

# The Marxist approach

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Yuval Yairi "Work," Zemack Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

Zemack Contemporary Art opened about six months ago in Tel Aviv's Kikar Hamedina shopping district. The design of the space, which greatly resembles the newly relocated Alon Segev Gallery on Rothschild Blvd.

himself and the objects under his gaze – a kind of layer that is difficult to define but whose presence is marked. Not only are Yairi's works highly polished, but they exude an inherent, deceptive distance. Indeed, it is not entirely clear to what degree this distance is self-aware; and whether, for example, Yairi suggests that viewers adopt this distanced gaze in relation to the

moment of inspiration (of the kind prevalent in cinema, in which the painter approaches the canvas to produce a masterpiece within seconds), detailing various stages in the process, including installation and lighting. So for example, in the photographs that document the setup of the large installation by artist Carlos Amorales, "Black Cloud (latent studio)"

during which museums were regarded as new temples. Indeed, the Israel Museum enjoys a prominent place in the Jerusalem landscape, a kind of acropolis, but its spiritual dimension has been sidelined by the surge of Israeli capitalism, which makes a discussion of the commodity in this regard especially interesting.

As Alon indicates, Yairi "chooses a complex location, lying at the intersection of mundane reality and the logic of the commodity." He is also highly aware of his own artwork as commodity, but in contrast to the sweat of the museum workers, Yairi's work remains relatively clean, with no traces of dirt or dust but only a slight mist, which occasionally acts as a merciful light.

Despite the fact that Alon refers to the low wages of the workers, noting that "migrant workers build the 'nation's temples,'" and that, to her mind, "Yairi chose to forego a distanced point of view in favor of a personal interaction with the workers, thereby shattering the invisible wall that separates those who provide the service from those who receive it" – the Marxist approach does not extend beyond the article. The photographs themselves bear no trace of such theory, as they retain a sense of distance and seem to glorify manual labor.

Some of the works evince the influence of the series "Museum Photographs" by Thomas Struth from 1989. In this excellent series, Struth photographed museumgoers from around the world, sparking a debate about the relationship between spectators and art. The anecdotes captured by Yairi in the museum are less dramatic, but the relationship is there, especially in the photograph "4934 (The Martyrdom of St. Bartholomew, Rivera)," which shows four men hanging a painting, their clothes and gestures echoing the depicted scene; or the photograph "1641," showing "The Death of Adonis" by Peter Paul Rubens, its plastic sheeting peeled off so that it resembles a piece of fabric hanging from the soft, voluptuous bodies of the women.



BUSY: Yuval Yairi: "Chronovation No. 6," 2008

(both were designed by architect Arnon Nir) leaves no doubt about the gallery's desired role in the Israeli art scene. In keeping with Zemack's ambitions, the present solo exhibition, "Work" by Yuval Yairi, features photographs that were taken at the Israel Museum, the flagship of Israeli art, throughout the course of a three-year period during which the museum was closed for extensive renovations.

Nissan Perez, curator of photography at the museum, invited four photographers (Yuval Yairi, Assaf Evron, Daniel Bauer and Eli Posner) to document the renovation process. This was a comprehensive photographic project, despite the fact that the catalogue for Yairi's show suggests that he was the only participating artist.

While Yairi's show evinces an observant and discerning eye, underpinned by an inner dynamic, the artist nevertheless maintains a barrier between

exposed insides of an institution that seeks to present itself as an all-inclusive whole. In any case, while the documentary figures prominently in Yairi's point of view, his pieces nevertheless blur categorical divisions.

Yairi shows photographs and videos. Some of the photographs show single, enlarged images, while others are grids composed of successive shots – resembling what is known as contact sheets. The works are numbered and collectively entitled "Chronovation" (a combination of the words "chronicle" and "observation").

The people that Yairi photographs are caught in motion: the wall painter, for example, or the electrician who stands on a ladder and seems to walk on huge crutches. In these pictures the museum becomes a kind of circus and the workers adopt the role of performers.

In other photographs Yairi dissolves the beloved myth of artistic creation as a singular

from 2007, shown as part of "Still/Moving," an exhibition that inaugurated the museum's contemporary galleries, Yairi succeeds in restoring the atmosphere of the studio to the creation of art. This environment brings to mind Andy Warhol's Factory as well as the guilds of the Middle Ages and Renaissance.

In the exhibition catalogue curator Dr. Ketzia Alon draws a relationship between Yairi's photography and Marxist theories regarding the commodity, which is detached from its mode of production and charged with independent, symbolic meanings. Alon describes the museum as a "super-commodity" – "no longer do the artworks it contains bestow the museum its glory, rather it is the museum itself that functions as the ultimate work of art."

In this way Alon expounds upon a lengthy debate about the status of the museum, which began in the 1970s and '80s –