

WALK WITH ME
by José Luis Sánchez Rull



MANUEL SOLANO
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WALK WITH ME

The worst questionings, the ones born of devastating bereavements, had her filling a notebook on the death of the musician, the death of the gold-seeker, the death of the inventor, the death of the great atheist believer, the death of the devout but limited believer, the death of the cynic, the surprise at death of the intelligent utopian, the indignation at death of the misled fighter, and how each of them faced up to the end with scruple, astonishment, courage, consciousness of the void, furious disappointment, desolate faith, quailing flesh.

*UNFORGIVING YEARS, Victor Serge*¹

1. THE VICTORY OF GOOD OVER EVIL

WAR: Sinead O'Connor buries her career aware of the self-inflicted wound she administers like an angelic Lucretia. Manuel Solano reenacts her performance with full knowledge of the consequences it had on her career, sending her to the killer's den, which is exactly where he rather be. The sweet and beautiful presence of a young man, elegant and angry, conveys the distance between himself and the emulation of a princess who sings, talks, screams: justice for all – over the powers of delusion. But he is not Sinead; he is the replica of her, a replica as sad and fragile as a photo of the pope. Tear the photo, rip it apart and send it to hell. The figures of control have spent serious time taking care of the children, taking care of mummifying their evolution. The gazes of a hundred thousand viewers soil the original image, it fades, the distance increases, each time a little farther away from the initial spark that detonates the fury in the performer. Here, the disguise and distance are denied, the incarnation of the exterminating angel is complete. Childhood, that jewel beyond all Price, that treasure house of memories?²

2. BELIEVE

But no, I can't be sure if you have been paying attention, have you noticed how elegant I am? Elegant? Don't you know I exist in your mind and that I seek my revenge? And that for the love of God Montresor, yes for the love of God I will repay? I will repay. Elegant like the aristocratic leader of the Heaven's Gate cult flying out of this world; ethereal-all-spirit into the cosmic truth (absolute negativity) – eerie mystical doom – But I'm still here and what am I supposed to do? Sit around and wait for you? Well, I can't do that, I would rather turn my eyes the color of silver and jump on your cranium repeatedly, over and over until I can smear you like peanut butter on toast, French-toast-you and swallow you hole with my cornflakes ... but I wouldn't be jumping on anything for you are not there, if you were your head wouldn't be there, for your head is like an egg shell alone, without a yolk, no spirit, not even in the shape and texture of viscous matter, I wouldn't be jumping on anything, see? Well, I can't do that and there is no turning back. *Vestigia nulla retrorsum*. Do you believe in life after love? I don't want to die like an asshole ... I want you there holding my hand, yes, yes you fucker. And for that I WILL STOP AT NOTHING. No one shall make me deny my faith. I will never believe, nor will I pretend to believe, that two and two make five, nor will I on any pretences admit the existence of two-sided triangles.³

3. EL CUERPO PERDIDO

Now I am walking in an exaggerated manner with my neon sign facing the interior. It needs to read and feel the power of those undeniable truths; mercy, pity, love and God. I need to sense its presence like the sun on my back when I turn around to meet you. Here you are, hello, I can't speak, I speak to you through my wounds. Are you afraid? This is me after I take my human mask off in front of a missile-burnt-tip-pink-dildo out of Beyond the Planet of the Apes. Quite a spectacle, don't you think? My tears? This is not Kelly and McCarthy's Fresh-Acconci this is Acconci GROPING AT BODY; GROPING AT MIND; GROPING AT CULTURE. The spectacle is the feeling of the real and the things you say through your work are for you to say. My mind wavers in weariness; perhaps we should neither punish nor absolve (...) Teach me, for I do not know. Lord they are thy little innocents. And I, Innocent, I do not know.⁴



Manuel Solano, details from *El Cuerpo Que Encontré* #2, 2015, images courtesy of the artist.

4. EL CUERPO QUE ENCONTRÉ

"I am a simple man that has suffered much. I think I have suffered more than Christ. I love life and I want to live, I want to cry, but I can't ... I feel pain so great in my soul, a pain that frightens me. My soul is sick. My soul, not my spirit. The doctors do not understand my illness."

*The diary of Vaslav Nijinsky*⁵

Sigourney Weaver. She will never find love, he said, not until she jumps into the very asshole of death, very well inside its asshole: until she finds an utero of fear. Then maybe she will find it.⁶ "Well?" he said. "Are you looking?" My eyes were still closed. I was in my house. I knew that. But I didn't feel like I was inside anything. "It's really something," I said.

*Who then devised the torment? Love.
Love is the unfamiliar Name
Behind the hands that wove
The intolerable shirt of flame
Which human power cannot remove.
We only live, only suspire
Consumed by either fire or fire.*

*Little Gidding, T.S. Eliot*⁷

José Luis Sánchez Rull
CDMX 2017

1 *Unforgiving Years*, Victor Serge. Haunted by the ghosts of his past and his fears for the future the main character of Victor Serge's novel finds himself amidst a passionate adventure where within the flames of a burning body despair gives to, against all odds, hope. The cover of The New York Review of Books (nyrb) classics edition shows a gigantic figure made out of flammable material, burning, about to collapse. Darkness falls and one can imagine that from the ashes of this horrible scarecrow, embers like bright red eyes will stare at us with the promise or the threat of a new era, of a mysterious and new world.

