

CRISIS

Andrea Canepa

ORO alla PATRIA

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An old photograph or the twists and turns of a film script can awaken memories that may seem implausible. But, as we delve into a story or move forward in a plot, letting our gaze get lost in an image allows the shift of the whole structure of perception of reality. If some build the story moving forward with firm and unidirectional steps, turning our back on it would mean, more than a negation, an opening to other multiple and intertwined perspectives.

In Andrea Canepa's first exhibition at Crisis Gallery, one must dare to step in, turn around, turn back and cross other thresholds, literally and metaphorically. Thus, with this first gesture that is imprinted on the interior architecture of the show, the artist convenes us to an attitude: that of analyzing architecture -its construction, those who designed it and what they had to realize it- and all the voices that can resonate in it. That is why the reference to a house in a desert manages to unfold to become the reverberation box of many echoes.

Image and voice are constructed here as installation and text. The flat reproduction revealed on paper, unfolds in the sculptural structures and their layers of materials. Voices - internal, official, forgotten - are summoned and intertwined in the chapters of the book. The artistic research project Oro alla patria develops, in this manner, as much in matter as in word. And the two mirror each other, multiplying the number of entrances to a reality approached from the present and in the past, from the abstract form and in the detail of the story.

Just as we see three installations, there are three chapters.

In the first one, the photograph that piqued the artist's curiosity transports us to the colonization of the Libyan desert organized by Mussolini's fascist government in the 1930s, which was cut short by the Second World War. The story of how this plan was designed, how metals were collected for its construction and conquest - the gold donation campaign that gives its name to the whole project - unfolds in references to other conquests, carried out unquestioned, as with the arrival of the Spaniards to Peru. But, beyond the parallels of historical data, «The Materials» allows us to delve into a much more intricate vision through the breakdown of the material components -sand and metal- that give physical basis to these events. At the same time, they are part of the construction of a shared imaginary and allow a poetic approach to how, after the developmentalism of any of the colonial plans, violence is exercised on the other -who is denied as a human being- and on the land.

The story of the Italian «adventure» in North Africa progresses, and just as rationalist buildings were erected for the conquest, monumental symbols were erected to support the propaganda of this enterprise. The second chapter, «The Form», tells us about the construction of one of these

symbolic machines: The Triennial Exhibition of the Italian Overseas Lands, held in Naples in 1940, and the (bad) fortune of the group of Ethiopians transferred there for the representation, as an image of the colonized, of the new empire. It was the confirmation of a geographic and economic hegemony, but also ideological, based on the superiority of race, which had the Fascio but also existed in Rome and in the later imperial idealizations. The manners of edification in this clash between the one who imposes power and the one who inhabits the territory -again violent, again against the other, denied as human being, and the land- are contrasted in the rigid structure of the cube of an assembly hall or the flexible and adaptable curve of a native hut.

The third chapter, «The Actors,» narrates the incredible fate of the Africans, stranded in Italy when the exhibition was suspended with Italy's entry into the war, as extras in a film set in New York and shot in Cinecittà in 1943. Architecture, once again, at the service of the construction of an image, this time represented in the medium that symbolized progress: cinema. The elaboration of a fiction that wants to naturalize an ideology. Again, the negation of the other - in this case, the African turned American, both portraits of the ignorant and depraved - and the imposition of the modern white man. The cinematographic image is constructed, just like the legend of an athlete or the political photography of uprisings and insurgencies -such as those in Harlem in the same year the film was shot-, all with architectures, concrete, and defined by an ideology, as background. Just as multiple stories are intertwined in the chapters, they are condensed in the materials, forms, images, and characters we see in the installations: sand, metal, and the line of rational architecture; the gold reinforced cube and the braided fiber circle; the theatrical stage set; and the representation and sublimation of reality in the reproduction of film scenes and the interpretation of violence in the sky and the architecture of Harlem, by the painter William Johnson.

In the mixture of narratives and references we find incredibly similar facts, a pattern is identified, the repetition of an action that also leaves a trace both material and in the imaginary. From the first Mediterranean empires, the later absolutist and colonial conquests, the fascist endeavors, or, now, the neoliberal enterprises, all have been constituted with a hegemonic narrative, constructed in the form of their buildings and the illustrations of their legends and tales. In them, their vision has been naturalized and taught as logic. Turning around and letting ourselves get lost in the parallels and evocations, as Andrea Canepa does in her work, allows us to glimpse that a story, even if it seems as though it is not our own, activates in us the memory of others we have lived through. Because in the end, just as the text ends, «it is still the same story».

- Marta Ramos-Yzquierdo