

### ***Hijos sanos (Healthy sons)***

By Nerea Pérez de las Heras

“They are normal kids”. Of all that has been read and written about the gang rape perpetrated in Pamplona in the early hours of July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2016, these three words were the most difficult for society to digest, and their meaning, the most difficult for the feminist movement to explain. That of “La Manada” is the great story of sexual terror against women of the internet era, but its effects on the collective consciousness have been the opposite of previous events such as the Alcàsser crime. As Nerea Barjola explains in *Microfísica sexista del poder*<sup>1</sup>, the media coverage of the event served as a warning and disciplining device for a whole generation of women. The snuff movie of the murder that was so insistently talked about did exist, it was produced by the Spanish media. And they made it for us, women. They raved about the details of the violence inflicted on the victims by "sick monsters", without mentioning the structure that fostered that violence.

The story of the multiple rape in Pamplona, on the other hand, caught us too awake. There were too many of us who had become aware enough to say: they are not sick, they are not monsters, they are healthy sons of the patriarchy. Five normal boys. The collective gaze was then fixed on them, the executing arms of a hierarchical, archaic structure, so normalised as to joke in a group chat. “La Manada” served as a cautionary tale, yes, just like Alcàsser, but in this case not for the victims, but for the perpetrators.

The idea of patriarchal authority as a normalcy that is difficult to perceive for those who move comfortably within it, like the proverbial fish that doesn't know what water is, runs through Olalla Gómez Valdericeda's pieces in the exhibition. The focus of reflection is directed at the source of violence, not at the bodies of the victims, as was customary in the proposals of feminist artists of the 70s and 80s, such as Ana Mendieta, Carolee Schneemann or Gina Pane.

With an extraordinary economy of means, the artist manages to concentrate multiple layers of interpretation in each of the three installations in the exhibition. The density of readings and meanings is deliberate, and corroborates the structural character of sexism: it is in the images, in the language, in the automatic mental associations between sex and power and, of course, in everyday expressions. As the feminist theorist Rita Laura Segato explains, it is a structure that transcends sexual violence and the ultimate goal of which is the perpetuation of power: "The term sexual violence is somehow confusing, because although the aggression is carried out by sexual means, the purpose of the aggression is not sexual, but related to power. (...) the libido is oriented here to power and to a mandate of male peers or brothers that demands proof of belonging to the group"<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> BARJOLA, Nerea. *Microfísica sexista del poder. El caso Alcàsser y la construcción del terror sexual (Sexist microphysics of power. The Alcàsser case and the construction of sexual terror)*. Virus editorial, 2018

<sup>2</sup> SEGATO, Rita Laura. *La guerra contra las mujeres (The War Against Women)*, Traficantes de sueños. 2016

The piece *Qué tienes en la cabeza* (What's on your head?) consists of a series of 10 ink drawings remitting to 19th century botanical engravings. They are a taxonomy of weapons from different periods whose use in language is linked to the penis. All of them are accompanied by their definition and colloquial expressions. The weapon expresses the threat of the exercise of force, the reference to the space of male power and, in the colloquial expressions, the acknowledgment that authority, the exercise of force and the male sex are interwoven in everyday life. The artist herself explains how this direct relationship goes back to the very origins of our cultural tradition: "In the Roman Empire, the so called *fascis* was the birch weapon carried by the police of the time, but the same name was also given to the penis. It is also the root of the words fascism and fascination".

In *Polvo eres* (Dust thou art), the phrase written on a blackboard in children's calligraphy: *Este niño será el terror de las nenas* (This boy will be a lady-killer), becomes a sinister prophecy when it is extracted from its original context: the conversations between parents in the park or in family meetings. Olalla Gómez, in a tremendously skilful way, manages to make us take a strange look at normalcy and how it is thought in families, schools and through religion. And it is indeed a frightening exercise. The work's matter is also loaded with allusions, in the words of the artist herself: "that heaped-up dust alludes to the cemetery of accumulated feminicides. Chalks are mostly calcium carbonate, just like bones".

*Hijos sanos* (Healthy sons) represents the culmination of the mechanism at its apex, the end of the food chain, where the aggressors celebrated by the system coexist. *Hijos sanos* (Healthy sons), in allusion to the phrase with which we began: "the aggressors are not sick, they are healthy sons of the patriarchy", acquires an ironic tinge. The perpetrators are no longer normal men, they are celebrated men, and the practice of abuse, sexual terror, blackmail and the use of women are simply a commonplace associated with an idiosyncrasy that has only recently begun to be questioned.

Patriarchy is a distributor of space and time, a user's guide for both men and women, an order to be dismantled. The artist's intentions, that is, to change the focus when talking about patriarchal violence, to look at normalcy with distrust, to answer to all expressions of male authority and to work in order to dismantle this system, crystallise in a hyper-concentrated way in the title of the exhibition: *Revolver*. The only thing that distinguishes this word referring to discomfort from the one that identifies the phallic weapon (*revólver*, in Spanish) is a small written accent. However, when elevated to the collective, "revolver" is also the act of inviting to revolution.