

## The drive to collapse

Capitalism rules, perverts, sustains the wealth of a few and tramples on those who nurture it from the bottom up. It is an individualistic and border-creating system: expelling or using the others does not matter if it contributes to one's own benefit. Capitalism expresses itself at the macro level in the functioning of the global superpowers, as well as at the micro level; in smaller economies and through the fulfilment of personal desire. It is an ever-evolving machinery through which subjects self-exploit and enslave inferior ones. Production and destruction go hand in hand in a process that, according to philosopher Byung-Chul Han, has to do with the Freudian idea of the death drive, that consubstantial tendency of living beings to return to an inert state, which manifests itself as vital anguish and destructive impulse. Capitalism's ruse, explains the Korean thinker, consists in orienting these aggressive forces towards economic growth, in order not only to forget the unconscious fear of death, but also to believe that we can overcome it.

"The more violence you exert, the more powerful you feel. Accumulate killing power produces a feeling of growth, force, power - of invulnerability and immortality (...). Killing protects against death. By killing, you arrest death. An increase in killing power means a reduction in death"<sup>1</sup>

**Ramón Mateos and Olalla G. Valdericeda** tackle the current perverse capitalist scenario and its consequences without anaesthesia. Through a series of multidisciplinary works, they criticise the Western system and the violent accumulation imposed by the law of the strongest. Accumulation of materialities (curtains, figures, coins...) generates a tension that seems to be heading towards an end or drastic change; however, this never comes: the unjust socio-political reality is perpetuated over and over again. How long will the ascending inertia that places us on the brink of collapse last? The answer is not very encouraging, the repetition of the past certifies that we are incapable of learning from it.

The accumulative nature at height is evident in Olalla G. Valdericeda's *Rapere* sculptures. Arranged as totems of adoration, they are made from coins from different countries whose only common link is that of minting birds in their coins, where the majority of them are birds of prey. The word *rapaz* [Spanish for predatory] is derived from the Latin word *rapere*, which means abduction, robbery and ultimately, rape. At the top of each totem pole, the first coin is always a superpower which, at one or several historical moments, has subdued various countries by means of wars, economic sanctions, etc. The most powerful subjugates the weakest in order to increase its strength and enrich its economy, as if it were vampirising its vitality and thus avoiding death. Unlike ancient cultures where totems were dedicated to spiritual figures and animals, these geopolitical structures pay tribute to power, domination and predatory economics. The fragility with which the coins are strung on a thin column, conveys the feeling that everything may collapse at any moment.

In Ramón Mateos's blunt sculptural piece *Tapiz 2024*, the accumulation is expressed in the form of a narrative sequence through figures painted on

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<sup>1</sup> Byung-Chul Han. *Capitalism and death drive*. Polity Press 2022.

curtains, made of aluminium chains, through which the audience has to traverse in order to go through the gallery. The first one corresponds to last year, 2024, and the following ones, in ascending order, allude to the people who have lost their lives trying to cross from North Africa to Europe, arriving through Spain via various routes (the Canary Islands, the Balearic Islands, the Strait of Gibraltar or the Alboran Sea). These figures belong to tragedy segmentations and function as a small story: in 2024, 131 boats disappeared, in which 1,538 underage people died out of a total of 10,457 people who tried to cross and lost their lives. Behind this wild figure we find a final curtain displaying a starry blue flag. Europe, a promised and 'welcoming' land to which migrants head in search of a better future.

The work is itself performative; it is transformed over time, by the audience, every time they move along the chains as they go through the curtains. They gradually carry away the remains, they wear out the piece, whereby the fulfilment of their function within the piece entails disappearance. The material erasure is used as metaphor for the sudden loss of consciousness in spite of the brutality of the event. These figures come from an official report published the end of each year. They are available to everyone and have been covered by the media, but the impact on people's consciences is minimal. Just a few days go by and then we move into something else. They are dramas that are easily 'transferred', they are immediately left behind, just as what happens with figures and records. From the 1st of January 2025, the balance is reset to zero and a new one begins, as if the previous one had never existed. Those who travel in small boats dream of the European Union, a place that can also be crossed over, and which vanishes in a second when they realise the harsh reality they face when they arrive. The presumed solidity and security is diluted. The curtains are reminiscent of the typical rural tapestries that separate the outside from the inside, the public from the private, the outdoors from the shelter. Here the passage is illusory, each barrier crossed only leads to the utmost helplessness.

Once we get past the flag, we come across the second part of G. Valdericeda's *Rapere (Constellation)* project, a sky with metal stars in which, symbolically, we discover the underlying framework that enables the previous fatal figures. This unusual firmament provides a wide-ranging X-ray of the current geopolitical landscape based on the countries represented by the coins with minted birds. Predatory birds, and sometimes aeroplanes, mercilessly capture their quarry, exercising their role as predators. These are the great imperialist powers dominating the world on the basis of their economic interests. Some seizures are obvious because they are mainstream wars broadcasted by the media: Russia eating up Ukraine, or an Israeli jet fighter seizing the Palestinian currency. However, there are less obvious moves that are not based on declared wars, but on commercial reasons, such as France devouring New Caledonia for nickel, Rwanda devouring Congo for gold and coltan, or China devouring Gambia for fishmeal. There are also more complex scenarios in which a third influential actor enters the picture; these do not attack directly, but pull the strings from behind. For example, Sudan's currency eats Sudan's currency because they are engaged in a civil war, but, at the same time, Russia eats Sudan's currency as they are selling them weapons.

In ancient times, wise men guided themselves by the stars in order to decipher universe laws. Today, the guiding principle is the economy, but we are sometimes not even aware of the extent to which it dominates and manipulates us. The display emphasises the distance with which we look at events. Equipped with a standing telescope, the work invites the viewer to look at the 'stars' from its vantage point, as if they were a reality outside one's everyday

life. Moreover, a peek only reveals an isolated fragment of the whole scenario, a strategy similar to that of the mass media: they make visible the wars that affect the superpowers, concealing a large part of the global reality.

Finally, Olalla G. Valdericeda's two pieces from the *Smile* project allude to the processes of productivist self-exploitation that govern our everyday lives. The sculpture consists of a skipping rope made up of two shackles and a chain made of two euro coins that, when placed on the wall, look like two eyes and a sinister smile. In the video that accompanies the piece, the skipping rope is activated by a performer, an older man, jumping endlessly while smiling at all times, even when he stumbles or hurts himself. The conversion of the playful use of the game of skipping rope into a cruel sport for the body reveals the relations between individual and collective identity, as well as a subject who enslaves itself without being aware of it. The frenetic movement in loop and the drive to collapse is never enough, he pursues an insatiable desire constructed by capitalism. Insistence only isolates and harms him, but he is unable to see it: the negativity of pain is eliminated in favour of the positivity of the future satisfaction of created needs<sup>2</sup>. Convinced that one day he will be able to achieve them, he smiles and says to himself 'how happy I am'.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.