

# WAR-TORN CHILDREN

AN EXHIBITION OF ARPILLERAS, PHOTOGRAPHS AND POSTERS

**8TH FEBRUARY – 24TH MARCH**  
**REGIONAL CULTURAL CENTRE**

## **WAR-TORN CHILDREN**

Curated by Roberta Bacic

Assisted by Breege Doherty

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

### **Introduction**

War-Torn Children, an exhibition of textiles, photographs and posters, bears witness to the devastating, multi-layered impact of war on children globally. Commissioned by the Regional Cultural Centre, Letterkenny, in collaboration with the Letterkenny Amnesty group, it was first exhibited at the Linen Hall Library, Belfast, 1st March - 15th April 2017. Since then it has been on display at the CB1 Gallery, Limerick (commissioned by Doras Luimní), 17th – 28th July and at the Verbal Arts Centre, Derry/Londonderry, 3rd – 27th October, 2017. Exhibiting it in the Regional Cultural Centre marks the first stage of its journey in 2018.

The arpilleras are drawn from Conflict Textiles, the framed photographs from Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc (Catalonia) with a selection of smaller archival photos from a few collections and the posters from INNATE (Irish Network for Nonviolent Action, Training and Education).

Partners to this initiative are CAIN (Conflict Archive on the INternet), at Ulster University, Linen Hall Library Belfast, Regional Cultural Centre, Letterkenny, Amnesty International Ireland and Letterkenny Amnesty group. The textiles, comprised of arpilleras and wall hangings are primarily drawn from South America and Europe. Together with the photographs, they uncover the raw emotion and a myriad of consequences endured by children caught in the centre and on the fringes of wars, both historical and current.

We are confronted with genocide, landmines, incarceration, displacement and starvation. Conversely, resilience and courageous responses in the face of conflict emerge as strong threads in this exhibition, challenging us to positively respond rather than passively react, to ensure that our world becomes a safer place for our children.





