

MAPS OF PAIN ROSALÍA BANET

In one of his best-known stories Borges envisioned an empire in which the art of cartography had achieved such a level of perfection and been taken to such an extreme that it managed to produce "a map of the empire, of the same size as the empire, and perfectly resembling it." The gap had been overcome. The representation of the royal territory had *become* the royal territory.

In this new stage of her work Rosalía Banet undertakes a similar strategy by creating a map composed of fifteen "speechless" maps whose contours and topography correspond to those of the world's poorest countries. Apparently conventional, as we approach them we discover that their scale has been subverted to an impossible degree, yielding "dermal" maps, made of our skin (evoking the navigational charts of yesterday, made of animal leather). That is, corporal cartographies, with surfaces of skin and waterway mapping in blood. The artist has taken as a reference point the real skins of people who in some way represent each of these countries, thereby furnishing with a human dimension a type of representation - the map - which invariably serves specific interests (economic, political, strategic... but never humanitarian) to project a perception of the world, always subjective and partial, aimed at power, hegemony and control over the territory, which strives to organize the diverse, impose distances, set limits and "establish the truth" in an absurd attempt to possess a comprehensive image of the planet in which "everything is identical" - an evidently impossible enterprise.

Far from these canonical representations, associated with a colonizing and purportedly scientific perspective, the artist reveals the "epidermal" and superficial character of all cartographic systems. The map, a figurative artifice which aspires to function like a mirror, often excludes more than it includes (something is always marginalized and excluded, invisible, absent), perhaps as an artifice to dispel the anxiety generated by that which is different. So says Estrella de Diego (*Against the Map*) resemble each other. While on a conventional map the relief darkens as heights increase, and particularities disappear, on these maps the skin blackens as the distance grows (physical, but also moral) and the differences are accentuated. Rosalía Banet performs an exercise in approaching - a corporal "zoom" - altering the scales learned to display a geography of a surface, of our own covering, revealing its wounds and bleeding. With the traditional coordinates wiped away, the spatial reference is suspended to offer an anatomical topography which evidences the fragility and vulnerability of the system we have created.

Opposite this mural of poor skins the artist places another which functions as a dialectical counterpoint, this time with maps of the world's fifteen world's richest nations. Here the representation goes beyond the skin, leaving the innards exposed, along with some of its ulcers. The series is entitled *Black stomach*, an expression which in Japanese (*hara-guroi*) is applied to the infamous (usually politicians, businessmen and bankers) who seek to hide something, indifferent to others' suffering. These are "sick" maps presenting blackened intestines, cast in a rank, dirty, almost rotten color - a portrait of an opulent society characterized by its overabundance and excess.

Rosalía Banet thus illustrates how some countries have grown grotesquely fat while others have been reduced to skin and bones. A series of digital drawings complete this

critical view of a consumer society based on cloned identities, which in its crazed thirst for more and more has overcome maladies born of malnutrition, replacing them with disorders and pathologies resulting from overeating and inadequate nourishment.

But no matter how the so-called *First World* strives to disguise its imperfections, the wounds end up surfacing. A map of Spain with diseased skin presents again a series of blisters and pustules which correspond to the number of suicides - more than 3,000 in 2010, according to data from Spain's National Statistical Institute - in our country as a result of the economic crisis.

Meanwhile, the suture lines marking the artificial boundary between two ways of life break, tracing a trail of blood (the border between United States and Mexico, in this case) or a large red stain (that of the inland sea which separates Africa from Europe), fed every day by people dying or disappearing in search of a better life.

Finally, a thoroughly "skinned" map of the world. The insides brought outside, exposing the nerves and muscles to reveal a body that is chopped up, fragmented, dismembered, with its highest levels in the form of bones and tendons, making the planet the replica of a modern Prometheus sentenced to the torment of being gutted, while mankind, just like his brother Atlas, carries the burden on its back, the weight of the world, ignoring the manipulation to which it is being subjected. In this sense, the video *Double Erosion* cannot be more blunt: a set of two hands wash (or, rather wash each other) the brain and the heart until they are reduced to two small spheres that have lost their defining traits, to the sound of the deathly tolling of bells.

Our skin, the body's largest component and also its most sensitive, functions as an interface or screen for our contact with the world, but also as a boundary of the self. Rosalía Banet produces a work of dissection prompting us to look inward and become aware of the world that we have created, thwarting the search for pleasure and control which maps too often entail. An ardent appeal for sensitivity. Humanized maps to divulge dehumanization. An impossible atlas of pain. Corporeal geography in the form of a *trompe-l'œil* which evidences the failure of language, for suffering is not transferable; as Chantal Maillard states (*Contra el arte y otras imposturas*) we are unable to suffer without stepping into the other's shoes... or skin: "Topological wisdom: if I am not there, where there is pain, can there really be any?"

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