

Disruptive Women

Arpilleras in action



Through a selection of arpilleras from the **Conflict Textiles** and **Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc** collections, we are introduced to disruptive women worldwide: women who have pushed the boundaries of societal expectations of women; women who have broken the mould; women who have challenged and denounced violence and human rights abuses; women who have supported each other in their demands for justice and fairness. Above all, this exhibition nudges us to consider our pre-conceived ideas of disruption.

It draws together many threads of connection. It marks the 15th anniversary of Conflict Textiles inaugural exhibition **The Politics of Chilean Arpilleras** in 2008. It builds on a ten year plus collaborative relationship with Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc, Catalonia and marks their second co-curated exhibition.

For a sense of the overall exhibition we encourage you to visit it across three venues:

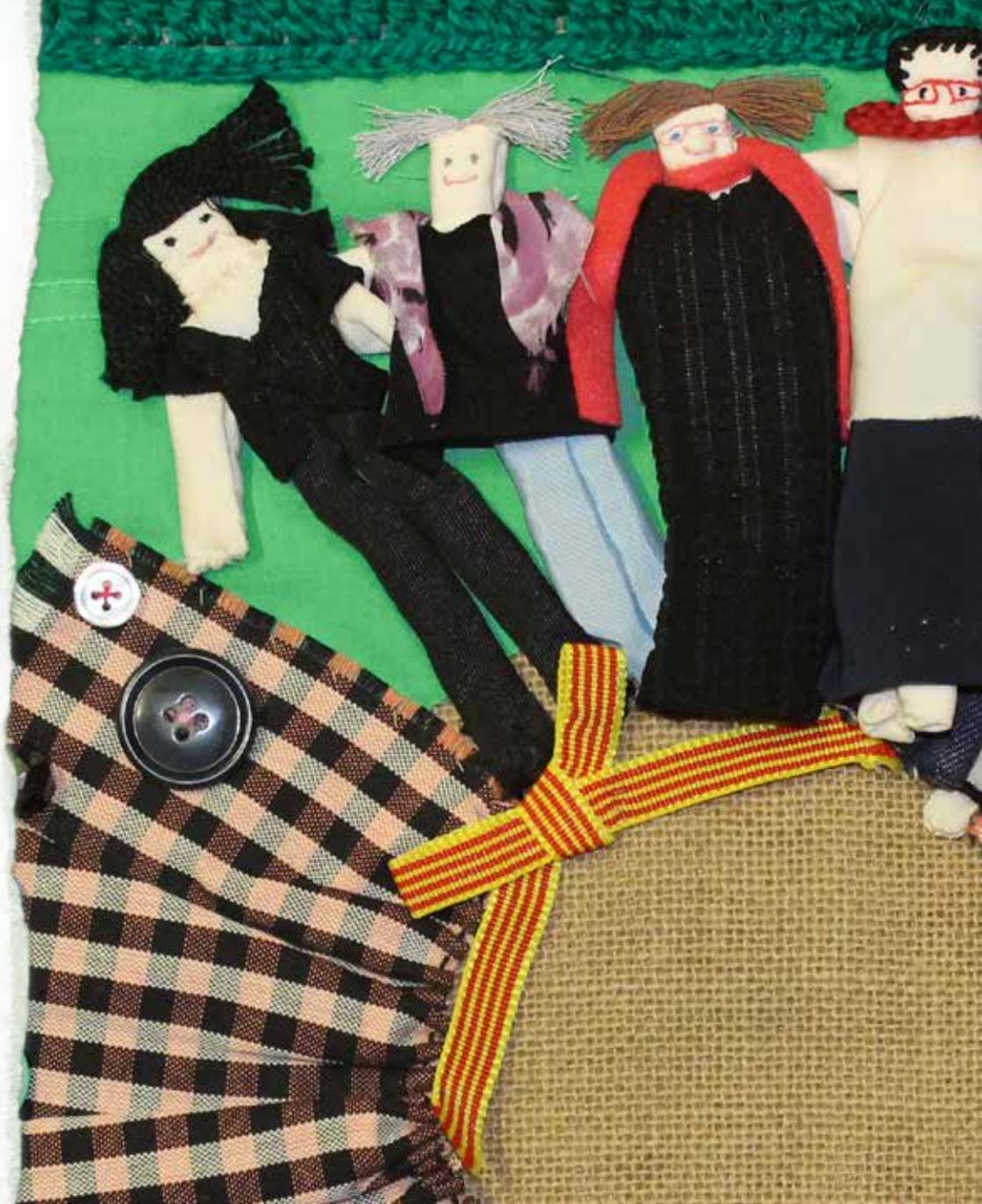
- **Flowerfield Arts Centre**, the location for **Arpilleras that Cry Out** (2009) will feature the bulk of the exhibition.