## RESCATE DE NIÑOS JUDÍOS / RESCUE OF JEWISH CHILDREN

Argentinean arpillera, Ana Zlatkes, 2011

Photo Ana Zlatkes

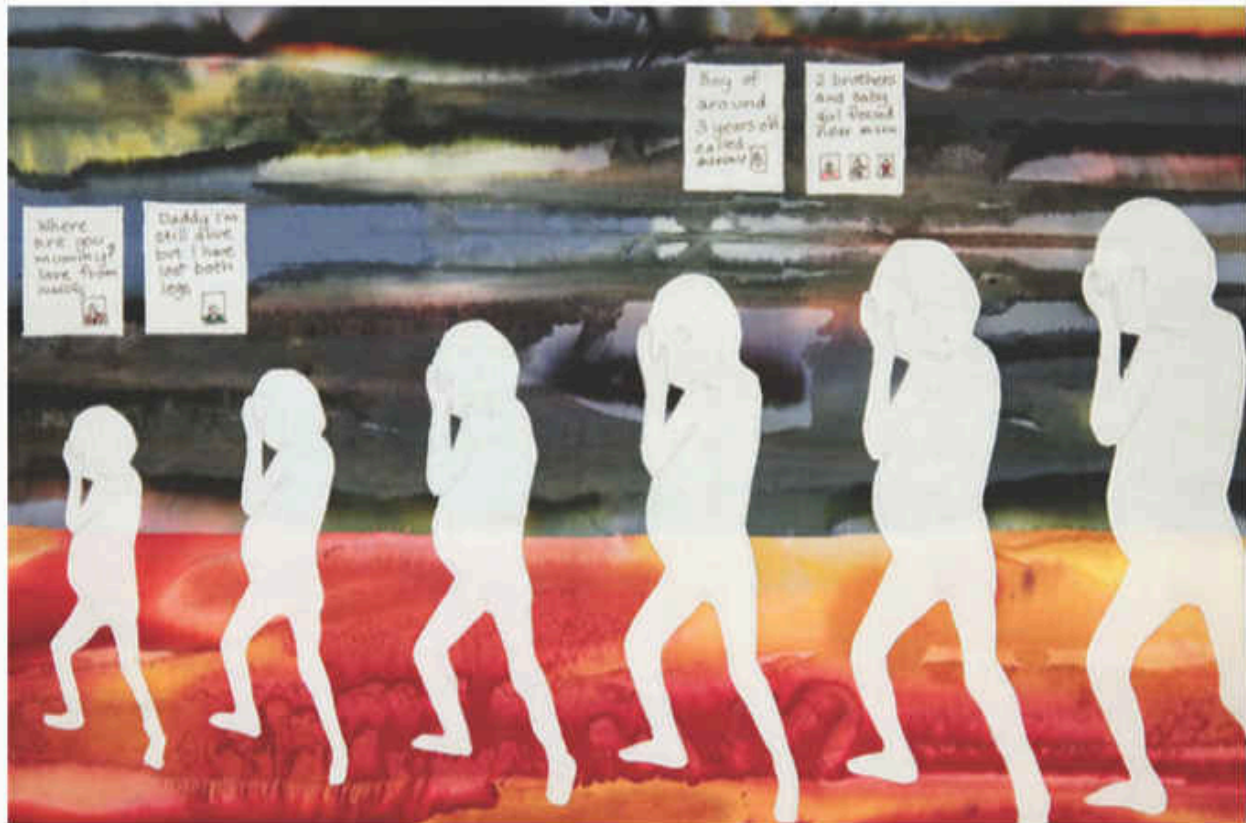
Conflict Textiles collection

Textile artist Ana Zlatkes first encountered arpilleras at an international exhibition at the Women's Museum in Fürth, Germany in May 2009. She has since become a passionate proponent of the arpillera mode of expression.

Working on this arpillera: *"my first homage to all the men and women who have had the courage to fight defending the lives of children,"* uncovered many different emotions and questions for Ana. *"I felt the need to be honest and situate myself on the side of the wire fence of my roots. I wasn't on the other side and I can't imagine what it was like. Even presently people keep giving explanations, responses. They cannot find them, because there are none."*

While her arpillera depicts the genocide inflicted by the Nazi regime on Jews during the Second World War, in her view the theme is universal and current: *"Genocide continues, changes in form and geographical location, but it is still a reality and it is the responsibility of all of us to try to prevent it."* This arpillera, as well as honouring those who resisted the repressive regime, has undoubtedly changed the artist: *"...after making this arpillera... something has happened in me and my life."*

Irena Sendler, a social worker, was one such woman who resisted the regime. Between 1942 and 1943, working through the Polish underground, she led hundreds of Jewish children out of the Ghetto to safe hiding places. Nicholas Winton, who worked on the London stock exchange, was instrumental in arranging for 669 children to leave Czechoslovakia at the beginning of the war. Vera Gissing, one of the children saved by Winton later commented: *"He rescued the greater part of the Jewish children of my generation in Czechoslovakia. Very few of us met our parents again: they perished in concentration camps. Had we not been spirited away, we would have been murdered alongside them."*



## LOST CHILDREN OF WAR

Northern Ireland arpillera, Irene MacWilliam, 2009

Photo Irene MacWilliam

Conflict Textiles collection

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

Recent reports reveal that worldwide, almost 28 million children have been forcibly displaced; 10 million of whom are child refugees, approximately 1 million of whom are asylum-seeking children and an estimated 17 million displaced within their own countries by violence and conflict.

<https://data.unicef.org/topic/child-migration-and-displacement/displacement/>

Displacement poses real dangers for children, with unaccompanied children being the most likely to be killed, tortured, raped, robbed and recruited as child soldiers.

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





## LANDMINES / CAMPOS MINADOS

English arpillera, Linda Adams, 2015

Photo Martin Melaugh

Conflict Textiles collection

Arpillerista Linda Adams created this arpillera *"as a response to the fact that even after a war is over the landmines stay and continue to kill."* Antipersonnel landmines, can lie dormant for years until their detonating mechanism is accidentally triggered. Designed to maim rather than kill, they cause horrific injuries resulting in amputations, long hospital stays and extensive rehabilitation.

<http://www.icbl.org/index.php/icbl/problem/landmines/What-is-a-Landmine>

In this piece, Linda depicts a woman tending her crops, a routine task which has become highly dangerous as we can see from the sign: *"Danger-Land Mines."* In the corner we see a child absorbed in play, bent over colourful objects, about to pick them up. These are *"butterfly"* mines, a type used during the Soviet occupation in Afghanistan.

Exploiting the natural, playful curiosity of children in this manner is particularly disturbing for Linda, who states that: *"children need to explore and play without risking injury and often death from a conflict which finished some time ago."*





## GAZA

English arpillera, Linda Adams, 2014.

Photo Tony Boyle

Conflict Textiles collection

On 8 July 2014 the Israeli government launched a large military operation in the Gaza Strip, codenamed "Protective Edge" with the stated objective of stopping Palestinian rocket firing at southern Israel and destroying the military infrastructure of Hamas and other armed groups.

