

עינוגע גלריה לאמנות עכשווית

Inga Gallery of Contemporary Art

רח' בר יוחאי 7 תל אביב, טל: 03-5181812

7 Bar Yochai St. Tel Aviv. Tel. +972-3-5181812

www.inga-gallery.com

Wormholes

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A conversation between Ety Schwarz and Adam Berg on the occasion of his show at Inga Gallery of Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, September, 2012

Q: You chose “Wormholes” – or “Time-worms” as a title for the video and show, what does it mean?

A: Yes, I have to thank the poet Maya Bejerano for her suggestion to translate *wormholes* into Hebrew as *time-worms*. Maya also re-arranged and wrote a text for the show. The notion of “Wormholes” is an astrophysical concept that assumes the existence of passages within the fabric of space-time. It sounds like science fiction but actually it is proposed in science as a possibility of traversing space through shortcuts in the very structure of the universe. In the show I had in mind two places, the two places that I live and work, Los Angeles and Tel Aviv, and their connection as a kind of passage-cave-tunnel, a wormhole so to speak.

Q: What really happens in the video “Wormholes”?

A: I filmed two cave systems. One located in the Carmel Mountains in Israel and the other, the Bronson Caves in a Los Angeles area canyon. The link between these caves-sites “occurs” in the video through the passage of contrasting space-times. I was interested in utilizing the caves as vehicles of “deep culture” exemplifying the transplanting process within the work as a metaphorical echo.

Q: What do you mean by “deep culture”?

A: I actually borrow it from the term “deep time” that in geology and evolution enables us to ponder time periods or periods that are not limited to our historical continuum or to a single epoch. I was compelled to offer an experience that is extended to a cosmic scale, to a “deep time” that exceeds our culture within the modern and late modern “culture industry” (Adorno) and doing so by linking it to our experiential depth of art to very old, pre-historical, modes that were shared already 100,000 years ago by early Neanderthal and Cro-Magnon cultures.

Q: We discover a sort of a performance of actors/cave people together with the musicians of the string quartet that play both the sound track of the video and

appear in it as well performing within the caves. What is the meaning of such doubling?

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A: I was intrigued by the unresolved tensions between filming, performance and enactment that constitute the relations between the actors and the roles they are portraying in parallel with the musicians who simultaneously “write” and “perform” the soundtrack.

Q: Who precedes whom?

A: Exactly! Wormholes traverse distances that obliterate the stratification of short-term and historical time. For example, the invention of hunting and the bow and arrow coincide with the genealogy of string instruments; say the violin, as though they were linked through a cave-like time-tunnel.

Q: How did you work on the video, what were the guidelines in terms of its making?

A: One of the issues that preoccupies me is our present experience of post-historical culture that for the most part is evident through the re-cycling and re-visitation of past moments that overwhelms our ability to appreciate our present and consequently our future experiences. Through techno-artificial forms of memory and the re-shuffling and re-enactment of “events” our culture generates gravitational pulls and movements that no longer abide to a simple historical order. Facebook seems to have replaced historical fact and culture. It’s strange, right?

Q: In a sense, the actors are both cave dwellers and theater actors?

A: Yes, this doubling is important. On the one hand this duality exaggerates the “event” through the anti-naturalistic nature of the acting, and on the other hand it’s completed and bridged by the actors’ movement and presence in these two places. I’m thinking here on some masters such as Artaud, Pasolini or even Brooks, who generated a similarly unsettled and unresolved tension as their theatrical or filmic reality unfolded. And yet, equally so, the experiencing of the natural settings, the caves and Nature relies on the traditional construction of reaching for the sublime in paint and canvas. Imagine Poussin in a cave. I did.

Q: What would be sublime in this context, of “Wormholes”?

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A: Precisely transgressing the boundaries of the 'here' and 'now' through "fictional artwork" to quote Ranciere. It is not so much sublime in the religious sense but rather in the biological and anthropological, a pathway that renders culture, like cultural bacteria, as moving endlessly towards generating new contexts and new possibilities of growth and consciousness as part of the organism.

Q: In contrast to Plato's allegory of a cave governed by ignorance or blindness, the cave people in your video emerge and then return to its safe haven. The cave becomes an acoustically harmonizing place of ancient tones echoed through the sonorous musings of the Quartet's. Fair assessment?

A: Yes, the cave is a place-space-womb at the same time as being a tunnel-passage-time. But, the harmony and disharmony of the music simultaneously exemplifies the relations between artifice and the nature of art, culture and biology. In this respect, the notion of "deep time" does not focus on the cave's shadows (as in Plato's tale) but on sounds. The sound as connected to *Arche`*, to origin, whereas the tool or instrument, be it for hunting or music, is *Techkne`*, and the two constitute a primordial tension of culture.

Q: Neanderthals lived in caves as a shelter or home. The cave's interior and exterior contrast and conflict. The former is dark and rounded, while outside, wide-open, sometimes dazzling, sometimes bright green and fertile. Strong contrast between the two spaces. Can you expand on that?

A: The archeological remains that were better preserved from pre-historical times are those of cave dwellers and surprisingly so mostly those of Neanderthals, who lived in Europe and the Middle East in cave sites long before Homo Sapiens arrived from Africa. The caves are pre-historical museums of ritual, burial, cooking and wall paintings and carvings; a kind of "nature" within "nature." The landscape, seen from the caves is not perceived as through the pictorial tradition of painting as window, but rather, as a "strange attractor" and a gravitational pole to the surrounding nature outside. But, the contrast between light and darkness, the open and the cave, is also acoustic.