- A number of pieces will also be displayed within two of our permanent rotating exhibition spaces **Conflict Textiles collection: Magee Campus Library, Ulster University**.

- **The Troubles and Beyond** in **Ulster Museum**.

The exhibition will be complemented by associated activities developed in collaboration with host facilitators within each venue.





Circle of Women: Forum of Arpilleras 2011

Roser Corbera

Homage to the 1st Forum of Arpilleras in Catalonia: Our stories make our history

We can clearly identify (left - right) Roberta Bacic (curator), Salut Torné (art therapist), Neus Bartroli (primary school teacher, Escola Sant Pau de Sant Pol de Mar), Pilar Lopez (coordinator, Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc), Alba Sanfeliu (researcher for Arts and Peace at the School for a Culture of Peace,

Autonomous University of Barcelona) and Roser Corbera (communications officer, Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc).

The other participants are represented by a series of buttons sewn onto the checked material typical of Catalonia.

The circle represents the feeling of cohesion, movement, continuity and expansion which sums up the spirit of this first meeting.



Social Empowerment

Patriarchal societies are based on an ideology that perpetuates male domination and social inequality. The process by which girls and women become aware of their discrimination and subordination challenges this ideology and is a first step towards transforming the structures that support it.

This awareness is the first step in the process of women's empowerment and quest to overcome inequality, gain self-confidence, enjoy autonomy over our own lives, and escape the control of the roles which society imposes on us.

Here we have some good examples such as **the Pasionaria** and her crusade as a trade union leader, or the women in the **United Kingdom** and **Liberia**, who have fought for their own empowerment and persevere in their demands for justice, disarmament, and peace.

Do you know any empowered women, what have they done...





They Shall not Pass!

Antonia Amador

When I was a young girl, I listened to Radio Pirenaica. The ideas I heard there left their mark and have stayed with me throughout my life.

One of the most important stories was about **Dolores Ibárruri**, who confronted a male-dominated society.

The daughter of a miner, her dream was to be a teacher but unfortunately that didn't happen and she studied dressmaking. She was a mother of 6 children.

As a politician. In 1921 she joined the Communist Party. In 1936, she was elected to represent Asturias and, when the military uprising broke out, she made a call to the working class shouting "THEY SHALL NOT PASS!"

She was also an exile. After the Spanish Civil War, she went into exile in the USSR and returned two years after the death of the dictator Francisco Franco.

Without a doubt, the Pasionaria – daughter, woman, mother, politician, and exile – is an image to reflect upon.





No to Arms!

Anita Ramonet

I decided to make this arpillera after seeing a human chain of women, 23 kilometres long, protest against a nuclear weapons facility. This made a huge impression on me. It is unbelievable that in the 21st century, there are governments who can operate a cruise missile base.

The women of the pacifist camp of Greenham Common endured many nights in the cold and rain to change the world for the better. The camp was set up in 1981.

In 1982, 250 women occupied the facility

and 34 of them were arrested. In December of the same year, a total of 300,000 women gathered around the base.

They became famous in many parts of Great Britain and Europe when, in 1983, 70,000 protestors gathered, forming a 23 km-long chain.

But, as is the case when fighting against powerful people, their efforts were in vain. Only in 2000, after the end of the Cold War, was the base dismantled and

yet many countries still keep nuclear weapons.





Peace has a Woman's Voice

Roser Corbera

This arpillera comes from the discovery of a country, a conflict, a movement of women, three leaders, and a hope for peace.

My first discovery is **Annie Nushann** and her peace huts; wonderful refuges for women, an oasis for conflict resolution, community work, education, and empowerment. They were great!

But where did these huts come from? A lack of security? War? Back in 2002, Liberia was like hell on earth – towns were scorched, women were raped,

and children were recruited to fight. In the face of this terrible situation, **Leymah Gbowee** called for peaceful protest and women demanded “We want peace now!”

