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When the Margins Burn: Adela Goldbard at Casa del Lago

by Iván Ruiz

A new exhibition from photographer Adela Goldbard dramatizes violence, allowing us to reconsider and reconstruct it: two actions stimulated by imagination that violence has sought to destroy.

Within the panorama of the photography currently being made in Mexico, Adela Goldbard's most recent work has consistently and provocatively taken a different path than the one it traveled years earlier: photography is no longer the primary medium of her explorations into the nature of fiction and perception (*En el camino*, 2010; *Non Reflex*, 2009; *Ficciones*, 2006), but has now been incorporated into a much more complex practice, involving cinema, installation, sculpture, and the conceptual activation of folk art. While her earlier project already showed clear signs of this separation, her exhibition *Paraalegorías* [Paraallegories], presented at Casa del Lago as part of the FotoMéxico Festival, organized by the Centro de la Imagen [Center for the Image], is irrefutable proof of it. The strangeness surrounding her title is merely the detonator to an associative montage of violent events that have occurred in this country—a montage where the literal meaning of the tragic events makes room for another meaning that, though it corresponds to that of allegory itself, is subjected to an additional metaphorical translation in this exhibition.

Paraalegorías deftly appropriates the meaning that discourse theory has given the concept of "paratextuality," one of the categories proposed by Mikhail Bakhtin to demonstrate how a text creates its meaning through the presence of peripheral elements (title, prologue, epilogue, among others). Collecting events marked by violence, Goldbard takes information that appeared in newspapers, removes it from its editorial context and restages it; though its informative aspects remain the same, its symbolic aspects become ambiguous. Thus, the news that sales of Ford's Lobo pick-up truck had fallen because of this vehicle's association with drug trafficking is taken as a pretext for the artist to fabricate

a full-size handmade truck and blow it up in a desert landscape where the boundary between reality and fiction blurs. Víctor Palacios, the curator of the exhibition, synthesizes this effect with the following question: “How is it that her work is both close and recognizable to us, while simultaneously being alien and indefinable?” *Paraalegorías* makes this inquiry more complex through the creation of an unusual, remote scene, much like the spectacularity developed by photographer Gregory Crewdson, which has been enthusiastically adopted by some photographers in this country.

Falling at the opposite end of the spectrum from visual preciousness, in order to create the eight videos that comprise this three-channel installation, Goldbard worked closely with pyrotechnic artisans from the municipality of Tultepec, in the State of Mexico. Their objective was precise: to construct full-size models of different vehicles, buildings and objects taken from news stories using materials like cardboard and reed. Each of them is loaded with a specific symbolism (the Lobo truck as the epitome of drug trafficking, the Oxxo as a symptom of a capitalism devouring its own tail), as well as a real dose of pyrotechnics. Later, with the assistance of a technical and cinematographic team, they filmed the different scenes that appear in the eight videos. In *Paraalegorías*, (almost) everything explodes: the burning flames are sown within the heart of the artifacts and, in a symbolic temporality, their explosion corresponds with the ritual practice of the Burning of Judas—where the community purges their social discontent through stoning, lynching or burning a puppet that embodies evil and degradation.

We must remember that the importance of this burning does not lie in a pathological tendency toward provoking fire or explosions (there is nothing more superfluous than reducing this installation to something purely "explosive"). The discharges in *Paraalegorías* are produced on the margins of that other great burning that engulfs this country. Drug trafficking, militarization, anarchism, capitalism, and forced disappearances are topics summoned by this exhibition from a subtractive and anti-monumental fiction. The austere locations, the barely audible soundtrack (except for at the time of the explosions), the cinematographic tempo imposed onto "real time," the entirely fictitious and precarious workmanship of the artifacts...: all this converges in an exhibition design that is

more interested in strangeness than in a wholly legible understanding of the creative process, for it is there—in perplexity—where *Paraalegorías* deploys its effectiveness as an artistic project. The staging of a violence banished to the margins allows for reconsideration and reconstruction: two actions stimulated by imagination that violence has sought to destroy.

Goldbard belongs to a generation of young photographers who have developed remarkable bodies of work based on very precise interests (the relationship between architecture and landscape in Pablo López Luz, nature's processes of abstraction in Alex Dorfsman, journeys made through a deeply divided Mexico in Mauricio Palos, to name only a few). Her transition into a three-dimensional language with installation and sculpture, and her marked interest in the possibilities offered by cinematography, reflect a creative maturity; and rather than photography being displaced or abandoned, it reappears in *Paraalegorías* with a new creative tension. While there is a singular nature to the artisanal pieces loaded with pyrotechnics, emphasizing that they are unique and unrepeatable, they are simultaneously multiple, having been recorded using photographic and film cameras: this is an innovative way around the always-present discussion on the loss of “aura” due to new and different technologies.

Thus, with an exhibition that brings together pieces made in the last three years (some of them made specifically for this occasion), Adela Goldbard confirms her position as an artist whose deep insight has allowed her to reintegrate photography into the dynamics and problems of contemporary art.

Source: <http://horizontal.mx/cuando-los-margenes-arden-adela-goldbard-en-casa-del-lago/>