Fifty days later, when the ceasefire was declared on 26 August between Israel and Hamas, United Nations figures stated that 2,131 Palestinians, mainly civilians, including 501 children, had been killed in the conflict. Over 3,300 children were injured resulting in a permanent disability for almost one-third. The already overstretched Education sector was severely affected with 22 schools completely destroyed and 118 badly damaged.

[http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha\\_opt\\_sitrep\\_04\\_09\\_2014.pdf](http://www.ochaopt.org/documents/ocha_opt_sitrep_04_09_2014.pdf)

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

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



## AUF DER FLUCHT 1945 / FLEEING IN 1945

German arpillera, Mara Loytved-Hardegg, 2010

Photo Martin Melaugh

Conflict Textiles collection

In this arpillera Mara vividly remembers fleeing in 1945 as a child from the Russians in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, in the Soviet zone north of Berlin.

*"We were about three months running westwards during the nights and hiding in the woods during the days. I was not yet three and had to run with my bigger brother of five years old. My mother took the one year old sister in her arms. Finally my mother returned with us to Ulrichshusen where we had found shelter in 1943 when bombing in the cities became too hard. When we returned... my mother had to work in the fields for the Russians. There was little food and a lot of people died of Typhus."*

More than sixty years after the event Mara reflects that *"children are always the fragile ones"* in such traumatic events *...mark[ing] their whole life."* She connects her experience to our present: *"all these children suffering now in these new wars is deeply concerning."*

This arpillera was sewn by Mara in one of the workshops -EVACUATION- that took place as part of the associated activities during the exhibition The Human Cost of War at the Tower Museum, Derry City Council Heritage and Museum Service, 2011





## OLLA COMÚN EN UNA POBLACIÓN / SOUP KITCHEN IN A BARRIO

Chilean arpillera, anon., Taller Fundación Missio, Santiago, 1982

Photo Martin Melaugh

Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Kinderhilfe arpillera collection, Chile/Bonn

This arpillera depicts the hunger and poverty that is wrought by conflict and social injustice. Created during the Pinochet dictatorship, it depicts both the desperation of hunger among the poor, forced to seek food from church charities, and also the resilience of those who find ways to ensure that the worst affected are not left hungry.

Soup kitchens, similar to the one portrayed in this arpillera, were a life line for the impoverished during the Pinochet regime. Church charities such as the Vicaría de la Solidaridad and later, the Fundación Solidaridad, were in the forefront in setting them up. María Madariaga, whose husband was unemployed and who wondered how she could provide food for her children, recalls what the soup kitchen meant for her family, even though not all of them could benefit from it: *"There was an age limit to abide by...of my three children at the time, only one was able to eat...We thought it was better that one eats than none..."* (Agosin, 2008).

The need was so great that difficult choices had to be made, both within the family and in the organization, which meant that for Maria and her husband: *"the days were especially long...because there was nothing to eat."*





## SMALL ACTIONS BIG MOVEMENTS

English arpillera, Linda Adams, 2014

Photo Martin Melaugh

Roberta Bacic private collection

In the foreground of this piece, we see two groups of activists bearing placards announcing the conference SMALL Actions BIG Movements in Capetown, South Africa, 2014, the event for which this arpillera was created. A third group display an image of a broken rifle, the powerful symbol adopted by War Resisters International (WRI) - the conference organisers - which represents the destruction of weapons and denounces the institution of war.

The face of Archbishop Desmond Tutu, well known for his work in the field of nonviolence, is a prominent image. For Linda the combination of: *"his wisdom, courage and brilliant sense of humour make him one of the most well respected people of this and the last century."*

The convoy of three trucks, travelling left on the overhead highway, bearing the conference title, location and broken rifle image, convey a sense of energy, purpose and moving in a new direction. It makes it possible to imagine that a world without war is attainable.

Linda reminds us that: *"we all have the responsibility to consider our actions and the results of them. We are never powerless and by doing even small things collectively we can produce big changes."*



## ANY TIME AND EVERYWHERE - ANNA FRANK'S UNIVERSALITY

German arpillera, Heidi Drahota, 2011

Photo Heidi Drahota

Conflict Heidi Drahota collection

This is the first arpillera by textile artist Heidi Drahota. She created it after participating in several arpillera workshops connected to International arpillera exhibitions, 2009 – 2011. For Heidi *"Arpilleras are like a diary, ... and like every diary they are personal documents."*

This piece is: *"[my] personal expression as a German profoundly affected by the Second World War."* In the top section, Heidi, inspired by the arpillera doll technique used by Chilean women, depicts teenager Anna Frank at work on her diary during the period 1942 to 1944, when she and her family lived in hiding in Amsterdam, during the German occupation of the Netherlands.

