

Dimensions of the Americas

Art and Social Change in Latin America and the United States

Shifra M. Goldman

University of Chicago Press

pgs 252,253,254.

There her artistic direction changed dramatically, influenced by an exhibit she saw of British and U.S. Pop Art: by the German Vanguard art of the 1920's and 1930's; and by the political movement of the 60's. Her experience in Europe convinced her that the strongest art was that employing materials of everyday life, an attitude first embraced by the Pop art and extended by arte povera (to which her work has been compared ) and Fluxus. Thus, upon her return to Chile in 1972 , she began to collect newspaper clippings which, after the September 1973 coup, became one of the major materials for her art works. Her first works after the coup (never exhibited), included postcards of the infamous stadium in Santiago, where thousands were held captive, tortured, or killed. By 1977, when she exhibited her IMBUNCHE series in the Galeria Epoca to enthusiastic crowds drawn by the magic of the name "Parra" in

Chile, her works were made of materials loaded with allegorical meanings. She used collages of her newspaper clippings, of periodicals, and of Chilean maps cut, shredded, and sewn together in graphic presentation of Chilean society; gauze which spoke of hospitals, wounds and the dead; desiccated animal hides, plastic bags, barbed wire from fences and other "trash" In one case large burlap potato

Sacks were inserted into plastic bags looking like body bags and hung with ropes from the walls of the gallery. These IMBUNCHEs reconstituted the memory of the people killed during the height of the coup whose headless bodies floated down the Mapocho River in the central area of Santiago. Thread and stitches(or sutures) invoked the myth of the IMBUNCHE which comes from Chilean indian lore; it is an infant whose bodily orifices have been sewn shut to prevent suspected evil from expressing itself- a metaphor used in a novel by Chilean novelist Jose Donoso, "The Obscene Bird of Night"

In " Diariamente" (or "daily" in Spanish), also from the IMBUNCHEs series, Santiago's most important newspaper, El Mercurio, is 'daily' bound into a loaf of bread, which is then sliced for distribution and consumption. Crude stitches hold the rifts in the torn paper together while stories are displaced, turned on their side. The key ideas, visually, are binding, slicing, tearing, displacing : processes related to censorship or the construction of an official tissue of lies in print communication. Another of the series,

DIARIO DE VIDA, features whole pages of El Mercurio covered with acrylic sheets and molded into a block sculpture held tightly together by bolts- an impressive metaphor for the control exercised over the news. Nevertheless Parra was able to exhibit these works in Chile without interferences from the censors. Why was this the case? Parra herself answers: "The message if there is one, is IN the material and IN the technique-in the cuts, the tears, the ruptures, as well as in the stitches, the sutures, the bindings, the gauze. If you know how to read, the message is THERE. Besides, how can you censor a knot or a tear? And I don't say anything myself. I don't have to. According to Parra, the whole thing was a question of reading between the lines.

