

Chilean *Arpillera* Exhibit and Programming 2019

Gibson Gallery, SUNY Potsdam: February 14 to March 30

Richard F. Brush Gallery, St. Lawrence University: March 4 to April 11



A collaboration of faculty, students, and communities in the United States and Chile has emerged to exhibit a collection of sixty-four Chilean patchwork appliques called *arpilleras*. Our project provides a special opportunity to share, in English and in Spanish, the moving stories told by these works of art. Their stories began in 1973.

On September 11, 1973, a military coup led by Gen. Augusto Pinochet—and secretly supported by the Nixon administration—overthrew Chile’s democratically elected socialist government. During the years that followed, the Pinochet dictatorship abducted, tortured, and killed thousands of its perceived opponents. In response to this repression, Chilean women handsewed *arpilleras* from scraps of household cloth, sometimes using the clothing left behind by their abducted loved ones. The *arpilleras* dramatically depict the protest, repression, survival skills, and daily life of Chileans after the coup.

Meanwhile in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, a fair-trade women’s collective called Jubilee Crafts began marketing and exhibiting the *arpilleras* as a way to educate Americans about U.S. foreign policy toward Chile. These Jubilee Crafts women are now donating these *arpilleras* to the permanent collection at the Museum of Memory and Human Rights in Santiago, Chile.

Before they make this trip home, the *arpilleras* will continue their educational work in two bilingual exhibits at SUNY Potsdam and St. Lawrence University (SLU) galleries in spring 2019. Preparation for these exhibits began in spring 2017 and has involved and will continue to involve an interdisciplinary team of faculty members and students from both campuses.

Three SUNY Potsdam professors initiated this project: Dr. Liliana Trevizán and Dr. Oscar Sarmiento are Chileans who lived under the Pinochet regime; Dr. M. J. Heisey directed Jubilee Crafts in the 1970s and 1980s, and has included work on the *arpillera* exhibit in her public history classes.

Dr. Trevizán and Dr. Sarmiento were both university students and then teachers in Chile during the dictatorship. Their experiences in the fight for democracy and their scholarly knowledge of the context and meanings of the *arpilleras* provide a special opportunity to deepen our understanding of the *arpilleras* as works of art, as historical texts, and as political statements. In addition, their contacts with Chileans across North America and their knowledge of scholarship on Chile and Latin America have made possible the inclusion of significant artists and scholars in programming for the exhibit.

This initial team has been joined by :

April Vasher-Dean, director of The Art Museum, who is leading work on the exhibit at Potsdam;
Romi Sebald, collections manager, who has overseen photographing and mounting the *arpilleras*;
Catherine Tedford, director of The Richard F. Brush Gallery, who is leading exhibit work at SLU;

Dr. Tamara Feinstein, Visiting Assistant Professor of Latin American History, who teaches at both SLU and SUNY Potsdam (Her SLU students in The Cold War in Latin America have begun building a digital timeline and podcasts that will be linked to listening stations at the SLU exhibit. In fall 2018, her SUNY Potsdam and SLU students in Dictatorship and Democracy in Chile will continue this work. She also won a 2018 summer CIIS Fellows grant to take an SLU student and, with funding, a SUNY Potsdam student to Santiago for two weeks of research on the *arpilleras*.);

Dr. Shiho Imai, Associate Professor of History and department chair, beginning July 2018, who won a BOB grant which allows six students working on the *arpillera* project to travel to Washington DC for a backstage tour on the curating of textiles at the Smithsonian and George Washington University's Textile Museum;

Dr. Marie-Élaine Gagnon, Assistant Professor of Cello, with the support of Dean Michael Sitton, will perform with pianist Angelica Sganga—the Zapateado Duo—music by Chilean and Cuban composers.

Students who have worked on the project to date include:

Carly J. Northup, who in spring 2017 photographed the *arpilleras*, under the direction of Sebald and Prof. Iggy Beerbower;

Charina Medina, who in fall 2017 interviewed Dr. Trevizán in Spanish on the *arpilleras*, and wrote summaries of those interviews;

Mahala Nyberg, who in fall 2017 served as a consultant on oral interviewing and interviewed Jubilee Crafts staff;

Ryan Hutchins, who in spring 2018 is continuing interviews in Spanish of Dr. Trevizán on the *arpilleras*;

Kelsey Newtown, who in spring 2018 is making contact with local public schools to plan curriculum that would encourage class visits to the *arpillera* exhibit.

We are planning interdisciplinary programs to celebrate the opening of the two exhibits and to encourage interest on campus and in the community in visiting the galleries. Most of the programming draws on the expertise and knowledge of local faculty and students.

The February 14 opening of the exhibit at SUNY Potsdam, hosted by The Art Gallery, will include presentations on experiences in the 1970s and 1980s by Dr. Trevizán, Dr. Sarmiento, Dr. Heisey, and Dr. Feinstein. Caramelo Trio, of which Dr. Sarmiento is a part, will perform Chilean folk music, including works by Violeta Parra and Victor Jara.

On March 3, the Zapateado Duo—Marie-Élaine Gagnon and Angelica Sganga—concert will take place in a Crane or PAC venue.

The March 4 opening of the exhibit at SLU will include a symposium with Dr. Trevizán or Dr. Sarmiento; Dr. Katherine Hite, Professor of Political Science at Vassar College and author of *Politics and the Art of Commemoration: Memorials to Struggle in Latin America and Spain*; and, we hope, a public artist who might engage our community in art as conversation and collaboration.

March 5 will include keynote presentations by Dr. Katherine Hite and an artist at SUNY Potsdam

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