

# crafts

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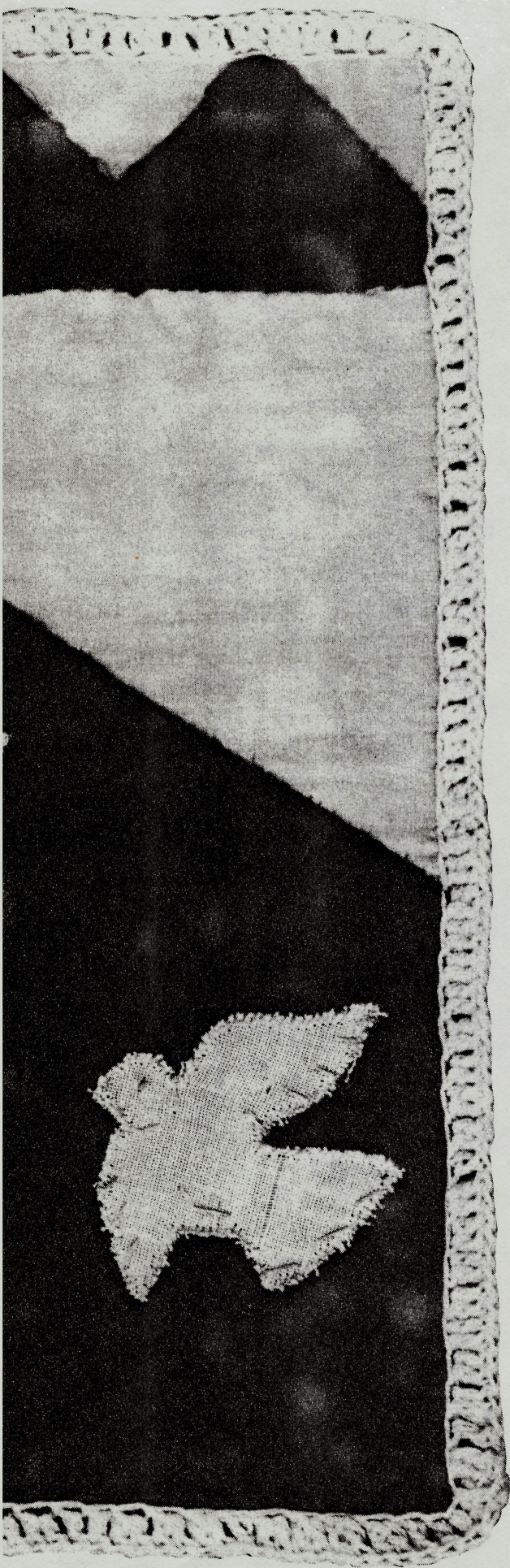
PATCHWORKS FROM CHILE MARIANNE STRAUB GERMAN JEWELLERY





¡Buenos  
días  
entregues  
ni  
te apartes  
del  
camino.





## Patchwork from Chile

These remarkable patchworks show that folk art is alive and well in Chile, motivated by the desire to protest against the current regime. We print here part of the introduction to the catalogue by Guy Brett, who organised the exhibition. Photographs by David Cripps

"Several hundreds of patchwork pictures like these have been made in Chile in the last two years, despite the atmosphere of terror. They form a popular art of resistance invented by the people themselves because of an overpowering need to express the bitter experiences they are going through and to find a channel of communication to the world outside. Some of the first of these patchworks were made in the prisons, but now they are nearly all made by women (both by the families of political prisoners and by the families of the unemployed) living in the shanty-towns, the poorest areas around Santiago.

They are not professional artists or artisans, and in general they have worked up and adapted a popular form of embroidery traditionally used to decorate bags and baskets. But their message can be understood anywhere in the world.

These rag pictures come out of poverty. They depict the brutalities and suffering the ordinary people have had to endure from reactionary rulers. They show them in detail. But in doing so they take none of the inhumanity, rigidity and coldness of their oppressors. They can express serious sorrow and at the same time be full of imagination and spirit. In the patchworks this comes out in the brilliant colours, and also in the witty and poetic way the scraps of patterned, mass-produced fabric have been used. Not only the subject, but the whole way they are made is like

