

De Zone

Participants: Alexis Couzino (Canada); Aim Duelle Luski (Israel); Raluca Grada Amandi and Olivio Logian-Genecio's (UK); Jackie Pearl (Israel); Barak Rubin (Israel); Stanislav Welbel and Yael Vishinzki-Levi (Poland)

Fata morgana is an optic phenomenon which is recognized by the spectator and can be documented. This optic phenomenon occurs in the space between earth and the sky and it is generated by fraction of ray lights which is caused by the significant temperature difference at the desert between daytime and nighttime. This phenomenon produces an inverted image on the skyline. The fata morgana (*mirage*) turns the desert from a wilderness into a fertile ground of emergent local imagery.

This phenomenon happens when mineral particles and salts, which gently move in the desert air, become a sort of a screen on which the images are projected. Thus, the desert can be seen as a huge resource for interminable creation of images. In this respect, the desert can be interpreted as an ecological system that produces moving images. This mysterious phenomenon also raises questions about the age of the Anthropocene and the influences of the human disruption of the sensitive natural balance which is at the core of this "optic machine" of the desert for millions of years. This natural phenomenon, however, is endangered because of climate changes and the influences of the continuous mining for minerals at the desert.

The fata morgana transforms the desert from an area that is ostensibly barren and usually not connoted with visual culture, into a fertile ground for growing images. This natural phenomenon is also somewhat metonymic to the invention of the photography that enables viewing of images anywhere and anytime. Notably, the production of the first photograph ever by the French inventor Joseph Nicéphore Niépce in 1820 involved various salts, including bitumen, a mineral that exists at the shores of the Dead Sea.

The interrelations between the desert and projected images are also often represented in literature and cinema, including Werner Herzog's documentary film *Fata Morgana* that he directed in 1971 at the Sahara Desert.

This exhibition suggests a reading and an understanding of the desert area, the Negev and the Dead Sea, as fertile grounds that generate and nurture images. The exhibition displays artworks that oscillate between a scientific point of view that regards the fata morgana as an optic phenomenon or a technological wonder, and a metaphysical perspective that ties the desert with mystic experiences and encounters, divine revelations and hallucinations as reflected by the Bible, the New Testimony, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and ancient Jewish external books.

Jacqueline Pearl's artwork *EshetLot (Lot's Wife)* (2017-2018) is based on autobiographical stories of women workers in a potassium factory that operated in Sodom during the 1930s and 1940s. This is an archaeological-poetic journey in geographical, mythical and historical Sodom. The artwork revolves around the women workers' stories that resonate the story of Lot's wife.

Lot's wife became a pillar of salt as punishment for allowing her daughters to be raped. She was as nameless as the women workers who wrote the diaries. The women workers were refugees from distant cities and mothers who were not allowed to bring their children to the workers' camp. The visual inquiry of the workers' camp in Sodom echoes their voices, as well as the mythical figure of Lot's wife hovering over the region and leading the artwork to spiritual zones that integrate poetics, politics and philosophy.

The working men and women at the site suffered from harsh living conditions and family and social isolation. In order to make things easier for them, a cinema theatre was built in a cave in Mount Sodom. The remnants of the abandoned desert cinema link the natural resource that was dug in the potassium plant and the films that were

screened inside the cave and offered a comforting illusion for the women who were cut off from their natural course of life. The artwork *EshetLot (Lot's Wife)* displays a pillar of female nonconformity as a reminder of the women who stood on the burning earth and refused the command "Do not look!"

Arad Camera (2018), a project of the theorist and photographer Chaim Deuelle Luski, comprises a camera that has been built specifically for this exhibition. This camera refers to the phenomenon of *fata morgana*, which is created by the enigmatic encounter between the earth and the sky, along the horizon lines at the desert. The camera separates, at the moment of recording, between the two parts of being: heaven and earth.

The work has been inspired by Martin Heidegger's renowned essay *The Origin of the Work of Art* about the "rift," the rupture between the earth and the sky that has been already debated by the pre-Socratic Greek thought. Parmenides has genuinely phrased the ontological question about the relationship between the particular and the general, and between the ontic and the ontological.

In the history of photography, the problem of balance, or, more accurately, the study of imbalance, in terms of the quantities of light, between the open skies and opaque earth, has been thoroughly discussed. The separation between the earth and the sky has also become one of the fundamental problems that shaped the development of the structure of the photographic emulsion over the generations, on one hand, and emphasized the need to refine the polishing of the lenses, in the *vertical* photography tradition, on the other hand. The *horizontal* photography, however, suggests a different perspective on this problem. Instead of balancing and "deceiving" the eye, it aspires to sharpen the differences and to detach what cannot be ontologically attached (Heidegger) and physically attached by the vertical photography.