In 2005 **Ellen Johnson Sirleaf** was democratically elected as the nation's President. She was even awarded the Nobel peace prize!

My arpillera is a tribute to these disruptive women who, with bravery and perseverance, saw the light at the end of the tunnel. Peace has a woman's voice!





Absences-Presences

Ana Zlatkes

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.

9000 cases of forced disappearance and other human rights violations were perpetrated. Approximately 30% of the victims were women with children under the age of 15. Many pregnant women died in detention centres and their babies were illegally adopted by military or political families affiliated with the regime.

In the face of these events, the Grandmothers (abue-

las) of the Plaza de Mayo emerged in 1977, an organization dedicated specifically to highlighting and investigating the disappearances of their children and grandchildren.

Here, Ana captures the anguish and determination of these grandmothers, who every Thursday for over forty years have continued to march around the government buildings, 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 and make it never ending.



Civil Rights

Women's rights refer to the rights that are recognised or conceded to women and girls in different societies throughout the world.

While in some places these rights are institutionalised with the support of laws, local customs, and/or social behaviour, in others the situation is very different. Instead, women's rights are repressed, ignored, or even denied in contrast with the rights afforded to men and boys.

The issues which are often associated with women's rights are: the right to physical integrity, to control their own bodies, the right to suffrage, the right to occupy public office, the right to work, the right to receive a fair and

equal wage, the right to own property, the right to education, the right to serve in the army, the right to sign legal contracts, and matrimonial and parental rights.

In this section, we can find the women who worked at the **Cotton Textile Factory** in New York and who went on strike to demand equal salary and work-life balance. And, also, **Rosa Parks** who went a step further, given that, faced with different types of discrimination as a black woman, she demanded equal rights for her whole community.

Which rights do you think are violated most frequently where you live? And in the world...





Colour doesn't Matter

Loli López

I read the story of Rosa Parks and was impressed by her fight for civil rights.

A black woman, she broke the “official” law.

In 1955, in the south of the USA, black people suffered the humiliation of not being able to share the same spaces as white people: schools, restaurants, waiting rooms...Segregation even went

so far as to toilets which displayed signs saying “No negroes!”

Travelling on a bus on a seat that was reserved for white people, she refused to move. The driver threatened her “I’ll get you arrested”. She spent the night in jail, accused of disturbing public order, and paid a fine of 14 dollars.

As I created my arpillera, I realised what a brave woman she was.





8th of March

Paqui Báez

On the 8th March 1908, 129 women who worked in the Cotton Textile Factory in New York burned to death in a fire that was caused by the owner of the factory.