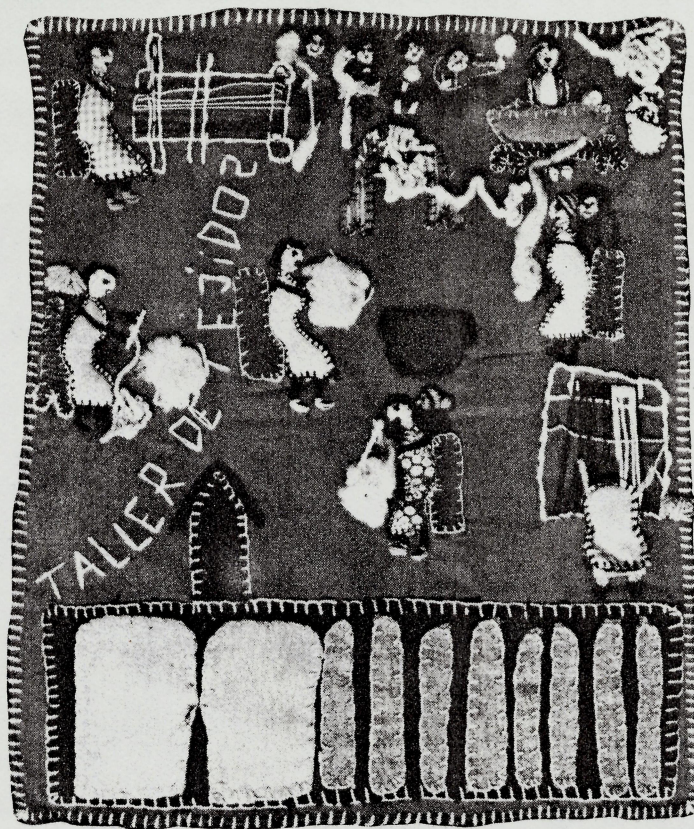
a message saying that the people will not be crushed and reduced to silence.

The appearance of these patchwork pictures cannot really be separated from a very broad wave of cultural activity in Chile over more than ten years. It began before Allende came to power and continues today despite the intense efforts of the present government to crush it. It has always had a popular character. It has been linked with a movement of masses of people against the conditions, physical and mental, of "underdevelopment". Many art forms sprang up in Chile during the Popular Unity period, although they had little time to develop: the New Song movement, street and field theatre, mural painting, publishing of popular educational books and magazines which reached enormous readerships for a Third World country, new style comics, the revitalisation of crafts which were languishing, and so on.

Among these crafts was one of making pictures from different coloured wools, which was specially admired and encouraged by the poet Pablo Neruda and by the folk singer and painter Violeta Parra. This peasant art is the nearest antecedent to the present-day patchworks. But there is no direct connection. The patchworks are something new. Their makers have no formal tradition to draw on and express themselves in a direct and childlike way.

The workshops are organised

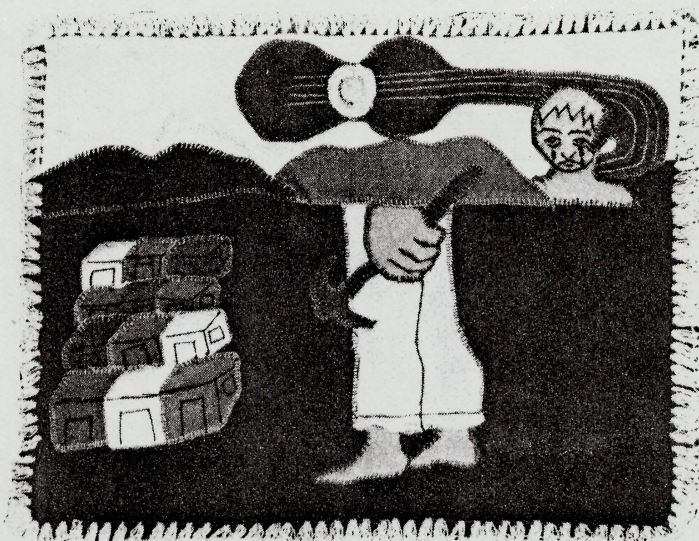




Previous page: "Never give in or stray from the true road." Birds are a constant symbol in these patchworks (cf. the cover). White birds stand for the people, who are drawn towards the light.

This page, top: weaving workshop. These workshops are for unemployed workers. They have been set up by the people themselves, often with advice and assistance from church bodies.

Opposite, top: "The land that God forsook? The black birds devour the animals which were living peaceably in their land"



This page, bottom: • "Redimir al cautivo – set the prisoner free." A guitar being made in a prison workshop. Prisoners are forced to leave their families, often unsupported. To help solve this problem, in nearly all camps prisoners have organised themselves into cooperatives and set up workshops. Their products are sold through the churches

Opposite, bottom: a prisoner in the hands of the secret police. The prisoner being kicked with two torturers looking on will not be taken to Tres Alamos, the prison camp in Santiago, but to an unknown destination

An exhibition of these patchworks will be touring Scotland this summer. Contact the Third Eye Centre, Glasgow, for details

by the people themselves, often with assistance from the Churches, which in Chile have become increasingly opposed to the military government. Patchwork making, like laundering and sewing, produces a minimal income for women to buy some sort of food, and medicines, for their children. At first they were sold inside Chile, now abroad as well as at solidarity meetings and events.

Because people's survival depends on them, these workshops are carefully organised. Production has to be rationalised. They usually consist of not more than twenty women. A treasurer distributes the money obtained from sales. A certain amount is put into a fund to be used for buying materials and

for emergencies. The number of patchworks produced has to be controlled. Usually one person makes one a week. At a weekly meeting the new patchworks are looked at and discussed by six women in the group and generally judged against the following criteria:

- that they should be well finished
- that the forms should be well composed
- that the subject should be truthful, and really "say something".

In fact, in the details of these pictures – sometimes disguised and "coded" because of censorship – is contained a whole chronicle of the lives of Chilean workers today."



