

## LIGHTS AND SHADOWS OF POWER AND MADNESS

Pilar Parcerisas

*"So what, they are insane, and I would be no less extravagant if I followed their example".*

Descartes, in *Meditations*

The world is the place of becoming, the temporal place where things happen; they oscillate between being and nothing and where the will to power is born, to dominate them and snatch them from *being* and *nothing* and then, to hurl them once more into *being* and *nothing*. Emanuele Severino reminds us as we contemplate the extreme insanity of our civilization combined with the abandonment of truth, the death of philosophy, and war as the evil of our culture, on which Occidental Civilization has been built.<sup>1</sup> War as the madness that involves the destruction of man, but above all, war as the error which contains the negation of truth and leads to the twilight of the Occidental soul. "All things are born from struggle", said Plato, paraphrasing the quote by Heraclitus: "War is the mother of all things". Since the Greeks, things are born, die, and make war. There is a historical awareness of becoming in the framework of "res publica" and "Polis", in which we share the view that things emerge and return to nothing, that the thing [ente] is nothing [niente] and it is here where the extreme madness resides, this essential madness, which, according Severino, "governs the history of Occidental Civilization" and this is the "original meaning of what we call "war": "The meaning that Occidental civilization confers to things in their *thingness-of-being* is the original meaning of war in relation to the event of the Occident".<sup>2</sup> As such, it also governs peace.

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<sup>1</sup> Emanuele Severino, *La guerra y el alma de Occidente (War and the Occidental Soul)*, Archipiélago, Cuadernos de Crítica de la Cultura n.7/1991

<sup>2</sup> *Id.*

The territories of *peace*, *war*, and *light* proposed by Ana DeMatos invite us to contemplate this Occidental Construct where the King symbolizes universal man, the reflection of the solar, the golden aura, the eternal and the saved, a figure which incarnates this madness of the West, invested with the power to sanction war and proclaim peace. With a unique attribute, the crown – to define both the idea of culmination or victory, as well as immortality, this eternity which passed from the gods to the Monarchs and later could be achieved by heroes and mortals – which reminds us that the King constitutes the memory of the world, our Occidental world, which is distilled into tales and legends which form a part of the collective unconsciousness.

In the *territories of peace*, the Kings are dead. The spectral image of the crowns printed on the cushions where the crowns rested, here black and adorned with embroidered edges where it is possible to read “Long live the King” (dead), which once again reminds us of the weird phantasmal life which the King's subjects conceded to the Monarchs who died in strange circumstances; in the end creating a legend based on the temporary reversal of the kingdom, such as reigning after death or expecting the king to return from this death when danger threatened the territory.

Like the sleeper and the dreamer, the artist's insanity permits her to be more insane than the madman, thus Ana DeMatos attempts to demythologise the crown as a symbol, and what surrounds it, to approach the spectral desire of the subjects to grant a life beyond death to the King, juxtaposed with the symbols of German National-Socialism such as the SS skull or the Communist hammer and sickle, symbolically altering this eternal peace of the Kings which the ideological and totalitarian movements removed from power by means of struggles and wars which have constructed the history of Occidental Society.

These spectral crowns, printed in calcographic engraving on canvas, which evoke a phantasmal memory, the skull of procession, symbolically allude to the royal tombs which the artist discovered in the Crypt of the St. Michael Church in Munich. The relic of the crown substitutes the cranium, since it was buried there. As in prior works, she once again resorts to the anthropology of death, but only in reference to a privileged few, and also embroidered works, for the adornment of death by means of stitches with simple golden or silver threads, adding red glass beads and decorative elements by means of completely feminine tools, which here evoke the hands of women with royal prerogatives, such as princesses, which having been renounced by their husbands and confined to a convent, dedicated themselves to the sophisticated and noble task of embroidery.

An ideological critical interpretation of the death of Royalty as the archetype of power, where the domination of the crown has extinguished to subsequently give rise to the permanence of women's noble work. A masculine world, where the King and the Prince cannot be imagined without their female counterpart, the Queen or the Princess. Together they comprise a perfect hierogamy (with origins similar to the sacred nuptial union between divinities, such as the model of Zeus and Hera), the symbolic union of heaven and earth, the sun and the moon, silver and gold, sulphur and mercury. The kings as archetypes of the power which they received from the sacred realm and which they transmitted from fathers to sons; where marriage is an institution to forge an alliance and royal power.

In the *territories of war*, the world of the royal standard dominates. Five flags serve as territories of power governed by the Crown of the Russian Romanov Dynasty, with whom the princesses remarried, printed in calcographic engraving with red ink on a silvery canvas with

Japanese reminiscences of leaves and plants in matte and bright thread; its reverse side displays a quote by a dictator, sewn with one of the simplest embroidery stitches: the chain stitch. There are other forms of the archetypes of power which overlap on the crown. The sensuality of the cloth, the delicacy of the crown, and feminine connotation of the embroidery contrast with the blunt force of the messages, whose meaning is raised as a double-edged weapon which equally serves as an indirect threat to the people. Some of the phrases comprise authentic Decrees or Manifestos. For example: "Democracy is only a door which Communism can use to enter", "My acts can only be judged by my fellow countrymen, whom I served peace in the midst of a world at war", or equally, "Man must be free, but there is no liberty without order". Here language becomes another archetypal symbol of power, such as that represented by the Crown for the King or the Cross for Divinity. The dictator is based on language and in words as the potential and real territory of domination, as the ideological apparatus of his State. The Word against the Crown, one convention against another convention. The Standard is the symbol of the Victor's conquest, which frequently displaces the Crown as a territory of power.