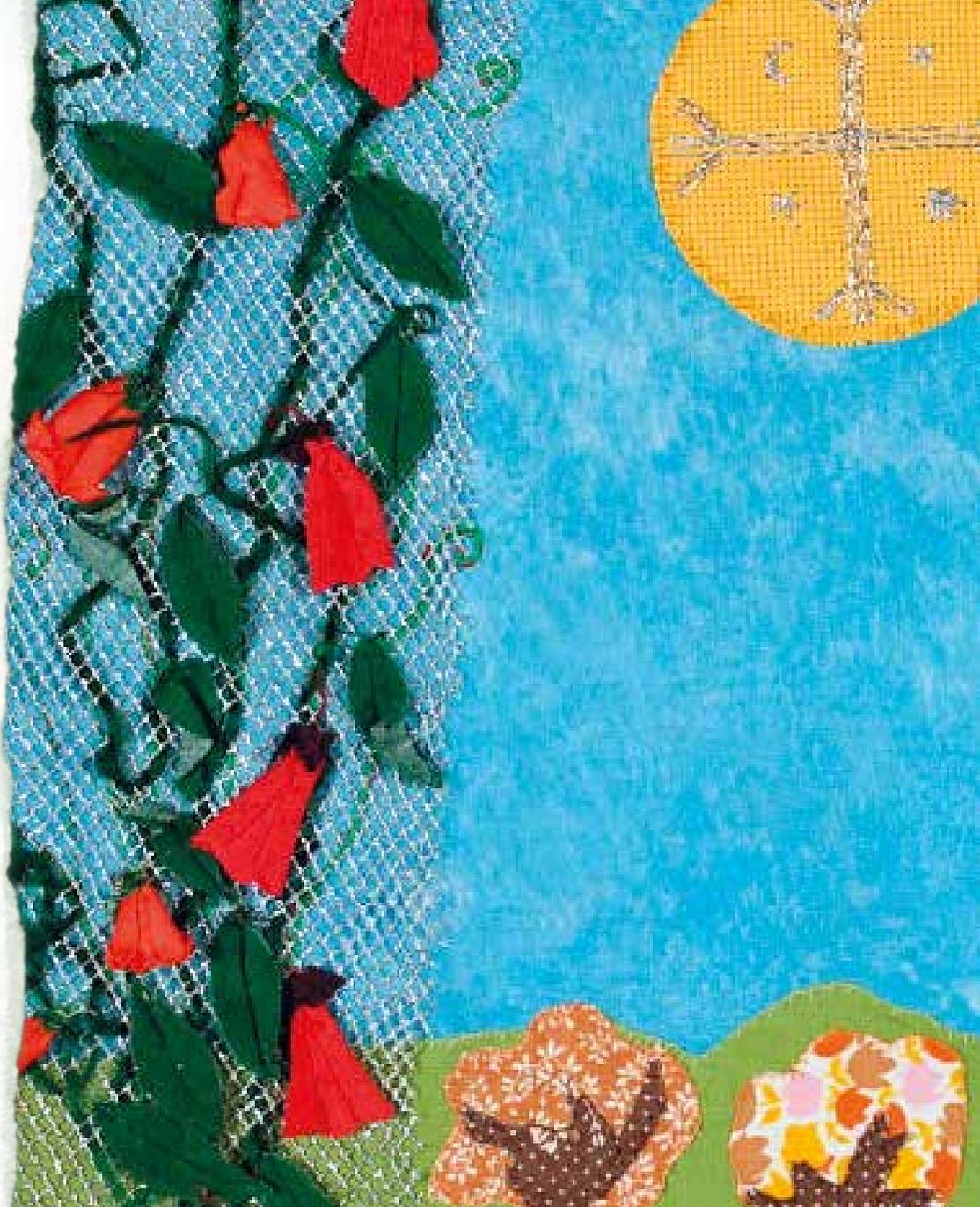
The owners had locked the women in the factory to force them to carry on working rather than join the strike. I have chosen these women because

I did a play about them and I was struck by the fact that thanks to their fight for a fair wage and better standard of living, today us women enjoy greater freedoms.

I have discovered that this sad case and the deaths that were caused can serve as inspiration to make progress with our rights.



Teresa Durán



In Memory of Teresa Durán

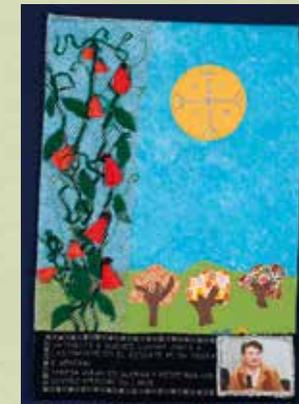
Linda Adams

This is a poignant memorial to Chilean woman Teresa Durán, who died in 2011. Teresa was an anthropologist and human rights academic, whose work led her to focus on the issue of the identity of the Mapuche people. Linda, the author of the work, shares her reflections on the choice of fabrics used: “the blue fabric used for the sky was made for wrapping flowers, I loved the clear sky blue colour which made

me think of heaven plus it seemed apt to put flowers as a tribute to Teresa and to use a fabric which would have been wrapped around them.”

Linda chose the national flower called the copihue, which is a wild flower native to the Mapuche land.

Linda made this piece as a gift for Roberta Bacic, who was a colleague of Teresa.



Education and Learning

Knowing how to read and write is an essential skill in order to further our personal development and enjoy the rights associated with citizenship. In other words, education is a doorway to individual fulfilment and collective progress. And yet, access to education is still a lesson to be learned throughout the world and illiteracy creates considerable inequality.

In our country, more women currently study at university than men, but we must not forget that at the start of the 20th century, there were no opportunities for women to access university in the same conditions as men. Girls and boys were separated in school and received an education that corresponded to two different models. Women's access to university was full of obstacles, and the same goes for their possibilities of using the skills obtained there afterwards.

