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Memories of Conflict Stitched Together for a Shared Future

The *Stitching and Unstitching the Troubles II* exhibition was recently launched at Mid-Antrim Museum at The Braid, Ballymena and will run until June 29th. It presents local and international textile artworks known as arpilleras which depict and share the personal stories and experiences of women in times of conflict. New arpilleras created by local women also feature in this exhibition which is curated by Roberta Bacic with assistance from Breege Doherty.

This exhibition is part of the North East PEACE III Cultural Fusions heritage based project which is being delivered by Causeway Museum Service and Mid-Antrim Museums Service. The project is funded under the European Union's PEACE III Programme and is managed on behalf of the Special EU Programmes Body by the North East PEACE III Partnership

Arpilleras are textile art works which originated in Chile in the 1970s under the Pinochet regime in which women used scraps of fabric to tell their stories of loss in conflict. Freedom of speech, a basic human right, was removed from Chilean society during this period. Therefore, the women used arpilleras, although illegal, to express in fabric what they could not freely discuss. This means of communicating and sharing visual messages, stories and memories of conflict has since spread to other countries around the world, including Northern Ireland, England, Ireland, Spain, Colombia, Chile and Peru. Arpilleras from several of these countries are presented in *Stitching and Unstitching the Troubles II* at The Braid.

Many of the themes and issues depicted in the international arpilleras displayed find parallels with how the Troubles impacted across the Province. These themes include the disappeared, protest and resistance, hunger striking and the displacement of communities. New arpilleras, created by local women from the Buzzy Bees



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(Glenarm), Stitch and Bitch, (Carnlough), Focus on Family (Coleraine), Fab Femme (Ballymoney) and Glenmona Resource Centre explore the impact of the Troubles in their area but also themes relating to a shared future. Work displayed by artist Sonia Copeland illustrates the fragility of peace in present day Northern Ireland. A large quilt completed in 1992 by Women Together emphasises the power of justice, equality, solidarity and peace, which have each been important elements in the progressing of peace across the Province.

Stitching and Unstitching the Troubles II is the second exhibition to be jointly delivered by Mid-Antrim and Causeway Museum Services as part of the *Remembering the Troubles* project. The first of these exhibitions was presented in Coleraine Town Hall in September 2012 during which many local groups visited. Since then, arpillera making workshops hosted by Deborah Stockdale have been delivered, facilitating the creation of the new work now displayed in The Braid.

Tours and workshops led by curator Roberta Bacic supporting engagement with *Stitching and Unstitching the Troubles* are now available to interested groups but a booking system is in place. On May 22nd, tours of this exhibition will be delivered from 2pm to 3pm, and from 3pm to 4pm a film entitled *Through the Eye of the Needle* will be screened for Community Relations Week. This film explores the embroideries created by Esther Nisenthal Krinitz who used this textile process to tell us stories of survival during the Holocaust.

To find out more, visit www.thebraid.com. To book a place for the film screening or for a *Stitching and Unstitching the Troubles II* exhibition tour and workshop, please email noreen.mullan@ballymena.gov.uk or call 028 2563 5925

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The Special EU Programmes Body is a North/South Implementation Body sponsored by the Department of Finance and Personnel in Northern Ireland and the Department of Finance in Ireland. It is responsible for managing two EU structural funds Programmes, PEACE III and INTERREG IVA, designed to enhance cross-border co-operation, promote reconciliation and create a more peaceful and prosperous society. The programmes operate within a clearly defined area including Northern Ireland, the Border Region of Ireland and in the case of INTERREG IVA, Western Scotland.

The PEACE III Programme, funded under the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), is worth €333 million and is aimed primarily at reinforcing progress towards a peaceful and stable society and promoting reconciliation. It focuses on helping Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland to reconcile communities and contribute towards a shared society.

For more information on the SEUPB please visit www.seupb.eu