

The Human Cost of War: An Exhibition of Quilts and Arpilleras

Forward

The Arts have a special part to play in our lives. They encourage us to look anew and transform our view of the world without being instructional - they do not tell us directly what is right or wrong. They also make it possible to speak about difficult subjects with imagination.

Movement for the Abolition of War (MAW) has developed a special relationship with the Arts in its campaigning and education activities. It has recently produced two music CDs and includes the visual arts in its annual Peace History Conference held at the [Imperial War Museum](#), London. It also works closely with the [Peace Museum](#), Bradford, which holds the national collection of historical peace art and other artefacts. MAW's newsletter, *Abolish War* is now noted for its use of photographs to illustrate the inhumanity and futility of military conflict.

The human cost of war exhibition follows this theme. The curator, Roberta Bacic, has selected 22 quilts and arpilleras to illustrate the subject. They speak about the state of the world and leave it to us, those viewing the exhibition, to compare this experience with how we wish the world to be. From here we may be encouraged to think about how the wish could be made a reality.

Roberta has been a friend for nearly 15 years and I have come to know about her personal experiences of conflict and her strong commitment to peace and reconciliation. I am delighted that she has been able to bring her expertise to create this exhibition for MAW and share with us her knowledge of this special art form.

May I also thank the Imperial War Museum, [St Ethelburga's Centre for Reconciliation and Peace](#), and the Whitechapel Gallery for hosting the exhibition and its associated events.

Enjoy the experience of viewing the exhibition and take seriously the impression it makes on you

Tony Kempster
Chair of the Movement for the Abolition of War

Introduction

When I accepted the invitation to curate this exhibition I wanted to incorporate two features reflecting my personal beliefs. So, on the one side, the exhibition addresses the moral and pragmatic stand that was unnecessary and also avoidable; that we have the intelligence and feelings which enable us to resolve conflicts in a non-violent way. On the other, I have put together pieces created by women from different countries and diverse walks of life that express and highlight the effect war and conflict have in their daily lives and the impact it has had on their feelings and attitudes.

The use of traditional textile crafts to depict repression, violence, pain, trauma and misery is growing. Furthermore, it is giving women the chance to say NO to the 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. They not only tell a story, a life experience, but also trigger in the viewer a response, be that an action or by just engaging. Most of the images speak for themselves.

Consider, for example, the five pieces related to the Spanish Civil War, made in Badalona, Spain. They are the product of workshops run by two young professionals, Alba Perez and Maria Vinolo, who visited my exhibition “The politics of Chilean arpilleras” in Barcelona in November 2009 and heard my talk. Prompted by that experience, they ran workshops at Fundacio Ateneu Sant Roc as part of International Women’s Day 2009. The outcome was a total of 56 arpilleras. For this exhibition I have only included some that relate to our theme, ***The human cost of war***.

Submerge yourself in these pieces; look into their stories, listen to what they tell you, explore where you are in relation to them and the world they represent, and ask yourself: ‘What can we do about this?’ But see them also as contemporary art, as they have been exhibited around the world in museums, art galleries, schools, universities and libraries; by NGOs, Church institutions, women’s organizations and more. They are no longer a set of women’s crafts accessible only to those who know their stories and have felt compassion and solidarity with them. They have gone beyond. Those spaces made them accessible to us, to do more, to move beyond. Enjoy them in all aspects that are possible.

Roberta Bacic, curator of this exhibition, November 2009