

**Andrew Gilbert**  
**“European Tribal War Idols, Waterloo, 1815”**

**14 October – 14 November 2015**

Opening on Wednesday 14 October from 6 pm

After “Andrew, Emperor of Africa” (2011) and “*Les Maîtres fous*, starring Andrew and Emil Nolde” (2013), Andrew Gilbert’s third personal exhibition at Polad-Hardouin gallery merges the old continent with Africa’s ancient colonial empires through a fierce and bloody portrait gallery. Under the aegis of marshal Ney, now part of Gilbert’s peculiar pantheon, the artist obsessively and scrupulously pursues his reflection on conquest and colonial wars. In his drawings, the battle of Waterloo, whose 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary we commemorate this year, and the Napoleonic wars become the absurd stage of military feats, the unsteady socle upon which the idea of nation is built. An ensemble of sculptures will also be presented for the first time.

The Scottish artist is a true connoisseur of European history as it unfolded both *in situ* and through the wars of conquests, particularly in Africa and India. He uses the “feats” of military heroes to draw scenes of open cruelty, and applies the same treatment to the colonial wars of the British empire and the Napoleonic wars. What Andrew Gilbert offers here is a very personal re-elaboration of traditional historical painting, with a sharp eye and without abandoning his strident humour.

In this shooting gallery, the protagonists of all the conflicts are equal: Zulus, Sudanese, Hottentots and Boers mingle with the victims of wars on the European soil, and the lustre of Napoleonic uniforms stands alongside the flamboyant kota masks, fetishes, and macabre trophies.

Andrew Gilbert, who has been living in Berlin for ten years, draws every day, surrounded by a library worthy of a historian. In these books he obsessively searches for the details which we find, in a transfigured form, in his drawings: costume decorations, positions of battalions, quotations, etc.

In this exhibition, Andrew Gilbert presents a sharp perspective, with neither limits nor reserves, supported by a trained and referenced trait. In this barbaric world, marked by a brutal symbolism, where savagery is not necessarily where we expect to find it, nothing escapes him. His drawings are extravagant, cruel, documented, and contemporary.

The press release and visual info are available at:  
<http://www.polad-hardouin.com/en/press-kit/andrew-gilbert-“european-tribal-war-idols-waterloo-1815”>

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## **A few remarks by Andrew Gilbert**

### **Looking for the fetishes of European civilisation**

“During my artistic training, I became very interested in Primitivist trends in modern art, and fascinated by the religious energy radiating from tribal art. Today, one task obsesses me as an artist: creating my own European idols. Putting in relation tribal art and European idols allows me to question the idea of ‘Western civilisation’. The approach is sincere, but it is also a way to parody our so-called values of civilisation and democracy.

For instance: I read a few articles distributed by British propaganda during WWI. They claimed that the Germans used war fetishes in which they would stick nails. The idea was of course to compare these practices to obscure African rituals. Yet Britain continued to consider normal to have a Royal family, enlightened and civilised...

I also drew inspiration from my readings about the destruction of Catholic idols by the Protestants. These idols played the same role as the voodoo idols of Benin or Haiti... I gradually came to the idea that contemporary Western culture has its own fetishes: the smartphones that enslave people and turn them into idiots. Instead of saints, we have ‘celebrities of the culture of Idiocy’, TV celebrities, and our democracy-exporting monuments take the form of plastic supermarket bags invading the planet! That’s our European fetishism...

We call ourselves ‘civilised’ and use the most advanced technology to make weapons that will destroy the children of the Middle East... We erected war idols to commemorate the young people whom we sent to die for no other cause than oil and money... but the people we massacred without even knowing their name have no right to the slightest monument....

And today, these people put on flamboyant uniforms and take part in absurd rituals to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Waterloo, the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of WWI, or the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1945.

Fetishes, idols... creation of the myth of a nation...

I mixed it all together and imagined a host of idols, combining what can be found in ethnographic and military museums.

Waterloo becomes the dance of a European tribal dance... men are parading in their useless uniforms and kill one another in well-organised rows, like good dancers, in a ritual characteristic of European civilisation.

And events repeat themselves: Waterloo, the Crimean war, WWI...

Everywhere, at all times, the drums of tribal wars are booming...

Napoleon is no more than a tribal leader, just like the Zulu leader Chaka, who also became a senile dictator who massacred his own people...”