



War and civilisation

I remember a video by Heimo Zobering which shows a sniper in action. The camera is located inside the room where he has taken up position, so we never see the target he is aiming at. With mechanical spontaneity, the sniper repeats the same gestures: he loads, waits and shoots; he reloads, waits again, and shoots again. The scene appears insignificant. But, there is a life at the end of each bullet. A life which is ebbing away.

War around the world is an everyday activity that kills millions of people. We talk about war when the United States spring into action and all the media follow in their wake. But war is found in many places. Although we do not even know about some of them because there is also a class system in war. Africa is scarred by wars. Three million people died in the Congo over a five-year period. How many First-World citizens have this war in their thoughts? The last genocide of the twentieth century took place in Rwanda, while the rest of the world looked passively on, beginning with the UN which, once again, showed its powerlessness to act. They say that an international peacekeeping force of 6,500 soldiers would have sufficed to prevent the genocide. And, at the present time, in the Sudan, there are 700,000 people trapped in the region of Darfur without any access to healthcare, and the world fails to show concern about them. And Uganda, and Chechenia and Kashmir and many other conflicts.

Violence is a component of human experience, with this difference in potential that determines all relationships between people –which Michel Foucault called power– running through it. Ritual and word have been the two traditional instruments against violence. Ritual helps sublimate it, although at times tension spills over and becomes a catalyst. The word is the best antidote to violence, until demagoguery erupts to work in favour of the expansion of violence. No matter how much Jean-Jacques Rousseau branded man as completely irresponsible, condemning social relationships as being to blame for all evils, something profound links man and violence. After all, the desire to survive compelled him to give over part of his freedom to the State (Hobbes) and to control his urges in the process of civilisation (Freud), even at the cost of an undeniable unease which provokes recurrent outbreaks of a violence which never diminishes.

Among the forms of human violence are the wars which, since time immemorial, have pitted tribes, communities, cities, nations and empires (us against others) against one another in a fight for land, water, wealth or simply the desire for power. War has had several manifestations throughout history according to the technological potential and the macrophysics of power of each moment. War entered the modern age as an extension of politics by other means and, in the twentieth century, wars on a massive scale were waged, which mobilised the entire citizenry and led to the growing involvement of the rearguard in the conflict. Besides mass warfare, the century has contributed crimes of logic (Albert Camus), wars of mass destruction (and as a –positive– consequence, the nuclear deterrent) and, in its final period, the privatisation of war (with an appreciable loss of the State's monopoly of violence) and the spread of weapons of mass destruction.

According to Ramón Lobo in *El País* an ancient from the Acholi tribe in the devastated country of Uganda said, "Peace occurs when a man is only afraid of snakes". However, in order to build peace you



Prologues by Josep Ramoneda to the CCCB's catalogues

have to look war in the face. Only then, by ceasing to rely on the good conscience of the fine pacifist spirit, will humanity be able to make war a permanent taboo one day.

At War is an exhibition which seeks to show the imagery of twentieth century warfare. It is not an attempt to issue a moral sanction, or to stage a militant exhibition. Quite simply, it aims to set out the mental construction process which leads a society to war and mobilises its citizens around it, the cultural constructions which go with it, and the marks it leaves on the experience and memory of peoples.

The exhibition has not been prompted by recent events. It was devised and planned before society's mass mobilisations against the war in Iraq. Although it is to be hoped that this return to politics will have repercussions on the exhibition, resulting in the more active and motivated attitude of the visitors. At the end of the day, an exhibition, like all work involving creation, is what it is and what its recipients make it.