

# PSJM equates commercial and religious propaganda at the Barjola Museum

“Slogans” ironizes the “bombarding” of contemporary advertising in the setting of Trinity Chapel.

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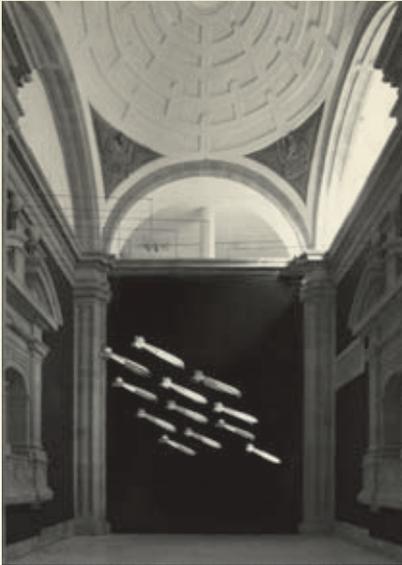
This is not the first time that Pablo San José (Mieres, 1969) and Cynthia Viera (Las Palmas, 1973) merge the language of advertising and war imagery with an entertaining, spectacular and at the same time devastating critical spirit. These two Spaniards, members of the active team of artists PSJM, take yet another step in the perverse, enlightening relation of their work with the universe of consumer capitalism, brand fetishism and the mercantile aesthetic in *Slogans*, an installation that is to occupy the Juan Barjola Museum’s Trinity Chapel until 11<sup>th</sup> October. On this occasion, however, they take a step backward into the historical past and not forward into a possible future as they did, for instance, in one of their more recent projects, *Corporate Armies*.

A major factor in this decision has been the scenic and symbolic power

that, as in so many other cases of specific interventions, the setting imposed by Trinity Chapel, which not only provides a glaring contrast with the pop aesthetic of the pieces that

make up *Slogans*, but which, above all, amplifies and confers greater density to the meaning of the work: a set of light boxes with the stylized outline of projectiles which, like ad-





vertising signs, carry a slogan as payload. These include some of the best-known texts heading the campaigns of some of the most powerful multinationals in sportswear, telecommunications services or cosmetics.

Hung at the same angle and at varying depths below the dome of the Trinity Chapel altar, the barrage of slogans rounds off an obvious illustration of the metaphor coined to describe the aggressiveness and intensity of advertising strategies: an authentic bombardment, like those that any inhabitant of this planet suffers in this day and age at any time and in any place. The evocation of the messages and caricatures with which projectiles are often adorned before being launched or dropped,

with an element of jest and another of trickery, they add an even more sarcastic reading to a array in which PSJM once more show that the advertising aesthetic can, in a perverse looping of its techniques, serve perfectly well to announce a caustic reflection against itself.

Without any major addition, *Slogans* would function by itself, as is, in any context. But the installation takes on a distinct resonance, much deeper in semantic and ideological terms, in its specific relation with its location in the Barjola Museum: a deconsecrated religious building that, as the introductory reflection that PSJM have inscribed in the Barjola Museum atrium and which almost boasts the rank of yet another component of the installation recalls, was built at the height of the Catholic Counter-Reformation; that is, as an active centre for the dissemination of religious propaganda in which all Catholic art, from paintings to architecture or oratory, was concentrated in what is perhaps the greatest advertising campaign in history. And one of the most successful.

In this setting, the succinct, sonorous phrases of advertising jargon end up establishing an analogous signification to those of the religious code. Written in the *lingua franca* of the age, English, with the same universalizing intention with which the

Church employed Latin, the slogans are clothed in resonances that evoke prayer and the different modalities of liturgical language.

But there is one more twist to the play that PSJM proposes on this occasion: the analogy drawn between *an advertising bombardment* and a *doctrinal bombardment* becomes a contrast, as well as a reflection on the condition of modernity and post-modernity, when the exhibition invites one to ponder the distinct nature of the world that each type of propaganda reflects. On the one hand, that of values based on a unitary vision of the world, solidly founded on religious faith and on an evangelizing goal that aspires to cover the entire world; on the other, that of a nihilistic, despairing stage of history in which the only universal values seem to be those embodied in the sermons of trademarks.

Although what is common to both below this great difference may perhaps be the most caustic distillation of *Slogans*: in both cases, in that of the religious sermon as well as in that of capitalist advertising, the universalizing, ecumenical aspiration of the message and its apparent goals—saving the soul, improving life—harbour other aims, equally unconfessable and even unformulatable in the perverse languages of their respective artefacts of propaganda.