

Through the Barricades

Daya Cahen, Cristina Lucas, Fernando Sánchez Castillo

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An encounter 'at the bomb site', in the no-man's land between conflicting worlds: the title of the group exhibition 'Through the Barricades' alludes not to a Romeo-and-Juliet-style love story situated in troubled surroundings, but to (political) conflicts in general and the agony of alienation brought about by ideologies and manipulation. The video works of Daya Cahen, Cristina Lucas and Fernando Sánchez

Castillo each display a distinct outlook on the consequences of the concept 'authority'.

In the forests between Moscow and St. Petersburg, 10.000 young Russians are preparing for a heroic future. Their goal: to make Russia the world leader of the twenty-first century. They are the chosen ones, the country's future managers and politicians. In 2007 Daya Cahen (1969, Amsterdam) was granted permission—highly unusual for an outsider—to pitch her tent in the Nashi summer camp. There she witnessed the day-to-day activities of Vladimir Putin's radical and patriotic youth movement, notorious for the part that its members play in breaking up anti-Putin demonstrations and using violence against opponents of the regime. The boys and girls spend two weeks at the remote, isolated camp where red banners wave and loudspeakers constantly preach sermons about their future. 'Nashi' (our people), 2008, offers a fascinating glimpse at the way in which both leaders of the system and the system itself are molded.

The folk song 'If I Had a Hammer', by The Weavers, was written in 1949 in support of the progressive American labor movement. It was banned during the McCarthy era but regained its popularity during the 1960s and 70s, when it was used as a kind of anthem by the Civil Rights Movement. The iconoclastic nature of the lyrics also lent itself to radical feminism, an ideology that became prevalent during those years. In a contemporary manner, the Spanish artist Cristina Lucas (1973, Jaén) brings the rebellious poetry of the 'hammer' tradition into the limelight with her work 'Habla', 2008. She hammers at a replica of Michelangelo's famous statue of Moses—the prophet of three monotheistic religions—commanding it to speak (Habla!) at every blow. Legend has it that Michelangelo was so proud of his lifelike Moses that he struck its knee with a hammer and asked it, 'Why don't you talk?' For Lucas the issue is not the destruction of the statue, but the representation of an ideology by way of acts that oppose archetypes used to uphold the patriarchal tradition.

The work of Fernando Sánchez Castillo (Madrid, 1970) revolves around the notion of 'power', which is conceived as a diffuse network of contacts that generates a repressive situation and ultimately takes the shape of specific organizations which command acceptance via fundamental processes of indoctrination. In his work the artist presents us with another perspective on—and way of dealing with—that reality. His video 'Rich Cat Dies of Heart Attack in Chicago', 2004, shows the camera following a series of actions involving a bronze head, taken from a demolished monument. As music plays in alternately restrained and impassioned tones, the head is pulled off the monument and then taken on a journey across the arid landscape of southern Spain. After the head gets kicked about like a football, pulled by horses in a choreography, dragged along by a car and chased by a pack of wild dogs, it finally ends up as a fodder bin for a farmer's donkey. The symbol of power is thus transformed in a subtle manner, and the course of history slightly altered.

According to the art critic and essayist T.J. Clark, wordless images can, precisely because of their wordlessness, show us aspects of the world that we had never seen before. "Images can be sceptical and stubborn and complex, in a way that is never displayed by writing and spoken language. They are important due to the very fact that we live in a world so dominated by language." (De Witte Raaf 180) Based on the idea that images moreover need to be given new and careful consideration time and again, 'Through the Barricades' consists of three 'older' works that show us how the artist views the world. In light of current affairs, they take on added significance.

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