

4 Shades of Plastic

How to Name a Nose with No Body, Nobody Knows / Gabi Kricheli – new works

One of the bitterest ironies of our time lies in the fissure between what most of us see on the surface of things, and the subterranean tissue which vibrates sub-strata underneath it all. This tissue, or fabric, is in many ways reality's most rudimentary matter. This is the principal perception informing Gabi Kricheli's new show at Givon Art Gallery, titled ***How to Name a Nose without a Body, Nobody Knows***. The works deal with our perception of reality, which by and large is geared towards the two-dimensional digital image. Kricheli addresses this two-dimensionality by producing masterfully crafted three-dimensional objects. The show's internal irony relays on the inherent tension between physical reality ('You, the viewers, are invited to touch a real object') and our flattened perception of reality-as-an-image ('You can never touch reality as-such'). In the cleft between the concreteness of physical touch and our inability to comprehend reality through sight or seeing, stretches a blind spot vast as a field, whose grayness is echoed in the limited color palate deployed throughout the exhibition. A similar contradiction also characterizes our ability to quickly adopt new technologies to ourselves, while masking our basic lack of awareness to the truth lying beneath most objects, tools and products we use. It is to this specific gap that the artist turns to, with his sleeves rolled-up, ready to work.

Kricheli places next to one another works that belong to two different 'departments' well known from his past projects and exhibitions. Here he displays almost only works constructed and carved-out of wood, and sculptured elements cast from life, made with liquid polyurethane. Some of the works combine these two fabrication techniques, but each preserves in its own way an ethics of low-tech manual work. As a sculptor working with a large variety of different materials, Kricheli shows the fabric of our reality to be a composite thing. He seems to be saying that our physical reality is really made up of chains of polymers, either natural or synthetic, that compose the majority of the objects we use. Tools, engineered food, drugs and medicines, decorative and art-objects – everything, or nearly everything is composed of processed materials which are basically quite similar to one another. In conversation, Kricheli refers to this rudimentary material layer as 'the gründer of Reality' [as in the German term designating the first layer applied to a canvas before beginning to paint, A.S], the non-color of the rudimentary stratum. In his recent works, this gründer seeps through vis-a-vis the yellowish, crème-like pigmentation of his polyurethane casts.

If 'everything is made out of plastic' and this ground of reality binds pretty much every Thing in the world – what, then, hides behinds all things? Well, more or less the same matter, an atom or two added or extracted from the molecular chain.

Sometimes a mattress is only a mattress. Sometimes it's not

Kricheli is an artist who samples and combines, even when he is busy carving one of his wooden sculptures by hand. You may view the entire exhibition as a series of such sampling actions, whose physical proximity enables one to create common meaning for them.

The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse is a series of four casts made of bi-component polyurethane foam which clone with extreme precision a Kanken back pack, a Yoga mattress, an Apple MacBook and a cauliflower. These objects are four indicators of the current bon ton, and by laconically placing them next to one another like Pop icons, the artist is winking an eye at the socio-economic milieu he himself belongs to. In the age supposedly predominated by this creative class, a MacBook, as a signifier of hi technology (a synthetic brain) quite naturally finds its place next to a cauliflower, designating here at once both an organic 'brain' and the hallmark of a specific culinary culture. Both are placed next to another version of the same MacBook, this time cast in resin mixed with powdered copper so it resembles something dug-out of the earth, or a quasi-Victorian, albeit funky, version of the 'original'. The material mediation and form of placing of these sculptures stress the fact that they are offered to us as flattened images, or quotes without an immediate context which are, in fact, samples, not of 'Reality' but of a certain lifestyle, and of the fantasy concerning that style of living. The installation of ***Cold Burekas at a Yellow Gas Station***¹ uses the same principle of theme and variation, but places the works amidst the forlorn reality of South Tel-Aviv, which is evoked through these empty doughy delights as a monotonous landscape of malnutrition and gasoline fumes. These cast works look like a statement of defiance in the manner of "what you see is what you get." However, they remind us that "you **never** get what you think you see."

"Repeating repeats itself, repeatedly reoccurring and recurring and repeating itself..."

