

THE EXHIBITIONIST
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OVERTURE
CURATORS' FAVORITES
BACK IN THE DAY
MISSING IN ACTION
ATTITUDE
ASSESSMENTS
RIGOROUS RESEARCH
SIX x SIX
REAR MIRROR

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THE EXHIBITIONIST



and rendering further discussion unmanageable. Your text scarcely does this. It speaks too much from a position of knowing.¹

The text he is referring to is entitled “Modes and Moods: Antique olive 15 lower case medium,” an earlier version of which was offered by De Baere to all participants sometime in the summer of 1994. The published text constitutes a chronicle of the first collective impulses that led to the show and already forms a response by the curator to some of the artists’ advice.⁴ Its introduction asks: “Are the artists not the museum’s most important advisors?” (This is indeed a question that should be asked again and again.)

De Baere’s text appears after Pültau’s critique, gesturing toward a reversal of powers alongside a reversal of chronology proposed by Luc Tuymans and partly translated into a shift of the “opening” to the end of the show’s run. Even more impactful, it seems, is Tuymans’s decision to lower the lighting scheme of the entire exhibition, an assertion of mood, where things are half-visible but seen more deeply, perhaps, which is discussed at some length in a conversation between the artist, the curator, and the two witnesses/critics toward the end of an array of artists’ contributions.⁵

The entire catalogue reads a bit like a captains’ log (yes, I do mean “captains” plural), as we get the sense that we are following not a recipe or a record, but a lively debate about the very nature of the show, and, by extension, art and exhibition making. And this debate (and the making of the catalogue) continued beyond the opening day. The fact that the exhibition never cohered neatly, but existed in a twilight that was both structural and phenomenal, doesn’t necessarily mean that it celebrated confusion for its own sake. Rather, to me at least, it signaled another way of knowing. The “position of knowing” is there, but perhaps misunderstood as Cartesian by Pültau:

For all of Searle’s allusions to the stupidity of Jason Rhoades,⁶ the artist certainly knew how to produce a very specific energy, mood, or atmosphere out of a seemingly chaotic arrangement of objects. This is one of the most difficult things to pull off in an artwork. And when you try to achieve it in a group exhibition, as a curator, you might expect that an artist who is particularly good at the task might refuse to play well with the other pirates.

Antagonism (and agonism) have been advanced as a necessary condition of a collective endeavor. And, in making space for artworks to transform and to relate intimately, *This is the show* . . . tested the nerves of some of the participating artists, not to mention some critics and some visitors. But I do not wish to conclude by simply celebrating these tensions as “productive.” Rather, it is more interesting to consider the curators’ attempts to learn from artists and thereby revise the very notion of knowing.

If the show (((resonates))) today, it is in large part, I think, because it carried one of the best titles in the business. (De Baere wisely revised the original working title, “Extra Muros,” upon the advice of the artists.) “This is the show” sounds so assertive and clear and indeed knowing, but “the show is many things” allows no closure. No wonder it has motivated remakes, curatorial workshops, and other nods and bows. But if it is in fact becoming something of a model (despite, or perhaps because of, its lack of stability), it might be interesting to consider what it held up as its own metaphor. It was *not* another exhibition.⁷ In his text, De Baere, the classically trained art historian who loves the Flemish Primitives, invokes the the Portinari Altar (ca. 1475) by Hugo Van der Goes, elaborating on how the late-15th-century altarpiece resisted the onset of Cartesian single-point perspective and instead offers “many moments of approach” and “a clarity with a sensual fullness” that “remains a proposition.”

To note this is not to say that artworks and exhibitions—or artists and curators, for that matter—should be interchangeable. But what does it mean to relax and admit that they can share intuitions?

Notes

1. Adrian Searle, “This is the show and the show is many things,” *Frieze* 18 (November–December 1994): <https://www.frieze.com/issue/review/this-is-the-show-and-the-show-is-many-things/>.

2. See note 6.

3. Dirk Pültau, “To Bart Roland and the Artists: Between the Process and Us: Me” in *This is the show and the show is many things* exhibition catalogue (Ghent: Museum van Hedendaagse Kunst, 1994): 6.

4. See pages 11–19. The time of this text is meticulously noted as “19th July, recollection 6th August, scrappings

(presumably the crossed-out passages, which remain but with a line through them) 26th August.”

5. In the conversation, Tuymans’s comments offer insight into the unhinged temporality and the particular mood of the show. “I am curious in this exhibition to see how things interact with each other. And also how up-to-date the idea of time can be brought, as well as the idea of space—again, I’m thinking of film—how on a material basis you can give shape to something that’s practically immaterial. . . . The idea is suggested of making an exhibition that is so dynamic that you have a continuous movement—and if it is not purely physical then certainly one which comes about in the mind, even also in the parcours people follow when they come and discover the exhibition. . . . Actually, I’m thinking of a particular period in the day, twilight. If that could be made to go on and on, it would be phenomenal, a constant twilight in the

exhibition. This will enable you to see things properly, in my opinion, in the sense that you see things just before the point at which they disappear. The vanishing point means that you can sometimes look at something more intensively from a certain kind of depth.” See pages 129–44; quotes are from page 129.

