

Twilight Zone

Ethical questions regarding appropriation, impersonation, paternalism and colonialism characterize the artistic discourse today in its preoccupation with the question of refugees and immigration in particular, and the human pain of marginalized groups in general. The exhibiting contemporary artists try to tell, reveal, and mediate the feeling that it isn't really possible to understand the other and his/her pain. However, even if the knowledge of the other is not possible - recognition and appreciation, learning and compassion, together with the development of joint strategies of resistance and mutual respect, are needed today more than ever.

The "Twilight Zone" exhibition seeks to draw our attention to the situation of refugees in Israel, referring to the issues of crossing borders, international rights, the lack of rights and neglect. It wishes to expose those who have been excluded from the space of visibility and are forced to live under media stereotypes and government spins that treat them as nothing more than criminals.

Contemporary thinkers see the figure of the refugee as one of the important entities that challenge the traditional national-liberal identity. The traditional view sought to see the national collective as the source of man's self-determination. On the other hand, immigrants, refugees, displaced persons, expatriates and migrant workers play a central role in shaping the post-national reality that aspires to dismantle larger identity constructs.

For many theorists, the figure of the refugee "without the right to have rights" (in the words of Hannah Arendt) is a symbol of resistance, challenging the most basic concepts of political discourse - human rights, civil rights, the sovereignty, labor, etc. The refugee must confront an organized system of state and law that includes police, bureaucracy, surveillance, enforcement and "municipal terrorism". The persona of the refugee proposes a new political philosophy based on nomadic principles.

The phenomenon of migration and refugees in the world can no longer be ignored or dismissed, and in some ways, it can be referred to as the "refugee revolution"; a quiet revolution, perhaps, but one that profoundly changes the human textures within a country.

In Israel, the refugee phenomenon (geographical or cultural-national) challenges the demographic self-perception of Israel as a Jewish state. It is this concept that enables the exclusion from the junctures of power and visibility of any other identity that is not compatible with the one defined as Jewish in the dominant ideology. The exhibiting Israeli artists, Jews and Arabs, emphasize the

refugee's power to resist this demographic logic and even contribute to a pluralistic view of Israeli society.

The exhibited works challenge the modernist discourse in Israeli art, which has traditionally avoided discussing refugees and immigration.

In the Zionist discourse, those who came to Israel were not "refugees" but "olim" ("new immigrants" in Hebrew, literally "ascenders"), carrying the promise of revival. The difference between immigrants and olim was summed up in the sentiment of Zionist historical uniqueness and a focus on the "desire to become a nation."

As a curator, I have been dealing with issues of immigration and refugees for many years, also from my personal life experience. Six years ago I curated an exhibition at the Haifa Museum as part of a wider exhibition in which I discussed secret and dangerous immigration.

The "Twilight Zone" exhibition is another attempt to mark the pain, this time in relation to this country where immigrants and refugees are trying to make a living. This pain is inherent in the carnival known as "the State".

The participating artists emphasize lack of autonomous space within the political order of the Israeli nation-state— an autonomous space unencumbered by biometric identification and surveillance; a space based on the concept of the individual's right to refuge (*refugium* in Latin) rather the citizen's subjugation to the law (*ius*); an a-territorial or extraterritorial space not bound by a homogeneous national territory. The artists illustrate for us that the solution - in life itself - is located in temporary autonomous areas where freedom is realized here and now, dissolving the boundary between the external and the internal, between the transient and the eternal.

Svetlana Reingold, Curator

Participating artists:

Farid Abu Shakra, Etti Abergel, Shai Azoulay, Gilad Efrat, Hamody Gannam, Thalia Hoffman, Manar Zuabi, Michael Halak, Yuval Yairi and Zohar Elazar, Tamar Nissim, Nitzan Satt, Emi Sfard, Ron Amir, Doron Fishbein, Nira Pereg, Roi Kuper, Miki Kratsman, Assaf Shoshan.

- This text is partly based on Hannah Arendt's writings