

The Blood of Images

On the “Infantry” series by Dariush Hosseini

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Artaud defined “the Theater of Cruelty” as a theater that, through the display of violence, causes “blood of images¹” to spurt into the minds of the spectators. The bond between art and evil is an older and more deeply rooted bond than that of art and the idea of goodness and morality. One of the most serious and profound situations that human beings have had to face universally are the situations which arise from extreme violence (whether by nature or born out of human relations), destruction, havoc, war, and other atrocities; situations that have terrified human beings throughout the ages, originating from the two major institutions of art and religion. The horror of catastrophes has been a major element in need of images, images through which human beings perhaps sought to tame the power of catastrophes, or perhaps through which they had the desire to discharge emotions, and perhaps they were mediums for the artist to testify to an event which is often suppressed and cast aside by the public at large.

Dariush Hosseini's “Infantry” series must be interpreted based on this long-standing artistic desire. In a time when, on the one hand, we are dealing with normalized images of violence in mass media, and on the other hand, a modern and technological form of barbarism emerges in all corner of the world, Dariush Hosseini wants to do his share as an artist whose works are testimony to the horrors of the unspeakable catastrophes of our age. To express the inexpressible, to paint the unpaintable, and to represent the irrepresentable is in fact the main challenge the artist has to address in this series. Dariush Hosseini's established, matured style, the style that dwells on the borderline between figuration and abstraction so as to make use of both, while at the same time not limiting itself to either of these frameworks, has provided him with a multitude of possibilities to execute this challenge on his canvases, without necessarily having to go beyond it. Where we might feel repelled by the images of skeletons and skulls, we will, at a closer look, meet the color patches and the painter's playful use of forms and abstraction.

Such a manner of expression is reminiscent of the Expressionist tradition of painting, a tradition that makes use of all the possibilities of the image to make it express and perhaps exaggerate situations. It is this method that gives this series spontaneity, intensity, excitement, visual

¹ Le sang d'images

activism, and in short, an expressive character. And what is more intense than the body itself? What emotion is more expressive than that which flows through the blood, veins and nerves of the human beings? In a sense, the images of evil have always been expressive and evil has, in fact, always sacrificed the body. From the dark Romanticism of the 19th Century to contemporary Expressionist works, the body, whether through its representation or its nervous intensities, has always been the main source of inspiration for artists. In this series, we come face to face with flesh, skin, veins, nerves, joints, blood and bones, in one word, with the bare-boned reality of the body. This bare reality of the body is also the point where the boundary between animal and human becomes blurred. It is as if humanity is nothing but his/her animal body, and as if just the way a butcher would hang the flesh of a slaughtered animal from a hook to mutilate and skin it, someone has mutilated a human body and poured its entrails on the ground. In "Chain", we are faced with this sort of uncertainty around the images of the bodies, mutilated bodies with a head that looks like the head of a cow and bones which at one instant appear as animal bones and as human skeleton the next.

Quick brushstrokes, stains, simplified figures, blurring of borders between the bodies and the background, combining surfaces across the canvas, are all visual techniques that bring these works close to abstraction. This expressive and abstract narrative has caused the extreme decomposition of the bodies. Yet, it appears as though this time the degradation of figures is the result of the destructive force of the canvas itself. The painter no longer reflects a particular event or experience. It is the thickness of paint and stains that have deformed the bodies and reduced them to a few colored patches. One can see the epitome of such formal games in "Gravity". When these series of semi-abstract paintings are placed side by side, and at the same time because of their titles, they yield to such interpretations. The quasi-abstract works of this series can also be regarded as the fields where the artist freely engages in a visual game, where the painter gleefully puts a red mark next to a white surface and by combining these color surfaces with an opaque grey background, he creates a modern and harmonious painting. The aesthetic pleasure created by these works also reveals a naked truth about the aesthetics of decadence and devastation. It seems that death, destruction and decomposition of the bodies have also become vehicles for aesthetic pleasure. It is right here that these paintings present the viewers with a disturbing question: is there no pleasure in death, in destruction and in decadence? Does being an audience of suffering put us in a position of aesthetic innocence? Is the "catharsis" through which one can interpret this series of paintings meant to purify the viewer from evil and violent emotions or rather to provoke such emotions?

Perhaps where there is a catastrophe, where death looks us in the eyes, there is no opportunity for such reflections. Therefore, the painter seems to have prophetically reconstructed that apocalyptic resurrection in his painting, presenting it before us at this very moment. In most of the paintings, it appears as if a dark background has swallowed up the bodies, as if a mass grave

that had remained hidden for many years has been suddenly eviscerated due to an earthquake or perhaps an apocalyptic event; as though the earth has all of a sudden vomited the bodies left from a genocide or a massacre and the painter has depicted this vomiting at that impossible moment. The corpses are thrown out and the painter shows us the horror of a catastrophe the nature of which we may not know for sure. This series, thus, seems to be a reflection of the non-historical time of the disaster, in the sense that the disaster is not accurately or fully experienced by human beings and it escapes the linear movement of time. The ghosts of the catastrophe keep wandering around and that which has happened before like an incident haunts the time ahead of us; as if the end-time event has already happened and it reveals itself from the heart of these images.

“Infantry”, a title that points to the humiliation and disregard of countless human beings who have always been pawns to the rulers, aims to paint a more tangible, less metaphysical picture of the apocalyptic event than we tend to imagine. It is not merely about religious prophecies on the resurrection from graves, but wherever an infantry falls prey to the politicians and militarists, we face the same apocalyptic event. The state of the infantry is such that human beings are reduced to flesh and bones, a state that is not unique to the battlefield and its military arrays; a state which, inspired by Dariush Hosseini's series, one can call “the infantry state”.