

## **“Revealing the Concealed”, P8 Art Gallery**

**Curator – Shimon Lev**

**Text - Dr. Fiammetta Martegani**

“Revealing the Concealed”, the English title of this exhibition, is actually not revealing enough the deep (and double) meaning of the original title in Hebrew: *Limtzo et ha - tzafon*, which means, “looking for the North”. Because of the complicated and also the magical system of the Hebrew phonetic, the title of the exhibition can also be read as *Limtzo et ha tzafon*, meaning “looking for something hidden”. The Hebrew root, *tzofen*, could refer to a kind of a secret code, like the “song-lines” the Aboriginals used to practice in order to develop a secret geography for their world.

In his famous book *The Songlines*, the British novelist and travel writer Bruce Chatwin describes the song-lines as: “the labyrinth of invisible pathways which meander all over Australia and are known to Europeans as ‘Dreaming-tracks’ or ‘Song-lines’; to the Aboriginals as the ‘Footprints of the Ancestors’ or the ‘Way of the Law’.

Aboriginal Creation myths tell of the legendary totemic beings who wandered over the continent in the Dreamtime, singing out the names of everything that crossed their path - birds, animals, plants, rocks, waterholes - and so singing the world into existence”.

What we use to call “Aboriginal Art” most of the time for the Aboriginals was just the only way to paint and to describe their world, through a concept of “map” that has nothing in common with the Western-European way to “map” the world as a “true” representation of it.

In fact, “the map is not the territory” as Alfred Korzybski admitted during the meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science in New Orleans, in 1931.

The Belgian surrealist artist René Magritte illustrated the concept of “perception as it always intercedes between reality and ourselves” in a number of paintings including a famous work entitled *The Treachery of Images*, which consists of a drawing of a pipe with the caption *Ceci n'est pas une pipe* (“This is not a pipe”).

But not only Artists and Scientists tried to deal with the delicate relationship between maps and their representation of “reality”.

In 1983 Lewis Carroll made the point humorously in *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded*, with the description of a fictional map that had “the scale of a mile to the mile”. One of the characters the book notes some practical difficulties with such a map and states that “we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well”.

In 1962 the University of Cambridge’s economist Joan Robinson emphasized the disutility of 1:1 maps and other overly detailed models: “A model which took account of all the variegation of reality would be of no more use than a map at the scale of one to one”.

In 2009 the American author Reif Larsen published the revolutionary novel *The Selected Works of T.S. Spivet*. The over-sized book (9.3 by 7.8 inches) is noteworthy for its unique design: the plot-line is illustrated with images which further the narrative by providing charts, lists, sketches, and maps accompanying each page, mirroring T.S.'s cartographic interests and his minute attention to detail.

Where is the border between true and false, reality and fiction, representation and imagination in the matter of “mapping”?

Many geographers and scholars in the last decades tried to give an answer to this never ending question. Some of them arrived to theorize the discipline of Geography as an art itself, as Donal W. Meinig in his book *Geography as an Art* (1983).

Geography, visual images, and creative visual representation have long been intertwined. These links may be most long standing and evident in cartography and in the conception and production of maps, which the International Cartographic Association defines as “symbolized images of geographic reality, representing selected features or characteristics, resulting from the creative effort of their authors’ execution of choices, and are designed for use when spatial relationships are of primary relevance.”

But the interconnection between geography and art extends well beyond cartography and map design. This relationship can be discussed in terms of landscapes and representation, geography and the production of art, and the role of art in remaking places.

In the age of Globalization, intensive migration of people and products and cultures, how do issues of place and identity, belonging and exclusion, are represented in visual

culture?

In 2000 Irit Rogoff examined in her book *Terra Infirma* how geography's truth claims and signify practices, arguing that geography is a language in crisis, unable to represent the immense changes that have taken place in a post-colonial and post-migratory world. She uses the work of international contemporary artists to explore how art in the twentieth century has confronted and challenged issues of identity and belonging.

What about the relationship between art and mapping at the beginning of the new Millennium? And how this kind of necessity of "describing the world" is influencing the visual art scenario in such a specific context as Israel or *Eretz Israel*: a country that has the routes of his place in his own name and a State that was founded because of that.

With more than ten Israeli Artists, the exhibition "Revealing the Concealed", curated by Shimon Lev, constitutes a very interesting mirror of the contemporary and artistic ways of representing our world.

Gilad Efrat, for instance, in his work *Stones and sand IV* represents a world that is not even "ours", and rather quotes Planet Mars's landscape. Using the technique of oil, Efrat pulls out the source for this painting, a small close-up of the surface of Mars to translate onto the canvas.

Hendler, instead, is describing a very specific world, the one of the Palestinians living in Bil'in, a village in the West Bank crossed by the Israeli border. The work *Bi'lin 2013* is a photo installation composed through pictures that the artist took at Bil'in using recycled barrels as Pinhole Camera.

