

Press information



Ella Littwitz. Tomograma

20 February – 24 April 2016

(Kabinett)

We, 9 March 2016, 7 pm

Curatorial tour with Séamus Kealy

We, 9 March 2016, 8 pm

Islamophobia and Anti-Semitism. Lecture by Farid Hafez

(Evens in cooperation with digital spring #artivism)

In her artwork, Israeli-born Ella Littwitz addresses territorialization and the construction of historical and psychological frontiers, and the often unstable rules that create these divisions. The artist presents an installation inspired, in part, by nineteen years of footballs caught in Jerusalem's mine-filled no man's land.

Ella Littwitz, born 1982 in Israel, lives and works in Berlin, Ghent and Israel

Ella Littwitz. Tomograma

Text by Séamus Kealy

Israeli-born artist Ella Littwitz works in a number of formats, combining archival and historical research with photography and sculpture, drawing, as well as Ready-made objects, and often producing installations. Her artwork addresses territorialization and the construction of historical and psychological frontiers, and the often unstable rules that create these divisions. Frequently referring to her homeland of Israel, where she was born and raised, Ella Littwitz takes relics, archaeological nominations and categorizations, political symbolisms, redirected narratives and other historical and anthropological cyphers to construct her artworks. Often these constructions critically and thoughtfully circulate around notions of nationhood and political identity while making poetic journeys through aesthetics of national symbolism, botany and soil, archaic signifiers, mythological gestures, and markings of war and conquest. The artist does not shy away from more difficult and complicated productions of identity, as well as the political problematics arising from and related to her homeland of Israel.

This trajectory of her work has examples such as the earlier work *The Pioneer*, in the form of bronzed weeds she had undertaken in a series. This work refers both to Israeli settlers and likewise the plant she has moulded, itself a territorializing and aggressive plant. She has also produced investigatory work around the "Ukraine Pine" which was brought to Israel, and its simultaneous colonisation and destruction of the landscape entwined with Zionist propaganda. Her research and interest in history for her art production also brought her to an excavation project at the Tempelhof archive in Berlin. There she unearthed and appropriated photographs to produce diptych banners of a great, Nazi beheaded eagle in the process of dismantling after the Second World War.

Her work has also circulated more contemporary realities of war with her series of shrapnel photographs, which are a violent fusion of flesh and metal with an essence of death. Overall, Ella Littwitz revives historical matters and political scenarios, as well as transforms elements of allegory, archive and symbolism into considered projects. The artist has a concerned eye for the past and future of humanity, which is evident in all forms of her work.

In the Kabinett space, the artist presents an installation inspired, in part, by nineteen years of footballs caught in a minefield in a divided Jerusalem, as well as other carefully constructed and consciously placed works that circulate around a number of political and historical problematics.

The title of this exhibition *Tomograma* arises from the word "tomogram." A tomogram is etymologically made up of *tomo* (Greek: tomos, τόμος), "slice, section," which in common linguistic usage will form terms relating to sections or to cutting; and *gram*, (Greek: graphō, γράφω), designating something written, drawn or recorded. Tomograms arise from tomography, which is forms of imaging produced by sections or sectioning, through the use of any kind of penetrating wave. The method is used in radiology, archaeology, biology, astrophysics, quantum information, and other sciences. More conventionally, medical X-ray tomography produces sectional images through a body by moving an X-ray source and the film in opposite directions during the exposure.

In the context of this exhibition, Ella Littwitz's work is a form of tomography, in its splicing or revealing of several layers of a culture produced over thousands of years, yet itself existing in a number of key political formations in the contemporary context. While different focal planes appear, there are layers that remain blurred or others that gain a level of increased focus. This overall culture in and out of focus is what is known in common discourse today as Israel.

And thus one enters this small exhibition encumbered with the burden of one's own knowledge or opinion of a complex and wondrous history, on an internationally-resonant difficulty of nationality and nationhood, realities of tragedy and injustice, and of various and varying forms of oppression and genocide.

A painted stone sits before us as we enter the exhibition. The title, *Like a Shadow of a Great Rock in a Weary Land*, is taken from the second verse from Isaiah 32, which is framed by references to a king and the splendour resulting from the justness of his rule:

Behold, a king will reign righteously. And princes will rule justly. Each will be like a refuge from the wind and a shelter from the storm. Like streams of water in a dry country. Like the shade of a great rock in a weary land. Then the eyes of those who see will not be blinded, And the ears of those who hear will listen....

A weight of meaning is palpable with the mass of this marked stone sitting on the floor, which itself with its mark indicates a path or journey. It is not clear, however, that once one has entered the space that one is actually on this same path, or has stepped away from it. The reference to the symbolic, historical and strategic importance of the (holy) land of Israel is clearly underlined here, which for the artist is an abstract idea that plays an active and daily role in the construction of the state and its people's identity. As she has an agnostic relationship to the biblical reference she makes, we sense also a doubtful, searching relationship to the geopolitics at work daily in her homeland, while notions of an ideal kingship or good government providing to its people hang over the grim realities of this nation.