6. “Instead of the Mystic Lamb, though, we get lots of placards saying ‘PORK!’” Searle scoffs, “which seems to be one of the few words Rhoades can spell.”

7. While the installation of Niki de Saint Phalle’s anything-but-phallic *SHE—A Cathedral* at the Moderna Museet in Stockholm in 1986, realized in collaboration with Jean Finocchietti and Per Olof Ultved, is held up by De Baere as an example, he concludes that it cannot function as a model because the task at hand will not yield a cohesive form.



Participants in the first *Liminal Spaces* meeting, Qalandia, Palestine, 2006

LIMINAL SPACES

Chen Tamir

Liminal Spaces took place from 2006 to 2007. Its initial focus was Road 60, which connects Jerusalem and Ramallah, and how it might be possible through art and culture to overcome political, social, and physical barriers created by the Israeli occupation of Palestine.¹ *Liminal Spaces* was not an actual exhibition, but rather a joint research project, a collective micro-residency and production platform, and a series of interventionist, site-specific conferences rolled into one. It has since permeated most of the politically engaged art in Israel and Palestine, and opened the way for experimental curatorial initiatives well beyond.

In March 2006, approximately 35 artists, activists, curators, and cultural producers of

various stripes gathered at the invitation of Reem Fadda, founder of the Palestinian Association for Contemporary Art in Ramallah; Galit Eilat, founder of the Israeli Center for Digital Art in Holon (just outside Tel Aviv); and Philipp Misselwitz, a German urbanist focusing on refugee camp cities. They rented a store 500 meters from the Qalandia Checkpoint, one of the largest checkpoints between Jerusalem and Ramallah, and spent three days there and in East Jerusalem listening to presentations by a variety of experts, including politicians and urban planners, and exploring the nearby area.² The intention was to have a gestation period of roughly eight months, after which they would convene again in Leipzig, Germany, for a follow-up conference



Participants in the third *Liminal Spaces* meeting, October 2007

and exhibition of newly created works, which would then be exhibited in Ramallah or Gaza and in Holon.

All of this, in turn, had grown out of several much looser gatherings of Israeli and Palestinian artists in 2004. They had come together as Artists Without Walls to discuss if and how they might be able to work in and through the Israeli Occupation. The meetings allowed the various artists and curators to build trust and form personal and professional relationships that last to this day.³ (The only artwork they created took the form a closed-circuit video that was projected on both sides of the separation wall in the Abu Dis area of Jerusalem, thereby creating a virtual window through the wall that lasted for four hours.)

A major element of *Liminal Spaces* was its negotiation with military and political forces. The Israeli Center for Digital Art was able to work with the army to issue entry permits for Palestinian participants, many of whom had not been to Jerusalem since 2000. The Palestinian organizers, Reem Fadda along with Khaled Hourani, asked the Tanzim, the military wing of Fatah that controlled the region, for permission and protection, which they were granted.⁴ They also sought approval from the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions movement that was coming into formation at that time. The BDS wanted to avoid the illusion of a shared or unified goal, and asked for a written statement that did not include the term “collaboration” because of its “informant” connotation (meaning, Palestinians who supply the Israeli military with information). The BDS also recommended that *Liminal Spaces* not accept Israeli funding.

The bulk of the funding for *Liminal Spaces* ultimately came from the European Union and

the European Cultural Foundation, along with two German sources: the Berlin University of the Arts and the German Federal Cultural Foundation. Support was also given by the Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst in Leipzig, Germany, where an exhibition of some of the works—or, rather, proposals or sketches of works in progress that grew out of the first conference—were to be exhibited in conjunction with a conference that would give participants a chance to meet again on neutral ground.

But there was considerable disagreement about how the project was being framed. While the German organizers took great pains to not offend pro-Israel visitors by avoiding terms such as “occupation,” Fadda, Eilat, and the other *Liminal Spaces* initiators fought to underline the anti-colonialist foundations of the project. A major fear was that it would be co-opted for the sake of a false normalization under the guise of two supposedly equal sides represented by Israeli and Palestinian artists.

