



Alona Rodeh, *Altar* (from the DARK AGES 2020 Series), 2019

Alona Rodeh. DARK AGES 2020

February 8 – March 31, 2019

Space = darkness; time = termination; and matter of architecture and cities = ruin and ashes.
Arata Isozaki

The title of the exhibition, *DARK AGES 2020*, refers to an approaching future, one already discernible. Alona Rodeh's first institutional show in Austria marks a challenging new step in her investigation of light as a cultural and physical entity. Her work draws upon research on cultural (especially modern) uses of light and darkness (especially architectural) as well as current technologies of illumination produced for road works, emergency services, airport runways and more.

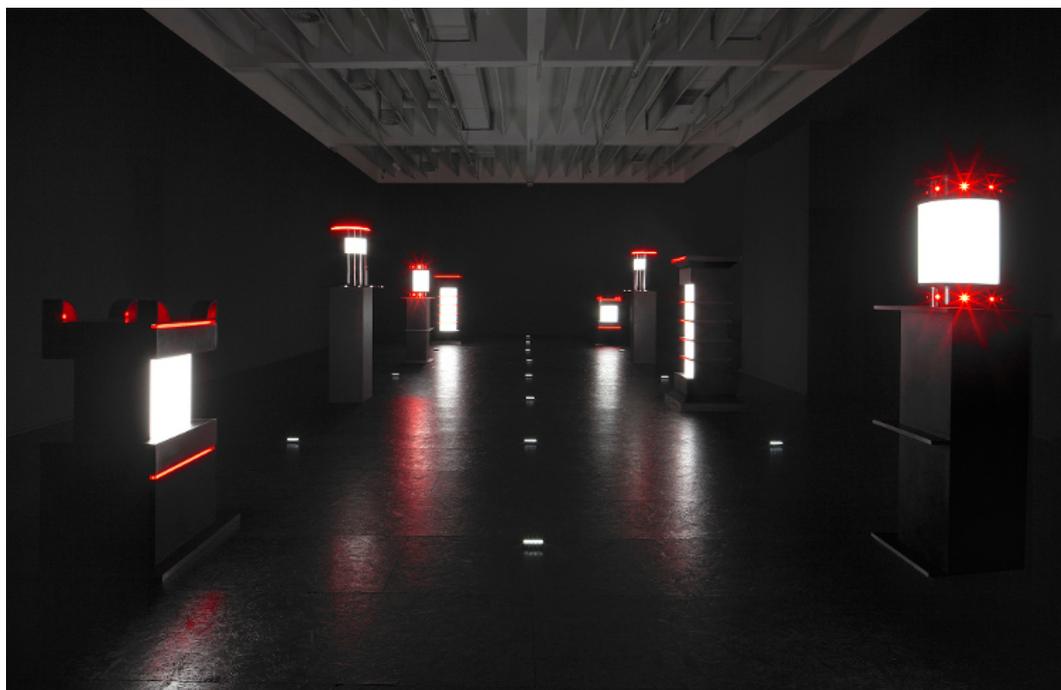
With black walls and black flooring throughout the gallery space, one encounters eight sculptural figures installed in a grid-like pattern. These objects resemble hybrids of street lamps, oversized bollards, real size columns, chess pieces, or futuristic totems. A variety of LED lights, as well as reflective materials, products of the booming vehicular light industry, are embedded in these vertical architectonic sculptures. These all illuminate intermittently, along with road-works LED lights placed otherwise throughout the grid, behaving as coded signals communicating with one another. All lighting blinks together in a choreographed chain reaction programmed with a sculpted sound filling the entire space.

DARK AGES 2020 is a part of Alona Rodeh's ongoing meta-titled "Safe and Sound" project, exploring the histories of off-the-shelf reflective, phosphorus and illumination technologies, their origin in magic, and their total adaptation in safety industries. A culture which has surprisingly strong affiliations with clubbing, fashion, theatre and architecture, Rodeh constructs technological and material performances without performers, set to original sound-tracks, bringing life to objects in their own oriented ontology.

Alona Rodeh (*1979) is a visual artist based in Tel Aviv and Berlin. Rooted in sculpture, her videos, sound and light installations, photographs, performances, artist publications and more have been exhibited in institutions such as, among others, Tranzit SK (2016), Künstlerhaus Bethanien (2014), Tel Aviv Museum (2013), CCA Tel Aviv (2013), PlugIn ICA Winnipeg (2012). Temporary and permanent public commissioned artworks of hers exist in Berlin and Tel Aviv. Her performances were shown at Transmediale Festival, Berlin (2016); Zacheta National Gallery, Warsaw (2014), Israel Museum Jerusalem (2013) and more. Rodeh works with Christine König Galerie (Vienna) and Rosenfeld Gallery (Tel Aviv), and has had solo presentations at ABC Berlin (2016), Art Cologne (2018), MiArt Milan (2017). She is an MFA graduate (2009) of the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design. Rodeh will have two parallel solo shows this upcoming winter/spring season: the first, at Salzburger Kunstverein and the second at Kunstpalais, Erlangen (opening March 15th).

www.alonarodeh.com

Funded by Berlin Senate, Departement for Culture and Europe.