Directly below she portrays the historical context in which this happened. Her vivid images of peoples' glasses, the presence of guards and dishevelled yellow stars reminds us of the genocide inflicted by the Nazi regime on Jews during World War II, a fate which befell Anna Frank and several family members.

The third section links the historical and current context. The end of World War II and the decline in Nazism is symbolised by brown helmet shapes, whilst the grey brickwork portrays the emergence of the UN declaration of human rights, the building blocks for a more equal world.

Worryingly, on the bottom right we see a gradual rise in Neo Nazism, reminding us that the issues of discrimination, denial of human rights and genocide faced by Anna Frank in the 1940s, is still a threat for children and young people 80 years later.





## ESCUELA EN LA POBLACIÓN / SCHOOL IN A POBLACIÓN

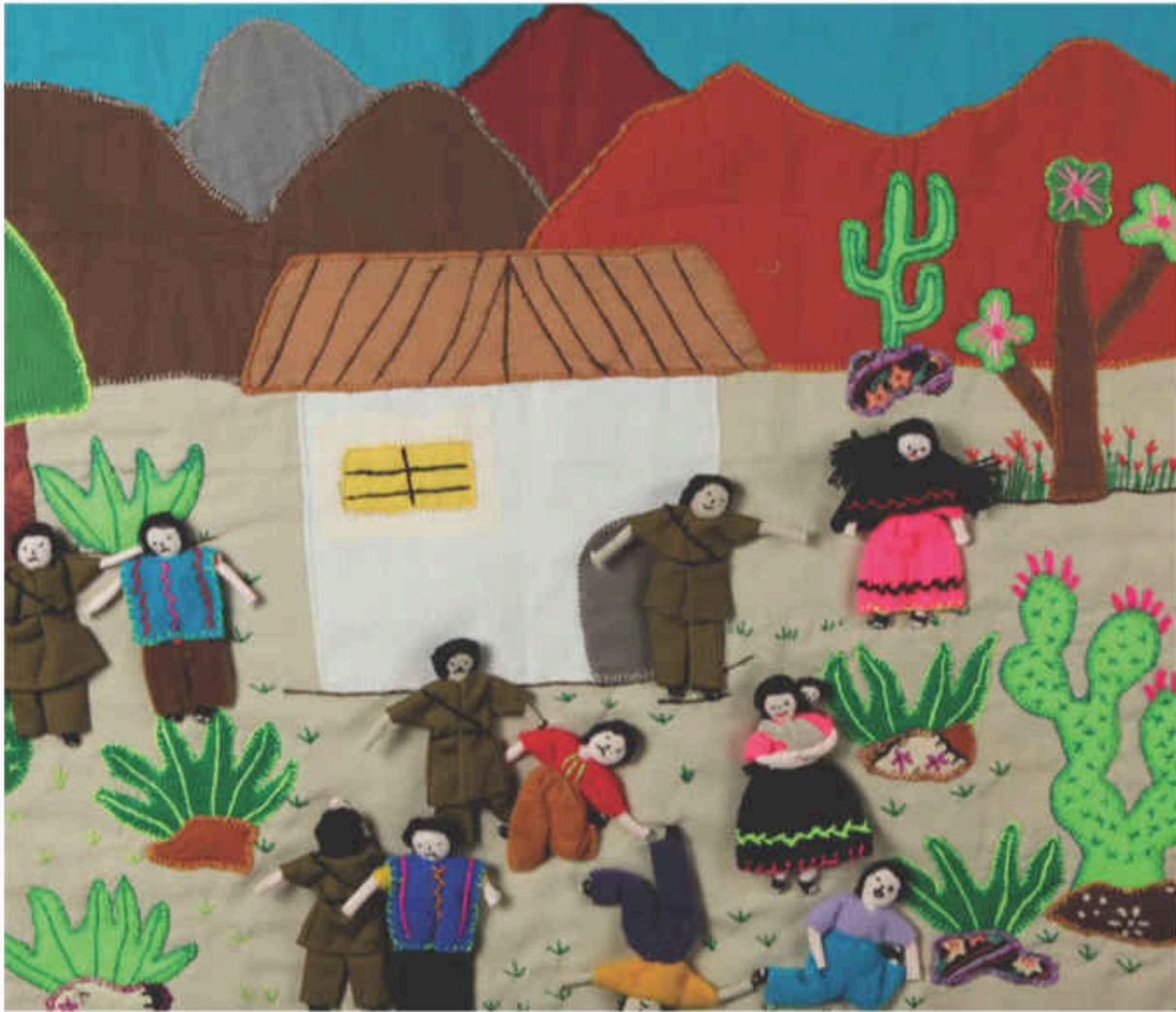
Chilean arpillera, anon., c1980

Photo Martin Melaugh

Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Kinderhilfe arpillera collection, Chile/Bonn

