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Paths of Destruction:

The end of the forest, Rest, Crystal

What can one make of a cut down tree? And what is the meaning of an immobile dog lying around in a clearance in a forest? What remains after the destruction of a house? And what power do the soldiers, whose portraits had vanished, or were made into landscape paintings possess? Through these questions among others, I seek to observe and read into the works of Dina Shenhav: "End of the forest", "Rest", "Crystal" (2008).

This interpretation can be derived from the understanding of the tensions between European and Israeli political, aesthetic, and poetic cultural traditions, in the past and the present, in German and in Hebrew.

The exhibition which includes three pieces, invites the spectator to tour through paths filled with destruction and ruin, and as such, poses challenges to familiar ways of observing, expanding the horizons of preconceived notions of beauty. Consequently, passing through the bodies of cut down trees, along the skeleton ruins of destroyed houses, in conjunction with the faces of soldiers as still lives, unravels sites of deficiency. Axis which cut through time periods and territories, intersections devoid of consolation, all dominated by disaster.

"City" (2002) is the title of a piece which isn't presented in this current exhibition. However, I would like to begin the tour with it in mind, since it is the memory of Shenhav's "City", comprised of wooden and coal ruins, that navigates me through this exhibition. In this piece, the city extends out as a rectangular field of shards and smashed, black wooden scraps which are scattered in a mess and appear like sooty stones which remained after the destruction. The city therefore, exists as that which is remained, and that which survived from the ruin. The inherent emptiness of the ruins is a testimony to that which preceded them, of the city that once existed. The black remnants of the city also suggest an archeological site.

The archeologist returns and discovers in the stone traces of lost kingdoms, cultures and modes of existence. He digs, excavates layers in the ground, plunges into the depths of territorial domains in order to learn about the lives of the deceased. The archeologist who seeks to reconstruct the whole from the parts, exposes the details, collects item by item and binds piece to piece. His discovery reveals buildings which were drenched with darkness and attaches a narrative to them, situating them within a coherent frame.

Yet the archeological site can also function as inspiration for a way of thinking, writing and creating, which poses a challenge to the archeological discovery, and to the historiographic narrative. I am referring to a poetry of hints and traces that enables a discovery which does not fully discard the concealed layers. This is a poetry which searches for a way of listening

to that which cannot be heard immediately, quantified and classified with scientific apparatus, and organized into reasonable categories. It does not provide an explanation, and does not endeavor to exchange one thing for the other, it does not withdraw into the identical, but allows moments of proximity, closeness, the simultaneous appearance of a thing and its opposite as evidence of a complex experience which is full of contradictions.

The transformation of the ruin into a poetic and aesthetic model is known from the conception of allegory as a form of representation which allows a unique kind of cultural memory¹. This is a mode of representation that internalizes the structure of destruction and interprets it into artistic configurations of fractures. The ruin is understood within a historical process of collapse and defeat. Even more so, it alludes to the essence of the proceedings of the historical process. The traces of destruction are embedded in the form of the representation. The ruin is an intersection of time and space – It embodies in part, what was, and what it used to be. And the fragment is a fracture, a cut, a tear which refuses to heal, continuing to testify to and yearn for the losses.

A poetry which does not alienate itself from the residuals of the ruin is worthwhile. It exposes the boundaries of destruction. It is a poetry which interferes with a harmonious appearance, it challenges constructs of perfection, which renders the fragment in its nature as a fragment, even though it relies on other parts, it is an absence or a deficiency which refuses to be filled...