

Miri Chais: Beyond the Real

Miri Chais turns the flux of images that continuously floods us in the present time into a source of inspiration to her art. Her works, conceived as lighting elements, are based on advanced materials, like LED and Plexiglas that are used in computers and communication devices, and on cutting edge technologies of sound and image, laser cutouts and movement sensors. She constructs her images from symbols and visual expressions used in the fields of science, biology, and digital software and hardware, alongside an overt dialogue with Japanese comics and animation – the Manga and the Anima culture – with Greek mythology and with pagan traditions that are deeply embedded in human behavior, even the most updated.

Chais wishes to understand the power and the density of contemporary images, their constant transformation, duplication and annexation. In her art she is preoccupied with the power of visual images to exist on their, losing all relation to any cultural, geographical or social source, representing no outside reality: The tension between the real and the imaginative turns into a tension between the imaginative and itself, with no need to relate to the real or to know it. This radical model appears and controls many aspects of our life in the 20th century. It continuously challenges the body and soul of the individual and of the community. It is this model that leads Chais to create sculptures, objects and installations that tell the fears, the ideologies and the enchantments of the epoch.

Chais' works act as simulacra – as images that represent images, whether these represent technological advancements, biological contaminations or ecological hazards. Simulacrum is an image that lacks the source and becomes the source itself, a replacement to a world that does not exist, a representation representing nothingbut itself. It is a term developed by Jean Baudrillard to describe the postmodern experience as living in a world of duplications and simulations that have lost their source. Baudrillard uses the allegoric story by Jorge Luis Borges "On Exactitude in Science", which describes the Emperor of China who commanded the cartographers in his kingdom to draw up a map that will fit the size of the empire. The map that they had finally conceived and satisfied the emperor covered the entire actual territory of the empire. The citizens got so attached to the map that they had lost all connection with the real territory. Baudrillard continues to argue that in postmodern age the map precedes the territory and even does not need it.

In the exhibition "Beyond the Real" Miri Chais wishes to create a sort of map – a city maze in which the urban chaos is constructed from crazed and alienated cyborg men and women, and from robot-like figures who supervise and rule life above ground. The dark underground world is exposed in the hatches of black sewage pipes: out of these pipes a cacophony of sounds is heard. A look inside reveals a stream of images that make up our collective postmodern subconscious – popular films and music, television programs, familiar cultural and technological icons, fragments of information that constantly reaches and passes us. In the far end corner, almost unnoticed, controls over the happenings, the illuminating eye of the colossus, that half-robot, half-totem, half-god. Above and in between everything, the figures of bats are hovering. Their heads are made of gas masks and their bodies –black umbrellas. The bats are the ones connecting between the day life and the night life of the city,

between the revealed and the concealed, between the known and the mysterious, between modernity and knowledge versus superstition and primeval fears.

Chais constantly examines the nature of the artistic image, its relevancy, and its sources of formations in the present reality: Her urban figures are a drawing in light tubes. When lit, the figures have a sculptural nature. When light is off, they appear like traces, like illusions; The big Colossus, as its smaller Giacometti-like versions, is a sculpture in space that strives to the two-dimensional; The tubes that hide secretive spaces, act as drawing lines against the white gallery wall. Chais' oscillation between different worlds – art, design, technology, science – enables her to conjure up a thrilling and intriguing ensemble that relentlessly challenges the viewer and induces him question the reality of his life and its authenticity.

Irena Gordon, curator