

DEEP INSIDE THE RIVER

Treno: Video and Photography Installation

By Maria Belen Saez de Ibarra

Installed face to face and fully spanning the exhibit's space, two large-format projections plunge us into the clamorous surge of a river's violent currents. By degrees, the water floods our consciousness. We are present at a video installation titled *Treno* (Funereal Song), by the artist Clemencia Echeverri.

The forces of the torrent run into a vortex, growing inside us and presently cropping up into the surface. Human voices draw echoes in that density. Those are calls – voices traveling through remote silences, in the darkness of the water's depth.

What is working on us here is the power of a subtle allegory that consigns us to war, to violence among men, and to mourning.

The power of this particular allegory lies precisely in its ability to lead us into that state of immersion in the current, to take us into a locus for reflection that – though not pursued – is almost subjected to expectation: a site where unintentional relations flow upon human misfortune in violence. It touches the translucent background that exists behind thought, linking us intimately to

the forces in conflict that bring forth an unstoppable torrent: War.

Clemencia shares her thoughts with me: “This installation lines up two river banks ... we cannot go across, cannot reach the other side. *The voices call from one side to the Other...*” The metaphor is clear, as it alludes to impotence, to the impossibility of shifting positions in the midst of the conflict – to the death experience itself. Further: by placing us in the center of that current, it has led us upstream and into the river. One more live force has been added to the river’s course. We are part of the conflict: *we are chips in the gamble.*

If art had but one attribute, that would be perhaps the allegorical power inherent to the sensorial, which connects us with those processes that the so-called unconscious cradles, and with something in it where we – even if not being aware of how – reach a distinct level of knowledge. It is then a knowledge that determines us. ... Giving an expression to the incommunicable, to the symbolic, such is the enormous responsibility that the artistic task implies.

We have seen, especially since the early nineties, many art works

that make allusions to war and violence. There has been a veritable invasion of violent images of pain in the globalized world of media. Most of those images, unknowingly, contribute in feeding the contemporary myth of terror – the myth that has come to justify the *just or rightful war*, the *preventive war*, the (permanent) *state of exception* where anything and everything is possible, even dispensing with the natural attributes of the human condition. ... This piece, *Treno*, is different. It goes to the bottom of the social condition of war without resorting to spectacle – spectacle, which nullifies the genuinely communicative capability of language.

From the outlook of contemporary artistic practices, this work proves the possibility of staging violence and pain without injuring the dignity of sorrow, and without turning violence and pain into symbolic merchandise.

Treno was presented at the *Alonso Garcés Gallery* (2007)