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## **Carlos Aires en la Gallery Aeroplastics Contemporary en Bruselas: I´ve got you under my skin**

Publicado 10-10-2011

Hasta el 22 de noviembre de 2011.

“Oh lord, won’t you buy me a Mercedes Benz?”. This lament could have been addressed to the crucified Jesus, hung on the wall and painted in the deep black used by Mercedes for certain of its models. Nonetheless, it isn’t Janis Joplin to whom the work refers, but rather Chet Baker and the documentary made about him by Bruce Weber in 1988. Between the arms of the torture victim is spread an inscription composed of light-bulbs, a wink to signage at a fairground attraction: “Let’s Get Lost”. The entire exhibition – the second by Carlos Aires at Aeroplastics – is inhabited by this duality between darkness and light, the evocation of a baroque religious art typical of the South of Spain from where the artist originates, as well as multiple musical references, pop or jazz. A triptych composed of gilded vinyl discs suggesting as much Bosch’s “Garden of Earthly Delights” as Rubens’ “Descent from the Cross” in the cathedral of Antwerp. Damned souls on the one side, those saved on the other: all pass through the square marked “death”, just as the skulls occupying the base of the composition recall. To each religion its emblem, be it Christ on the cross or Mickey Mouse.

The installation *Llorando* is described by Carlos Aires as autobiographical, even as a self-portrait. It also constitutes the pivot point of the exhibition. The sculpture of Jesus taken down from the cross, comes from a village in the vicinity of Barcelona, famous for its religious statuary. The artist’s intervention is at once discrete and spectacular: the body has been covered in gold leaf, and the wound, traditionally situated lateral at the left ribcage, has been slightly displaced to the level of the heart. On the wall, a multitude of knives held fixed by magnets, fall upon the Christ like tears of compassion or, more prosaically, like the rain that – to the eyes of a Southern Spaniard – so well characterizes the Belgian climate irrespective of season. “Cry me a river”, “How deep is your love”, “You cut me open”, “Open your heart to me”... are some of the song titles engraved on the blades. The rapport between Love and Death is the oeuvre’s true subject, just as in the installation *How Deep is Your Love*, with 54 knives and as many love-song titles in the form of a heart.

A voluntary exile of longstanding, domiciled in Antwerp, Carlos Aires now rediscovers the history and culture of his native Spain, but also the dark period of the Civil War and Francoism. The installation Luto iberico makes clear reference to this: the tricornered hats moulded in ceramic to serve as pots for exotic plants, are juxtaposed with archival photographs, portraits of members of the Civil Guard. The ensemble evokes a patio, typical of architecture of the South.

Finally, if Carlos Aires cannot imagine life without music, the same can also be said regarding his death. After I'm gone comprises a casket – his own – made using crates destined to transport his works. A monitor streams the text of a song by Jimmy Scott, engraved on the inside surfaces. The inscription seems to have been filmed in the interior of a closed box, thanks to an infra-red camera – a technique that cannot but remind us of his controversial video from 2004, Mister Hyde (2004), made in both a haunted fairground castle and in a backroom. As for the choice of Jimmy Scott, it is not a matter of pure chance: his extraordinary woman-like voice (a consequence of affliction with Kallmann Syndrome), involuntarily makes of him a kind of transgenre icon – a theme that would no doubt be very much to the artist's liking.

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