

ADRIANA VERDEIRA TÊLEZ

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**Arnaldo Simon.** *Killing me...*, 2016. Bronze, leather, ropes on quartz base.



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**Eugenio Dittborn**  
Alexander and Bonin  
Anyone familiar with the work  
know that, alongside the concept

Eugenio Dittborn, *Nodas, Pintura Aero Swins, Airmail Painting No. 1911*, 2017. *rhutryvannhir silkscreen in two thin eas*

(210 x 140 cm).



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## BY ADRIANA HERRERA

Design elements of iconographies that have had a central role in the beginning of wars were used by Arnaldo Simón as raw material. These include symbols from ancient theocracies—and not only the conjunctions between gods and kings up to the 19th century, but also political-religious systems presently fighting to convert or kill people.

Additionally, he deconstructs the awful symbols of totalitarianism—communism, Nazism, fascism—that turned the 20th century into a time of dystopias.

Following the same reflective spirit found in the title's play on words between "Raw" and its anagram, "War," the exhibition functions as a mirror of the relationship between aesthetics and violence evidenced in the iconography of the various adversarial, war-fueling, systems of power. Simón is amazed by, on the one hand, the seductive nature of signs conceived by anonymous designers and, on the other, by our willingness to give our lives for which is ultimately a set of visual conventions.

The series “Untitled” (2011) consists of drawings created with graphite pencil, print and gold leaf that associate two objects that contain discourses and “value-based” category found in every Eastern and Western political system: medals and coins. It is not lost that the polysemy of the term oscillates between courage and quantity. Here, Simón also ironically inserts plays on words from medal catalogs and complements his drawings with abstract figures symbolizing “oceans of gold,” in reference to an obsession with the accumulation of the precious metal that has been responsible for the corruption of every empire. Interesting referents for this proposal by Simón are the work by the Claire Fontaine group, creator of a rotating neon sign that alternated the words “Warm” and “War,” as well as the piece titled *Change* (2005), which combined a semicircle and a quarter dollar coin.

The series of bas-reliefs “Untitled” stands out for the double emptying process employed so viewers can read the symbolic images and words in an inverted manner. While underscoring the very process of iconographic deconstruction, the series also conveys a crucial critical awareness—in the analytical sense—through the extrapolation of strictly historical images to new contexts. The act of inverting a sickle, for instance, to suggest instead the shape of a boomerang, not only allows for the mutation of the inveterate communist sign but also reveals through a visual trajectory the ability of an iconographic sign to turn against those that expand it.

The opposition between nationalisms and the value of individual identity is approached in a series of ten works, each titled with a term from military jargon used as an insult—obtained by subtracting material from a vinyl surface through laser cutting. The shapes of the pejorative terms that have been accumulated since the Great War are combined with the DNA of anonymous persons, suggesting that any human being can be at the receiving end of an insult at any given moment. These works are completed with an action painting rendered in neutral gray: Arnaldo Simón chooses this intermediate color, not associated with any artistic current, to instill in the pictorial gesture the anguish that the dehumanizing wars provoke in him. In a similar manner, in the series titled “National Patterns,” based on research about the various types of military camouflage used in different countries, he replaces the usual tones with grays and blacks rendered with graphite pencil and ink, as well as with the red from his own blood, in an approach that completely subverts the function of camouflage. This series enriches other contemporary art works that approach this survival strategy, like the series by María Fernanda Cardoso.

“Raw War” also includes sculptures inspired by objects like ascending and descending military ladders and a recreation of a military chair ingeniously constructed with crutches, along with the warning by Cato de Elder “Bellum se ipsum alet” (War feeds itself). The sculpture titled Killing Me operates like an ideological whip that in the end, through its multiple metallic arms and with daring iconoclastic freedom, stands for all the important religious and political symbols. In this manner, “Raw War” functions like an observatory of history that, through different artistic strategies, reveals the relationships between designs and the war-inducing potential of ideologies that, far from what the theoreticians of power like Foucault assumed, did not disappear during postmodernity. The demise of the great narratives that made philosopher Arthur C. Danto wonder about the end of art has taken a twisted path: we are returning to times of marked triviality. Instead of an ivory tower, Simón proposes a watchtower to gain perspective on the abuse of symbols, which begins when these are imposed on others and can end with taking away people’s dignity or even their lives.