

# Sinkholes

Keren Benbenisty; Sari Carel; Cooking Sections (Daniel Fernandez Pascual & Alon Schwabe); Michal Gilboa David; Ronny Hardlitz; Nir Harel; Dana Levy; Yair Perez; Gilad Ratman; Ada Rimon & Ofeq Shemer; Hadas Sstt; Shiri Shalmy; Santiago Sierra; Julia Wirsching & Gabriel Hensche

The exhibition 'Sinkholes' takes place at the Contemporary Art Center in Arad, about ninety years after the severe earthquake in the Dead Sea area. The 6.25 Richter scale earthquake occurred on July 11, 1927, and resulted in 500 casualties and about 700 wounded people in Palestine-Eretz Israel and Jordan. Residents in the upheaval area described the sea in their diaries as "a site of tremendous boiling and severe waves."

The horrifying quake, at the turn of the previous century, was a part of a chain of topographic changes that started 25 million years ago, when tectonic plates began to move away from each other. The movements led to the formation of the Syrian-African rift, which runs from southern Turkey to Tanzania, and passes through the Dead Sea – the lowest terrestrial place in the world.

The 'Sinkholes' exhibition explores a unique phenomenon in this place: the land surrounding the Dead Sea occasionally opens its mouth and swallows soil, sand, stones, objects, roads and even people.

The sinkhole is a long-known geological phenomenon, but it has appeared along the Dead Sea only a few decades ago. These concavities that suddenly emerge in the salty soil are the results of an ongoing dissolving process of an underground salty layer. Yet, this phenomenon doesn't necessarily occur due to natural circumstances. Sinkholes may also occur because of manmade activities, such as collapsed mining sites, pumping groundwater, construction works, eruptive water in broken pipes

systems, etc. The phenomenon of sinkholes is considered as a real danger, due to the unexpectedness of these concavities and their size.

The exhibition deals with the curse of hubris, people's sin of vanity – the excessive human domineering of nature – and it relates to the primitive human fear of being suddenly sinking in subterranean depths. The exhibition invites the visitors to a journey into the depths of their bodies and souls, while dealing with their existential fears. The exhibited artworks create a kind of kaleidoscope of decay, trembling, swallowing, collapse and pumping, those phenomena that stimulate the power of imagination.

The works in this exhibition are a sort of Richter scales that indicate fearful and undermined existentiality. These works deepen into the abyss of our being, while examining the effervescing materials of its interiority. These artworks delve into the depths of our existence while contacting its most elementary materials – the steaming core of its essence. These works aim to uncover the tenacious, consistent and monotonous principles of the primal existential element.

The works in the exhibition 'Sinkholes' walk on the soft ground while skipping the enclaves of life. Sometimes they stray and swallowed up in the black holes, where they are connected to other dimensions – parallel universes, sites that are seemingly connoted with fantasy films and science fiction books.

'Sinkholes' metaphorizes art as a sinkhole: a pocket air, a burp in our challenging life sequence; a sudden space of yearning and fear in which the unknown dwells. The power that creates the dramatic concavities – the human being's vanity – generates a grotesque "swallowing" essence that provokes curiosity and astonishment. The future of this dark essence is unknown, but its persistent existence in our life is undeniable.

The title of Keren Benbenisty's kinetic installation *Avec le vide, les pleins pouvoirs* ("With the Void, Full Powers") relates to two well-known creators: the artist Yves Klein and the writer Albert Camus. During his artistic career, Klein aspired to find an artistic "container" for a spiritual space. Monochromatic painting was his initial attempt

to accomplish this mission. Klein's combination of monochrome and exclusive use of blue (a color he patented under 'Klein's International Blue') was another step toward a spiritual space.

In his 1958 exhibition 'The Void' Klein presented an empty displaying space, and at the opening ceremony, he served blue cocktail to his 3,000 guests, including Albert Camus who signed the guest book: "With the Void, Full Powers."

The exhibition's title and its connotation with Klein's cocktails lead to reconsideration of Benbenisty's installation – recycling the content and pouring the blue liquid – as a statement about the void, the Sisyphean attempt to fill it, and its inevitable emptying.

Michal Gilboa David's sculptural installation deals with the empty space and one's discomfort in encountering it. Gilboa David works in traditional minimalist sculpture tradition. She places a series of similar monochromatic units on the floor of the exhibition site. But in addition to her reference to minimalism, a field dominated mostly by male sculptors such as Judd, Flavin, Kelly and LeWitt, Gilboa David vividly examines negative spaces.

The English sculptor Rachel Whiteread is famous for her artistic interest in empty spaces. She exhibited a concrete casting of the interior of a three-story residential building in a London neighborhood. Like Whiteread, Gilboa David presents interior castings that are designated to transform the fear of void into an arena of playful relationships between shapes and volumes. The negative space of the interior of the containers is a metaphor for dealing with things that do not exist yet, or hasn't begun yet.

