>	Chile
<b>Year Produced:</b>	1980s
<b>Size (cm):</b>	52cm x 39cm
<b>Materials:</b>	Scraps of material hand sewn onto hessian
<b>Type of Textile:</b>	Arpillera

**Description:** In this arpillera, we see women in colourful dresses protesting on the side of the road displaying a banner, which contests the denied atrocities of the Pinochet dictatorship by asking a simple question: "¿Dónde están/Where are they [the disappeared]?" The answer to this simple question was repeatedly ignored by the regime, who frequently told the women checking jails and detention centres, seeking news of their disappeared loved ones that the people in question did not exist, that they had left the country or gave implausible answers.

It is likely that the road is crafted from the trousers of a disappeared relative. The sun, a common feature in the majority of arpilleras, has been replaced by two grey clouds. Indifference towards the plight of these women and their families is also apparent in this arpillera. The motorist and the pedestrians in the bottom right hand corner avert their faces from the protestors, in denial of the atrocities committed by the Pinochet regime made public by these women.

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

**Owner:** Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Theresa Wolfwood, Victoria, Canada



'Escuelita de Otavalo / Otavalo Primary School', Anonymous. (Photo: Colin Peck)

<b>Title of Textile:</b>	Escuelita de Otavalo / Otavalo Primary School
<b>Maker:</b>	Anonymous
<b>Country of Origin:</b>	Ecuador
<b>Year Produced:</b>	2008c
<b>Size (cm):</b>	82cm x 82cm
<b>Materials:</b>	Scraps of indigenous woven cottons
<b>Type of Textile:</b>	Arpillera

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

This arpillera was bought in 2009 by the Chilean filmmaker Vivienne Barry, who is known for her award winning animated short film about the arpillera movement in Chile. The largest image is that of a female with braided hair carrying a bag. She may be the teacher of the school, or perhaps the schoolchild who made the arpillera. We also see a row of children and a blackboard bearing the words: "My little house is the most beautiful in the world." It is a simple, yet powerful image, reminding us of our human need for a home and education; needs which are often denied or unattainable to people living in conflict zones.

**Owner:** Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Vivienne Barry, Chile



**'Life with and without Bees', by Janet Wilkinson. (Photo: Janet Wilkinson)**

**Title of Textile:** Life with and without Bees  
**Maker:** Janet Wilkinson  
**Country of Origin:** England  
**Year Produced:** 2014  
**Size (cm):** 43cm X 57cm  
**Materials:** Handstitched on recycled and donated fabrics  
**Type of Textile:** Arpillera

**Description:** The declining bee population, both nationally and globally, under threat from disappearing green spaces, intensive farming practices, disease and over use of pesticides, prompted Janet to create this arpillera.

Here, Janet, using images from her immediate environment comments: "The left hand side is present day with active bees and the right hand side is a possible future as the bee population declines." As bees pollinate three-quarters of the world's most important crops their absence means - no fruit, vegetables, flowers, wildlife and less food.

She urges people to take actions to prevent this doomsday scenario, ranging from planting flowers, campaigning against pesticides to keeping bees.

20 things you need to know about bees, see Friends of the Earth Trust <https://foe.org/>

**Owner:** Janet Wilkinson



**'2016 Starvation in Zimbabwe', by Lakheli Nyanthi. (Photo: Ukuthula Trust)**

**Title of Textile:** 2016 Starvation in Zimbabwe  
**Maker:** Lakheli Nyanthi  
**Country of Origin:** Zimbabwe  
**Year Produced:** 2016  
**Size (cm):** 56cm (w) x 49cm (l)  
**Materials:** Cotton and wool  
**Type of Textile:** Arpillera

**Description:** In Zimbabwe, a prolonged drought has led to crop failure, severe food shortages and hardship for a people already living a precarious existence. A recent UNICEF report estimates that approximately 30% of the rural population are food insecure; simply meaning they do not have enough food to survive. UNICEF Zimbabwe: Zimbabwe Humanitarian Situation Report No. 2, 29 February 2016

The drought stems, in part, from a cyclical weather pattern of warming in the central and eastern tropical Pacific termed El Niño. Less rainfall, less water for people, animals and crops and a reduced power supply from dams are some of the severe results of this El Niño event, described as one of the strongest in 50 years. UNICEF - Zimbabwe

In this arpillera, Lakheli gives us a window into the severity of the situation in her local area. The words "Severe drought" and "Starvation" dominate the piece. She graphically explains the reality and sense of desperation: "In 2016, the rains failed and people in Zimbabwe are facing starvation in some rural areas. The textile shows hungry people and livestock, and a nearly empty dam. 'Asazi' means 'what can we do?' and 'iThemba' means 'hope'."

In February 2016 the Government declared a state of emergency and the indications are that extensive crop failure with serious consequences will not improve until at least the next harvest in 2017.