On the wall at the entrance is the work *...Which Came Up in a Night, and Perished in a Night (Pyjamas #7)*. This print was acquired by the artist from the Israeli National Natural History Collections. It is actually the inadvertent transfer from a castor oil plant onto preservation paper. Ella Littwitz often gathers botanical forms and references that in themselves carry political and historical attributes. In the book of Jonah, this plant is referred to as an ephemeral plant "which came up in a night and perished in a night," and carries the Hebrew name *Kikaion*, which means ephemeral. The plant is known for its extreme toxicity and its short life. In one season it will gain its full growth. Whether the reference here ultimately is to the people of Israel, the state of Israel, or to all of humanity itself no matter the context, one senses that an urgent tone, both existential and humanistic, is implied.

In the main space of the Kabinett, we encounter the floor sculpture *Seam ReZone*. This work carries with it a tale, written by the artist:

On November 30, 1948, after the conclusion of the Arab–Israeli War in Jerusalem, the Israeli political and military leader Moshe Dayan and Abdullah al Tal of the Arab Legion signed a ceasefire

agreement. Each drew a line on a map with grease pencils – Dayan's pencil was green, al Tal's pencil was red – to demarcate the areas of Israeli and Jordanian territory.

Neither realised their line would be a defacto border for 19 years. Nor did anyone at the time realise that each line was three to four millimeters thick, which, on a map drawn to the scale of 1:20,000, represented strips of land 6080 meters wide, in a city where streets measured nine meters across. This map was the source of many disputes between the two states and a no-man's land emerged. Landmines were deployed there.

The College Frères was a school for Arab children and bordered the no-man's land. Footballs were often lost by the schoolchildren into this area, to be perpetually irretrievable. In December 1965, Israel was asked to return the footballs to the school as a Christmas gift. Israeli officials immediately agreed, and, as the UN officials looked on, an Israeli officer marched through the minefields of the no-man's land while Jordanian soldiers directed him 'go left' or 'go right,' to prevent him from stepping on mines. Two days after Christmas, 28 balls were handed over to the school at a celebration inside the UN building across the road. The title Seam ReZone is a paraphrasing of Seam Zone, a term used to refer to a land area in the West Bank located east of the Green Line and west of Israel's separation barrier.

The final work at the wall of the gallery is called *Uproot*. These 20 drawings come from a series of 143 works, and contain a thoroughly produced allegory, with its roots also heavily in Israeli geopolitics. Emerging from her interest in and analysis of the 1941 book *The Weeds of Palestine and Their Control*, by Dr. M. Zohary, the artist has drawn each weed fragment based on the weeds that are each originally circumscribed by the author. Zohary had painstakingly documented each weed which were later sometimes chosen to be re-politicized and re-named after the creation of the Israeli state. In this work, the artist herself emulates the activities of Zionist settlers, as the Israeli author and curator Matan Daube writes, "who acted as archaeologists, scientists and architects that had measured, examined, marked and appropriated every stone in Palestine/Israel." He continues:

Every plant and vantage point was given a Hebrew name, and the local terroir drastically changed: wilderness was disseminated, forests were planted, rivers were diverted, hills were built, and just like on a Hollywood set - a new landscape, similar to Tuscany or Provence was created. Thus, whole epochs from history were erased. The desire to connect the land to its Jewish past is one of the most prominent principles of the Zionist movement. This seemingly romantic approach, which aims to expose a hidden, misunderstood or distorted secret, is the direct result of the settlers' aspiration to create a mini-Europe in Israel.

It is important to note that this methodology that the artist has employed in this exhibition – an aesthetic and semiotic dissection of Israeli culture and some of its symbolisms – could be applied to any culture or nationhood that exists today. The common notion that the Jews are the "chosen people" or the far-reaching mythologies around the land of Israel, as well as the histories and legacies emerging from the Old and New Testaments that are embedded in the landscape in and around Israel (as well as appearing, if briefly, in this exhibition), for example, does burden this analysis by the artist with more complexities than many other geopolitical situations today. It is a hot topic, there is no question. However nothing deepens the gravitas of this analysis more than the current political situation in Israel itself. The aggressive acquisition of territory that goes hand in hand with the internationally-connected,

industrial-military complex and militarization of space in Israel and the Palestinian territories, along with the tragedies and atrocities caught up in this political maelstrom, are a conscious backdrop to the artist's work. Her love of her country, its culture and histories is a pained one, as it is for many Israelis and Jews today. And so her artwork carries a heavy burden, but without depicting this ongoing tragedy directly, in order for us to consider it humanely as the deep complexity that it is, perhaps with an element of hope.









Exhibition views "Ella Littwitz. Tomograma," Salzburger Kunstverein 2016,
Foto: Andrew Phelps, © Salzburger Kunstverein

More information & photo material:

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Salzburger Kunstverein

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Hours exhibition: Tue-Sun 12-7 pm
Hours Café Cult: Mon-Fri 9 am – 11 pm