



Yonatan Ullman's new solo exhibition, "LEGACY", deals with fracture, being part of / or not belonging to, and a search for his place within art history

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Yonatan Ullman, 'Moshe and me' detail from 'LEGACY', solo show, ArtSpaceTLV, 2015

Yonatan Ullman's New York studio walls are exhibited in his Tel Aviv solo show. confusing? For sure. In 2011, before moving away from living in New York, Ullman tore apart the walls of his studio. Sheets of drywall turned into a mosaic-like floor comprised of uneven, un-glorified shreds. The vertical walls now lay horizontal and look like ancient ruins, archaeological findings, or a scorched desert terrain. These were initially exhibited in the exhibition "Colored Cactus" (Industry City, NY, 2011), then in the "Rising Stars" of Verge Art Miami (2012) and now have made their way to Israel to be exhibited in "Legacy" - Yonatan Ullman's solo exhibition at ArtSpaceTLV.

From this shattered floor erect an upside down Greek column - its Corinthian order meets the floor, whereas its top is the head of Michelangelo's sculpture 'David'. Or rather, a cheap replica bought off Ebay. A human head at the capitol of this shattered, upside down world.

David's head is also wounded - Ullman peeled the white 'skin' off from the back of its head to reveal a luscious, blood-like, red layer of paint underneath. In close examination the result looks like exposed human anatomy - it's terrifying.

In a conversation with "Globes" magazine, Ullman explains his motivation - *"I wanted to reveal the vulnerable human beneath the pristine white marble. After peeling paintings for approximately two years (referring to the project "FORCE" which Ullman worked on between 2008-2010), I thought about peeling three dimensional objects. I then thought about trophy hunters who go out to nature, hunt exotic animals, peel the animal's skin off, and take the skin as a trophy from their expedition - isn't that basically what painters do? I had this bizarre thought about a fictional character who, rather than hunt and skin exotic animals, hunts and skins sculptures - isn't that basically what collecting is? But, which sculptures would this character have in his collection? I decided to start with the world's most well known sculpture - Michelangelo's 'David'. I went on Ebay, typed: "Michelangelo's David", and was pleased to receive multiple results. I chose one that appeared the best copy and ordered it.... Sure enough, a few weeks later I receive a notice to go to the post office to pick up my order - seemingly, a very mundane situation. I waited my turn and handed my slit to the clerk. He went behind the scenes to retrieve my package, then returned and took another clerk behind the scenes with him, and another and another. At this point the people waiting in line next to me began to become interested in what my package contained. Finally, four clerks hulled out a very large box from behind the scenes. I opened the box and, in a surreal almost biblical 'David and Goliath' like scene, pulled out David's head and raised it above my head to the cheering sounds of the other people waiting in line at the post office."*

Now, this bleeding David's head erect atop a column which brings him to Goliath's height. When this re-treated icon from art history premiered in New York ('Colored Cactus', Industry City Gallery, 2011) it 'faced' the Statue of Liberty - another cultural icon. The actual sculpture could be seen through the galleries window. Ullman placed a telescope on the shattered floor, which 'absorbed' the sculpture's image into his exhibition - thus merging the two icons.



left: The Statue of Liberty viewed from a telescope - part of Yonatan Ullman's installation 'Rudgum' at 'Colored Cactus exhibition, Industry City Gallery, 2011. right: Moshe Gershuni, "WHO IS ZIONIST AND WHO ISN'T", July. M. Gallery, 1979

Here in Israel, David faces a new horizon - Moshe Gershuni's iconic work "WHO IS ZIONIST AND WHO ISN'T". For his 1979 solo exhibition at July. M. Gallery Moshe Gershuni completely emptied out the entire gallery and wrote half a sentence in large red block letters directly on the walls on either side of the gallery. One wall had the words "WHO IS ZIONIST" written on it, the opposing wall had the words "AND WHO ISN'T" written on it. Gershuni thus reflected what then was the central question in Israel's discourse on the walls of July. M. Gallery (This work was recently re-exhibited as part of Gershuni's retrospective in Berlin). However, Ullman doesn't quote the entire sentence. Rather, he 'beheads' its first half to write on the wall of ArtSpaceTLV only the words "AND WHO ISN'T". When asked why? Ullman gave a reserved critic of Israel's current cultural climate: "I feel the discourse has changed dramatically since Gershuni created his original piece. I feel that, rather than be occupied with the question of 'who is a part of Israel', the current discourse has become very occupied with marking those who aren't."



Yonatan Ullman, "LEGACY" (installation shot), ArtSpaceTLV, 2015

Ullman continues his dialogue with the local icon, Moshe Gershuni, with several drawings. In one group of four drawings Ullman uses the stencil letters from the sentence "WHO IS ZIONIST AND WHO ISN'T" in faulty order to form the words: "MOTHER", "WHO AM I", "PLEASE" and a fourth word which could read as "OFFSPRING", "GET OUT, GET OUT" or a nonsense word somewhat like "DADA". Across from this group of drawings is one photo. It depicts both artists (Gershuni and Ullman) standing near one another in an almost inter-generational hug, asking to be part of the Israeli canon, if not part of the cannon of all of art history. David's head oversees all of this in complacent indifference.

