

NOA GUR

Collective Identity



TUE - SAT, 09/10-05/11/14 , Galerie Campagne Première, Chausseestraße 116, 10115 Berlin

in her video “Collective Identity” (2014) Gur probes another traditional learning exercise with art. In this work, produced during a year-long residency back in Israel, she accompanied a school group on an educational visit to the Tel Aviv Museum. The pupils are children of asylum seekers and economic migrants, whose legal status in Israel is ambiguous. During the museum visit, the children learn to look at art by making sketches of the paintings in the museum’s collection. However, the so-called educational lesson is not conveyed with language, but is rather substantiated by the established order of visibility and representation. The children’s own status within Israeli society is unclear and even politically contested, yet they’re indiscriminately subjected to a reactionary cultural education that propagates a fixed national identity, made visual in the canon of Israeli art.

In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, French philosopher Jacques Rancière argues that aesthetics are necessarily bound up in the struggle of the unrepresented and unrecognized subject for visibility in the established order. Visibility thus implies political recognition, as aesthetics are the image of society, and reflect what it is permissible to say and show. Here, Gur increasingly engages with looking at the ways in which art institutions and the display of visual culture can become entrenched in programs that instill political ideologies, and serve to affirm those narratives upon which collective identity politics have been founded. Indeed, politics is inherent in the cultural forms themselves—in the museum, the book or the theater, for example. Artistic interventions into places of cultural and aesthetic authority, Rancière argues, have the potential to help to reconfigure, directly or indirectly, the landscape of the visible. *Collective Identity* was also the title of Gur’s recent show. The aforementioned, eponymous work was shown with two additional video works that center on the reliance of nation-states on ideological narratives, while at the same time maintaining the semblance of encouraging a culture of artistic production free of censorship. On another wall, the artist screened “Postmodern Ornament” (2014), where the former director of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art recounts a controversial episode from

the 1980s: a curator and an artist painted the walls of the museum with the colors of the Palestinian flag for a specific show. He recalls that rather than standing up for their political action, the curator had told him that the paint was but a “postmodern ornament.” The request came from the Sheik, and was enforced by the fair organizers. In “Art Dubai” (2014), her Berlin gallerist recounts an anecdote from the Art Dubai art fair, in which he was asked to conceal the names ‘Israel’ and ‘Persian Gulf’ on an artwork that showed a spinning globe.

While both anecdotes demonstrate instances where an institution reacts in compliance with a certain political ideology, the work “Collective Identity” exposes something far more troubling: Of particular interest here is the educational audio guide that accompanies the children’s surveying of early Israeli paintings. We hear two Israeli actors play the voices of two Palestinians depicted in one painting, and see the children retracing the visual narrative described. The actors mimic Arabic accents in an exaggerated manner, ridiculing the “simple” Palestinian farmers. For the children, whose families come from Eastern Europe, South America, Africa and the Far East, and who are marked by their own Otherness in Israeli society, successfully entering the melting pot of Israeli identity is learning—by repetition and reproduction in this case—that the mutual Other is Palestinian.

In presenting the three videos together with little commentary, Gur probes the less visible mechanism linking aesthetics to politics in order to uncover the politics of aesthetics—that is, the meanings and images through which a community recognizes itself and its world. As John Berger famously noted, the way we see things is determined by what we know. Gur explores these sites of visual culture as obvious Althusserian sites, where, through selective representations and omissions, knowledge is shaped and dispersed to fit and propagate specific ideologies. To highlight these aspects of certain institutions is to prompt spectators to seek the root of the images being tweaked and critiqued in her work.

