

ARTFORUM



Carlo Gabriele Tribbioli, *Bishamonten (Monte Nimba)*, 2018, silk screen on ink-jet print and glass, 33 x 24 3/8".

Carlo Gabriele Tribbioli

FEDERICA SCHIAVO GALLERY | MILAN

It is not easy to face the questions posed by Carlo Gabriele Tribbioli's latest documentary film, which he created in collaboration with director and philosophy researcher Federico Lodoli. *Frammento 53* (Fragment 53) (2015) is uncomfortable not because it confronts the subject of war, but because of the interpretation and method Tribbioli has chosen. The film was the core of the exhibition "*Intorno l'altare di un dio sconosciuto*" (Toward the Altar of a God Unknown), which consisted of three other parts, developed from research materials the artist collected with Lodoli for the film: eight portraits of statues from the series "*Altari*" (Altars), 2018; the book *Towards the Altar of a God Unknown: Liberian Notes* (2018); and a catalogue of everyday objects, maps, and notebooks, titled *Archivio 2011–2016*, 2018, displayed in a structure the artist has designed.

Shot in Liberia, *Frammento 53* presents seven rough interviews with warlords involved in the civil wars fought in this small West African nation beginning in 1989. With neither anger nor compassion, the combatants describe atrocious acts—the tragic truth is that under conditions of extreme violence, feelings are not useful for survival. Tribbioli and Lodoli act as impartial and nonjudgmental listeners, and close-ups replace any possible dialogue, focusing on faces, scars, and bodies, whose physicality is examined amid austere settings, sometimes closed off and at night. Images of warlike divinities from ancient civilizations make up the film's opening section, representing conflict as a universal cosmological force and foreshadowing the testimonies of the warlords. The film does not explore the economic, political, or historical aspects of the conflict, which are entrusted to the aforementioned book, available for perusal at the gallery. Similarly, in the eight works from "*Altari*," portraits of gods are juxtaposed with photographs of sites or details that are symbolic of the Liberian conflict. A list of names, dates, and places is silk-screened on the glass that frames the photos, once again rooting speculative reflection in a context that is exceptionally and desperately real.

For centuries, philosophers have questioned the fundamental and historic nature of evil. The film takes its title from a text fragment in which Heraclitus asserts that *polemos*, war, is the principal generator of the universe, so that everything emerges and is destroyed in a dialectical relationship with its opposite, without which it could not exist. Embodying the philosophical question in the historical reality of Liberia, the work tackles the ontology of war. Liberia becomes a case study, an emblem of the revelation of these forms of energy; the warlords define their subjectivity in relation to the enemy, a theme obsessively present in their words. To what extent does human nature degenerate mired in a permanent state of conflict, and how far does a tendency to evil, carried to extremes, develop? The film is an unsettling and revealing work precisely because it maintains a distance from current events to address a far-removed core of human nature, deliberately smacking the viewer in the face without the mediation of moral assessment.

—Alessandra Pioselli

Translated from Italian by Marguerite Shore.