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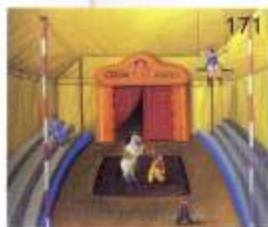
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occurred thirty years ago when Olazábal became a Babaláwo at a young age.

In the recent exhibit, the artist underscored his drawing talent with twenty-one medium-format poster boards created with mixed techniques. He also included an installation conceived as an offering to the Earth. The thesis of this work circles around Ebó (the son of Orúnmilá and Aiyé, a gift from Olodumaré to resolve the problems on Earth), whose name means "sacrifice" in the Yorubá language. It is Olazábal's view that humankind can reach a resolution to conflicts through the "little things" that seem insignificant to many people.

The quality of the drawing was the heart of the exhibit. According to the artist, drawing is a more rational and less emotional medium than painting due to its nature; as such, it aids him in achieving the desired effect. Olazábal is interested in touching on specific human issues without indulging in visual effects that deviate from his main message: calling attention to the need for nurturing the will. What is most attractive about this artist is his energy. On this occasion, Olazábal eloquently conveyed this energy with a degree of synthesis that only an artist at the top of his game could master.

Olazábal's artistic career was first noticed during the 1980s, a renaissance in Cuban visual arts when the Afro-Cuban tradition adopted a new function through discourses that combined the occult with the popular. To Olazábal, religion is a way of life; the artist was raised under its influence from the time his parents were initiated in the cult of Ifá. Thus, he possesses a profound understanding of the tradition. He addresses the fate of the founders of these religious practices when they were violently forced out of their native lands. He comments on his ancestors with a combination of melancholy for the shadow of colonization and nonconformity for not being happy about the way many of the priests manage the cult. Each work conducts a dialogue with the pronouncements at the Ifá Oracle. Recurrent in all of Olazábal's works is the presence of points that symbolize concentrations of energy. For instance, when the artist draws these points near a mouth, they are associated with words that cast the spell.

Olazábal's temperate use of color and formal economy in "Pequeñas Cosas" enabled the exhibit to move the discourse into

the forefront. Although the majority of the artist's works were resolved with two or three compositional elements, including the ever-present human figure, they nevertheless achieved a visual and thoughtful impact that brought to light attitudes toward fellow human beings. In *La Fuerza del Hacha* (The Strength of the Hatchet), which depicts a Black man bent over with a hatchet next to him that makes him look smaller, the artist played with the representation of power. The instrument turned into an ambivalent element: it can be used as both a tool for work and for combat. The artist's perspective made one rethink everyday occurrences and situations. In *Esta no Puede Ser la Única Forma de Partir la Diferencia* (This Can Not Be the Only Way to Split the Difference), he addressed domestic violence. Here, the character carried a knife in his hand because he lost control over his emotions.

En Otra Cuerda está el Otro Cazador (The Other Hunter is On Another Cord) was a work that transported the viewer into a state of calm. Here, the human figure appeared as if it possessed a divine halo, engaged in a creative stillness (to borrow a term from Indian philosophy). A man with an absorbed gaze aimed his spear toward a point of energy in this image, one of the most mystically charged in the exhibit.

One of Olazábal's works proclaimed the following: "Every young person must venerate old people, for they are the carriers of wisdom; nevertheless, it is oftentimes the case that they are not appreciated. No headcloth can be wider than those used by the old

people of the night." Here, the artist paid tribute to the wisdom of elders. Such reflection is significant within Cuba, where older people are often treated with disrespect.

With this exhibit, Olazábal highlighted the attitudes that exist both inside and outside his professed cult. In the end, humans are the same everywhere notwithstanding their origins, and our miseries blanket the entire planet. The solutions to our problems are dependent to a great extent on the sacrifices we are willing to make: Ebó on Ebó ad infinitum?

Amalina Bomnín

Adonis Flores

Galería Habana

War as a fashion statement. The military only if it is a snob show. Soldiers dancing the hula and the manneristic, feminine camouflage. Flowers rather than bombs. Tragedy transformed into circus, into a spectacle. All is glamour, converting violence in pleasure, delectation. This is the path Flores' most recent works have taken, as evident in his latest personal exhibit entitled *Carne de Cañon* (Cannon Fodder) at the Havana Gallery. Adonis Flores immerses himself in the military world to subvert its cannons, its paradigms; its central mechanisms for self-sublimation (the phallic center, among those). On seeing his work, we are invaded by an estrangement-like effect that subtracts any solemnity before the event witnessed. Thus, aesthetic perception does not pro-

Santiago Rodríguez Olazábal. *The Other Hunter*, 2007. Mixed media on cardboard. 30 x 43,3 in. (76 x 110 cm.).



