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curator for the installation Listen for the Beside War festival 2016

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Review on Lang Ea  
translated from Italian

Lang Ea is an artist whose talent is manifested through the use of various artistic media: painting, sculpture, cast, installations. The attitude in experimentation, together with her unconventional biographical path, has ensured that the works of this New Zealand artist of Cambodian origin reflect in a deep way her personal stories.

For example we could talk about the power of *The Coming of Darkness* series, whose refinement in the use of colors and in an elegant decorativism, directly derive from Lang Ea's experiences. Her trip to China in 2005 gave her the opportunity to get in touch with the works of Chinese painting masters, of which she admires the compositional minimalism, the use of few colors and often the monochrome, and the perfect fusion between painting and canvas. Even the Islamic Art contribution was fundamental to the conception of *The Coming of Darkness*, whose production has been extended in a wide time span: 2005-2015; ten years in which the artist, in addition to producing several works, meditated on the dramatic significance of the war through the medium of painting. The preciousness of the lines and the explosive use of color in Islamic Art are manifested in this series of paintings characterized by a strong formal liquidity: the figures seem to melt and become one with the background. Especially in the so-called 'red series' the violence of war emerges through the use of this intense and symbolic color; It has been adopted not so much from the will of a direct reference, as an instinctive approach to painting.

Use a single color means literally blow up the canvas, giving emphasis to the dark silhouette who crowd the space to tell the horror of the conflict.

The instinct and expressionism characterize on one hand the New Zealand artist's painting, on the other hand they're the counterpart to her more rational and analytical part, which has the task of ordering the ideas and develop the work organically.

In the work *Broken Toys* the war is seen through the eyes of children: the game, as an object or a situation, usually joins pleasant thoughts, but now it turns into tragedy. Lang Ea's sculptures are scary wrinkled monsters crumpling on themselves, which prevent the children even that little joy expected from a game. These toys are bearers of death, and they can no longer preserve the purity of childhood, indeed, they seem to favor the wrong and unnatural acceleration of the consciousness of a violent and ruthless world. They are transfigured in their essence, becoming the symbol of a disturbed childhood and of a change from which there is no turning back. These toys are also a mirror of artist's personal stories, whose childhood was marked by the horrors of war, in particular by the bloody genocide committed during the Khmer Rouge regime.

The violence of the conflict and the inevitable negative consequences that they pose are the direct perpetrators of a denied childhood, devoid of any stability that each child needs to grow peacefully.

*Listen*, an evocative installation composed of twenty casts of human heads and one ear, rather than telling the tragedy of war, it seems first to launch a message of peace and hope. A world without conflicts can't exist; conflict, confrontation, behaviors are inherent in the human soul, and they, according to their bound, can turn into something bigger and dangerous.

While the conflict, mostly intended as a confrontation, it is necessary and healthy for the development of ideas and situations, we shouldn't be missing the ability to listen to our interlocutor, and in general who is the bearer of a different thought culture.

The twenty casts of human heads, stacked one on the other, lie on the ground in all their heaviness. Their eyes are closed as if a fatal sleep had clouded their minds: their eyes symbolize man's stupidity toward war and its terrible consequences; a dramatic event of which we probably do not fully understand the gravity, and to which we seem to have become accustomed. Blindness is a justification to our deliberate impotence toward the horror of war.

Not only the closed eyes characterize physiognomy of these heads; in fact there are no ears. These human fragments are closed in themselves, isolated from the world, hopelessly distant from it, and yet they are here, still, motionless. Just the cast of an ear, isolated from the rest of the body, is positioned in front of the twenty heads as to reclaim its function. It is the importance of listening which means respect toward the Other and consequently the removal of any conflict.

The ear demands attention because of its isolation in front of this multitude of human simulacra, deprived of any characterization; the cast medium, albeit in its required adherence to real data, is separated from this through an uncanny approximation.

The twenty heads doesn't represent a particular reality, but the universality of a situation that can no longer been ignored. These heads are the symbol of the whole humanity, a humanity which is slowly losing its identity if it is not willing to listen.

Perpetrating a conflict means to destroy the Other and then ourselves, our essence and our dignity as men.

The universality of this message, which on one hand expresses all the pain related to the war, but on the other begs for respect and peace, expresses itself through the particular medium used by the artist, and through the special collocation that this installation requires. *Listen* is a work of art that can be received within a more aseptic area such as the museum, thanks to its formal and powerful content, but when exposed in a more specific context, in direct relation to the marks left by the war, it can amplify the intensity of its message.

Val Dogna trenches are the right place to accommodate this installation of Lang Ea, in order to give life to an experience in which all senses are involved in an elegant synesthesia.

*Listen* is in a sense a *memento* of what we were, what we are and what we will be destined to become if we don't take care of other people and do not listen to them. It is a work of art that involves us closely, that impresses us and touch us; calling for attention, yelling into their deafening silence, just like that ear isolated from the heads.

We have to listen each other and find our deep essence.