Nir Harel presents a selection of digitally printed drawings of occasional forms. Harel chooses to display the paintings as hammocks hanging from the ceiling. By inviting the viewers to use his paintings as a place to lay their bodies, Harel considers

art not only as a platform for observation and paying attention to the environment, but also as a site for swirling, undressing, and fading within the environment.

The hammocks shield and surround the viewers while enabling them to delve in a private space within a public sphere. The range of issues dealt with by the observer-participant comprises thoughts about composition, color, shape, and instrumental aspects such as weight, height and speed.

Ronny Hardliz's video art 'Unoccupied Territories' focuses on the hole in its physical and philosophical dimensions. It includes three video channels. The first channel shows a group of young people who are engaged in what appears to be digging a hole. This event takes place at the home garden of the Arad Artists Residency Project. This action raises moral questions: does this group of young people know what the pit is meant for? What were the orders they received and who ordered them? Despite the pleasant temperament of these young people, it is impossible to avoid morbid thoughts about the possibility that this hole can contain a human body, and the fact that the action is taken place in the dark.

In the second part of the work, Hardliz is crawling into the pit made by the young people in the previous channel. The different photography angle creates an illusion that Hardliz climbs up in order to be swallowed by the hole.

The third channel shows the site of the events that occurred in the previous two channels, but this site now appears to be static, motionless. Over the landscape, flying titles deal with occupation, peace and coexistence.

In deconstructing the action in three parts, Herdlitz redeems the action from its specificity, and stimulates us to conclude that the hole is simultaneously political and poetic.

The artist Sari Carel turns paper into a sculptural device. She engraves in the soft paper and creates traces of action on its surface. She creates signs that indicate

the transformation of the material in her studio – from a complete and consistent unit into a decayed material whose surface has been scratched and excavated.

Sinkholes are a phenomenon created not only naturally but caused by human actions that disrupt nature. Likewise, the natural paper in Carel's artworks undergoes a series of invasive interventions.

The artist Dana Levy has filmed the two video channels in her installation 'Monolith' at three different sites: the Dead Sea beaches, Death Valley, and Lake Mono in California. Levy settles herself in the "spacious" landscape and she manipulates it by diverse devices. She projects beams of light, she blows bubbles, and she splashes sand. Levy projects these interventions on rocks placed in the gallery, while one rock has been photographed during daytime, and the other was photographed at dark.

The displayed rocks are associated with "earthwork" or "land art," particularly Robert Smithson's artwork 'Spiral Jetty'.

We live in an Anthropocene era, however, a new geological period that marks a stage in which the contemporary human influence on Earth reached a point of no return. This era requires a reconsideration of "land art." Whereas Smithson and his contemporaries preferred large-scale works that demanded a lot of energy, today's "land art" yearns for reduced energy. Hence, Levy's artwork places the technology at the center, while offering it as a substitute for physical action in space. In this way, Levy wishes to reduce the energy expenditure in space.

Hadas Satt's work 'Sinkholes' turns the viewer into a witness of photographed apocalypse of nature. What appears to be, at first glance, a program on National Geographic Channel, is gradually revealed as parodied nature programs: a decline of small stones causes a rockslide which accelerates a collapse of whole mountains, leading to a collapse of millions-year-old tectonic plates.

The understanding that the photographed events are actually made by Set – a purposed rolling of stones on the edge of the Dead Sea – reveals the inherent paradox

in human-nature relationship. The same nature that expresses a transcendental beauty is also a site for intervention, disruption of natural processes and imprinting a human mark. The photographic tricks that seem to be taken from science fiction 'B movies' embody the price of this ambivalent relationship between human beings and nature.

The Spanish artist Santiago Sierra, in his video art '3,000 holes 180x50x50 each', presents a high angle photograph of an area of 3,000 holes. The work was created on the shores of Morocco, opposite to the Gibraltar Strait, and it deals with the daily struggle of Africans who immigrate to Europe.

The holes were dug by a group of workers of African origins. The dimensions of the holes are connoted with graves. In their location on the coast between Spain and Africa, these holes associate the dangers faced by illegal immigrants.

Along with his discussion of emigration, Sierra seeks to reflect the slavery conditions of the immigrants, who yearn to reach European countries. They try to fulfill their dream by digging holes for a minimum daily wage.

Cooking Sections' artwork 'Climavore' concentrates on a perforated horizontal slab hanging from the ceiling. Throughout the exhibition, this board often functions as a platform for eating. The holes along the "table" were made according to a map of the current sinkholes along the shores of the Dead Sea.

In a world dominated by food corporations, there's a need for a different logics of food consumption that is not produced by the market. In this work, the climate is the main actor. Cooking Sections (Daniel Fernández Pascual & Alon Schwabe) offers a new form of food: the Climavore.