Do you know what games boys play when they are outside?
And what about girls...

Thanks to the drive of individuals such as **Francesca Bonnemaison** from a bourgeois position or **Marie Curie** with her brilliant contributions to science from a perspective of equality, the struggle for women's rights and resistances against cultural andro-centrism, today we are starting to notice encouraging changes.

It is absolutely vital to continue to work on promoting co-education in the classroom, which strengthens equality of opportunities in practice and the elimination of all types of discrimination based on sex.



Francesca
Bonnemaison



Every Woman is Worth More when She Learns to Read and Write

Mònica Moro

I have read the story of Francesca Bonnemaison over and over again. Francesca was a woman who enjoyed a good social standing and who liked to sew, get involved in charity work, attend church, and play sports. At the turn of the 20th century, being a woman with interests, beyond getting married and having children, was frowned upon.

I decided to “sew” this arpillera because, without making too much noise, drawing attention to herself, or resorting to any form of violence, Francesca was a woman who brought about change, a definite rupture with what had come before. Creating the first public library for women in Europe is worthy of

merit, but all the more so because it was opened up to all young women, whatever their social class. The initiative really worked; an exclusive space for women to learn and grow together gave an opportunity to develop new perspectives on women’s lives.

I repeat her words here, “Each woman is worth more when she learns to read and write” and today I maintain that every woman is worth more when she learns about everything.



My disruptive woman, my heroine was able to break the system from within, with no turning back. Today there is no doubt: education and learning will make us free.



From Science to Freedom

Mercè Monge

I knew that Madame Curie was a Nobel prizewinner, I knew that she was a scientist. I knew that much about her.

Facing this arpillera and representing the life of a woman who I had just discovered with thread and bits of clothing, was quite a challenge.

What should I value about her? Her intelligence, force, frugality, bravery?

I decided to reflect on her achievements, where her intelligence, value, force, and bravery can be seen:

- Discovering Polonium (Po) and Radium (Ra) in precarious conditions...

- Organising vans to take X rays to the front in the First World War, thus saving a million lives.
- Being the first woman to receive a Nobel prize and the only one to receive it in two different areas.
- Becoming the first woman to teach at the University of Paris.

All of these achievements in a world... where women were invisible.



I leave you with a quote from Marie:

“Lies are difficult to kill, but a lie which attributes to a man the work done by a woman has more lives than a cat.”

Women's Bodies

Traditionally, women's bodies have been regulated by religion, customs, education, family, medicine, art, music, television... For the body of a woman to be socially accepted, cultural standards must be fulfilled, including appearance, behaviour in the public and private spheres, relationships, and sexuality.

We find ourselves in patriarchal societies where the rights of women are often violated, where violence against women takes shape and makes itself present in a symbolic way through language or imagery. There is structural violence that reflects injustices and inequalities, or direct violence, such as physical, psychological, sexual, and economic harm. This is evident both

within the domestic setting and the public space, with the commonplace and systematic practice of femicide as an instrument of terrorism, which is met with impunity.

In this section we focus on physical violence with the testimony of **Asha Ismail**, an activist who is against the practice of female genital mutilation, and **Ana Orantes**, who was murdered by her partner. We call for the right to life.

Do you know any cases of gender-based violence, from microaggressions to femicides...





Don't Cut my Wings

Manoli García

My reason for choosing Asha's story about mutilation is that I reject this tradition, which is an attack against women's freedom and health.

I believe that it is an excuse for a man to control a woman even more, depriving her of her sexual freedom which is so rooted in culture that even women themselves sacrifice their own daughters, despite the suffering they

themselves have experienced as a result of the same practice.

What I want to point out about the central figure of this arpillera is her bravery and decision not to continue with this tradition, refusing for her daughter to be subjected to it. As a result, she was ostracised by her family and the community, fighting so that other women would follow her example.





Not One Woman More

Encarna Ortega

My arpillera pays homage to women who suffer from domestic abuse, particularly Ana Orantes from Granada.

In 1997, this woman appeared on television to denounce the abuse that she had been suffering for 40 years at the hands of her husband. What's more, a court order meant that she had to stay with him.

In revenge, her husband tied her to a chair at home, poured petrol over her, abused her, and burned her in front of her 14-year-old son, who could do nothing to stop it.

