

Poetic Notes of Violence

'The term kanaimá refers both to a mode of ritual mutilation and killing and to its practitioners. The term also can allude to a more diffuse idea of active spiritual malignancy, in existence from the beginning of time, that consumes the assassins. This book is about those killers and the reasons they give for their actions.'

So does anthropologist Neil Whitehead begin his book, *Dark Shamans: Kanaimá and the Poetics of a Violent Death*, about his research and personal encounter with an obscure shamanic movement in the Amazon forest of Guyana.

Based on Whitehead's research and recounts, the olfactory installation *Poetic Notes of Violence* takes up the difficult theme of a poetic aspect of violence. Not in the sense of a discursive reflection, but as a sensorial response: a visual and not least olfactory interpretation.

Inspired by the structure and methodic of perfume making, a process which involves the blending and composing of base notes, middle notes and head notes, the current installation thus functions as an initiation of a bigger project: a base note in a larger sensorial composition.

The olfactory element, however, is not an extraneous element to Whitehead's book and its subject. Since the kanaimá, the so called dark shamans, do not only practice a mode of ritual killing, but also a ritualistic consummation of their victims' putrefied dead bodies. This is done by locating the graves of the victims via:

"the akaikalak aroma of the kanaima. The smell of rotten pineapples that the corpse of the victim is said to give off and that is 'honeylike' to the kanaimas. The juices of putrefaction are said to taste like honey both because of their tepusine (sweetness) and because the grave is "tasted" with the help of a yé (ritual stick) in the same way as a stick is used when eating honey from a hive. Other metaphors also are used by kanaimàs to explain this key moment: that of anteaters licking and sucking ant and termites from their mounds, or of plants sucking up food through their roots."

The kanaimà as shamans and worshippers of Makunaima, the devine creator of animals and plants, thus commits these violent mutilations, killings and the consummation of their victims according to a poetic paradigm of upholding a cosmological equilibrium:

"ensuring that the bounty of Makunaima is balanced by a sacrifice of human nourishment that feeds kaikusi-yumu (lord jaguar) and nourishes koumima (the garden spirit)."

As a sensorial interpretation of this poetic violence, an olfactory composition has been created for the installation consisting of pineapple juice, essential oils of ginger and vetiver, and tinctures of beeswax and indole. Spread around the room, this blend of natural smells lingers with a peculiar combination of a 'honeylike' sweet scent, the earthy smell of roots, plus a hint of the upsetting stench of rot and putrefaction. A bouquet of notes provoked and bound by the use of indole in particular, an aromatic organic compound found naturally in many flowers but as well in decaying cadavers.