

BATTERSEA/AIR

Caroline Tisdall

Women

SOMETHING new has been developing in London over the past few years. It's a way of presenting exhibitions with social themes and accompanying them with supporting programmes of discussions, lectures, films and plays. By now it's become quite familiar, but it's worth remembering that the extra effort required is in fact something that has come about as an effort to overcome legendary British apathy.

This week there are two such examples: a programme supporting the March on Women at Battersea Arts Centre, and a comprehensive background to the Chilean patchworks at the Air Gallery in Shaftesbury Avenue.

Both shows contain historical sections. At Battersea Margaret Harrison has drawn up a history of famous fighting women from Rosa Luxemborg to Janis Joplin, emphasising the way in which history tells against women's achievements after their deaths, while driving many to an extreme of desperation during their lives.

This is one section of Harrison's three-part study, combining painting and documentation. The other two are on the themes of rape, with all its legalistic tangles and blatant injustices, and the crucial issues of women who work at home in the most exploited of all-economic sectors: home piece work undefended by unions and ignored by organised workers. Harrison has taken steps to find challenging ways to present material that usually remains buried from sight.

The patchworks sewn by the women of Chile as a defiant gesture against the repression of a regime that imprisons their sons and men needs little introduction. Guy Brett wrote about it on these pages when it opened out of London, and will be talking about them this afternoon at the Air Gallery where there is also an excellent documentary history of popular arts of resistance in Latin America.