

ARTFORUM

Bayrol Jimenez

GALERIE DUKAN | SAINT-OUEN

In early 2012, the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris opened "Resisting the Present: Mexico 2000/2012," an unexpected selection of work by young Mexican artists that narrowly, although knowingly and playfully, skirted clichéd representations of the country. A skewed idea of Mexico has become commonplace in France, particularly in the wake of the trial of Florence Cassez, a Frenchwoman accused of complicity with a Mexican kidnapping gang. The exhibition included a large-scale wall drawing in mostly red acrylic by Bayrol Jimenez (based in Oaxaca, Mexico, he was a resident at La Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris in early 2012), who debuted his solo show "The Roads of Devotion" shortly after the museum opening.

Jimenez realized the title works of his show, a series of eleven framed drawings in ink, watercolor, colored pencils, acrylic, and pigment on paper, in 2011. Hung edge to edge, the equally sized works stretch more than twenty-seven feet and are legible as a continuous image, like an ancient narrative frieze or a religious parable illuminated in stained glass. Working with the precision and brilliant color of a tattooist wielding his needle, Jimenez descends into the recent history and current affairs of his country, mining art-historical and religious references as he goes. In this work, portraits of former Mexican generals and presidents as well as contemporary celebrities and narco-traffickers are punctuated by detailed renditions of fantastical rock formations, abstract shapes, modern weapons, and a wrecked car. Jimenez carefully depicts each element like a relic, an icon on the postapocalyptic road of devotion.



Doom Heads in the Form of a Totem, 2012, details four decapitated heads, one atop another, in black gouache. With the image seeping off the paper, Jimenez continues his depiction of the barren ground that supports the macabre tower on the gallery wall. He allows the long sheet of heavy paper to curl at the bottom and rest on the floor, hinting at possible sculptural or architectural forms. The heads are based on Caravaggio's David with the Head of Goliath, Medusa, and The Beheading of St. John the Baptist, as well as an unfortunate victim of narco-trafficking warfare. They are topped by a blackened silhouette of a human skull, a cynical nod to the symbolic language of the academic still life.

Heads Versus, 2012, is an imposing two-part drawing in ink, gouache, and acrylic paint on paper and the wall. While the dark circular composition that frames a severed head with a pool of black ink and four outstretched arms bearing weapons, money, and other objects exudes a totemic presence, the image on the facing wall reads as a recent trace of an occult ritual. Realized in red and black ink, the eye sockets of a larger-than-life-size head bleed into the form of a ladder. The open mouth spews black pigment down the wall and onto the floor, pooling like blood or an oil spill. A piece of bone-

PERES PROJECTS

colored sponge rests at the edge of the dark expanse, a plastic eye positioned mockingly in one of its round cavities.

Jimenez's work recalls that of Daniel Guzmán and Dr. Lakra in its embrace of drawing and the appropriation of contemporary and historical Mexican iconography. But whereas Guzmán has recently turned to Aztec symbolism, and Dr. Lakra incorporated African totems into a wall drawing shown last year at the Drawing Center in New York, Jimenez infuses his work with the weighty legacies of Catholicism and European art history. Straddling the Atlantic, he reveals the often strained dialogue between former colonists and erstwhile colonies. The ongoing battle for cultural sovereignty is played out in a tangle of diplomatic rows, media depictions, and the powerfully direct language of drawing.

— Lillian Davies