



Arnaldo Simón: Anagramas de guerra



## Anagrams of war

BY JANET BATET

The name *Raw War* gives title to Arnaldo Simón's (Pinar del Río, Cuba) most recent personal exhibition now open to the public at Concrete Space, in Doral. The exhibition includes works from 2011 to date, with a refined strike and balanced handling of the featuring elements in each piece, becoming a comprehensive vision of the most recent work of this artist established in Miami.

With Joaquín Badajoz as curator of the exhibition, *Raw War* resembles an essay about the symbol as a driving force and manipulation tool in history. Starting mainly from the seminal essay *Le crut et le cuit* (Raw and cooked) from the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss, Arnaldo Simón displays a clear counterpoint of contemporary mythologies around war and power. Through each one of his pieces, it seems to appear Levi-Strauss's clairvoyant assertion: “it is not social phenomena that gives shape to intellectual and cultural phenomena, but –precisely– the opposite”.

The semantic and visual replay –as the reverse of the image before the mirror– that originates the very name of the exhibition, serves as a prelude to the controversial game of symbols and meanings to which the artist challenges the visitors.

*Untitled* is the name of the series that welcomes the visitor. Using the binary oppositions and the notion of anomalous category proposed by Lévi-Strauss, Simón generates in his series a tense and balanced counterpoint between war, ideology and religion; three of the most efficient modeling archetypes present in society. Participating in cultural appropriation and recreation, the artist compels us through complex visual anagrams. Each one of the pieces integrating this series focuses on a specific historical moment balanced through its symbols.

The Order of the Rising Sun, details of Japanese rifles confiscated after the war and the deconstruction of the swastika (exponent of the Rome-Berlin-Tokyo axis) give shape to *Untitled V*. The elements, of exquisite realization, generate poly-semantic readings about the war, the loyalty and the patriotism.

*Raw War*, also under the title name of *Untitled*, includes a series of drawings from year 2011 performed with graphite and gold paper. It also works as an immediate prelude to the pieces comprising the most recent work of the artist. In these masterful drawings, high voltage contradictions are generated by the contrast present in representation, materials used and extracts from instructions in catalogs where medals are sold.

*Killing me ...* (2018) is a series of graphite drawings that complement the homonymous central sculpture from 2016 made of bronze, leather, ropes and quartz. The piece is, undoubtedly, the archetype and sine qua non expression of the binary oppositions and the anomalous category declared by Lévi-Strauss. Its central body, at the same time, sackcloth and whip, is crowned at the lower end of each of its feared tentacles by dissimilar religious-mythical symbols formerly reused throughout history to manipulate the emotions of social groups.

Two of his series directly address the current war context. One of them originates in another appropriation: the military jargon. The particular lexicon in symbiosis with anonymous DNA combinations refers to issues of segregation, prejudice and stigma within the military sector. Directly associated with this series are *Upgrade I* (2016) and *Upgrade II* (2017), and *Ascend Descend* (2018), in which a replay between the military bars and the ascension to power is established.

On the other hand, the *National Patterns* series (2015), incorporates a study and recreation of multiple camouflage grounds. Developed in graphite, ink and human blood, the series assumes an abstract morphology in which the diapason, including also biomorphic elements, varies from geometric abstraction to expressionism. *Sella Castrense Revisited*, 2016, stands in the center of this exhibition as the perfect complement of the series. The sculpture resembles the curule chair created since the Roman Republic and inherited by the empire. The iconic seat, whose name derives from currus - war tank - was privative of magistrates and pro-magistrates who possessed an empire. In the seat, supported by two pairs of crutches made of calcined wood and aluminum, the phrase attributed to Cato el Viejo: *Bellum se ipsum alet* (war feeds itself) can be read.

*Broken*, 2018, along with part of a series still in process, is the most recent piece included in the exhibition. The black and white video functions as an essential alter ego to the rest of the sample, opening the door to the personal drama that in terms of power derives from the manipulation of signs. Using a vast symbolic arsenal and a commendable economy of resources, *Raw War* is an open and pertinent question about the manipulation of the masses originated from emotions and beliefs at the service of power throughout history and -although often unnoticed- more than present in contemporary society.