

English **Matteo Guidi, *Remover con una vara de madera*. From October 11th 2017 to January 7th 2018. Individual project, Sala Petita. *Barcelona Producció is an initiative of La Capella.***

“The lock of the warehouse was not broken, so the authorities suspect an inside job. Yes, we know that the perpetrator or perpetrators of the attack took their time: they worked well with a blowtorch or radial saw, making ‘a clean cut’ according to the City Council. The head has not turned up.”¹ It seems that the statue was also missing a leg, but they cut it off fifteen years earlier when it was moved from outside to the inside of a castle and couldn’t fit through the door. This loss did not hamper its movement, however, as it was on horseback. But now they say that it has also lost the horse and that its hiding place must have changed. Some are starting to worry, but nobody knows if it will reappear. It also seems to be a fact that “a spectre [has been] haunting Europe” for some time now. Yet in our city, what was announced by that pair of thinkers in that manifesto² exactly 169 years ago has not happened.

We see a drawing of a man holding a pole in the centrepiece of this exhibition. Is it a ghost that he is relating to? And who is this man? What is he trying to do? He seems to be poking in the fog, but maybe he is just someone doing something practical that he was ordered to do, like remove a piece of fabric. Or is it a flag and he is waving it? And if it is a flag, what colour is it? It looks white. So maybe he is surrendering. And what if what matters is not so much what he is moving or removing, but what he might find under the fabric?

Matteo Guidi gives us few hints with the title of his work *Remover con una vara de madera* (Moving with a wooden pole). And neither of the two black and white pieces displayed in the dark and grey exhibition hall seem to give any clues: an illuminated retro photograph of what seems like a dirty corner of a warehouse and the video projection of a hand-drawn animation loop. The artist explains that the animation was made from a video that he filmed over a year ago when he visited a municipal warehouse out of curiosity and filmed it without artistic pretensions and to the regret of the employee working at the time. But art “is an activity performed in the margins”, said the esteemed Benet Rossell and that implies, among other things, working with everything that is hardly anything and that hardly had to be anything. Guidi is used to developing his projects in contexts like prisons or refugee camps, where the limits of what you can do and cannot do, what you can show and cannot show, are extreme; contexts in which the conditions redefine the meaning of the activities carried out, however simple they may be, as well as the objects used. This is why only by following some of the elements present in the stills of the aforementioned video (and not others), as Zaida Trallero speculated when this work was still just an idea, the 263 drawings that make up the animation could “become an exercise in psychological suppression and

historical narrative in which the epic is condensed solely in an arbitrary movement”. This is because the real action that took place at that municipal warehouse, which only seemed circumstantial, takes a central role here and comes the focal point for reflection. The question is whether that can help us to then ask ourselves how we confront the ghosts of our historical memory and to question who has the right to bring them back to life.

Because this would be a key to understanding *Remover con una vara de madera*: it is a work that symbolically redefines another monumental work of art through a small gesture. And the poetic charge of this gesture is essential for understanding how this work relates with its implicit – but hidden – political dimension. Like through a veiled image and a silent video that documents an apparently absurd or initially arbitrary action whose beginning and end are unknown to us, it subtly reveals the spectrum of “stolen” images that allow us to uncover the historical narrations that lie underneath.

It is probably not a coincidence that the artist’s anthropological thesis on portraits of prisoners in high-security prisons used as a reference the few and equally precarious images that some inmates in harrowing conditions could sneak out from the Nazi concentration camp at Auschwitz in 1944, on which Didi-Huberman in his book *Images in spite of all*, reflects, stating that “these →

Matteo Guidi (Cesena, Italy, 1978) graduated in Ethnoanthropology and lectures in the Sociology of Communication at the ISIA University in Urbino (Italy). His art work focuses on methods of resistance in daily life within limited systems that tend to objectify us. His most recent exhibitions and talks have included: Bienalsur (Cúcuta, Colombia), Indonesia Media Arts Festival (Jakarta, Indonesia), Yorkshire Sculpture Park (Wakefield, UK), MAGASIN (Grenoble, France), ESAD School of Art and Design (Matosinhos, Portugal), Centro Cultural de España (Montevideo, Uruguay), Free University Bozen-Bolzano (Italy), Akademie der Künste der Welt (Cologne, Germany), International Academy of Art Palestine (Ramallah, Palestine), Campus in camps and DAAR (Beit Sahour, Palestine), Homesession, UB, Escola Massana, CaixaForum, La Virreina and Fundación Suñol.

→ images do not say the truth but are a fragment of it, its lacunary remains". Those that force us to the "creative" act that we owe to the victims and to ourselves: that of completing history even if we have to imagine it. "To know, one must imagine for oneself", the author tells us. And Guidi's piece also points us to this endless task. Imagining ourselves here would also involve the subversive act of questioning the legitimacy of the monuments that remain in the public space and those that have been removed. In this way, Jorge Luis Marzo also urges us to "think about the legacy monuments, above all for a technical reason: because they are historical, they cannot be touched or withdrawn. [...] What a paradox! On the one hand they devastate the Barrio Chino to create order and on the other

hand nobody can touch López because it is a historical sculpture. I say López, but I could mention many other cases".³

In this direction and to complete (or expand) the exhibition's approach, Guidi has organised a tour of the warehouse of the museum of the history of the city where the City Council holds sculptures that have been removed from the public space throughout the years for different reasons and based on the political culture of each government. The tour will be guided by Jorge Luis Marzo and without knowing at this moment whether the visit will be imagined, real, virtual, performative or with phantasmagoric nocturnity and treachery – because when reading history, we never know what will happen – if we take into account that the curator once lost a job as a tour guide for saying

that a public sculpture by Joan Miró looked like an erect penis, the activity is wholly recommendable. Because it is clear that what Guidi moves in *Remover con una vara de madera* contains more elements than what can be seen. And the success of this approach lies in how an outside perspective can highlight an important moment in the history of our country reflecting on the life of the objects that create memory through a dissaturated act: with the precarious image of a marginal action.

¹ "Decapitan una estatua [...] en Barcelona", *Libertad digital*, Madrid, 19/09/2013.

² Engels and Marx, *Manifiesto of the Communist Party*, London, 1848.

³ Marzo, Jorge Luis, *Arte y espacio público*, viewed at www.soymenos.net.

Barcelona Producció is a cycle dedicated to the emerging creativity of the city.