Pigua (Hebrew for 'terrorist attack') is a series of four casts of a miniature bus whose intestines burst-out from within, sending feelers of smoke and fire to the air. An earlier and a slightly larger version of this work, titled ***Jerusalem***, was shown in 2013 in [I Do what I Can](#), Kricheli's solo show at the Artists' Workshops in Tel-Aviv. Each of the four units is painted a

¹ For the benefit of the none-Hebrew reader, the specific kind of pastry used by the artist is called 'bureka' (from the Ladino – 'filled pastry'), while Yellow designates a popular chain of convenient stores run under the franchise of the Paz Oil Company (the would-be equivalent of Shell plc.) in its nation-wide gas stations.

different tone, from white to charcoal black so the borderlines between blast and blasted-object (each bus) is rendered indistinguishable. One unit of the series is left in the 'natural' yellowish hue of its polyurethane body. The similitude of the four copies to one another and the fact they are painted in an ascending scale of 'shades of grey' draws them closer to digital pixels, which also adorn computer screens in four degrees of darkness, as some sort of pre-given, underlying fabric anticipating any image that would appear on it. The flattening of color and the action of multiplying the objects (as if the work echoes '*attack, attack, attack, attack*') places these exploding buses within the space of traumatic repetition. They are served to us as images removed from reality, and as an attempt to report some Thing which can be seen but is difficult to comprehend.

Carving a tree out of wood

Kricheli samples reality regardless of the mode or technique he may be working with. His carved wooden sculptures look as if they were created by some 'tribal' master-craftsmen of one sort or another. A closer look at them discloses their synthetic quality. They are tattooed with geometric designs that are the product of an inquisitive, yet empty, manual gesture, having no religious dogma or symbolic structure supporting or 'justifying' them. They relate themselves to any culture and to no specific one in particular, and so the 'tradition' from which they stem is, in fact, the artist's own body of work. In the wooden sculptures as in the cast polyurethane works, quoting and self-referencing creates an 'organic' development of forms, opening a space of inner meaning between various pieces, or, at least the possibility of such a space.

The twigs mounted on the wall in the upper floor of the gallery are stems of Cannabis plants which the artist carved and mounted one on top of another so as to make them one. The resulting stem, having a double crown (the lower one replacing the root-system), invokes an engineered nature, albeit a manual and rustic genetic engineering such as in traditional grafting. The striking symmetry of the branching out of their shoots reveals the fact that these plants were manipulated by hand like Bonsai trees, trimmed in order to control the direction and timing of their growth. The result also echoes the geometric designs carved unto some of the other wooden works in the show. This isn't accidental, as the Cannabis works embody yet another double-repetition which again problematizes any notion of a 'natural' source for these forms.

Wait a minute, how can you read this?

How to Name a Nose with No Body, Nobody Knows is a title whose tongue-in-cheek humor works better in English than in Hebrew. But, if folded on top of one another, the Hebrew and English may 'work in translation' in a funny, yet somewhat dry way. Like so:

'How to name' = in Hebrew this also reads, literally, 'What's the name of';

'A nose with no body' - No-Body Nose

'No (one) knows' – (again) Nobody Knows

A nose without a body is an absurd, macabre image of an organ which is removed from the general context of the face, the face being the background that is supposed to provide the individual organ with meaning. The nose from the show's title – much like the buses, spheres, octopus' arms, portable computers and mattresses, the cauliflower and the face of Yigal Tumarkin (a cast duplicate of which appears in one of the works) – is also an image of no-one. In Woody Allan's *Sleeper* (1973) a group of rebels plots to destroy the nose of the dead tyrant so as to prevent his genetic reconstruction and thus, his resurrection. At the peak of the chase scene, when Allan is about to blast off the severed nose, the gun in his hands turns out to be a hoax, an impotent ersatz organ that can only produce a BANG! sign from its barrel. Allen's ironic mockery is directed toward his own social milieu, at would-be liberals and free-radicals wannabes. **Tam**, a plexiglass sign bearing the only written text in the exhibition, echoes the same kind of faux explosion sound that occurs in the mind of the viewer who is now, quite literally, *reading* the work and having a hard time deciding to which one of the word's meanings she or he may believe (*Tam*'s denotations may include *honest*, *artless*, *finished* or simply an onomatopoeia of a drumming sound). There's a refined sarcasm to this piece, perhaps mocking the text's status as the work's supposed interpreter and that which grants it meaning. As in another text-work bearing the inscription **Yesh Sof** (literally 'There's an End'- a play on the Hebrew *Ein Sof*, which means 'Infinity'), here too the artist claims to himself the last word. Forever with his finger in the viewer's eye, Kricheli leaves us to finish the job ourselves and to make up our own minds, stuck amidst possibilities like a Jerusalemite bus, forever frozen in time and memory.

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