

Guatemalan Communiqué

By Janice Bloomfield

Although visually appealing, **Guatemala! The Road to War**, showing at the Eye Level Gallery, portrays an ugly story. Artist Freda Guttman, through the media of political art, exposes the horror occurring within Guatemala. There, it would appear, the state, a recently reclaimed democracy, encourages foreign investment at the cost of their Indians, the Mayan people.

Primarily through six sculptures, each representing a native village, Guttman brings to the Canadian consciousness the ravaging many Mayans live with daily. Newspaper clippings mounted on hollow, mountain-like creations graphically tell of police and military torture. In one village, phosphorus bullets spontaneously ignite their targets: men, women, children. In another, over 150 people, herded into waist-deep water, explode into shreds as grenades fall about them. Abducted bodies are found tortured — hands, tongues, testicles lopped off. Why? Ask the Guatemalan government. They'll tell you these people are subversives, Communists, a force they must conquer if foreign investment, primarily that of the United States, is to be encouraged.

However, Guttman portrays the Mayans as a peace-loving people who consider tribal warfare a sin. They desire the freedom to pursue their own lifestyle, native art, and traditions without fear. And, indeed, the textile artifacts included in the exhibit indicate an aesthetically sensitive people.

But even these people after 400 years of oppression from one government or another speak of the need for this mass slaughter to quit. Groups of women entreat governments for the return of their abducted men, while others warn that a continuation of the oppression will cause the mountain to come back to the town.

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PHOTO: ROCHELLE OWEN

Exhibit exposes the horror within Guatemala.

Guttman's message is clear and plain — but to whom? If Guttman created the exhibit to inform the Canadian public, as she claims, why then is this exhibit locked in a gallery? Galleries too often home only the artists, the politically aware, an

elite and dwindling few. As one viewer put it, "This should be in a shopping mall. Right now, only the already informed will see it."

This protest is indeed valid, for right now the Canadian government, aware of the extreme poverty within Guatemala, plans on reinstating funding to the Guatemalan government. But monies to the state will only support further oppression. The exhibit includes a petition to be signed by viewers requesting the government to stall until it can guarantee the needy receive the funds.

But even though the exhibit has not come to your local shopping mall, it is well worth viewing. The message behind its aesthetic appeal challenges indifference. May it call you, as it did me, to join the Mayan people in the fight against this injustice.

Eye Level Gallery is at 2182 Gottingen Street. **Guatemala! The Road to War** is on until Sept. 26.

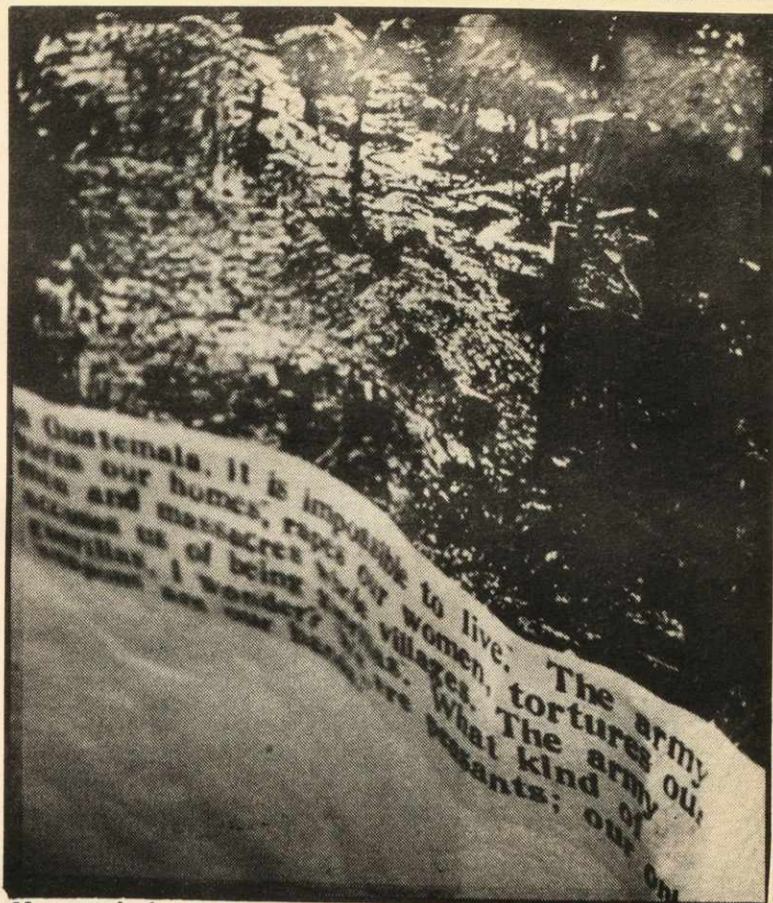


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Mayans desire the freedom to pursue their own lifestyle.

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