

In word and thread

Graciana de Barrenechea

Basque Country (Navarre), 1610

Dear Graciana,

You lived in Zugarramurdi, a small village in Navarre, in the Basque Country. Nestled among the green hills were the Cuevas de Zugarramurdi, the Witches' Caves. To you, they were not legendary places. They were simply part of the landscape you called home. A world of shepherds, farmers, fishermen and craftspeople, with its own language, traditions and strong identity, shaped between the Pyrenees and the Atlantic coast.

Then came fear.

In 1609 and 1610, your world was engulfed by one of the largest witch persecutions in European history. Ancient customs suddenly became suspicious. Folk tales became evidence. Rumours became accusations. Accusations became confessions. Confessions became sentences.

You were probably already more than eighty years old when you were arrested. Your daughters and other members of your family were swept up in the persecution as well. During the interrogations, you were forced to confess that you were the Queen of the Akelarre, the woman whom your interrogators claimed led the witches' sabbath.

Then came the most terrible accusations. A pact with the Devil. The murder of children. Brewing poison from toads. Causing the deaths of your neighbours. Today we know that these confessions were not the truth. They were the result of fear, coercion and relentless interrogation.

Yet you found the courage to withdraw your confession. You continued to insist on your innocence.

You died in the prison of Logroño before a final sentence had even been passed. But not even death brought you peace. During the great auto-da-fé of 1610, your remains and an effigy representing you were publicly burned. Two of your daughters, who had also died in prison, suffered the same fate after their deaths.

As though they wished to erase not only your lives, but your very names.

They failed.

Your name lives on through MICCA. I created a long mantle of coarse wool in your honour. Not as a reconstruction of historical clothing, but as a tribute to the landscape where you lived. The thick wool shields against rain, wind and cold, just as generations of people in this region protected themselves from the harsh climate of the mountains and the sea. The mantle is sturdy and enduring, made to last, just as memories can survive for centuries.

The Lauburu, the Basque cross, immediately draws the eye. For centuries it has appeared on houses, gravestones and furniture. Its exact origin remains unknown, yet it has become one of the most powerful symbols of Basque identity. Its four turning arms are often associated with movement, continual renewal, and the cycle of life and death. I could imagine no more fitting symbol for a design that seeks to make your name visible once again.

The diamond bands are inspired by traditional Basque folk art. The diamond is one of the oldest geometric motifs in textile traditions. Formed by intersecting lines, it creates a network of connections. It made me think of the bonds that unite people. Your own family was torn apart by the persecution. Daughters, relatives and neighbours became trapped in the same wave of fear. What had once symbolised belonging became a reason for suspicion.

The motifs are not knitted into the fabric but duplicate stitched onto the mantle. Stitch by stitch, the yarn is laid over the existing knitting. The original fabric remains faintly visible beneath the new layer. That became an essential part of this design. Your story, too, did not reach us directly. It came to us through the words of interrogators, judges and chroniclers. Your own voice can scarcely be heard anymore. Just as the original knitting remains visible beneath the duplicate stitching, the woman behind the accusations remains only faintly visible beneath the layers of history.

Yet you have not disappeared.

Your name is spoken once more.

Not in a courtroom.

Not in a confession.

But in wool, colour and thread.

In word and thread.