

# JEWELRY

Arts & Culture

Adam Berg

By Zeek Fiction / September 11, 2008

Visual artist Adam Berg considers himself a double-agent. An artist today, he says, ends up doing double-duty — not only making the work, but also showing it off. Yet the artist must be careful to remain a creator and not merely become a producer.

“You have to subvert yourself as a practitioner of art and be a practitioner of creativity. Otherwise, you become a complicit part of the trans-globalization process.”

Berg is talking about a world-process that has transcended the realm of society and economy and is now as much an ecological as a human concern. His most recent exhibition, “Archipelago,” curated by Mordechai Omer and showing at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, deals with the physical human stamp on the world, as well as our attempts to recreate history and redefine the future.

The drawings on exhibit, dating back to 1987, are the understated focus of the show. “Drawing is the web that I weave between my work in other media — video, sculpture, painting.” His scrawls are like artifacts, unearthed images of a process we may not fully know, blueprints for another form of reality.

At the center of the large exhibition hall is a sculpture of bulbous, dark, metallic moulds hanging on threads from the ceiling. “Sculpture is a question of fragility,” he says about the piece. “Not something to regard as an object, but a state in which we find ourselves — a certain pose, a kind of expression, a frozen moment.” Though they look like random growths of some diseased organism, on the wall across the hall hangs a drawing describing their form. It follows, then, that every one of the hundreds of drawings has the potential to be a real object.

Though the show’s focus is on Berg’s drawings, the exhibit includes a life-sized billboard mounted on a metal frame, projected onto which is a video-work titled “Entropic Islands.”

The video shows a series of locales in which natural landscapes — small islands just off an ocean coast, or nearby cliffs and quarries — have been violated and defiled by industrial activity from oil speculating to chemical runoff. Digitally rendered seagulls fly across the screen, giving off unnatural chirps, and as they disappear out of view we hear an explosion, after which flames rise and block our view. But these bird-bombs don’t actually destroy anything, and after the flames recede, we see the same polluted, unpeopled scene.

Berg doesn’t expect his ideas to “translate” correctly to one audience or another. “Here,” says Berg, “rather than responding to this piece with a notion that pollution and the green movement are like Siamese Twins — for example — someone might see a sort of dystopia, the ongoing process in Israel of construction, destruction, reconstruction.” He calls this recoding, a process in which an audience is not interpreting the piece, but mis-translating it by applying its local meaning to the visual cues.

Berg has been using a variety of media since 1989, when he started showing video and paintings together. “Juxtaposition was the point,” he says. “I was interested in the discrepancy that resulted from different mediation — how does the same image look as a drawing, a painting, a video.”

Berg is a draftsman, painter, sculptor, and video-artist who studied architecture and holds a PhD in Philosophy. He is also a father and husband, and regularly traverses the cross-demands of family life, university teaching, and art practice. Still, this delicate balancing act seems to be integral.

“Can you be creative when something is a practice,” he asks, “when it’s habitual?”

The exhibit is less a single installation than a collection of fragments. It is accompanied by a monograph from the art publisher Charta Edizioni, incorporating past and present drawings, paintings, installations, sculptures, video-stills, as well as Berg’s original theoretical texts with such titles as “Beckett,” “Exiled,” and “Video.” They are difficult, dense texts that integrate existential concerns with ruminations on art practice.

“Boundaries between philosophy, architecture, art — they’re artificial. You have artists as media-makers, architects as designers. The challenge is to preserve and develop creativity itself.”

This creativity is not limited to the life or work of an artist. “Art is about its own afterlife,” says Berg. “It’s not about you, the attention you get, the money you generate. It’s about art’s possibility to project itself into the future.”