Hili Perlson



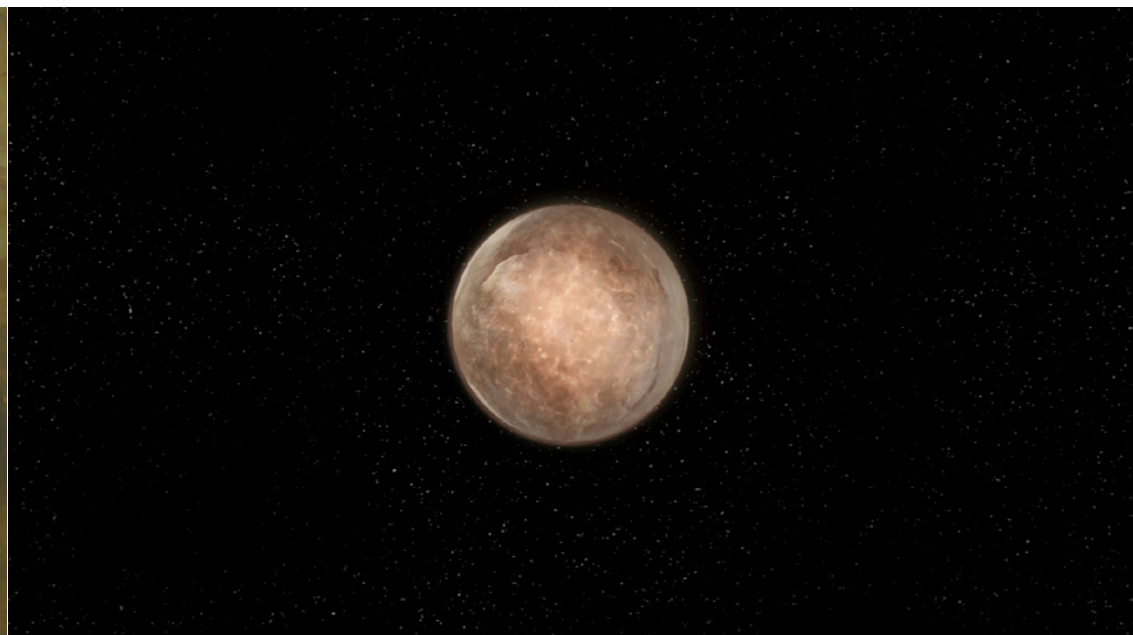
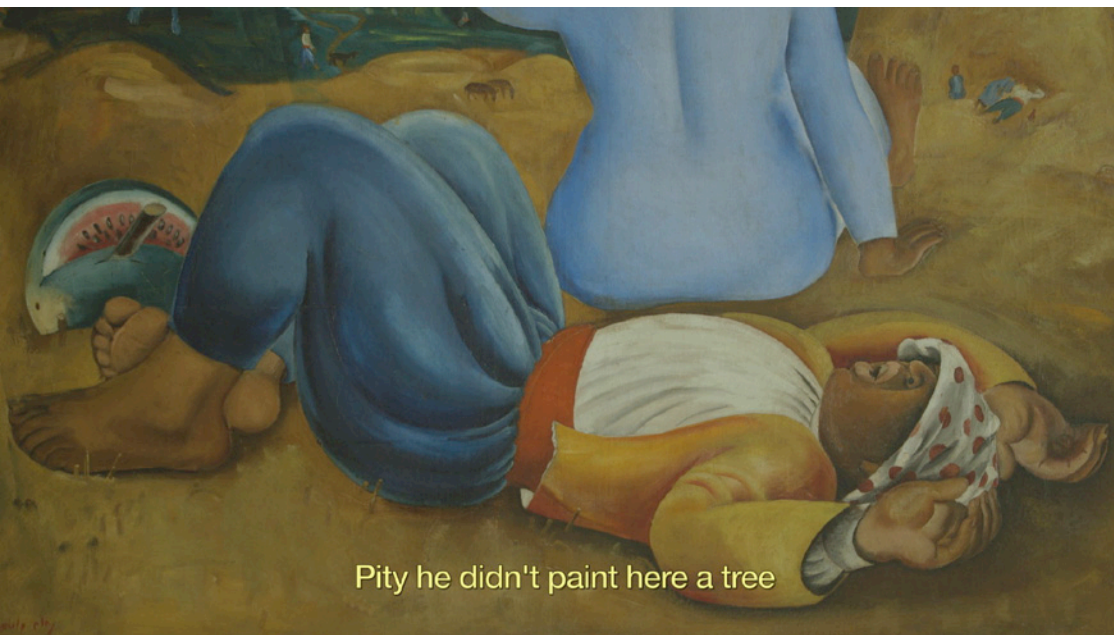
Installation view „Art Dubai“ (left) and „Collective Identity“ (right), HD video installation, 2014, colour, sound, 05:25 minutes