The *territories of light* comprehensively deal with the feminine world, queens, princesses, daughters and mothers treated as semi-goddesses, the Queen as Icon, close to the Virgin, to the Russian Icons, or the Byzantine Virgins. The relationship of power with what is holy, the light that shines from gold and gems, the faceless beauty of these Virgin-Queens whose attire, jewels, and ornaments speak to us of the ritual of power from the feminine realm. Like the convention which is transmitted from mothers to daughters, from Queens to princesses and princes, which is still accepted in the present day as a conventional representation inherited from history, archetypal formulas of a feminine culture built over the centuries and transmitted in an unchanging way.

Ana DeMatos conceives and provides us with the conventional representation of female royalty by means of diverse resources, direct methods such as embroidery or indirectly by means of engraving which coexists with the embossed relief of glass beads and jewels. She also embroiders iconographic images such as the *Vanitas (Still-life paintings whose objects symbolize life's brevity)*, in the image of the Queen-Mother in front of the mirror, in two different versions, which incarnate the sensual character of provocatively painted lips which praise the image of the physical body (just like in fairy tales: "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of them all?"), which has simply become an archetype without a legend.

*Territories of light* reveals a concealed world, and constitutes what we can call feminine "iconostasis" of royalty, where the golden hues are paradoxically incrustated in black auras. They could perfectly serve as objects of worship, because they invoke the sacred as its inheritance. The negation of the face converts them into immortals, because they refer to no one, they are images in themselves. Here the artist creates an unprecedented iconographic tradition in painting, because it converts an ancient icon, intimately linked to a millennium tradition into a contemporary prototype, the fusion of the contemporary Occidental world with the Oriental Byzantine representation of the Madonnas, Virgins, and Empresses. Similar to icons, what matters are the image, the symbolic codes, and the force of this image but not their creator. The majority of Russian icons are usually anonymous works. In the configuration of the queens and princesses which Ana DeMatos reveals to us, the artist has erased the traces of her artwork to create an image in itself, which appears to emerge from immemorial times, as if these women had been transported or created by a religion. And the same as Russian dolls, it sometimes creates the effect of an image inside an image. In this feminine "iconostasis", the royal woman is absent, only the ritual attributes which are associated with her emerge.

By means of the *Territories of peace, war, and light*, Ana DeMatos' discourse has carried out a displacement of meaning which ranges from the reflection about the identity of gender which has characterized previous works such as *Vestidos mínimos (Minimal Clothes)* (1999), *Homo textus* (2000), *Destrucción/Reconstrucción* (Destruction/Reconstruction) (2003), to the configuration of the individual mythology of women, which includes herself and her work method in this search, in the end opting for the ideological critique of a cultural archetype, giving rise to an activist political art, which is served by the same instruments which configure it. Thus, this is how *she deconstructs* the world to provide an identity to the feminine realm, based on recognizable signs such as the action of sewing or embroidering, the use of thread, wool, hair, clothing, fabric, or the traces of the female body. Here she intensively applies this *deconstruction* from the platform of a powerful social elite, whose legend trespasses the limit between what is human and divine, both in initiation cultures as well as in the evolution of the Occidental world. The artist uses the female body's experience in the service of an icon, the Queen, or uses the Crown as a metonymic symbol of one of the greatest iconographic repertoires of power which the world has ever possessed since its origins until the present day. However, based on the female iconographic model of queens and princesses (including their attributes), it is possible to deduce how other ritual forms of imitation were derived as reflected in the clothes, tulle, crowns, necklaces, and other jewels which influenced the social and religious orders such as the brides and little girls celebrating their first communion, simultaneously leading-characters and victims of the archetypal model they imitate; a model on the other hand which is extensively practiced in social behaviour even today.

*Deconstruction*, which also means to unmask, to reveal what is concealed, and on this occasion, the imprisonment of the woman who lives in the powerful grip of royalty, where the flesh and bone person

disappears and surrenders to the attributes. This is the *El Dorado* paradise, of gold and diamonds which imprison the weakness of the person under the golden domination of the crown. Czarist Russia knew how to make this world into a perfect synthesis between the earthly power of the Czars and the divine power of their icons from Moscow, the Orthodox Rome, whose Kremlin Square caused the newly admitted Boyars (Nobles) to exclaim: "This is paradise!". In this sense, a Russian proverb affirms: "Above Moscow, there is the Kremlin; above the Kremlin, there is heaven". Perhaps Russia is where royalty was able to touch the divine Arks thanks to its religion. It is only necessary to behold the cross which adorns Peter the Great's Coronation helmet or Boris Godounov's Coat of Mail in which each hoop is engraved with the inscription, "God is with us, no one can conquer us". Nevertheless, this paradisiacal world of golden legends conceals the embittered soul of the race which extended over the Steppes, the struggles, sufferings, and tragedies of the people, and even the artisans and goldsmiths themselves, who were summoned throughout the country, forced into work for this golden universe of the Kremlin under penalty and threat of sending their wives and children to prison.

This and many other stories can be revealed in the crossroads of these territories of war, peace, and light, which Ana DeMatos narrates to us in a refined grammar which must be *deconstructed*, in order to discover, underneath the appearance of a universe that has been encoded as *good*, all the secret *evil* that it conceals and the idea of death in a latent state.

Like the madman, who likes to disguise himself as king, the artist condemns, by means of the ritual exile of insanity, this way of making the world turn, which still continues today with all its clichés, with all the force of an icon, and which invites us to decode and unravel a cultural archetype which appears to have survived history unharmed.

