



A look at Yonatan Ullman's "LEGACY"

Smadar Sheffi, December 12th, 2015



Yonatan Ullman, "Legacy" (installation view), ArtSpaceTLV, 2015.
photo: Barak Brinker

Visitors to Yonatan Ullman's one-person show hear their footsteps loud and clear. The floor is paved with fragments of the drywalls from the artist's NYC studio. These bear marks from visitors shoes and have been chipped away at the corners under the weight of their feet. On the wall in big red letters are the words "WHO IS NOT" half of Moshe Gershuni's 1979 wall piece shown at Julie. M. Gallery.

The first part of the question, “WHO IS ZIONIST” resonated through the deep rifts in Israeli society following the Right’s victory in the 1977 elections and arguments over the price of peace with Egypt. The dichotomy in Israel between the two camps with no option for complexity arises from Gershuni’s textual work. Twenty-six years later, Ullman leaves only “who is not” – exclusion as praxis.



Moshe Gershuni, “WHO IS ZIONIST, AND WHO ISN’T”, Julie. M. Gallery, 1979

The immediate and distressing visual association to Ullman's installation is Hans Haacke's key work *Germania*, installed in the German pavilion in Venice at the 1993 Biennale. There, Haacke shattered the marble floor of the pavilion (which was originally installed in the pavilion during the Nazi regime's rule over Germany) and inscribed the word "Germania" on the inner wall. A picture of Hitler hung on the door and a replica of the pre-Euro German mark hung over the entrance.



Hans Haacke, "GERMANIA" (installation shot), German pavilion, Venice Biennale, 1993

Germania, the ancient Greco-Roman name for a broad geographical expanse (encompassing even modern Germany), encodes the Teutonic mythological memory and Hitler's ambition to create a new world order. Germania was to be the name of Berlin after the Nazi victory, designed to embody the Nazi power. Haacke illuminated the link between German art and the German pavilion – an important site for it – and Nazism, while Germany has fashioned itself as the representative of freedom and liberty after its reunification and the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Hitler's first foreign visit as chancellor was to Italy, in 1933. An art lover, he visited the German pavilion, among other sites, and ordered the construction of a new pavilion. The new building was to have a marble floor instead of parquet; inaugurated in 1938, it is still used today. Haacke created a chilling monument to history and the way in which totalitarian language has become part of the civic discourse.



Hans Haacke, "GERMANIA" (detail), German pavilion,
Venice Biennale, 1993

Ullman's installation comments on kitsch and power with the "classical" pillar on its head, made into a pedestal for the copy of the head of Michelangelo's *David* (1501-1504).

The statue was the symbol for ideals of freedom in the Republic of Florence; Ullman painted the back of the head in a similar blood-red to that of his (and Gershuni's) text. The combination between the wounded symbol of David on a crumbling floor, a text boding ill, and the covert memory of a dystopia of power generates anxiety.



Yonatan Ullman, "Legacy" (detail), ArtSpaceTLV, 2015. photo: Barak Brinker

