

Catalina Parra  
What's it to you  
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An exhibition of Catalina Parra's work in Chile in 1977 showed pieces constructed of barbed wire, gauze, sterile pads, and X-rays sewn together, along with brief, stark, subtly provocative texts. Her friends, knowing it was a damnation of censorship, expected the show would be closed down by Chilean officials. But the artist had become so adept at speaking in between the lines that no complaints were voiced.

I have used text in my art since I was in Germany in the 60's says Parra. "The Dadaists, Brazilian concrete poetry, Fluxus, American and British Pop were all important influences."

Also her own heritage. Her father is Nicanor Parra, one of the most important living poets of Latin America. Her aunt, Violeta Parra, was the moving force the revival of Chile's indigenous musical tradition.

For more than 20 years, Parra has been creating works loaded with meanings that go beyond the objects themselves. Text and materials are used as a metaphor to reflect Latin American visual thinking and to create new connections to different fields of experience. Her pieces reflect centuries of coexistence between diverse cultures that respond to different values and philosophies: indigenous American, African, Spanish, and European.

Latin America has a history of writers and poets involved with the creation of national conscience, and Parra's concern for the basic rights and freedom of the individual comes from a natural attitude of the artist as an uncompromising human being.

In 1987 she collaborated with her father in a 30 second computer animated message on the Spectacolor light board at Times Square. The work read "USA, where liberty is a statue."

For years, Parra has been sewing together materials such as torn newspaper, plastic, gauze, X-rays, and photographs in allusion to the IMBUNCHES, a term from the Araucanian Indians for a person who has all the body orifices sewn shut,

all the holes blocked so that the evil spirit can't get out of his body. Parra first encountered the IMBUNCHES myth in Jose Donoso's *The Obscene Bird of Night*, hailed by some as the most important novel by a Chilean writer. There are several versions of the legend in Chile, and Parra's work evolved into a reshaping of myth as a way of commenting on the censorship established by the Chilean government. The economy of Parra's iconography focuses on the role of language in today's society and brings our attention to what is most important: words fail to reflect what the speaker feels. Indirectly, the subtext that reaches us is about the institutionalization of force as a vital resource used by contemporary societies that operate for the benefit of a privileged few.

Catalina Parra was born in Chile in 1940. She lived in Germany from 1968 to 1972 and came to New York in 1980 on a Guggenheim Fellowship. She has participated in international exhibitions in Colombia, Germany, and India and has exhibited individually in Chile and New York.