Courtesy of the artist & Christine König Galerie, Foto: Ludger Paffrath

Alona Rodeh, *DARK AGES 2020*, 2019

MDF, Aluminium, Polycarbonate, Plexiglas, LED lights, sound

Dimensions variable

Sound and light design: Alona Rodeh, Rachid Moro

Engineering: Rachid Moro

Construction: Adam Goldstein, Liav Gabay

Courtesy of the artist and Christine König Galerie

Alona Rodeh. DARK AGES 2020

Text by Seamus Kealy

DARK AGES 2020 is an installation by Israeli artist Alona Rodeh. With black walls and black flooring throughout the gallery space, the visitor encounters eight sculptural figures installed in a grid formation. These objects resemble hybrids of street lamps, oversized bollards, real-sized columns, chess pieces, or even futuristic totems. A variety of LED lights—themselves products of the booming vehicular light industry—are embedded in these vertical architectonic sculptures.

Being Rodeh's first institutional show in Austria, the show marks a challenging new step in her investigation of light as a cultural and physical entity. Her work draws upon research on cultural uses of light and darkness as well as current technologies of illumination produced for road works, emergency services, airport runways and so on.

This exhibition is a part of the artist's ongoing "Safe and Sound" project, a series of artworks and exhibitions that explore the histories of off-the-shelf reflective, phosphorus and illumination technologies, their origin in magic, and their total adaptation in, for example, road safety industries. But much more lurks around in this exhibition. The entire installation has strong affiliations with clubbing, fashion, theatre and architecture. Nocturnal architecture or "architecture of the night" (*Lichtarchitektur* in German) is especially referenced. Rodeh has looked very closely especially at early modern civic and architectural designs using light, from French, German and American uses for light festivals or commercial purposes to the dramatic floodlighting by the Nazis (Alfred Speer famously used 152 anti-aircraft searchlights for rallies at Nuremberg for example). Design-wise these references merge in the bollard-like sculptures, themselves associable not only with traffic control, public safety and urban design but also with homeland security (as per the American Bar Association's definition) and counter-terrorism strategies today. Overall we can sense several emergent themes on the relationship between architecture, humanity, behaviour and greater socio-political topics. Architecture and its effects on sex for example is also a backdrop, if a quieter one, in the exhibition. Altogether, Rodeh constructs the gallery space into a set of technological and material performances without performers, programmed with original sound-tracks, bringing life to objects in their own oriented ontology. These objects—as participants in an overall orchestrated, electronic performance—illuminate intermittently, along with the orderly placement of road-works LED lights throughout the grid, behaving as coded signals communicating with one another. All the forms of lighting blink together in a choreographed chain reaction programmed with a sculpted sound filling the entire space. These moments are then followed by complete darkness and stillness, which immediately returns the visitors to ground zero: a kind of spatial and liminal blindness.

The title itself speaks pessimistically of an approaching future, one perhaps already discernible. It also immediately, if unintentionally, beckons upon Jane Jacobs' final book, *Dark Age Ahead*.¹ Jacobs warned of the dissolution of civilization through the loss of a mindful relationship with culture and history. Although heavily pessimistic, the book is a powerful calling to next generations (Jacobs wrote the book a few years before she died) to take up the responsibility of preserving larger swaths of human dignity and humanity itself. This, she argues, is necessary through actively protecting five central pillars: community and family, higher education, science and technology, taxes and government responsiveness to citizen's needs, and self-regulation by the learned professions. She argues that these pillars are all under threat due to an overall decay of memory and knowledge that threatens to bring on another dark age unless trends are reversed. Jacobs characterizes this *Dark Age* as a "mass amnesia" where even the memory of what was lost is itself

¹ Jane Jacobs, *Dark Age Ahead*, (Chicago: Vintage Books, 2005).

lost.² Jacob's points are more relevant today with the hyper-escalation of international capital and the overwhelming trends towards global environmental catastrophe. This pessimistic and already tangible future for humanity, although not necessarily irreversible, is certainly a central backdrop to Alona Rodeh's installation. On the other hand, the title also has within it (again perhaps not intentioned) reference to the English expression, "hindsight is twenty-twenty." This saying effectively means that it is easy enough to know or understand the right thing to do after something has happened, but on the other hand it's hard to predict the future. Here a prognosis of the future is presented within the space of the exhibition and within its actual title. With the entire space dominated by inter-connected machine-like objects and electronic music, that is, without much of a human-like reference, a human-less, future world is depicted.