In the photographs produced by the *Arad Camera*, the horizon – the desert – evokes the rift between the earth and the sky that one of its manifestations is the *fata morgana*. The *Arad Camera* aspires to show the conditions of the possibility of separate between the ontological "authorities".

Blue Board/Tablet, Red Board/Tablet, Green Board/Tablet is Barak Rubin's series of photographs which is based on 14th century BC written books that were found in the ancient Near East, mainly in Mesopotamia, Syria and Palestine.

Writing books had been probably anticipated today's printed books and e-books (tablets), and they are considered as one of the most primeval means of preservation of texts. Their inner surfaces were covered with wax that allowed engraving of the text by a sharp tool. The wax also allowed appearance and also disappearance of the written text. From time to time, the wax could be melted in order to erase the text, hence the Latin concept *Tabula Rasa*.

Rubin's photographs also comprise images from the ancient Near East. On the right side of the photograph *Blue Board/Tablet* appears an image of winged beetle, a symbol associated with the Hezekiah Seal that has been found in the City of David and the Heads of the Kingdom of Judea in the 8th Century BCE. On the left side of the photograph appears an image of the Tree of Life, a common motif in most of the ancient Near East cultures. This particular image of tree originates in the Assyrian culture and Ashurnasirpal's palace in the city of Nimrud.

On the right side of the photograph *Red Board/Tablet* appears a motif of an oak tree, which is also a common image in all the ancient Near Eastern cultures. It is particularly connoted with the mother-queen Astarte whose origins are in a Jewish image that was found in the ancient Canaanite/Israeli city of Armageddon. On the left side appears an image of a bull-god whose origins are in the archaeological site Beit Tzida. This figure is considered by the Canaanite mythology as the Head of the Pantheon of Gods and one of the prominent Gods in the city of Ugarit. It is also

referred to as *I'll, Elu, Tar* (bull, in Hebrew: *Shor*), a symbol of power and fertility. Many scholars agree that the image of the bull has originated the image of God in Judaism.

Green Board/Tablet comprises three parts. The left side and right side include images of pairs of winged creatures which are typical to most of the ancient Near Eastern cultures. The origin of these creatures is the statue of Cherubim (angels) which erected above the atonement that covered the Arc of the Covenant at the Holy Temple. This pair also appears near the Ark of the Covenant that has been revealed at the Temple of Solomon in Dvir. The Cherubim represent celestial entities or virtues. They are also mentioned in the Bible and the Talmud, as well as in the External Books and other scripts. The priests at the temple publicly revealed the Cherubim of the Ark of the Covenant during the Jewish Three Pilgrimage ceremonies. Due to the Cherubim's location at the holiest part at the temple, the God of Israel has been rendered "The Dweller of the Cherubim."

At the center of this artwork there is a photograph of a map of the world as it is currently displayed in Google Earth Internet website. Rubin places Jerusalem at the center of this photograph, resonating T & O world maps from the 1st Century CE that merely included the upper, settled part of the world. The T (earth, in Latin: *terra*) represented three continents – Asia, Europe and Africa – whilst the O (ocean, in Latin: *ocean*) represented the seas.

Raluca Grada Amandi and Olivio Logian-Genecio's (UK). *Inhabitants of Exclusion Areas (I.E.A.): r#creat1on* is a spatially based and augmented reality-based work. The work, that deals with temporal digital forms of life, illustrates and criticizes the contemporary human condition while looking into both past and present. It follows the trajectory of the human being's pursuit of perfectness, whether this fantasy is

connoted with belief in immortality, intellectual emancipation, national pride, occupying territories, artistic achievement or financial dominance.

Inhabitants of Exclusion Areas (I.E.A.): r#creat1on focuses on the contemporary human being's fantasy of perfectness which is manifested in the obsession of technology. It proposes an apprehended perspective on an era in which artificial intelligence attains the highest level of evolution -an era which merely enables us to realize that the human being is nothing more than a human being. Notwithstanding, this artwork is about the desire of the human being to be more than humane: to live the dreams and to technologically imitate human behavior.

