

Sommer Contemporary Art is pleased to host the solo exhibition:

Michal Helfman – Doctor! Doctor!

28.10.2010 – 4.12.2010

For her third solo show in Sommer Contemporary Art, Michal Helfman presents an all-encompassing installation that combines sculpture, drawing and video.

Iron gates block the entrance to the gallery space, as if appropriated from a stage setting. The shape of the gates resembles that of a broken glass and also that of desert landscape – a cross-section of cracked mud, mountains and sun – all of which are recurring themes in Helfman's work of recent years. The only way to pass the gates is to walk *through* them and thus we are left trapped in Helfman's world, in a space full of happening.

The exhibition includes four monumental color drawings in which the strongest presence is that of the body. The body plays a double role in Helfman's work – as it engages in a "civilized" activity like playing the cello or participating in a dance lesson on the one hand, and as its physicality is exposed on the other, left to be seen as mere flesh and bones. It is thus that the body brings about the presence of civilized culture and barbaric primitivism all at once, blurring the distinction between desire and delirium. The technique that Helfman uses is a technique that we recognize from children craft, where glowing color fields are covered with a surface of black crayon, only to be later engraved on so that the under-layers are exposed. This technique of exposure echoes the process that the body undergoes. Dark and glowing colors mix together to instill in the drawings a nightmarish mood – simultaneously sinister and enticing.

An additional wall presents portraits that Helfman created in the past year titled *The Plague*. Helfman dots the white paper in black charcoal and then connects the dots with lines, again drawing from the techniques of child painting. A unique portrait appears from the schematic and random process, much in the same way that the plague attacks its victims systematically and randomly.

Three sculptures function as independent happening zones that have been in some way altered or damaged by the hand of man. The (locally) well-known photograph of Peter Merom, taken from his photography album that documents the Israeli desert strip of the Negev, is presented in a glass cube, circling a fossil in a cut-out form of a topographical spiral. The Negev strip, that has become a symbol for the hubris of the Zionist endeavor of settling the land, here receives a life of its own as a plot of nature that retaliates against its destruction.

Fossil forms also appear on the large mirror wall, this time surrounded by cracks and fissures. As remnants of ancient times, the fossils either break or appear from beneath the cracks of the mirror, where today's reality is reflected, fracturing the wall as if by violent struggle.

In the floor piece, Helfman's preoccupation with uncovering the surface of objects is again evident. The circle of sand becomes a deserted site of a children game, where

territories are marked by carving in the sand, until one is left without a territory to stand in and is forced out of the game. The seemingly innocent activity is given a twist as the slit circle of land is brought inside the sterile exhibition space, with a knife stuck in its core.

In an interview for Flash Art magazine (March 2009) Helfman discusses the different themes of her work: *What disco clubs, dance and theater sets have in common is the performance they entail. These are places where the physical experience happens in real time in front of others. The club, the stage and also the desert landscape define an area of happening that demands a total sensual presence from those who attend. Art's space is cooler, more reflective, and I test how it can be considered in relation to the inverted totality of performance-sites.*

Michal Helfman's video work *Duet for a Flame and a Boy* is projected in the gallery's project room.

Description of the video work is taken from the exhibition text published by the Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art:

Duet for a Flame and a Boy, 2010, video, 5:30 min.

The work is based on Freud's text, appearing in his book "The Interpretation of Dreams", about a father who had fallen asleep next to the body of his child, who had just died. In the father's dream, the child stands besides him and whispers: "Father, can't you see I'm burning?"

The work examines the moment in which reality raptures the sleeping defense mechanism. The external reality - in this case a disaster - seeks entry, and correlates with the internal events of the nightmare on the one hand, while the dream on its part turns out to be not a symbolic story, but rather the direct representation of the external reality.

The video ends with the dance piece "Duet for a Flame and a Boy" composed of dance sequences from "Bill", the latest piece by choreographer Sharon Eyal. The duet is accompanied by the pop song "Doctor, Doctor Can't You See I'm Burning", which imbues the term "burning" with seemingly reversed content - one that expresses burning adolescent desire. That reversal tries to offer a fundamental solution to the dead-end towards which the dream leads.

In the process of shooting the video Helfman conducted an intervention in the installation of artist Santiago Sierra, covering the 12 military concrete parapets comprising it with metallic fabric. The strict order maintained between the original elements of the installation is abruptly interrupted - and the backdrop becomes dreamlike and surreal.

Cinematography - Asaf Sudri, Editor - Sagie Bar-Or, Choreography - Sharon Eyal, Bat Sheva Dancers - Iyra Elezra and Tom Weinberger, Music - Ohad Fishor and Thompson Twins, Soundtrack Design - Ohad Fishof

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Michal Helfman (b. 1973 in Ramat Efal, Israel) is a multidisciplinary artist living and working in Tel Aviv. Holding a BFA from Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem, Helfman has exhibited in numerous local and international exhibitions.

Among her solo shows are: 1999, *Iris*, Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, Herzliya / 2000, *Tiesto*, Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv / 2001, Institute of Visual Art, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee / Institute of Visual Art, San Fransisco / 2003, *Kochav Yair*, Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv / *The Owl*, The 50th Venice Biennale, Venice / 2007, *Bat Dor*, the Israel Museum, Jerusalem / 2008, *The Lesson*, The Nathan Gottesdiner Foundation: Prize for Israeli Art 2008, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv / 2009, *Cardi Black Box*, Milan