But the references in the exhibition do not simply end there in a kind of murky despair. Notions and realities of blackouts are also clearly present. As a term, blackout naturally can refer to a cultural wipeout as much as a large-scale electric outage. Both these points of reference also converge in the exhibition. The artist herself has researched histories of blackouts, including parallel six year civic blackouts in German and British cities during the Second World War.³ Not unrelated, the unspeakable cultural and ethical blackout of the Nazi period—itsself an interregnum of cultural amnesia of the worst kind—is also enunciated in this context. To be modern, indeed to be German, as author Marc Patrick Wiggam reminds us, is a Janus-faced dilemma: One must always be aware of the profound consequences of the modern and industrial era,⁴ and be aware of a burgeoning political climate that may indeed lead to another dark ages. This is as true today as ever. These sentiments hover continually within different references throughout this exhibition. Indeed, to return to the period of WWII blackouts, it was not uncommon, for example, for the Germans to display bombs on plinths as warnings to be vigilant in ensuring a total blackout. The eight sculptures and the space they occupy in this exhibition, while as discussed clearly carrying references to bollards, raves and nocturnal architecture for example, are also reminiscent of these other historical anecdotes.

In the exhibition, we can also glimpse clear elements of a fading counter-culture, the rave scene. First starting in the 1980s during (and perhaps even as a partial reaction to) a more conservative and global trend of accelerated capitalism, raves eventually morphed into staid, commercial leisure and have now all but lost their once counter-cultural energy. Recently, rave culture has been retrospectively analyzed by cultural critics. Timothy Morton, who in his most recent book, *Being Ecological*, references science fiction, Tibetan Buddhism and German philosophy among many others to call for a paradigm shift in our relationship to the world to avoid global annihilation,⁵ is one such notorious proponent. In his 2016 book *Dark Ecology* his theorizing covers an ecology of rave culture, expounding the idea of the rave as something that brings people together in the "symbiotic real" that we are actually always already, if not consciously, within, to experience an "ontological shimmering." That is, the bringing of bodies together in an enclosed, shared, ecstasy (whether one decides to take it or not) is an active form of "becoming," that emancipates those participating. This leads, he argues, to a greater and embodied awareness for a complete consciousness that asserts, "I'm ... part of an entity that is now a *geological force on a planetary scale*."⁶ Ultimately Morton says that the rave is a space not only of performing revolutionary thinking, but indeed intensely embodying it in a pre-lingual, anti-

² On this profound notion of cultural amnesia (forgetting what was even lost), Alona Rodeh points out that many early lighting technologies, for example, have been lost and then some re-constructed via other technologies. This technological amnesia naturally also applies to many software programs, for example for design and architecture, as well as to issues around storing and preserving technological artwork for example, where technologies become obsolete and then altogether forgotten.

³ For further reading, see: Marc Patrick Wiggam, *The Blackout in Britain and Germany during the Second World War*, (University of Exeter: Doctoral Thesis, 2011).

⁴ Ibid, 12. The artist, born in Israel and currently living in Berlin, would have a particular sensitivity to this history.

⁵ Timothy Morton, *Being Ecological*, (New York: Pelican, 2018).

⁶ Timothy Morton, *Dark Ecology*, (New York: Columbia, 2016), 75, 11.

ideological and actualizing manner. He makes comparisons with the radical ideas of *becoming* as courted by Deleuze and Guattari, who call in various published texts for new forms of revolutionary bodies amassing without the trappings of what they argue to be a number of failed modernist notions. Essentially what is at work in the rave, says Morton, is an anti-essentialisation of individuals' identities as they amass together within ecstasy, trance and dance.

In a rave, you are not an ethnic particularity or an individual with clear cultural boundaries; you are rather an active blend within a collective experience tending towards something more schizophrenic. This is mystical rapture and simultaneously collective euphoria encased in a morphic kind of non-identity and spiritual awakening, even if temporary. Thus, it breaks one's normal perception of the world into something that is of high empathy and critical understanding. This is the revelation Morton refers to as "Dark Ecology," where a paradigm shift may happen collectively, also in the same vein as it should by the counsel of Jane Jacobs: to prevent an irreversible, global blackout of humanity. No Dark Ages 2020 please and thank you. No regressive politics and no essentialist nationalism, not only because they are untrue, but they only lead to catastrophe. A political dark age can be averted if this collective consciousness arises, argues Morton.

The fact that 2020 is only a year from now makes these notions (and realities) all the more urgent. It is not an exaggeration to assert that humanity has underestimated its own destructive impact but also how finite and fragile and inter-connected the greater, singular ecosystem (that we are embedded within and responsible for) is. There is no question that a shift is underway, but we can actively hope that it is not too late, and thus the shift must accelerate counter-effectively as has our own destructive impact with the progress of modernity, to avoid a foreseeable but overall preventable blackout.

Alona Rodeh's exhibition powerfully presents, amongst others, these above notions, and invites visitors to be immersed within this dark, active landscape, perhaps to be embodied within something collective and urging.

The Director wishes to thank the artist Alona Rodeh for her energy, conviction and the reading material and feedback that informs this essay.

More information: Michaela Lederer, Communication & curatorial assistance
Contact: lederer@salzburger-kunstverein.at, +43-(0)662- 842294-15

SALZBURGER KUNSTVEREIN / Künstlerhaus
Hellbrunner Straße 3, 5020 Salzburg, Austria
www.salzburger-kunstverein.at
Hours Exhibition: Tue-Sun 12-7pm
Hours Café Cult: Mon-Fri 11am-11pm