ceed beyond being entertained, an unflappable dehumanized hobby. No catharsis when face-to-face the image, but rather stoicism, fearlessness, indifference. Our gaze turns impassive, exactly like what takes place with mass-media warfare feeds. This occurs because Adonis Flores' pieces are just that: a signic testimony erected on metaphors by the contemporary subject's perceptual determinants in relation to his surroundings. Even the probably most grotesque piece of them all, *Carne de Cañón*, is beautiful, monstrously beautiful; aestheticized until rendering irrelevant its possible repulsive dimension. I am very pleased that once again Cuban art surprises me with another creator in the search for universality, eschewing localisms - that "self-defining neurosis" - fighting the political demons. It is time to toss away the banners and globalized ourselves once and for all.

All the pieces at the exhibit demonstrate the artist's irreverent and sacrilegious posture. In *Aliento (Breath)*, for instance, a piece showing a dead soldier with lush and intensely green vegetation growing from his mouth. The dying of this young

Adonis Flores. *Mascarade*, 2006. 26 1/2 x 39 1/4 in. (66,67 x 100 cm.). Digital print.



soldier implies here a nearly spring-like rebirth; the extinction of human life in this case leads a birth of another kind. Similarly, in the video entitled *Honras Fúnebres (Funeral Pomp)* a soldier morbidly plays with death, oblivious to concern or anxiety ("The fear of dying that surrounded me constantly, even to when I was 18, lead me as time went on to make fun of its solemnity" ¹, Adonis Flores admits). The artist presents to us death with a self-confidence that defies contention, as he sarcastically ridicules it. He appears to have concluded that fearing death is no more than a cultural construction, and that our paranoia in considering the finiteness of our existence has no basis, is empty. On the other hand, *Lenguaje (Language)* speak to us of the camouflage or pretence in military dialogue, of orally transmitted information. Similarly, another extremely revealing piece, *Oratoria (Oratory)*, refers to the consubstantial demagoguery and hypocrisy inherent in every discourse delivered from nucleus or hegemonic institutions, while at the same time dispatching us to that popular refrain: flowery words, a figure of speech that in this military context becomes extremely provocative and insidious.

In the instance of *Maleza (Brush)*, a connection is once again established between the human-warrior and the realm of inanimate vegetation. Except this time, it does not originate in the individual but in the masses, the collectivity that depersonalizes, invalidates, and desecrates individual free will. Thus, we observe that huge uniformed multitude dragging their feet to combat, while the title indicates to us how destructive the troops can become: The artist reminds us that in "*En la Unidad está la Fuerza (Strength in Unity)*", the latter forms the basis of strength, but also leads to destruction, injury, and insanity.

Undoubtedly, one of the most subversive pieces in the show is *Mascarada (Masquerade)*. This iconographic representation pictures the face of a soldier covered with makeup that transforms him in a "clown", and entertainer whose central mission is to amuse others. Here, the irony explodes into paroxysmal limits: the war correspondent is ballooned with buffoonish nostrils; a carnival rendering that reveals in the soldier's gaze the

desolation, dissatisfaction, and weariness betraying his commitment to war-mongering.

Self-referentiality is a central premise in understanding Adonis Flores' poetics. Primarily, the artist utilizes himself as the model for his works. Further, the fact that he participated in the war in Angola in 1989 comprised for him a transcendental event that from then on would mark the course of his life and the paths he would come to choose as a visual artist. Therefore, he selects this particular imagery as the point of the departure for presenting his proposals. The artist himself has explicitly expressed this. "In questioning the human condition with themes such as fragility, violence, insecurity, power, irrationality, and death, I resort to my experiences in army life and in my participation in Angola in 1989, but mainly draw my vision from the current climate of war and terrorism" ².

NOTES

1. Conversations with the artist in November 2007 in Havana.
2. Ibid.

Piter Ortega-Núñez

LONDON / ENGLAND

Humberto Vélez

Tate Modern

A ship filled with boxers departs from one of the old trade union ports in London and sails through the Thames to the rhythm of African drums. Other boxers headed by a piper advance in a procession through the Millennium Bridge. Both groups greet each other at the entrance to the Tate Modern Gallery downtown in the capital of Great Britain. Inside the gallery there is a boxing ring, where girls and boys between the ages of 10 and 12 train. Dancers from the Flawless Dance Company and rapper MC Mic Assassin, welcome the newcomers to begin a night of boxing. *The Fight* is a project by Panamanian artist Humberto Vélez, whose work centers around communities and groups that are sometimes marginal.

Vélez told BBC that "The idea for the project came from my experiences in Panama and also from my life in Manchester, England, where I lived for more than