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Art and Politics: Contemporary Arpilleras

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Figure 1. Yawar Fiesta. Flora Zárate Figure

My name is Flora Zarate. I am from Ayacucho, Peru. Thank you for inviting me to this event in memory of Dr. Elayne Zorn. I want to thank Dr. Blenda Femenias, Dr. Andrea Heckman, and all the other people

involved in creating this symposium and panel.

Like all Andean women, I learned as a child to spin, weave, embroider, etc. For me it was easy to adapt to creating arpilleras, incorporating themes of daily life and thus these became like an autobiography of my personal life from the Andes of Peru to the United States. I developed a technique for sewing a variety of fabrics that I selected, creating a three-dimensional work.

Arpilleras originated in Chile as a protest against the Pinochet government and from there were introduced into Peru.

Following are descriptions of some arpilleras that I have made in the last five years.

Life in the Andes. In this picture we can observe daily life. In the upper part is the sky, the sun, the condor. The mountain peaks are the apus, the Andean protector gods of the community. We can see the wild animals such as the vicuna and puma, as well as the domestic animals such as the llama, alpaca, etc. Also there are the sowing of seeds, potato harvest, quinoa, corn, and others.

Yawar Fiesta (Figure 1). This *Blood Festival* is a fiesta of a bullfight in which onto the flanks of the bull they tie a condor. This symbolizes the encounter between the Spanish and the indigenous people, showing the repudiation and resistance against the Spanish invaders. More deaths make for a better fiesta. Today the practice of this type of fiesta using a condor has been prohibited. In place of the condor they place a poncho, mantle, or paper drawings called *ingalma*, which symbolize the condor.



Figure 2. Pishtako or Nakaq (the Decapitator). Flora Zárate.

Pishtako or Nakaq, the Decapitator (Figure 2). This is an indigenous story or myth that people begin to hear in childhood. My grandparents and parents told me about the *pishtaku* or *nakaq*, a Quechua name that means “decapitator.” It / he kills people to extract their fat, which has different uses. These people were foreigners, from other places, tall, white, and so forth. I depicted it in three epochs that have distinct meanings but for the community are nevertheless the same.

1. In the colonial period dressed as Franciscans, they took human fat to lubricate the church bells. The size of the bells and the sound they produced depend on the type of fat.

- 2 In modern times with the Industrial Revolution the pistaku or nakaq had beards, capes, boots, were tall and white. They took human fat to lubricate machinery and airplanes, and to build bridges.

3. In the 1980s and 1990s, were the problems of violence and the Dirty War in Peru. In those days the former president Alan García decided not pay the external debt and, given the presence of the military, people thought that Alan sent his pistakus to take out the fat, and with the fat he would pay the external debt. This myth is not limited to the countryside because we have migrated to the cities, with our customs and thus the pistaku exists as well in urban áreas, where he is known as the *sacaojos*, “eye remover.”

Robbery and Theft in Lima. Because of the lack of resources in communities, such as education and work, and owing to the neglect of the politicians, provincial residents always have migrated to the cities, especially to the capital, Lima. In the last decade, with the violence, there was more migration, creating a large area called *pueblos jóvenes*, young towns (shanty towns). To get to work, going from place to place, there is disorder, traffic, and robberies in downtown Lima.

Cuban Rafters. One of my experiences when I arrived in this country (the U.S.) was that I noted the different types of migration, such as the Cubans when they set foot on land are free of everything and “Welcome to the USA!”

Immigration (Figure 3). Another type of immigration is crossing from Mexico by way of the river, passing through the desert, and so forth. The immigrant is imploring that the Virgin watch out for the border patrol. (Translator’s note: This is the arpillera that Ms Zárate brought to show during her presentation.)

Demonstration (Figure 4). The demonstration that occurs in different cities for the legalization of immigrants.

Flora Zárate is an indigenous Quechua (Inca) woman from the highland region of Ayacucho, Perú. Arpilleras are appliquéd hangings with three-dimensional elements and embroidery. Zárate has adapted indigenous Quechua and Hispanic folk textile traditions, which she learned as a child in Ayacucho, to make contemporary artistic creations. Her arpilleras demonstrate an exceptional mastery of technique and a unique, wide-ranging artistic vision, whether depicting scenes of rural life, urban strife, social violence, or environmental destruction. Zárate has participated in and earned awards at individual and group exhibitions in Peru, Argentina, and the United States, including the Santa Fe International Folk Art Market.



