

Memorial

Artist: Gerardo Goldwasser

Curators: Laura Malosetti Costa and Pablo Uribe

*I believe that all weapons are disastrous. I am a pacifist.
I'm not crazy. I believe that no war is justified.
There are no victories, there are only defeats.
Every victory is a defeat from the moment one man kills another.*
Jorge Luis Borges¹

In 2022, from Uruguay, Gerardo Goldwasser's work proposed at the 59th Venice Biennale for the whole world a critical reflection that brings to the foreground a basic but complex aspect of human societies: the ways of disguising and exhibiting bodies, of disciplining and distinguishing them. The issue raised by his work refers to the ways in which human beings conceive themselves as *personae* by constructing their appearance, their way of coming on stage every day of their lives: the etymology of the concept refers to classical theater, "actor's mask" would be its first meaning.² This mask is at the origin of the culture of dressing.³

Since his first solo exhibition in 1985 at the Goethe Institute in Montevideo, Goldwasser's vast and recognized trajectory has been linked to tailoring: as a craft, as a form of drawing subject to specific rules, as a repetition, and as an institution of norms, all linked to memory and trauma traced back to his family history. His work is constructed on the basis of a German tailoring handbook inherited from his grandfather, a Jewish tailor who managed to survive the Nazi concentration camp of Buchenwald thanks to his trade, making uniforms, and thus arrived in Uruguay.

A constant in Goldwasser's work is the overwhelming presence of the absence of color. In this installation for the Parque de la Memoria, the wall entirely occupied by layered black cloth cutouts and the tailor's molds arranging every chink appear as a black nightmare that dialogues with the *Monumento a las Víctimas del Terrorismo de Estado*. A long series of left sleeves occupying the entrance corridor proposes a critical allusion to the will of absolute domination implicit not only in the design of the uniforms, but also in the salute of the uniformed Nazi crowds (*El saludo*, 2010-2023). The space of the perfectly empty room highlights the intolerable and uniformizing pressure of the molds on its walls.

¹Translation of his reflection in French included in the film *Jorge Luis Borges. Una vita di poesia* (1998) by Fernando Arrabal.

²"Máscara de actor" in the original (Joan Corominas y José Pascual. *Diccionario crítico etimológico castellano e hispánico*. Madrid, Gredos, 1985, p. 2250) and "actor's mask" in English (Oxford Reference. Retrieved November 2, 2023, from:

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803100319947>)

³ Cfr. Valerie Steele. *Fashion Theory. Hacia una teoría cultural de la moda*. Buenos Aires, Ampersand, 2018. María Isabel Baldasarre in a recent publication has defined it as "un complejo entramado de discursos, imágenes, prendas, maneras de lucirlas, de producirlas, de adquirirlas, de nombrarlas" [a complex web of discourses, images, garments—ways of wearing, producing, acquiring, and naming them]. *Bien vestidos. Una historia visual de la moda en Buenos Aires 1870-1914*. Buenos Aires, Ampersand, 2021, p. 11.

In a new context of global crisis caused by climate change, post-pandemic times, the proliferation of new wars, and the danger of extinction of our species—the only one capable of extinguishing all others, of extinguishing everything—this exhibition of strong humanist and pacifist character confronts us with past and present projects that seek to transform human beings into infallible, punctual, orderly, obedient machines, builders and at the same time destroyers of everything that is not useful or disciplinable.

Gerardo Goldwasser's *Memorial* is an invitation to remember and also to reflect on the doubts which pervade the sciences, the arts and the myths of our time—in black and white, as in that anonymous tailoring handbook he inherited from his grandfather, with no edition data. It also invites us to look critically at the present and to imagine new ways of situating ourselves in a future perceived to be threatened by new wars, ideologies and uniformizing and destructive technologies.