One of the more fascinating books that were written on this subject is *The Neanderthals Singing* by Steven Mithen who raises hypotheses concerning the split between language and syntax and music in contrast to Neanderthals who still communicated in high pitch and acoustically enhanced musical modulations. In this sense, the music that is played in the video with the string quartet situated within the caves replaces, with the exception of some sound effects and humming, both speech and languaging.

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Q: Your drawings and paintings rely on scientific diagrams of molecular and nuclear modeling or of mapping the universe. What are the senses of references for example oceanographic phenomena and cosmic movements?

A: Underlying my work as an artist is the juxtaposing and superimposing of the language of art with the language of the sciences; in harmony, overlapping, or clashing in head to head collision. Scientific language is rooted in mathematics, geometry and representational or formal coding and computation that culminate often with simulations and diagrams. Whereas in art we can identify various representations from cave paintings to modern abstract. The two run parallel pictorial histories or genealogies but can only be truly explored by being fused and tested. Especially today when science is almost completely immersed in technological production and art making is disposed to pre-production such fusion and collision seems to me critical on both an aesthetic and an ontological basis. Perception challenges evidence and vice-versa. It's a tension that fascinates me.

Q: It seems that you are sculpting and painting the invisible aspects of the Real, or what exceeds the ordinary perception of things represented. Any response?

A: You are right in that the modes in which we can imagine the invisible aspects or elements of the "real" (in Merleau-Ponty's sense) are never in opposition to what is sensed but rather in continuity to it and hence enhancing the ontological dimension. But, of course, physics does not contradict our normative representations as long as we do not regard it as purely descriptive. Another way to say it is to allow "seeing" the invisible, that which is extra-sensory in the strict sense, as integral to life.

Q: Would you agree that the works are all involving and concerned with time, movement and matter?

A: Time, movement and matter are all metaphysical concepts that I explore in my work as "trans-objects": through paintings, sculptures, images, sounds that traverse the boundaries of matter, movement or time.

Q: It seems that the works unfold through a slow motion or by bursting movement into a whole. Unlike photography, which freeze time forever and anchors particles into fossilized moments where everything stands still, in your works the times arrested continue to move, merge and fall apart and continuously emerge as circuits or formed layers of a sculptural dynamic play.

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A: Most of the processes in my work explore syntactical relations between languages that overlap and dissipate. Each piece is a dynamic encounter between the artwork and its space. In that sense, my artistic expression is “performed”, concurrently, as an object generated, and then displayed.

Q: How does this exhibition reflect in your opinion, the way you work in the studio?

A: My studio practice is more like diving to depths, and then I need to ascend slowly and not at once. Not much oxygen in the depth, and all aspects of life that are not part of the “diving in” simply get cut off. Often the personal, political, psychological lose their stable contexts and morph into the works’ material constitution. On the other hand, an exhibition is often “above water” and poses a highly performative emphasis even though sometimes I work on the ideation of a show and that provides me with guidelines for my studio’s “diving expeditions” so to speak.

Q: What is behind the continued paintings on the gallery’s walls?

A: The continued drawing on the gallery’s walls is connected to the ways in which painting becomes a vehicle to revealing the “context” that otherwise remains muted. Any context as such is political and better be signified rather than ignored. And the continuation of the paintings’ lines on the wall raises the problem of boundaries or the demarcation of finitude of the seen and its relation to the experience of the sublime as boundless.

Q: Every artist has a unique perspective on “ways of seeing.” It seems that similar to a seismograph or an existing scientific device you transcribe vibrations and frequencies for registration without relying on the visible alone and aware of the existence of these hidden “natural imperceptible” forces. Indeed?

A: My working modes vary from works that are objects or states related (say a painting, or sculpture) with a conscious abstention from the use of found objects or ready-mades together with modes of intervention either through working with actors or musicians or simply through being in the sites, such as the caves or a recording studio or a green room, and as analogous to painting.

Modes of representation and intervention are complementary and counterpointed. Drawing is walking or gliding along the objects’ or states’ boundaries that are never entirely conspicuous and extended to gaze. Painting is different and more connected to the act of memory and measurement that becomes a second nature, an unfolding.

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Q: The works act as a magnetic field between their plexus and the viewer. They invite you to walk through the sculptures, paintings and video as a researcher looking for new and unknown place or phenomenon. Viewing the works I feel sucked into a time warp that is equally ancient or pre-historic and contemporary to our technological society with its metallic and shiny surfaces. Again, the Basalt rock compared to stainless steel, the drawing contrasted with a photogram print, a pre-historical cave and string quartet music. Tell us more.

A: It's important to me to generate a space in show that is activated by singular objects, states and that is equally acting like a unified field not separated by its aggregates. In this regard, each work retains its discrete autonomy despite being weaved into the whole field without being reduced to "parts."

The slicing of rock sculptures, as temporal strata, the video with its "chronotopes" – its passages of space and times (wormholes), the paintings and the photograms all move in circles that are dynamically organized and yet without being reduced to a single succession and instead conforming to multiple continuums.

Q: What is the source of the music?

A: The music is a libretto without words composed for a string quartet by Haim Shtrum. We spent months discussing the transplantation of time and space to build a musical composition that would be a reflection on music itself, from the caves themselves. And very early it became clear that the composing process would help drive the shape of the video montage. We recorded the quartet both in a sound studio and in Bronson caves, then combined the two to create this incredible echoing tension. It was clear to me from start that "Wormholes" – or "Whispers" as I initially referred to it - allowed the co-existence of the sublime and grotesque and with a *sotto voce* underpinning the artifice with the naturalistic.

Q: For me, the exhibition ranges from the sublime in art to the apocalyptic in the humans attitude to the environment. Is that so?

A: Indeed, apocalypse in the Greek sense of "revelation". The work is revelatory, awakening, and epiphanic. But a certain treachery or cunning to the work too.