**Owner:** Enyandeni Peace Centre collection



**'Libertad a los presos políticos / Freedom for the political prisoners', Anonymous.  
(Photo: Martin Melaugh)**

<b>Title of Textile:</b>	Libertad a los presos políticos / Freedom for the political prisoners
<b>Maker:</b>	Anonymous
<b>Country of Origin:</b>	Chile
<b>Year Produced:</b>	1985c
<b>Size (cm):</b>	46cm x 37cm
<b>Materials:</b>	Scraps of material hand sewn onto burlap
<b>Type of Textile:</b>	Arpillera

**Description:** The women who made this kind of arpillera have resorted to their textile skills as a means by which to live with conflict and its memory on a daily basis. As Marjorie Agosin(2008) quotes: "For the arpilleras the political events of their country and their daily lives became inseparable" ("Tapestries of Hope, Threads of Love" , Rowman & Littlefield).

The struggle for better conditions for political prisoners became extremely relevant. This arpillera shows a group of women defiantly demanding the release of the prisoners inside the prison they are protesting in front of.

Actions depicted in arpilleras like this one brought international pressure on the Junta, and internal disagreements within it, made General Pinochet sign the convention against torture in 1988. In turn, this allowed Spain to indict General Pinochet on charges alleging human rights violations during his regime from 1973 to 1990.

The powerful effect of this type of political expression was not recognised at first by the military. Ariel Zeitlin Cooke explains: "Ironically, war textiles are largely disregarded by modern military authorities because of their feminine connotations and can therefore be a relatively safe forum for dangerous or provocative ideas" (Weavings of War).

When the Chilean military finally recognised the power of the arpilleras, they condemned these works as subversive materials and if found they would have been stopped at Customs and destroyed before leaving the country.

**Owner:** Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Kinderhilfe arpillera collection, Chile/Bonn



**'Recuperación de cuerpos en 1990 / Recovering the disappeared in 1990',  
Taller Fundación Solidaridad. (Photo: Martin Melaugh)**

**Title of Textile:** Recuperación de cuerpos en 1990 / Recovering the disappeared in 1990  
**Maker:** Taller Fundación Solidaridad  
**Country of Origin:** Chile  
**Year Produced:** 1990  
**Size (cm):** 50cm x 40cm  
**Materials:** Scraps of material hand sewn onto burlap  
**Type of Textile:** Arpillera

**Description:** 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.

**Owner:** Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance, Professor Masaaki Takahashi, Japan



**'Paro de los estudiantes chilenos 2 / Chilean student's strike 2', by Pamela Luque.  
(Photo: Rory McCarron)**

**Title of Textile:** Paro de los estudiantes chilenos 2 / Chilean student's strike 2  
**Maker:** Pamela Luque  
**Country of Origin:** Chile  
**Year Produced:** 2012  
**Size (cm):** 53cm x 56cm  
**Materials:** Scraps of material hand sewn onto burlap  
**Type of Textile:** Arpillera

**Description:** This arpillera depicts the actions of the mass student movement in Chile, who since 2011 have initiated a series of mass marches and creative actions demanding free education as well as reform of the existing economic model. Led by student leader Camila Vallejos, the movement, with a set of concrete demands and solutions, has strong links to workers unions and public support.

Here we see students carrying a placard demanding: "Education-liberty, dignity, no cost". A second placard assures the public that: "We are not doing this because we are terrorists or delinquents but conscientious students", while a third one states: "Kisses in favour of education", highlighting their creative approach. Illustrating the intergenerational support for this movement, another placard reads: "Grandparents support their grandchildren".

Chilean native Pamela, living in Ireland for 20 years, was moved to create this arpillera on seeing the exhibition "Events of the Year Quilts and Testimonies of Survival" in Donegal, Ireland in 2012. Purposely using only scraps of leftover and recycled fabric this piece is reminiscent of the work of the early Chilean arpilleraistas, techniques she had learnt as a young woman while living in Chile. The influences brought to bear in this arpillera, which depicts current student protests in a country where grassroots resistance was immortalised in arpilleras a few decades ago, is testimony to the enduring and global power of arpilleras.

