

## ***The Enemy***

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*Tania Bruguera has decided on silence.*

### **I.**

On one ocasión, I saw her transformed into a Caryatid; the ceiling and walls of the gallery forced her into a discomfiting reverence. One of the straps that help her also covered her mouth, impeding the free flow of her verbalization. When Homer described Ulysses' eloquence, he said Words sprung from his chest, not his mouth. But Tania is not exactly a hero, and from her breast come only humility and obedience. While silence served her as a precarious brace, she held in her hands the still warm heart of a lamb.

Tania's is a silence of profound intensity, even when her vulnerability is akin to a blank sheet of paper about to be squandered on inkblots and smudges. It's not an accident that cotton crops up often in her work –to cover the body or any surface that imposes limits on infinite space: an absorbent material, snow white and clinically pure.

Still, sometimes it's not clear if Tania "keeps silences" or sheathes herself with it. Indeed, to be silent is to keep the verb captive. Homer himself affirmed that teeth serve as a barrier against the tongue's natural impetuosity. But Tania isn't satisfied with what nature has prescribed; since the enclosure is not enough, she creates all sorts of ruses.

Before her own verbiage could be contaminated by others, Tania has preferred to chew entire pages of alien Words. With her teeth, she repeats the same ponderous mechanism as the printing press; but her actions results in eroding all content from whole books. With her own spit she depopulates them of writing, until they are stamped only with silence and each of their pages has been turned to a sterile pulp. So much ink reduce to an overflowing mass of opinions in her mouth, she spits into glass vials, being careful not to spill a single letter.

Later, she seals each vial with the masticated paper, so white, so empty. If we didn't know where the Words came from, we could say with certainty that these "in vitro cultures" are nothing less than self-portraits. Tania calls them The Body of Silence.

### **II.**

The History of Art in Cuba –and in this sense it's no different that anywhere else—is surrounded by an anecdotal history that survives in the form of urban legend and rumor. One of these stories concerns the writer Virgilio Piñera at a meeting on intellectuals and politicians in the early 60s. To be true to this particularly persistent legend, it should be noted that the politicians were doing the talking and the intellectuals the listening.

Virgilio then respectfully asked to say a few Words. It was assumed that his Words would relate to what had been discussed that afternoon. But Virgilio was as laconic as he was intense: "I want to make a confession. I am afraid."

Fear is never in the past. We're overcome by a foreseeable turn of events that can put our security in double; a mistake that can alter routines which govern our existence; or the consequences of our inability to auto-suppress our disagreements. This kind of anguish always has a hint of premonition or instinct.

But it is not impossible to imagine Word and Fear meeting at some point, maybe even trading places. When this happens, Word and Fear enter into calculated dance. Sometimes surreptitiously challenging, evasive at others, Word and Fear construct behaviors, claim territory and conceal realities. What remains is the need for masks, metaphors and latent ambivalence which elude the weight of that which has now become unspeakable.

Virgilio's confession seems prophetic. Perhaps that's why his Words took flight from official history to find refuge in its margins. Words and guilt roll around behind Tania Bruguera's silence. Her Fear doesn't belong to her; it's just an echo that has finally caught up.

### III.

There was a time when Tania felt beaten by arithmetic. As she tallied, she realized that nation could be a matter of numbers: add deaths over here, subtract lives over there, multiply bread and fish... divide and conquer –that's the perfect equation.

To be precise in her "statistics", all Tania had to do was refuse to separate the just from the unjust. Epic deeds intertwined with remorse, inequity and Fear. Heroes and traitors enveloped in the same shroud. In the kingdom of guilt, just as in that of the dead, everyone is guaranteed a place. Tania has woven funereal flags, in which she winds the intensely intricate workings of the nation. In these, guilt is spread all around.

*Estadística* began as a succession of marks on a wall. Obsessed with the limitations, Tania painted the wall black, as a silent requiem. Drawn with thread and strips of fabric, a tangle of hair was lined up on the wall with rigorous geometry. But a few details betrayed it. The flag had a beginning, but lacked an end. Ulysses; wife unraveled her work each night only to begin again at dawn. Tania drags out the wait with incomplete stitching. To compose the nation should not be an easy task. It's always the midway point, wither her not there, exactly between the two shores.

### IV.

If reversal can be made into victory, then many reversals would make for a great triumphant march for all eternity. By erecting a monument, no one can be sure the enemy doesn't exist. The most fitting pedestal will be a book of selected pages with all the weight of the monument on top; some loose pages might make a difference. There will be no strays. And those that do not fit into the canon of the nation will be torn out at once.

Victory should be cautious; whatever Word escapes means another book is written. It seems reversal and victory are complicated theorems. To resolve them, Tania respectfully keeps a minute of silence, then dedicates herself to spinning the intimate thoughts of the nation.