The narrative of *Inhabitants of Exclusion Areas (I.E.A.): r#creat1on* presents robots entering and exiting surrounding areas of action (mining areas, military zones and tourists sites). These robots leap into the humans' dream of perfection by spending their leisure time on the shores of the Dead Sea without realizing that the sea's specific conditions, its medical benefits due to its salts, endangers them because their metal body parts. The user of this artwork follows the robots while their bodies are deconstructed by the salty water ;following the escalating corrosion of their metal parts and the collapse of their digital brains that is illustrated by a series of hallucinations. The user encounters the robots who congratulate her/him: "Hi, how are you today?" During the developing conversation, the user might get awkward answers from robots. The lack of communication between the user and the robots emphasizes exclusion at two levels: the robots are excluded from the natural leisure areas on the shores of the Dead Sea, whereas the user is excluded from the unrevealed secrets which are stored in the robotic brains.

Throughout the journey, the interaction between the user and the robots is gradually disrupted until the entire screen is covered with technological bugs. The bugs stimulate fabricated messages such as "the battery is coming to an end" or an illustration of a telephone that doesn't work as a last attempt to warn of a final

annihilation of the communication between the human being and the robots that he created in his own image.

Once the journey stops, a last message is sent from the disintegrated robots, in which they express their desire to stay in touch with the user.

Inhabitants of Exclusion Areas (I.E.A.): r#creat1on is the swan song of the contemporary human being that aspires to bring the technology closer to her/himself and to create its own (technological) image. Eventually, s/he realizes that technology imprisons the human being in her/his own world, and that there will not be a substitute for the human being.

Arad lines by Yael Vishnizki-Levi and Stanislaw Welbel (Poland) was realized during their participation in artists residence program 'Arad Art Architecture' during 2017. The work is the product of an intense search after genuine interpretations of archaeological sites and artifacts from the surrounding area. This investigation of the distant past of the region was carried out while having in mind one of the most mysterious human visual phenomena of the desert: the Nazca Lines in Peru are a series of geoglyphs (giant earth paintings) which are partially abstract and partially figurative. They have been created by an ancient civilization that resided in the area between 500 BC – 500 AD. These paintings, which can only be noticed from a higher angle, were created by moving stones on the ground while exposing the naked desert. The purpose of these paintings is still unclear. Researchers assume that there is a connection between them and religious rituals and astronomical maps. Alternative interpretations suggest that these are secret coding systems designed to assist the landing of UFOs on Earth.

Vishnizky-Levy and Welbel's interest in the Nazca Lines, however, stimulated them to look for similar phenomena in the Negev desert and around Arad. They visited archeological sites, followed ancient paths and met with archaeologists. During their investigation they recognized interesting visual phenomena in the area and they

reconsidered the meaning of local visual phenomena: stone labyrinths, ancient routes, mysterious sand circles, and concrete playgrounds at the city center. In order to conceptualize these desert patterns, they met with a variety of residents and local community representatives. They accumulated a pan array of interpretations of these patterns that eventually resulted in a new system of hiking trails. The shape of *Arad lines* logo – three circles that join together at six points, without beginning or end – is considered in various cultures as a sacred pattern with spiritual qualities. The project integrates ancient artifacts and artworks made by the couple together with students of the town's Democratic School and interconnects paved roads, existent hiking trails and a territory which is on the border between the town and the open desert. The artwork can be experienced on different levels: Whether as a performative and communal artwork, as a spiritual experience, or as an invitation to reconsider social and environmental issues, Vishnizky-Levy and Welbel are in the process of advocating *Arad lines* to become one of the local tourist attractions in this region. *Arad lines* by Yael Vishnizki-Levi and Stanislaw Welbel (Poland) was realized during their participation in artists residence program 'Arad Art Architecture' during 2017.

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Alexis Cuzino's (Canada) artwork *Mirage* has been inspired by his 2016 participation in the artists residence program 'Arad Art Architecture'. The five works which comprise of *Mirage* have been initiated as a documentation of the artist's performances, in which he improvised movements in the desert surrounding Arad.

The mechanical movements emphasize the limitation and temporality of the living body in correlation with the temporal natural environment. In the second stage, the photographs that documented the performance have been edited into a photographic collage that generates a dialog between different forms of being of human life and natural life. This dialog includes interfaces between the flexible body organs and the strict stone angles, between the inner intimate parts of the artist's body and the open space of the desert. The decision to print the photographic collages on golden fabric is motivated by an aspiration to capture the shiny desert light. The leather-like material on which the photographs are printed, originally used for covering furniture, has a sort of mountain topography, that in a way resonates with the rough surface of the area where the work has been created.

The fabric's angles also return light to the viewer's eyes and from time to time blinds her/him. The artwork shimmers as the image appears and disappears, correlating to the viewer's movement in front of this artwork.