

## *The Mediator* | GÁBOR T. SZÁNTÓ

Eyal Segal's paintings, videos and installations are about freedom and the search for identity. All artworks by all modern artists are about individual freedom and the search for identity – we may instantly point out, casting doubt on our previous statement.

If, however, the artist happens to be from among the youngest generations of Israel, itself a young country, with his parents originating from two different parts of the world – the distant locations of Germany and Chocin, India – but from a shared tradition, then, in his artworks, we will more likely encounter such themes as the search for identity and a balance between the particular and the universal. Or perhaps it is through our own associations that we more easily find shared motifs in this domain of interpretation.

Especially if the person viewing the works is someone who is also interested in these questions.

Eyal Segal's paintings also reveal a diverging or overlapping duality of shades and form. The blurred and flashing lights and hues of cities and landscapes; the various textures of parting or opposing figures. Everything is possible but nothing is quite for certain – only the simultaneous presence of parallelisms.

The videos of the Moon, Mars, Jupiter trilogy are dominated by images of school/work/law enforcement authorities – the well-known curtailers of freedom. It is as if the artist sought release from these in the unexpectedly wild images of Columba Riot – but the flock of pigeons he has roused cannot find an exit from the building.

His two-channel installation entitled Time Container shows parallel recordings. We see images shot in rainy, foggy weather. Then, on the left hand side, in Israel's Port of Asdod, the artist's father, formerly a sailor, tells his son about the time he spent on a sea boat in his youth. He recounts, for instance, the time they sailed around the shores of South Africa, the Cape of Good Hope. In the life threatening storm they had to steady their beds, and bind themselves to them so that they wouldn't fall down. To the right, the cranes and power units of the port can be seen. Parallels and contradictions in the two image fields. Power and the personal, on the one hand, power, mechanicalness and the impersonal, on the other. The son asks his youthful, energetic father – who says that if he saw the world as a teenager, he saw its "arse" at best in ports and on oil tankers, often physically wading in the oil – to summarize his experience. The father responds with a manly smile and says: "What experience? You're done!" Behind the figure of the father, images of the belly of the cargo ship, then the port, before and after we see the early morning sea and the port, blurred and shrouded in grey fog, just like the parents and the past that can never wholly be known. On the parallel video channel and at the end of the interview, vivid images of the port, of the ships, cranes, and containers: a current time that is devoid of human presence, of stories, or even a sense of continuity – of completeness – between the two image channels. And still, in the closing frame of the interview, it is as if the grey, misty sight of the sea visible behind the father alluded to Sándor Ferenczi's Thalassa theory, a sense of oceanic

vastness that goes against the sequence of sharp, colourful, and high-contrast images that appears in the image field on the right side, showing the containers and cranes of the port.

In another video entitled *Turgor*, we hear birdsong while we watch cyclists pass in front of the building of an old fort. Then, we see the artist dip his head in a fish tank placed in the foreground. As if he were doing a handstand, he slowly lowers his head into the water and remains there for an entire minute, during which we hear, in addition to the birdsong, an elderly woman singing. The cyclists, who are also visible through the water, appear to completely ignore this person with his head dipped in water. *Turgor* refers to internal pressure, a state of tension, of being filled with water. We can only understand the full meaning and uncomfortable contradictions of the image once we read the accompanying text. The building seen in the background is Münster's Zwingler (meaning dungeon, bailey). Set in the "city of water", it was a site of torture (often involving water) and executions during Nazi times. For the Israeli artist of half-German family roots, whose grandmother sings in the video, the components of the image embody the history of suffering and the contradictions of indifference, ancestry and alienation.

In his video entitled *Sandstorm & Lawrence Tree* (which is not featured in the material exhibited in Budapest), in a gradually expanding image field, we see, from an increasing distance, a leafy tree bending and feathering in a sand storm to the sounds of music composed by Isaac Shushan, which combines elements of Eastern Jewish, Arab, and perhaps even Indian, influences. The footage recorded in Wadi Rum, Jordan – an area occupied by Bedouin tribes, whose name may be familiar to Western ears from the story of Lawrence of Arabia – may bring to mind Csontváry's *Lonely Cedar*, just as it may remind us of the Middle Eastern conflict ready to explode at any moment through the silence of the desert.

"The new artist will be a hybrid. The new artist is a multidisciplinary, autodidact, (...) a painter, photographer, designer, he will do video art, sculptures, installations, the artist will be (...) a Mediator," reads the artist statement of Eyal Segal, the Israeli artist – the mediator – who comes from a European Ashkenazi Jewish background and roots in the most ancient Indian Jewish community, which, according to legend, traces its ancestry all the way back to King Solomon.

The distant branches of ancient roots once again become intertwined through means of the postmodern age, creating a hybrid culture. Eyal Segal's search for his path may not necessarily have as its objective the arrival at a given destination. Perhaps art is but a constant and continuous journeying between parts of the world and branches of art, between the search for freedom and identity, and between the personal that takes place in finite time and the collective that becomes historical.