

The Pinochet dictatorship in Chile was an incredibly violent 17-year period. Tens of thousands of people, mostly men who opposed the regime, were tortured, kidnapped, and “disappeared” by this brutal regime. With such wide-spread, violent means of suppressing political resistance, Chilean women turned to artistic resistance in the form of arpilleras. Arpilleras typically depict military violence, or everyday life in Chile. Even the arpilleras that depict everyday life show some aspects of the Pinochet dictatorship; they leave things out, or alter small details to give an uncanny feeling that something isn’t right.

This arpillera only depicts women. While women were targeted by the Pinochet regime, and reported their children being stolen and adopted by military families, men were more commonly targeted which is why there are none in this arpillera. The women in the scene are shown doing many things: dancing, walking in the forest (presumably to collect food), walking around the houses, and holding a sign that says “Donde Estan.” Without context, this almost looks like normal life in Chile; however, we know the women in the scene are grieving the loss of their sons, fathers, brothers, or husbands, while continuing to live and work as if nothing had happened.

All of the women in the arpillera are excellently dressed. The attention to detail on the dresses, all of which are well designed and beautifully posed, is incredibly impressive given that they are only a few inches tall. Similarly, the hair is very well done; despite being on a head the size of a blueberry, every woman has a unique hairstyle that is textured and styled. Femininity was a powerful tool of protest under Pinochet. It allowed women to protest, create arpilleras, and partially protected them from being disappeared. However, it didn’t spare them from the cruelty of disappearances. People

who weren't disappeared, still had to live with the grief of losing people they knew. Women had to work, tend to their families, and protest against disappearances.

The environment in this arpillera depicts the Andes mountains, and the sun, which are present in nearly all arpilleras in Augie's collection, as well as some trees and houses. The detailing on the scenery is exceptional. The pattern on the mountains all match, which likely means they were hand-dyed. The colors on the trees work very well together, and the patterns for the ground are very fun. On top of all this, the stitch work is great. Many other arpilleras used running stitches or back stitches for the designs, while this one uses mostly cross stitches. The lines are incredibly clean, and add to the texture of the piece.

This arpillera, like many others, is even more impressive when considering the context in which it was made. They were made on burlap sacks with only the materials people had on hand, including clothes of people who were disappeared. Arpilleras were often a collective project where women shared materials and skills to create beautiful artworks. I rarely see art as beautiful, cohesive, and politically meaningful as this arpillera, even in an era of crafting where many of us have access to warehouse-sized craft stores. It's hard to believe, but also so amazing to see something like this made on a burlap sack, during the Pinochet regime.

