

Infierno Dulce

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The project of Tom Phillip's Humument Project can be described as the restructuring of an existing piece to recreate the narrative arc by altering "each page with collages and drawings, carefully cherry-picking a handful of words to leave unobscured so as to make poetry out of the existing text" (Weisblum, 2015). This art form is unique in its commitment to redefining—rather than seek creativity through originality, it finds expression through a pre existing document. An essential aspect of this work is reinterpreting the narratives surrounding a topic, and showcasing them in a new and innovative way, as Gia Cummings did in the work *Infierno Dulce*.

Originally, the document that provides the base for the artwork is a page from Joaquin Hurtado's *Laredo Song*, as found in Maria de Bruyn's Archives of her global health work. *Laredo Song* itself is a novel that focuses on the narratives of prostitution, so it is through this lens that artist chose to examine the content of the page in order to repurpose it. The piece aims to overlap two dominant and conflicting narratives surrounding sex work—the negative concept that emphasizes danger versus the positive view that prioritizes a life of luxury and sustenance. The dual nature of sex work inspired a consistent emphasis on duality through the piece, beginning with the title—*Infierno Dulce*, meaning sweet fire—that contrasts with the original title of the page, "Infierno Negro" which means black fire. The work employs the use of fire, both as a medium and a visual, to emphasize the concept of duality. Fire is a necessity and a danger; it keeps its users warm with an ever-present threat of consuming them, which is how the artist views sex work and its multifaceted nature. To create an effect of consumption, the artist chose to physically burn the edges of the work, as well as several burns and holes throughout. She then chose to accent those burned edges with orange marker to recreate the effect of the paper being on fire. The words of the poem itself are outlined in a thick black line, accented with orange to insinuate that the chosen phrases have burned through the paper. In addition, to both incorporate more flames and transform the page, flames have been added throughout. Surrounding the words of the poem is an abstract figure of woman, outlined in purple glitter. The rich plum sparkles give an air of opulence to the visual, which is meant to serve as a reminder of the sweetness of sex work, which can sustain and provide luxury in some cases. However, the only body parts depicted of the woman are those of intimate value: her neck, her breasts and her vagina. The artist chose to only depict this pieces of the body because it reflects the aspects of the body that are deemed as useful for a sex worker, while her other features are extraneous and unimportant. Additionally, the artist takes special care to create a figure without any distinguishable features to communicate that the woman herself is unimportant, her value lies in the parts that she offers. The artist is asserting that prostitution is valuable not because the workers offer something unique, but rather that they are able to satisfy a universal need for their customers.

The poem itself does not have a cohesive narrative, but is rather a collection of phrases that the artist felt reflected the duality that she was trying to convey. An essential aspect of the phrases is that they are positioned to 'shield' the intimate aspects of the body: the neck, the nipples, the vagina. The artist purposefully organized the piece that way to emphasize the link between the narrative of a sex worker and her body, but the words' failure to adequately cover her body signify that sex workers often lack a voice in the creation of their narratives. The poem itself reads: "infierno negro, transparente y dulce, belleza formas se suavizan, humo de un fuego sordo. los angeles, destino diferente" which translates in English to read as "black fire, transparent and sweet, beauty forms that soften, smoke of a bitter fire. the angels, different destiny." The phrases themselves are not chosen for grammar or a cohesive meaning, but instead for the mental images that they invoke to the reader, which is intended to be a stark contrast between the negative and the positive. They can be read as individual pieces or as a unit, but the dual nature is of most importance. The only phrase that diverges from that is "destino diferente" which is the only phrase not encapsulated by a piece of the body, and is placed outside of the larger poem to act as the alternative narrative of a "different destiny" for sex workers in a realm where they are valued for their work rather than disrespected.

References

Hurtado, Joaquin. *Laredo Song*. Fondo Estatal Para la Cultura y las Artes de Nuevo Leon. Box 15. Maria de Bruyn Papers. David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library. Duke University, Durham, NC. 15 November 2017.

Weisblum, V. (6 August 2015). Pages of a Humument: Tom Phillips on his show at Flowers Gallery. Retrieved from <http://www.tomphillips.co.uk/humument/essays/item/6261-pages-of-a-humument-tom-phillips-on-his-show-at-flowers-gallery-by-vida-weisblum>

INFIERNO NEGRO

Lo encuentra asilado en la polvera de un viejo tráiler, dos de la mañana. Uno que otro chofer se asoma estirando el cuello, queriendo adivinar qué hacen dos pelados hablando plácidamente a la orilla de la carretera. Infierno es moreno, chaparrón, ajolote de mirada torona, bigote espeso y chorreado.

Boenas, buenas. Qué haciendo. Nada, nada. Y luego un silencio escrutador. Los dos buscando lo mismo sin decirselo. Castela de carnívoros.

A esta hora la ciudad es más transparente y dulce. Su belleza se mece con el fresco que sopla desde el sur. Las formas se suavizan con el silencio de las ausencias. Qué son los que se roban el rojo del semáforo sino destellos en el centro de un universo que no tiene asideros. El Infierno se presenta: Carlos, que fue luchador y chingó a muchos —y aún puede sentir de un putazo a veces él considere amenazas. Es chofer de profesión.

Si me hubieras acercado cuando ando de oficial en el tráiler te hubiera dado en la madre. Ahora ando de cotorreo, a ver qué sale. Y con esto el Infierno perdona a la humanidad. La paz se mantiene con las frágiles puntas de la desconfianza mutua.

Sólo con los ojos de los trasnochadores se pueden apreciar las lentas alas de estos cabrones. Brillantes miembros que se alzan como el humo de un fuego sordo. Los ángeles aguardan el momento en que deben dictar la furia que lleva a los hombres a la devastación o a reinventar esa cosa turbia llamada amistad. Infierno insiste, qué haciendo?, así, con esa entereza que significa no te voy a dejar porque somos esa acción que cierra el paso a todo destino diferente.