

INHERITED GAMES

I understand *Inherited Games* as a palimpsest, as the rewriting of a ritual that was traced in the past upon a collective memory that is still legible today. Standing in opposition to the commonplace, that past is quoted here in the context of a piece conceived, constructed and exhibited by means, and on the basis of various technologies. Likewise, distancing the work from the commonplace, the term “games,” referred to in the title, stands as the marker for a ritual of death.

A visual and resonant multichannel video installation, *Inherited Games* is stamped with the seal of a local Colombian cultural tradition, where the present comes together with historic rituals. The present being here a Surface, upon which Clemencia Echeverri sets down a text with a distinct calligraphy – that of the artwork.

I had to wonder what motivated the artist to register the image and the sound of a ritual that takes place in Colombia’s Pacific shores – to engender and construct a multimedia narrative from its fragments. It is peculiar, the cruelty inflicted upon an innocent victim, the rooster, by these “lower-case” men whose magnified images are revealed in the simultaneity of the screens. Not so peculiar, however, is the cruelty inflicted by “upper-case” Man upon another innocent victim: generic men and women.

This work of art – in upper case too – does not stand apart from the story told in other pieces by the same artist, who *thrusts upon* the viewers’ senses the concealment as much as the howl of Others – victims also, and anonymous – who are as buried as the rooster is, but in their case under a silence that whitewashes the infamies of societies and associations.

Even as it refers to a game, a sport, in this piece the playful element is, by choice, absent, while image and sound flow through the tension, the howl, death: through the conclusiveness of an image that imposes itself forcefully on the viewer and, at the same time, through a compassionate iconic deconstruction.

The ritual upon which the artist set her eyes, her consciousness, her cameras and sensors is the Feast of the Rooster, which takes place every year in the Colombian coastline of the *Valle* and *Chocó* States. I choose to dodge the entity of the ritual to place myself face to face with a powerful multimedia narrative:

fragments of images perceived simultaneously, where the occurrences in the original account are invested with power by the attentive manner in which the artist reconstructs what or whom she chose as the actor of the sacrifice. It is a peculiar cruelty, that which the Feast of the Rooster inflicts upon an innocent victim.

Here, it is art as multimedia, propounding to the viewer a visual and resonant display that turns the recipients of this piece into *parts* of the device. Surrounding them, the screens follow each other to offer fragments of images that concurrently involve those who are confronted by the work and lead them to the arena of the sacrifice. There is a calibration of what is shown and what is hidden: The obscene is left outside the stage; we do not see how it is that the rooster gets killed, but it is nonetheless heard as the sounds of the decapitating machete are amplified. It is absence as presence – the potency and the reticence of a segmented image that enlightens the viewers' awareness with the disturbing beauty of a Goya.

The segmented visual construction prevents one from following the “figurative” narrative of that Colombian feast/ritual, as the piece arranges for a novel spectacle made up of heedfully measured image and sound fractions. Surrounded by *Inherited Games*, the viewer ceases to be just a viewer and becomes an active receiver of the potent multimedia device.

Uprooted from its original context and spread open by the framework of the gallery, the “fiesta” becomes a new text where the image and the sound track of a sinister inheritance of “virility” transcend what is mere *articulation*, establishing this piece as the severe testimonial of a gratuitous exercise in sport and death.

Inherited Games has no need for electronic interfaces, as it is a conceptually interactive work just because no one can remain outside the margins of its visual and resonant impact. It is the author who determines the progress of the work, proposing to the viewer a hermeneutical, inductive, reflexive reading. Upon the screens, we are given a narrative marked with the imprint of a chekhovian play – that is, one where we do not see the act of dying, which transpires in the entr'acte, just as it occurs here off screen. ... The foot that humiliates and squashes, the hand that severs heads. The head of a rooster as it emerges red from the ground entrapping it – buried alive – and an eye, also red,

that stares in judgement at us, appear projected on a circle at ground level, concentrating the attention and the tension upon another eye: ours.

A foot next to the head of the innocent victim. ... Guernica – where the painter placed the horse's hoof and its horseshoe beside the head of the fallen hero. The dignity of a head where thought resides. A living creature tortured. Should it matter that it is simply a rooster in this instance? A foot despoiling a defenseless being. By now not even its beak can serve it as a shield. Just as Others find themselves without defenses from mistreatment in other testimonial works by Echeverri. ... Silences, voids, absences, profuse rivers dragging everything in their wake, death, beheading edges, blindfolded eyes that cannot weigh the magnitude of the action perpetrated by the hand, the machete on the foreground, the sound of the machete.

Capturing the image. Recording the sound. The immensity of the ocean. Tradition. The narratives of Echeverri converge in the act of the dialogue, with the distance, the cruel, the absences and the pain as colors of her works. *Inherited Games* rewrites inheritance, past and present, as an exquisite palimpsest.

Prof. Susana Pérez Tor, Art critic – September, 2010