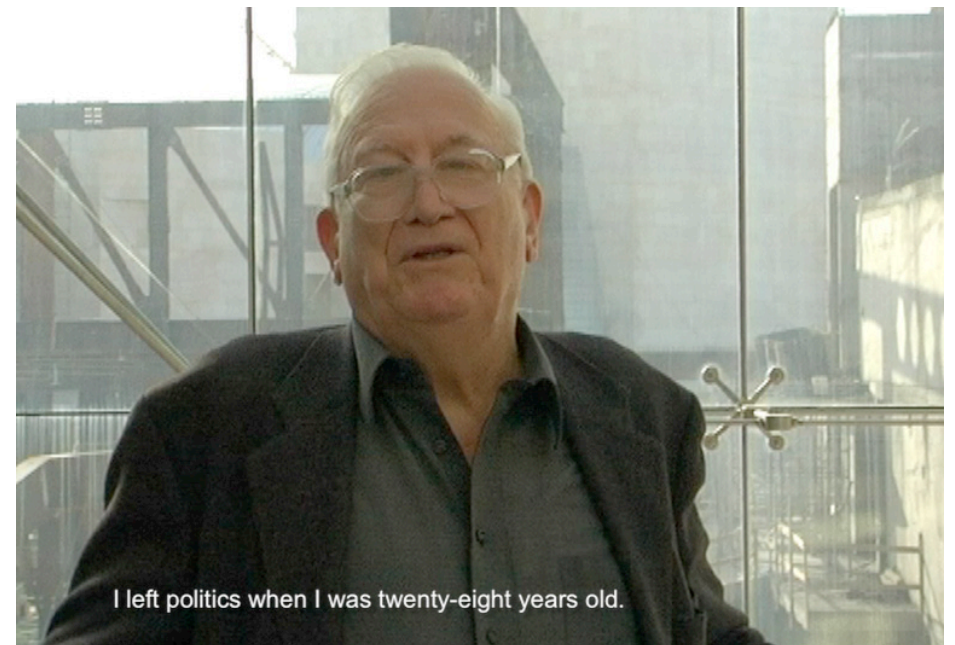
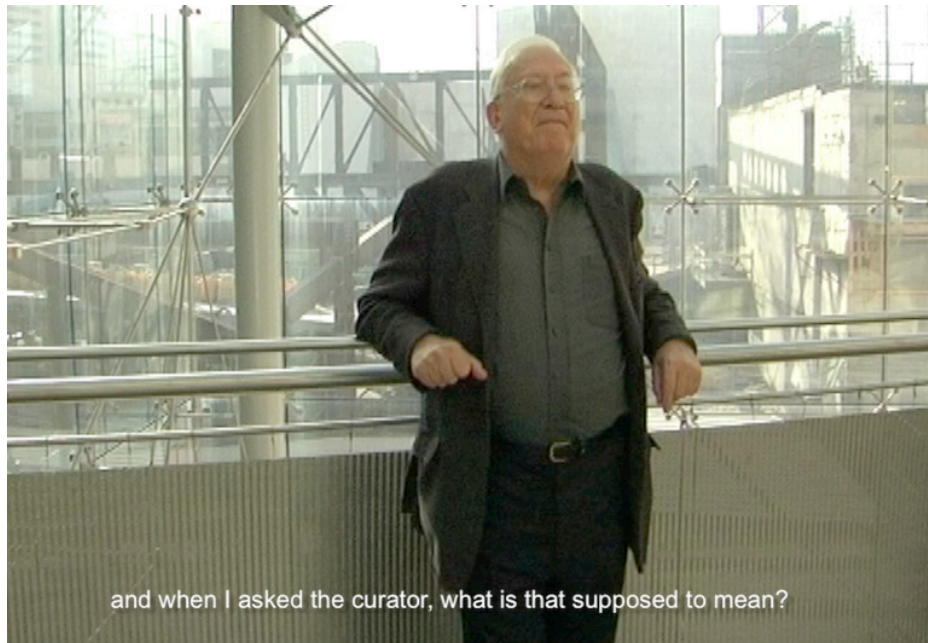
Installation view „Art Dubai“ (left) and „Collective Identity“ (right)



Installation views „Art Dubai“ (left) and „Collective Identity“ (right)



Still images from „Collective Identity“



Still images from „Postmodern Decoration“, 2014, SD video, colour, sound, 03:02 minutes