

Constanza McKinstry
username: cnmck

Witral: Weaving the Dreams of the People of the Land
My Study Abroad Experience

Oddly enough, and recommended by the International committee, my study abroad experience was in the country where I was born, raised and left a decade ago. Some students choose programs that are already designed and through an organization. I, on the other hand, took the challenge to tailor my own program and I chose to explore Mapuche weaving in Chile.

The Mapuche people are the native inhabitants that live between the Central Valley and Southern Chile. The natives have had a lot of turmoil caused by the arrival of the Conquistadores, as they settled down in the new world. The social dynamics of the tribes changed because of the newcomers, and this change never stopped. The change became more rapid in the end of the twentieth century due to the adoption of Neoliberalism. The Mapuche people had to find extreme ways to provide for their families since they are settled in remote locations. Many individuals commute hours to work. That leaves women having only enough time to do their chores and they are not able to transmit the art of weaving, or metals to their children.

I thought that because Chile was my home as I was growing up, things would be easy, but the disconnect between my idealization and reality was large. It was nearly impossible to find weavers to instruct me. Once I left southward, I discovered that the differences between living in the bubble of Santiago and the life in the Valley of Elicura are so big, that sometimes I had to wonder if I was in the same country. In this trip the known became unknown and I opened my eyes to a reality that was too uncomfortable to face earlier in my life.

The most important and relevant thing during this trip for my practice as an artist is the political act of carefully selecting pieces of yarn and setting up my loom. I realized that taking the time to spread a narrative of history and tradition is a rebellious act against Neoliberalism and Patriarchy. This realization was incredibly helpful for my Integrative Project because the idea of challenging patterns that are deep rooted was an ideation, I didn't realize until my trip that I could participate in this narrative until I had this trip.



This is Rosita, she was my instructor from Elicura Valley. She taught me the basics of Witral weaving and some designs. She works all day in her farm and takes cooking classes as well. She has a small studio and shop where she sells her designs.



Maria was my instructor from Puerto Saavedra. She has been weaving for years but she is still working on perfecting her craft. She uses every training provided by the government to offer more products. She also works the land and sells snacks in different locations to make extra cash. She kept me fed and warm in her shop.

Rosita was teaching me a certain kind of design. This particular project took me about five hours. Rosita was in her cooking class in the community center across the street while I was trying to finish this project, she still helped me a lot.



This is the landscape I saw every day when I would leave my hosts' home in the Elicura Valley.