**Owner:** Conflict Textiles collection.



**'Somos Mujeres cesantes / We are unemployed women', Anonymous.  
(Photo: Martin Melaugh)**

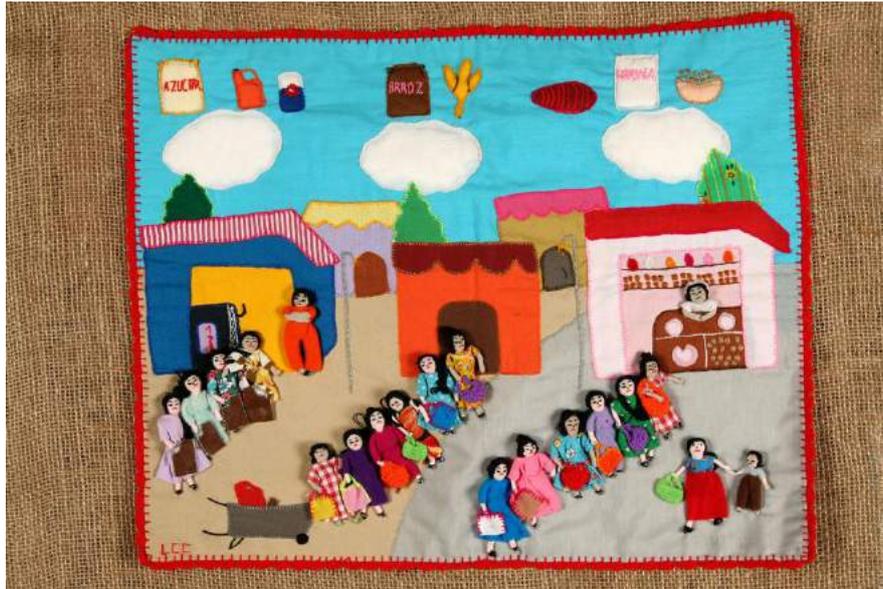
**Title of Textile:** Somos Mujeres cesantes / We are unemployed women  
**Maker:** Anonymous  
**Country of Origin:** Chile  
**Year Produced:** 1980c  
**Size (cm):** 47cm x 37cm  
**Materials:** Scraps of material hand sewn onto burlap  
**Type of Textile:** Arpillera

**Description:** Here we see women from a poor neighbourhood in Santiago protesting about their lack of employment. For these women, with their men-folk disappeared or imprisoned through the repressive actions of the Pinochet dictatorship, earning money to feed their families was a daily struggle.

“Percale” cotton, probably from old aprons, is used for the trees and flowers. The bright sun and the mountains framed by a crochet border are classical arpillera features. The simple stitches indicate that the arpillera was not a seamstress but an ordinary woman undergoing difficult times.

The collective, non-violent actions of these women, in the face of violent repression, invite us to pause for reflection on international Women's day 2014.

**Owner:** Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Theresa Wolfwood, Victoria, Canada



**'Los precios están en las nubes / Prices are sky high' by LCC, Mujeres Creativas workshop. (Photo: Colin Peck)**

<b>Title of Textile:</b>	Los precios están por las nubes / Prices are sky high
<b>Maker:</b>	LCC, Mujeres Creativas workshop
<b>Country of Origin:</b>	Peru
<b>Year Produced:</b>	2008
<b>Size (cm):</b>	58cm x 50cm
<b>Materials:</b>	Scraps of material hand sewn onto burlap
<b>Type of Textile:</b>	Arpillera

**Description:** Returning to issues of poverty, this arpillera, a replica of the 1985 original made in a Mujeres Creativas workshop, illustrates the Spanish saying: "Los precios están por los nubes", literally meaning "the prices are in the clouds", or "prices are sky high".

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

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

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

**Owner:** Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Rebecca Dudley, USA/ New Zealand



**'We Arpilleristas portray our own personal truth', by Linda Adams.  
(Photo: Julie Coimbra)**

<b>Title of Textile:</b>	We Arpilleristas portray our own personal truth
<b>Maker:</b>	Linda Adams
<b>Country of Origin:</b>	England
<b>Year Produced:</b>	2017
<b>Size (cm):</b>	43cm x 31cm
<b>Materials:</b>	Recycled textiles
<b>Type of Textile:</b>	Arpillera

**Description:** Public spaces, parks and care of the environment are recurring themes in the work of Linda Adams. She first discovered arpilleras when she attended "The Politics of Chilean Arpilleras" exhibition at the Centre for Latin American Studies (CLAS) in Cambridge University, 2008. Her first arpillera featured her local park, "a special place in the snapshots of womens' lives".

Nine years later, returning to the exhibition space where she embarked on her arpillera journey, Linda revisits the theme of public parks. She presents a grim picture of a self-absorbed populace, pre-occupied with "selfie" images, unaware of what is happening in their immediate environment and beyond.

Linda "weep[s] in sympathy with those who lost their family and friends in the Grenfell Tower fire in Kensington, West London, a disaster which claimed the lives of 80 people. She loudly proclaims: "THEY DID NOT DESERVE THIS". As she weeps, it seems to her that "the city swarms with people totally engrossed in taking selfies", prompting her to conclude that "feeding social media has become the most important thing in peoples' lives [and] some die taking unnecessary risks to get a selfie".

This self-absorption assaults Linda's senses at every turn as she portrays people "selfish enough to ignore children who could be in danger". She witnesses people who "deliberately

go to where a tragedy is unfolding and get in the way of rescuers so they can take selfies”, numb to the adversity and misfortune of others.

While the park will always be a special place for Linda, her personal truth portrayed here is that many who pass through it remain addicted to their technological devices, are cocooned in their own world, inured to the pain of others and oblivious to the expanding city encroaching on this natural environment.

**Owner:** Conflict Textiles collection.