3. *Immigration*. Flora Zárate.

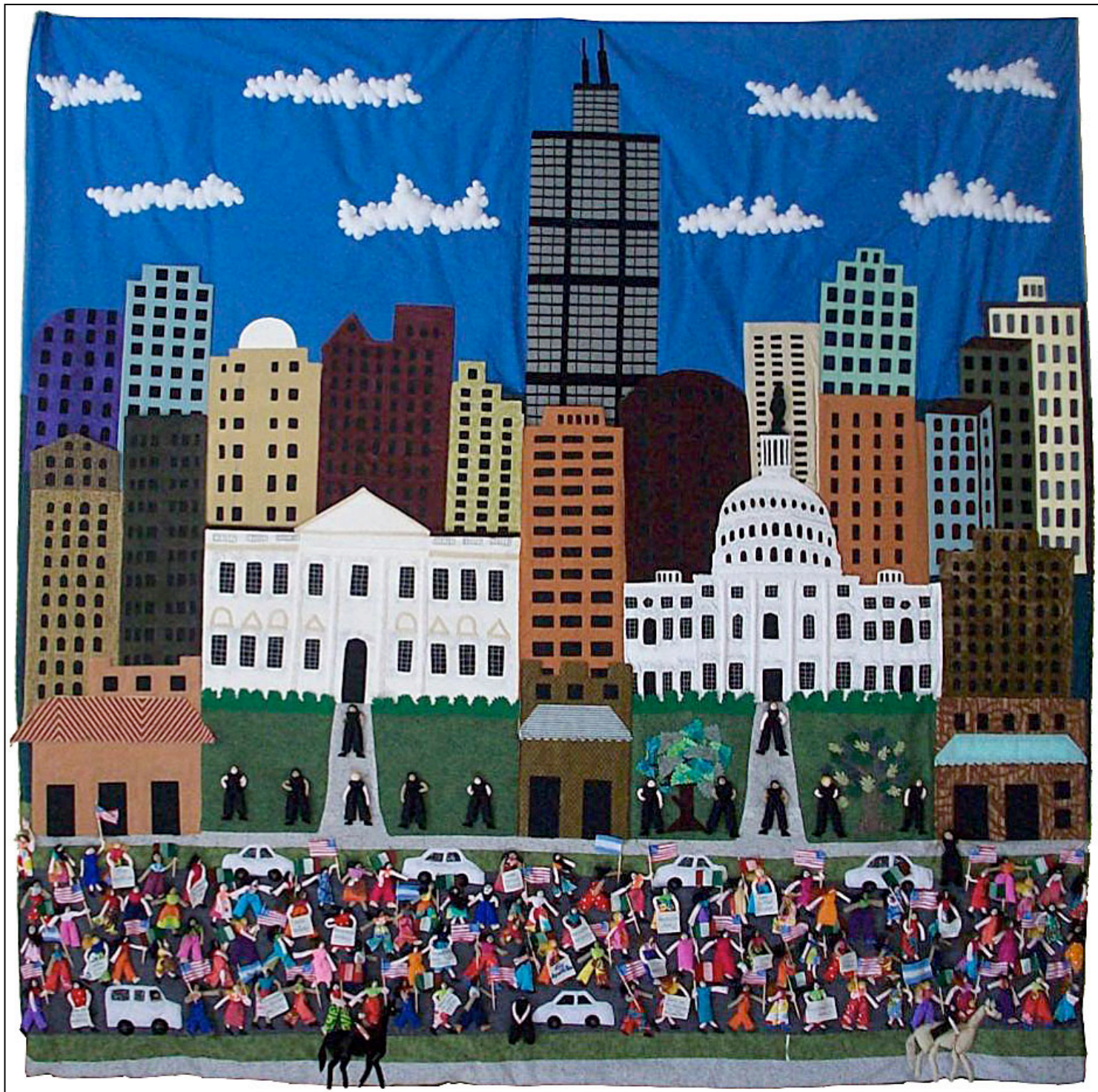


Figure 4. Demonstration. Flora Zárate.