

Common loss: 3000+ dead between 1969 and 1994

Northern Ireland four panel quilt by Irene MacWilliam, 1996

Photograph: Colin Peck

Between 1969 and 1994, more than 3000 people, many of whom were civilians, died as a result of The Troubles in Northern Ireland. Quilter Irene MacWilliam, deeply moved by the loss of lives across all sectors of the community responded by creating this four panel quilt. Each piece of red fabric, deliberately torn to convey a sense of destruction, represents a dead person. Some fabric pieces are overlaid with a tiny teddy bear, symbolising a dead child. The peace dove symbol is also visible.

The starkness of this creation, both in content and color, has touched a chord with people globally. As the process of creating the quilt evolved, people from as far away as Japan and the USA, as well as Northern Ireland and England sent pieces of red fabric, of varying size, texture and shade, to Irene for inclusion.

While Irene herself did not suffer any personal tragedy during The Troubles her concern at the devastating impact of the loss of lives in Northern Ireland is evident in the powerful statement stitched at the bottom of the quilt: "Each of the 3161 red pieces represents someone killed in The Troubles." Through this simple statement, Irene demonstrates her capacity to look beyond her own immediate community and equally acknowledge and honour the common loss and the common pain, of the entire community of Northern Ireland, in all its diversity. This all encompassing nature of **Common loss** makes it a truly unique quilt.

Further information on the work of Irene MacWilliam is available from her website <http://www.macwilliam.f9.co.uk>

Courtesy of the artist

Source:

Accounts of the Conflict (*archive*)

Bacic, Roberta. (*individual compiler*)

Conflict Textiles (*collection*)

<http://accounts.ulster.ac.uk/repo/collections/show/153>