

# Skewed perspectives

Ido Michaeli's complex take on the production of art, Gilad Ratman's surreal concept of a rock concert and Dana Levy's view of humanity's attack on nature are part of the Israel Museum's exhibition '6 Artists – 6 Projects,' which kicks off its jubilee celebrations. First of two articles

Is there a common theme running through the six solo projects by six different artists with which the Israel Museum in Jerusalem has chosen to launch its 50th anniversary celebrations? Some of the works in the exhibition "6 Artists – 6 Projects" deal with the apparatuses involved in the production of art in the contemporary world (technologies of power relations, economic structures or security mechanisms), exposing the conditions that enable art to be made and the restrictions and prohibitions imposed on it.

Another theme is the mechanisms of vision, which regulate our view of reality. Some of the works simulate a surrealistic scene or an esoteric phenomenon that creates a parallel reality, grotesque or terrifying, fragile or nostalgic. In all cases, the artists resort to tactics of subversion and diversion, forcing a focused gaze on a specific phenomenon, creating an alternative visual history.

The totality, then, oscillates between macro and micro, contrasting meta-structures that forge reality with fabricated or ephemeral phenomena that create a crack in the political-economic reality.

The project that most strikingly blends the different approaches is "Bank Hapoalim Carpet," in which the artist, Ido Michaeli, embarked on an immense journey, both geographical and critical.

Michaeli designed a carpet, arranged for it to be hand-woven in traditional style in Afghanistan and documented the entire process. The result is a large wall carpet that was created in Kabul and smuggled to Israel by a network of agents.

At first glance, the carpet looks like an advertisement for the bank in the museum. A closer perusal of the details reveals a complex, hybrid story. The basis is an architectural



Ido Michaeli's "Bank Hapoalim Carpet."



Gilad Rafman's "Five Bands from Romania."

structure that categorizes social classes, within which are icons derived from a variety of sources: coins and stamps related to Israel's development and to socialism, manuscript

illustrations, leaders whose portraits appear on banknotes, quotations from old pre-1948 posters. At the apex of the architectural pyramid is a figure holding scales, which is taken

with an ethos that disintegrated and was supplanted by a cultural mutation. The two-channel HD video shows heavy-metal rock bands in a large open space near Bucharest, tuning their instruments and then playing, with the amplifiers buried in the ground. The result, in the words of the curator, "Five Bands from Romania," Amitai Mendelsohn, is "surreal – a blend of distorted guitar, drumming, and vocal sounds erupting from the earth."

Viewed without sound in the exhibition space, the film becomes a weird choreography of electrified beefy men dressed in black, their long hair flailing, as they pantomime "freedom in the liberal West." Alternatively, it can be viewed in an inner room, in which the faint sounds from the earth, the musicians' guttural groans and the lowing of cows from the surrounding area can be heard.

Ratman subverts the concept of a performance by inviting several bands to play together and by altering their musical product. In this work, Ratman reaches a peak in terms of homing in on the themes that occupy it: the political subtext, the primeval, the subterranean, the regimen of the body or its transformation into meat, the primal scream and more.

Dana Levy continues her ongoing investigation of planned environments, of domesticating and taming habitats and institutions such as nature museums and preservation institutions. In her work, she sets up a confrontation between the ideal of domestic design and the savagery of deadly storms as a titanic struggle for political supremacy.

Levy's video installations, "Literature of Storms" and "Everglades," show the consequences of global ecological change. In the former, using a simple technique of screening

from a 1930s poster for a fund for the unemployed.

The interactions between the figures hinge on relations of give and take, bargaining, robbery and plunder – hollow logos of socialist ideologies that were an element in the bank's history. ("Bank Hapoalim" means "workers' bank.") The problematics that Michaeli works into the carpet concerning routes of money and its institutions, the ethos of manual labor and the history of its exploitation in propaganda of different kinds, and about what constitutes "the enemy" and the global economy make for a compelling tangle.

## Subverted performance

"Five Bands from Romania," a 14-minute video installation by Gilad Ratman, also deals

*Continued on page 6*