This arpillera belongs to a series of three big arpilleras, the complete size of a flour sack, with a specific focus on each. This particular piece titled: "*Vida cotidiana poblacional; vamos a la escuela.*" depicts dwellers in a shantytown community of Santiago going about their daily routines, engaged in a myriad of family, community and economic activities.

On the left hand side we see a community school where children are attending lessons. Here in this community, where life is a daily struggle for the majority, education remains at the heart of the community, highlighting the resilience of families in finding community solutions during the dictatorship. Attending classes in these small schools also protected children from being involved in riots or detained for breaking curfew.



## **VIOLENCIA EN AYACUCHO / VIOLENCE IN AYACUCHO**

Peruvian arpillera, FCH Mujeres Creativas workshop, 2009

Photo Martin Melaugh

Conflict Textiles collection. Provenance Rebecca Dudley, USA/ Northern Ireland

Made by the Mujeres Creativas workshop in Lima, Peru, this piece, a replica of the 1985 original arpillera, takes as its inspiration a picture drawn by a child portraying his memories of the military arriving in the city of Ayacucho in south-central Peru. His mother, through the Mujeres Creativas workshop, created this arpillera depicting the harshness, violence and repression of this era.

Over 600,000 people were displaced within Peru during the 1980s and 1990s as a result of an armed conflict between the government, self defence groups and insurgent forces of the Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru Resistance Movement. In 1980, the Shining Path (Sendero Luminoso) used Ayachucho as its base for its campaign against the Peruvian government.





## WELCHES KIND LASS ICH ZURÜCK? / WHICH CHILD DO I LEAVE BEHIND?

German Wall hanging, Heidi Drahota, 2015

Photo Heidi Drahota

Heidi Drahota collection

As textile artist Heidi Drahota skimmed the *"Nürnberger Nachrichten / Nuremberg News"* newspaper over Sunday morning breakfast at her home in Nuremberg in 2011, the headline *"Which of the Children Shall Survive?"* claimed her attention.

Reading on, she absorbed the stark choices facing parents in the East African famine region, fleeing conflict, famine and drought, on their long trek to the refugee camp in Dadaab, eastern Kenya, home to approximately 340,000 refugees, the majority of whom are Somalians.

When Wardo Mohammad Yusuf's four year old son collapsed just before they reached the Kenyan border she eventually left him behind to die, in order to at least save her daughter, a decision that continues to haunt her. When Faduma Sakow Abdullah's two eldest children collapsed, she had to save the little remaining water for her three younger children, leaving the two eldest to their fate under a tree. Faqid Nur Eimi's three year old son died from dehydration on the long journey. Too weak to dig a grave she put a few dry branches around his body and then resumed her journey *"I only thought of how I could possibly save my other children"*, she says. The stark news story which, for Heidi, epitomises *"the endless suffering that wars, terror, and hunger inflict on individuals and entire peoples..."* impelled her to create this piece.

Creating such a piece *"is a slow process of development ...which is necessary for textile work"* comments Heidi. *"I feel the needle stitches, the pain of the story I am telling, ...the individual decisions, how do I express this situation, with which material in which technique, needs and gets my special attention."* For her this creates *"a very intense relationship with the story and these people, which I do not know at all."*

As the shadowy figures in her piece trudge forward on their arduous journey from Somalia - a country where almost one third of the population of 12.3 million are dependent on humanitarian aid, where more than 300,000 children under the age of five are acutely malnourished, where over a quarter million died in the 2011 famine, half of whom were under five - Heidi *"confront[s] the viewer with these cruel truths.. Innocent children have to leave their lives in a terrible way."*  
<https://www.unicef.org/somalia/children.html>



## ALEPPO SCHOOL

English arpillerista, Linda Adams, 2016

Photo Linda Adams

Conflict Textiles collection

In March 2011, inspired by the Arab Spring, Syrians took to the streets, in ever-increasing numbers, demanding reform of the oppressive Assad regime. Repression of these nonviolent protests by Syrian Armed Forces & Allied militia was immediate and brutal. Soon the conflict escalated into civil war between government and rebel forces, with both sides aided by a proliferation of armed groups and powerful external players. As 2016 drew to a close, the country's infrastructure was in ruins; over a quarter of a million Syrians had been killed and an estimated 13.5 million people, including 6 million children, were in need of humanitarian assistance.