20 years later, we are in the same situation; women are murdered and governments are doing nothing to stop it.





Mothers of Elna

Group of Arpilleras (Fundació Ateneu Sant Roc)

The years of democratic transition in Spain left many stories of suffering, violation of human rights, and fear, which have been forgotten.

Between 1939 and 1944, around 600 boys and girls from the refugee camps in the South of France were born in Elna Maternity Centre.

Elisabeth Eidenbenz, founder and director of the centre, provided a solution and hope for the pregnant women who struggled to help their babies survive in the camps. Among the lack of dignity and contempt that they suffered, Elna was an “island of peace amidst an ocean of destruction”, where women from different origins shared the experience of motherhood.



Equality and balance

Nothing of what we do or say at each moment of our lives is neutral: all of our actions, thoughts, and words can be read from a gender perspective. Even before we are born, everything that we hear, do, or see, conditions our masculinity or femininity, shaping our behaviour, feelings and thinking as “men” or as “women”, in a way which is socially and culturally constructed.

Equality between women and men is a question of human rights and a condition for social justice. However, there is no society on earth where men and women receive equal treatment. This discrimination, based solely on having been born a woman, transcends social categories such as socio-economic status, age or the ethnicity we belong to.

In order to fight discrimination based on gender, it is crucial to promote egalitarian social behaviour in different places and areas such as the family, school, leisure and free time, the media...

Throughout history we can find examples of women who have dedicated their lives to looking for individual and collective autonomy such as the **suffragettes**, with their demands for equal rights or **Frederica Montseny**, who from her position as a politician and trade union member questioned the patriarchal system in her articles and novels.

Do you know any women who fight for their rights, for your rights... who are close by and persevere in their activism?





To Frederica

Rosa Borrás

My aprillera portrays Federica at three stages in her life: with her parents at a protest; with her partner, daughters, and son; and Federica as a government minister giving a speech where some of her proposals can be seen.

I have also created some of the best-known books that she wrote, two of the journals in which she participated, and another two journals. Her mother, who was a teacher, taught her at home

and it was decided that she would not be sent to school.

I have used several fabrics, including a patch of silk belonging to Roberta Bacic, a patch from my father-in-law's blue-striped shirt, and Federica's dress (blue with white spots) comes from a dress that my grandmother Lola gave me when I was 20 years old. I wore it often during a time when I read about anarchism and was a bit of a hippie, haha!



The Suffragettes



Votes for Women

Pilar López

A book on the life of English immigrants in New Zealand made me aware of an incredible movement: **the Suffragettes.**

I have always been convinced of the importance of voting... too many people have fought too hard to gain the vote for everyone for us to just forget about it during elections. And the Suffragette movement captivated me.

Wealthy women in meetings, often in secret. Working class women joining the movement after long days at work.

Massive protests to communicate their struggle.

Reading, investigating, looking at photos, I thought of the first Suffragette that I had met (without realising it): Jane Banks, the mother in the Mary Poppins film, with her "Votes for women" banner in the streets of London, always busy with the Suffragette cause.

New Zealand was the first country where women could vote, back in 1893; in Switzerland it took until 1971, in Kuwait until 2006, and there are still some countries where women cannot vote!



“Unemployed”
Women



We are Unemployed Women

Anonymous

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 arpillerista features. The simple stitches indicate that the arpillerista was not a seamstress but an ordinary woman undergoing difficult times.

These are collective, non-violent actions, in the face of violent repression.





21st Century Goddess

Ana Zlatkes

This arpillera was created specifically for the Verbal Arts Centre International Women's day 2014 initiative "Women 31". It gives us an insight into the lives of contemporary professional women.

We see a woman juggling the demands of family and professional life. Her ironing board doubles as a computer table and with her other hand she manoeuvres her hair dryer while balancing her phone. The stethoscope slung around her neck indicates that she is in the medical profession. The toddler wrapped around her legs,

demanding immediate attention, is a quintessential image of motherhood, which resonates in all cultures. For this woman and for women globally, negotiating their multi-layered roles is a delicate, ever shifting, act of balance.

Through this textile image, which was inspired by a cartoon drawing by Mónica Lalanda, Ana and Mirta prompt us to consider the global journeys of women, and to reflect on how and where women's experiences are at odds with our vision for women in the twenty first century.