The Climavore is based on a temporary diet that responds to the unstable state of Earth. In the neoliberal economy, food is produced according to the consumers' demand. The four seasons – summer, spring, autumn and winter – do not affect the diet of contemporary human beings. Cooking Sections, however, offers five food seasons in order to overcome the overuse of natural resources. The five seasons vary and extend

over weeks, months, years and decades: the 'forever fertile' season, the drought season, the invasive season, the season of ocean cleaning, and the season of the deserts.

Yair Perez's paintings introduce the viewer to ephemeral occurrences that range from early primordial moments to apocalyptic and terminal occurrence. The painted scenes show some universal creatures that are the products of chemical evolution that merged atoms and molecules inside a fertilizing fluid.

The bright and radiant colors, as well as the frantic brush strokes, however, create a sick environment. Perez paints deformed, deviant, clumsy, freaky and abnormal figures without natural proportions, which are possibly inspired by the Hiroshima and Chernobyl children. These figures interact with a poisoning environment. Consequently, they are mutilated, inflated and mutated.

Gilad Ratman's video art 'Boogieman' is named after its protagonist who gradually disappears into a muddy soil. This work is an anthology of videos shot by Boogie man, an Internet persona.

The work presents Boogieman's psychological relations with the muddy land. Boogieman's acting and photography are so compelling that the horrified viewer is repeatedly detached and reattached to him.

Seemingly, Ratman chooses to present Boogyman as a sort of his own alter ego. Ratman, whose works demonstrate a primitivist-barbaric spirit, is occupied with the terrestrial uncanny who disappears into the earth.

Like reality television and survival shows icons, Boogieman is released from societal restrictions through his unmediated encounter with nature. He plunges into the heart of the earth, and he stays there until his body is almost completely submerged. Ratman offers the viewers to reconsider art as an experience of delving into tunnels and underground passages, and human beings' merging with the material to the point of uninhibited release.

Shiri Shalmy's artwork focuses on a folly, an architectural structure built for decorative purposes, without any architectural function other than improvement of the area. Nevertheless, one who observes a folly might be interested in what is going on inside it. The polygonal observatory facility in Shalmy's folly installation enables the viewer to look inside the folly and encounter an unexpected structure that traverses the folly – an interior *without* exterior.

The video that is projected inside the structure reflects a point of view of a body moving inside a sinkhole. At first, this body is in the swallowing chamber of the sinkhole. Then it undergoes the curves and twists of what appears to be the sinkhole's digestive system, and it finally reaches the bottom of the sinkhole. This work enables the spectator to experience a most horrifying route in a sort of flat replica of a 100-meter sinkhole that emerged in 2007 in a street in Guatemala City. This sinkhole became an Internet sensation and emblematic for urban sinkholes.

Shalmy has created this video from adapted and edited found footage, determined to find out if it is possible to represent nothingness by existence – does a hole remains nothingness even when it is materialized?

Translated by Gilad Padva

<https://vimeo.com/43965570>

Hadas Set



Gilad Ratman





Dana Levy – Projection on stones



Shiri Shalmy

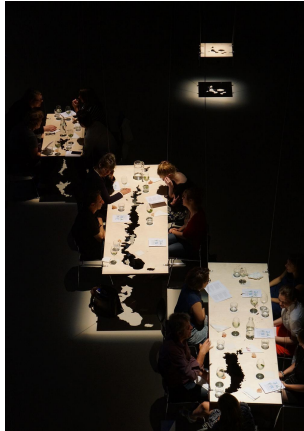
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4FJmFMJjEU&feature=em-share\\_video\\_user](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r4FJmFMJjEU&feature=em-share_video_user)

Michal Gilboa David – a sculpture



Alon and Daniel's Cooking Sections

'Climavore'



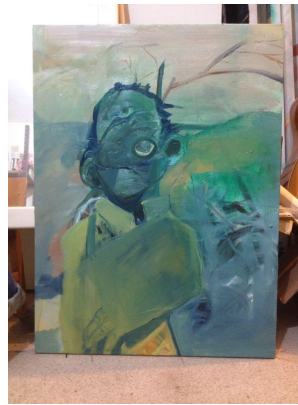
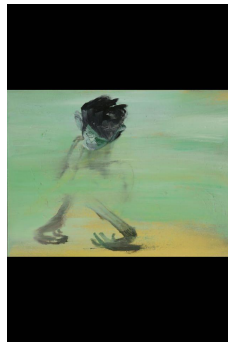
Keren Benbenisty

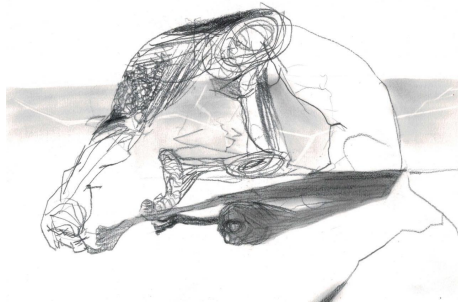


Nir Harel



Yair Perez





Sari Carel



Performance:

Dan Alon

'Cooking Sections'