<http://www.unocha.org/syrian-arab-republic/syria-country-profile/about-crisis>

Thousands of miles away in England, arpillerista Linda Adams was shocked at the images of Syrian children caught in the chaos of war. Digging deeper she *"watched newsreel film and read first hand reports for days"* and with needle and thread she stepped into their world. In this piece, as the barrel bombing continues relentlessly overhead we descend into an underground school, where teachers, at great risk to their own safety, persist in educating their students.

Absent children and adults, killed during the war *"are represented ...as shadows in the spaces where they would have been."* Childrens' drawings cover the walls, a common sight in schools worldwide. Linda reminds us that these images *"came from children's drawings [in] Aleppo [and] show things children shouldn't have to see."*

Mindful of the fact that that *"new news [items] ... push stories like this away from the front pages"* Linda is hopeful that her work will bring *"some attention and understanding"* to the crisis in Syria, where, as we see in this arpillerista, people are striving, against all the odds, to educate children and rebuild communities.





## LA MATERNIDAD DEL ELNA

Catalonian / Spanish arpillera, Arpilleristas Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc, 2012

Photo Roser Corbera

Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc collection, Catalonia / Spain

In the closing days of January 1939, with the Spanish civil war in its third year, Nationalist troops captured Barcelona. As the whole of Catalonia soon fell to Franco, an estimated 500,000 Republican supporters began their exodus across the border into refugee camps in Roussillon, France.

In these overcrowded camps, where infant mortality exceeded 90%, the Elne Maternity Home was set up nearby by Swiss National Elizabeth Eidenbenz. It is remembered by Arpilleristas Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc as: *"the only refuge and space for pregnant women who endured misery for their babies and themselves in the camps."*

Here, the arpilleristas pay tribute to this remarkable centre where, between 1939 and 1944, almost 600 babies were born to women fleeing the Spanish civil war and later, Jewish refugees and gypsies fleeing the Nazi invasion. We see women about to give birth, the new babies in the nursery and women engaged in the general running of the centre; women of so many different origins sharing the experience of motherhood. Overall, a sense of dignity, calm, care and welcome pervades this arpillera, a far cry from the chaos and disorder of camp life.

In the words of its founder Elizabeth Eidenbenz, it was as *"an island of peace amongst an ocean of destruction."* For the arpilleristas reconnecting with it through their stitching almost 80 years later, it was a respite from *"their [experience] of suffering, human rights' violations and fears"* endured during the Nationalist occupation and their journey into exile.

<http://memorialdemocratic.gencat.cat/web/conten>

/04\_demana\_una\_exposicio/05\_documents/maternitat montjuic\_ang.pdf



## HER PILLOW, THE EARTH

Welsh arpillera, Eileen Harrisson, 2017

Photo Arthur Harrisson and Eileen Harrisson

Eileen Harrisson collection

This piece expresses Eileen's grief at the terrible suffering in Aleppo; of people enduring relentless bombings, of the tragedy of children caught up in the conflicts of adults, in which over a quarter of a million Syrians have been killed and an estimated 13.5 million people, including over 6 million children, are in need of humanitarian assistance.

An article in the UK Independent newspaper "*Massacre of innocents*" (28th October 2016), touched Eileen to the core of her being and impelled her to respond via textile.

In his report, journalist Robert Fisk described how three children were playing on their balcony adjacent to a school in Aleppo when it was hit by shell fire one day at break time. All three died, a little girl, Khanom Fallaha, just two years old and her two older brothers. In death, she lay with her head turned to the right as if sleeping and the article read, "*Tonight, she will be in the earth*".

These words and photograph of the classroom with its overturned chairs, little desks and trail of blood flowing over floor and books, haunted Eileen; so she made this work in which a swathe of earth coloured muslin sweeps round a small girl like a shroud and red stitches flow like blood. On the other side, ruined buildings gaping with black, empty shells that should have been homes filled with laughter, light and love, threaten to topple onto her.

Tents on hard ground offer scant shelter for the 4.8 million Syrian refugees in winter's freezing cold but, trapped like the little girl drawn in thread, for far too many, the earth gives its pillow for the dead.





