



DESCONOCIDA UNKNOWN

Lise Bjørne Linnert

Edited by Lesley Millar



FOREWORD

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There are certain occasions in life when an idea, an image, a project reaches out and demands engagement, and from that moment there is no leaving, no polite nod and moving on. Such a moment happened for me in Oslo in August 2008 when, through her exhibition at Gallery Soft, I encountered the embroidered nametag project of Norwegian artist Lise Bjørne Linnert. As I stared at the more than one thousand nametags I knew that I had to bring this exhibition, 'Desconocida: Unknown', to The Gallery at University for the Creative Arts Epsom.

The central element of the exhibition is a wall covered with nametags that have been hand embroidered by participants in workshops in 22 different countries. The ones with coloured thread each contain the name of a woman murdered in Juarez, a town in the 'Amexica' border between Mexico and the USA. The nametags embroidered with white thread bear the word 'Unknown' in the language of the embroiderer and represent all the unknown women across the world who have suffered similarly.

Traditionally, textiles and the making of textiles have occupied territory that is both universal and intimate, one that is transnational and cross-cultural. Cloth may carry overt and covert textual and non-textual narratives that communicates between cultures where there is no common verbal language. This historical role has been at the core of much contemporary textile art. In the context of this exhibition, textiles have also been used to give voice to those who, for various reasons, are denied that voice. In Chile, for example, the Association of the Relatives of the Disappeared took the traditional appliqué technique known as Arpilleras and used it to record those things they could not speak about: what they had seen, what they experienced, so that others would know'. In Sarajevo the



LESLEY MILLAR TALKS TO LISE BJØRNE LINNERT

How did you first find out about the women in Juarez?

The first time I heard about it was in the news when I was living in Houston Texas in about 2000. I lived in Houston for about six years, then I moved back to Norway. At the end of 2005 the Station Museum of Contemporary Art in Houston – a museum that was dedicated to a very political and social agenda – invited me to be part of the exhibition they were organising concerning the women of Juarez and the situation there.

My first intention was that I should show the rayographs but the Museum encouraged me to think of different ways of responding to the situation. I spent a long time considering what I could do, because when I moved back to Norway I felt distanced – both the physical and emotional distance. It seemed so far away. I needed some time to think what would I do – what could I do that would make a difference? I wanted to make an effort....

Make not just a response, but to connect?

Yes, exactly. I felt that the rayographs were a response but I wanted to create something that would spread the awareness so that we couldn't stay 'outside'. We can read about such things and feel 'oh it's about them' but the essence of what is happening – the abuse of women – is something that has happened and is happening everywhere, all over the world. I wanted the work to be a protest, and I wanted it to be a community project, a piece of work made together. Eventually I came to the embroidery because I wanted it to be a female activity, I wanted it to be connected back to women but not in a way that celebrated the violence, or focused on the women as victims. I want it to be the opposite. I also wanted something that was connected back to Mexico and of course embroidery is very important there, but it is also a global activity.

And the name tags?

I think we all have a relationship with names – it is the first