The works of Zvi Tolkovsky are also dealing with the world of the Palestinians, trying to reveal their concealed world from a *micro* to a *macro* prospective. The work *Noema*, in fact, is a series of pictures revealing, through a kind of archaeological prospective, some very specific particulars of the Noema refugee camp. The lens' perspective gets larger in *Seven Sisters*, a work referring the "Seven Sisters Road", a panoramic road to Jerusalem that was named like that by a Scottish regiment during the time of the British Mandate of Palestine. The *macro* perspective of Tolkovsky finds his place in the work *Oasis*. This time, in order to describe the world, the artist uses a world map written in Arabic and he

adds on to the map a series of mysterious objects and signs to let us decode an imaginary world as the one described in the novel *The Selected Works of T. S. Spivet*.

Describing a world is not only a matter of “mapping” but also of “orienting”, or sometimes of “disorienting”, as in the work *Overtured Plane* by Matan Ben Tolila. His work is focused on a large-scale landscape painting, lingering on moments in which reality and abstraction co-exist. He investigates issues of mobility, stability and control while at the same time the lack thereof, suggesting several possibilities simultaneously. The temporary structures spread out and conquer the landscape while at the same time blocking it, dictating scale, perspective and narrative. His landscape seems to describe nowhere specific, it reflects detachment, anxiety and constant tension which characterizes our contemporary life, specially in a place like Israel.

Israel is actually the main subject of Ariane Littman’s works. In the *Shredded Land* series, she carries on using Closure Maps of the West Bank and Jerusalem. Through a long process of *Papier Maché* these maps became a symbol embodying the complex reality of Jerusalem’s disputed boundaries. On some of the maps, the settlements were returned behind the Green Line, the barrier walls were eliminated and a slow disintegration was taking place with the breaking up of borders, lines, checkpoints, Israeli settlements and Palestinian cities. As the artist explains: “I can change the political reality that often leaves the individual powerless”.

The relationship between power and fantasy is also a dominant issue in the “multi-cultural” work of Asad Azi. As he explains, we live in a world in which societies with different languages and heritages are still not able to coexist peacefully. But through a kind of process of “post-orientalization” Azi produces a new world where everything is possible.

“The map is not the territory” as stated above. And often even the territory is just the result of our childhood fantasy. “The south of Israel is the landscape of my childhood” explains Roy Kuper about his work *Gaza*, which is a series of pictures that he took from the Kibbutz where he was born, next to the border of Gaza. In one of his early works, *Vanishing Zones* (1991-1994), Kuper created black and white existential images, which

echoed timeless scenes from some far away past or an uncertain future, like the one that characterizes the life in Israel. Nurit Gur Lavy Karni is also dealing with the representation of Gaza. Preoccupation with the Karni Pass in the Gaza Strip (named after her father, Joseph Karni) leads to the paintings of the refugee camp of Jebalia in Gaza based upon aerial photographs of the refugee camps. As the artist explains, *Aerial photographs of Gaza* is an attempt to look at a direction we do not look at.

The relation between cinema and war was deeply analyzed by Paul Virilio in his work *War and Cinema: The Logistics of Perception*. The video-installation by Michal Rothschild is also dealing with the relation between technology and control. In her work *Vision*, in fact, she films a policeman describing “Vision 2000”, a project established in order to control the Old City of Jerusalem with static cameras. The installation of Rothschild investigates the relationship between restriction and limitlessness through simultaneity and contrast. The Old City of Jerusalem is seen from the perspective of a police control room and from the lens of a camera floating through the narrow and empty Old City alleys at night.

Once, instead of the cameras, in order to map the territory, we just had the maps. Even very detailed maps, on the scale 1:20.000, like the maps of the British Mandatory used by Shimon Lev in his works: from the serial: *Memory Mixers*, *Bab al Wad*, a road to Jerusalem, *Jaffa*, Aerial photo representing the old cemetery of Jaffa, and *El Ramle*, representing the Arabic city of Ramle and other maps from the British survey of Palestine. In all these works, through the action of “re-painting” and “re-mapping”, Lev is actually producing a new world where past, present and future are coexisting together in a new world without geographical, nor physiological borders.

I would like to conclude our journey with the only non Israeli artist of the exhibition. Monika Grabuschnigg was born in Austria but she studied abroad in different Institutes, including the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem. The main theme of her work concerns the abstraction of fear and violence in society. In her work *Warporn* she describes the phenomenon of people watching real videos and pictures of war situations. This itself it is not a new phenomenon, but became increasingly popular with the boom of

digital technology and the invention of the Internet. The works in “Warporn“ are produced as the hyper-real objects they represent: assemblage of old war photographs and painted patterns on paper. We can look at messy organic dripping colours of screaming pinks and reds, mirroring themselves in a manner reminiscent of a manipulative Rorschach imagery.

To conclude, where is the border between reality, representation of reality and imagination? Maybe the exhibition “Revealing the Concealed” is not giving us a definite answer, but it's surely trying to reveal how we still live in a concealed world.

**Fiammetta Martegani, Tel Aviv, 2014**