2 *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rainer Maria Rilke. In the work of Manuel Solano a certain search for purity prevails, this idea of purity finds its nesting grounds in childhood, an idea which Rilke insists upon without irony or cynicism, without the knowledge perhaps of the psychopath child whose playground has turned him into a horrible monster fed on darkness and cruelty, circumcised by the hand of trauma.

3 *Novel of the Black Seal*, Arthur Machen. There is an absolute mystery which precedes the existence of homo-sapiens and it doesn't take kindly to that species. Its horrible, it's the very speech of hell to human ears and it is not recognized in anthropomorphic monsters. One has to deny a whole structure of beliefs in order to accept the mere existence of the supernatural, a supernatural that in the words (and well aware I am of introducing a quote within a note for a quote in the manner and well beneath the use of this "second voice" by the late David Foster Wallace in Infinite Jest) of Mark E. Smith, the leader of the great post-punk band The Fall states about Arthur Machen: "He lives in this alternative world: the real occult's not in Egypt, but in the pubs of the East End and the sinking boats of the Thames – on your doorstep, basically. I know what he means." ... and yet the terms that define an oppressive reality that swallows whole the imagination and spits its bones into the catholic wells of the stillborn babe shall be constantly put into question.

4 *The Children's Crusade*, Max Schwob. I can only expand by quoting again, now from the introduction to Schwob's work from the 1929 facsimile edition snatched from the Harvard University Library, to demonstrate the multiplicity of voices and intent embodied in the body of Manuel Solano's work: "Full of sympathy with the child crusaders whose faith centuries ago led them to slavery and death, he made himself imaginatively, now their friend a wandering ignorant brother, now a leper, their pathetic convert, now one of themselves ... They had brought him from horror to the simplest love, and they had given him power to breathe into a delicately original form the tender spirit of the Children's Crusade." I venture to advance a somehow more perverted and beautiful version of The Children's Crusade in the work of Henry Darger which establishes a conversation with popular culture and an extremely personal vision, not unlike Manuel Solano's pop culture narratives and within the drama of a hiper- subjective sense of salvation and within Darger's extensive writing I quote him from the entrails of his creative process: "I wanted to conquer this inferno and I firmly believed I was and am the only one who could really conquer it."

5 *The Diaries of Vaslav Nijinsky*. A jewel of interpretation, beautiful as a gazelle in heat, rubbing himself against the boards of the stage in masturbation; narcissistic and pious, scandalized all in the performance of the *Prélude à l'après - midi d'un Faune*, alive, magnificent. His diaries are a testimony of great importance to mankind and so are the works of Manuel Solano.

6 *Cathedral*, Raymond Carver. Just as in the text for "*El cuerpo perdido*" where I alluded to the practice of Bruce Nauman (alone in the studio trying to make sense of what an artist does) and the sinister sing-song on one of Victor Hannibal Acconci's performances; in the following text ("*El cuerpo que encontré*") I go along the path of the words of the aging beast Marlon Brando reciting strange poetry to his young mistress in Bertolucci's Last Tango in Paris, leading to that most wonderful of short stories where a broken man who has lost all faith meets at his home with a friend of his wife (his home is as barren as his soul notwithstanding the presence of a wife), he is a blind man who after sharing several glasses of scotch and a "number" of strong weed asks him to describe to him a Cathedral. The drone of a documentary on the subject emanates from the television, the blind man asks what a Cathedral is, the man does his best and his best is not enough to describe a Cathedral. The blind man proposes an experiment using a rough piece of paper and a thick marker telling him to draw one exactly as it appears in his mind's eye, as the blind man's hand fastens upon his... all artists should be blind this way.

7 *Little Gidding*, T. S. Eliot. This lines from his Four Quartets stand alone as a reminder of what it is to be alive. ("What we call the beginning is often the end/ And to make an end is to make a beginning.")

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Manuel Solano (b.Ciudad Satélite, 1987): I grew up a misfit in the suburbs of Mexico City where, from an early age, my gender ambiguity and artistic temperament set me apart from other kids and fueled my impulse to express myself through artistic creation. As a teenager, I realized making art would be my means to bridge the inescapable gap I found between myself and the world. In early 2014, having been denied access to retroviral treatment, I became blind for life as a result of an HIV-related infection. It seemed like I would have to renounce my artistic career dreams to become the kind of blind individual my world expected me to be; but I, a born rebel, determined to make more art than ever before. My work has since been shown at Galería Karen Huber and Museo de Arte Carrillo Gil (CDMX) and been acquired by the Luciano Bennetton Foundation (Venice) and the Florida Institute of Contemporary Art (Miami).

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

José Luis Sánchez Rull (b.1964) is an artist, professor and performer based in México. He holds a BFA from Pratt Institute (BKLYN N.Y.). He has taught for many years both production and theory workshops at the National School of Painting, Sculpture and Engraving (E.N.P.E.G. "LA Esmeralda"). From 2011 to 2016 he was a member of the National Creators System (S.N.C.A.) Conaculta - Fonca. His work has been shown nationally and internationally, in group and solo and with the collective G:H:E (Gabinete Homo Extraterrestre). Amongst his exhibitions can be included: RADIOACTIVE CEMETERY!!!, Museo del Chopo CDMX 2014/THE FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE, Anonymous Gallery CDMX 2012/THE PROVERBS OF HELL, Iago, Oaxaca 2011 & with the G:H:E; DESTROY ALL YOUR HUMANITY, The Mistake Room, Los Angeles, California 2017.

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