

**Pavilion of Guatemala
at the 58th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia**

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN: GUATEMALA PARTICIPATES AT THE BIENNALE ARTE 2019 AGAINST FEMINICIDE

The Guatemala National Pavilion participates at the 58th International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia with an exhibition that reflects on the serious problem of violence against women, widespread not only in the Latin American state but in all the countries of the world, from the most industrialized to the developing ones. This theme will be represented by two artists, which are Elsie Wunderlich, originally from Guatemala, and Marco Manzo, an Italian artist who has a deep knowledge of Latin American traditions and culture.

Each exhibited work will reflect any “act of violence that provokes or is likely to cause physical, sexual or psychological harm” as the Declaration on the elimination of violence against women, approved by the United Nations in 1993, defines it. In particular, the sculptor Elsie Wunderlich will focus on those signs, those scars and mutilations of the female face, expression of persecutory acts, beatings and domestic violence. Marco Manzo will bring at the Biennale Arte 2019 the tattoo, as an authoritative language of contemporary art, animating it on an installation made up of feminine and masculine sculptural hands that come out from a monumental wooden wall, engraving on the palm or on the back of the male limb those symbols of *machismo* taken from Guatemalan culture. Even in this case, the wall will symbolize the thick barrier of silence in a game of contrast and resistance, between the victim and the oppressor.

The theme of the exhibition will then focus on the anthropological analysis of women, starting from a local examination and playing on the pair “interesting state – interesting state”. The expression “interesting state” is, in many languages, mostly referred to the pregnant woman, to the new life. In this sense Guatemala appears to be an “interesting” state due to the persistence of the phenomenon and the government's desire to solve it. The rooted culture of *machismo*, in public and private life, which draws its roots from the colonial history of the Latin American continent, meets a high female illiteracy, that is a source of discrimination ranging from personal vulnerability, social exclusion, to the economic dependence of women from male figures. By interpreting this situation through a structuralist analysis, it is possible to add also a difficulty in accessing an effective judicial system for crimes of mistreatment and violence and the lack of a collective awareness of the problem. The Guatemala National Pavilion therefore intends to promote an art in which aesthetics is parallel to a universal message of awareness.

FOCUS ON THE ARTISTS ON EXHIBITION

Elsie Wunderlich

Scars, wounds, deformations and lacerations disfigure the cathartic faces of women made by Elsie Wunderlich. The Guatemalan artist sacrifices the ideal beauty in favour of a disrupted aesthetics, explaining the violence suffered by the female gender in different parts of the world. By enclosing the

annihilation and the subordination of the woman's identity in the sculptural material, Wunderlich shows a physical and psychological subjection, unfortunately, seriously silenced. In her works two essences are intertwined, the feminine and the naturalistic, a combination of Woman-Nature that characterizes the entire sculptural series, becoming her stylistic character. The link between the lush and wild Nature and the Woman, pure, fragile, but at the same time full of resources, becomes an inseparable fusion, where feminine traits weave together with natural elements, inspiring majestic metamorphoses. And so the mangrove roots blend with the hair of a young girl, the volcanic craters become arched eyebrows. You could say that it echoes the image of the "Pachamama", the "Mother Earth" worshipped in indigenous cultures: woman, recognized in her role of procreator, is connected to the expressions of nature in a profound and visceral way. But these two essences also share deep suffering. The symbiosis delineated by Wunderlich indicates how both of them are associated with the sad condition of being the object of the human violation in modern society.

Marco Manzo

Marco Manzo presents the environmental installation "El muro del silencio", composed of two distinct portions of a wall, called "Tatuana" and "Salvarse el pellejo". From the walls, symbol of confinement, silence and barrier of every way out, emerge white hands, in Carrara marble, both male and female. The former are aggressive and armed, capable of offending and ready to commit violence against women. Tattoos inspired to traditional themes are engraved on the back of their hands, as if they want to symbolize the permanent mark that *machismo* has left in the popular culture of Guatemala. The protagonists of this painful narration are the female hands, that try to defend themselves, in their tragically violated purity. This very dramatic work holds actually a positive interpretation, where the female hands react to violent acts demonstrating a peculiar physical and psychological strength. On the women's skin there are typical themes of the "Ornamental" style – of which the artist is a precursor – characterized by great delicacy and refinement. And then Venetian lace, macramé, *dentelle*, mandala and precious jewels of the Victorian age appear on the female limbs, decorating the woman body and covering the physical scars and those of the soul. If, on the one hand, the "Ornamental" style, for its stylistic features, suggests an act of vanity, on the other, in this context, it becomes a symbol of resistance and rebellion against male laws, a painful autobiographical testimony and a collective narration, a place of memory for a cathartic process aimed at overcoming the drama, where femininity becomes a source of solidarity and hope for every woman.

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