In the words of Eyal Danon, curator at the Israeli Center for Digital Art, “The idea of having an exhibition abroad was too similar to European initiatives that brought Israelis and Palestinians to Europe to talk. The whole Leipzig experience was uncomfortable. We had lots of arguments. You can imagine what it was like to bring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to Germany. When we published anything, we constantly had to negotiate the terms we were using, such as ‘occupation.’ Often, what was for the other side a huge compromise was for us not even a starting point.”⁵

Eilat says: “They assumed that their audiences wanted a peace project, a collaboration between Palestinians and Israelis. It’s not that good relations can’t exist between us, but we

didn’t want to use art to depict bridges that don’t exist, or that present an asymmetrical situation in a symmetrical way. One of our aims was to present problematic terms, not solutions.”⁶

The Leipzig exhibition was seen largely as an unfortunate concession and made it obvious that such an exhibition in Holon or Gaza, even if successfully carried out despite the logistical challenges, would fall into the same traps, and fail to serve the goals of the project. And there were other factors that shaped the decision not to have an exhibition, particularly the changing political landscape.⁷ As Eilat explained: “It was clear that having an exhibition in Holon when not all the artists could come, or having an exhibition in Ramallah with Israeli artists, would be very problematic. To insist on it, even if it succeeded, would create a false image of normalization, which we didn’t want. The focus shifted to meetings and production.”⁸

The next conference took place in October 2007, and, rather than holding it in Gaza, the organizers decided to examine segregation and oppression as they manifest in ethnically mixed cities within Israel, such as Modi’in Illit/Bil’in, Ramle, Jaffa, and Lod, and in the Christian Palestinian town of Taibeh (Taybeh) in the Occupied Territories. Students in the newly opened International Academy of Art Palestine joined, as well as several new participants, bringing the total number to around 80.⁹ Among the new participants was the artist Artur Żmijewski, who later developed several projects exploring the Occupation, such as the video he made in Holon called *My Neighbors* (2011). When Żmijewski curated the 2012 Berlin Biennial, he invited the International Academy of Art Palestine to collaborate on the temporary importation and display of the massive key from the Aida Refugee Camp.

Liminal Spaces installation view, Galerie für Zeitgenössische Kunst, Leipzig, Germany, 2006, showing Yochai Avrahami’s *Rocks Ahead*, 2006



One of Yael Bartana’s projects that came out of *Liminal Spaces* was *Summer Camp* (2009),¹⁰ in which we see the artist turn toward a cinematic style that quotes from early pioneering propaganda, later developed in her infamous . . . *And Europe Will Be Stunned . . .* (2007–12), which represented Poland in the 2011 Venice Biennial (co-curated by Eilat). During the first conference, Bartana went for a short exploration near Qalandia with fellow Israeli artist Yochai Avrahami. They were stopped by the Israeli army and interrogated. The experience had a marked influence on Avrahami’s practice. “It was obvious I couldn’t make a simple work about crossing a border. [The interrogation happened on] Saturday, and on Sunday Google Earth launched in Israel and I started to map the places I had been to. Since they turned me into a spy, I thought I’d make work like a spy. The experience affected all the work I made in the years following.”¹¹ A sketch of Avrahami’s piece was exhibited in the Leipzig iteration of *Liminal Spaces* the following October, and the completed work was shown at the Taipei Biennial in 2008.

Other projects grew out of *Liminal Spaces*, such as Peter Friedl’s stuffed giraffe, which was shown at the 2007 Documenta and consisted simply of a taxidermied giraffe; the animal had died during an Israeli military strike near the Qalqilya Zoo. The Dutch collective Superflex did several projects in and around Palestine following the conference, including organizing an appeal to the European Broadcasting Union to include Palestine in the Eurovision Song Contest. The project *Picasso in Palestine* (2011), which centered on the enormous logistical challenges in bringing a single Pablo Picasso painting to Ramallah, was conceived by Khaled Hourani and carried out in partnership with the Van Abbe-

museum in Eindhoven, the Netherlands, where Eilat was by then working.

Although *Liminal Spaces* opened up many channels for collaboration, research, and exchange, it also opened people's eyes to the seeming impossibility of peace or social justice. Both Eilat and Fadda have since left the country, frustrated by the social and political impasses they faced on a daily basis. Fadda especially talks about her disillusionment following the third iteration of *Liminal Spaces*, which took place mostly within Israel proper: "I saw that Israel had its own colonial racist project to deal with, beyond the Occupation. Of course, people aren't going to look past the border because they already have tons of issues to work with at home. How do you wake up an entire society? How do you show them they have to salvage themselves?"¹²

Eilat continues to serve as an inspirational figure to me and several other cultural producers in Israel, and I'm sure far beyond as well. She has pioneered a shift in the Israeli art scene from a Westward-looking cultural island largely influenced by Western Europe and the United States to one rooted in the Middle East, with ties to other balkanized areas such as Eastern Europe. She accomplished this by focusing the programming at the Israeli Center for Digital Art on politically and socially engaged experimental art. I probably would never have moved back to Tel Aviv a year ago if I hadn't seen firsthand how mixing local and international programming can be so successful.

Although the mandate at the Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv, where I work, is somewhat different than that of the Israeli Center for Digital Art, and the political situation has changed since 2006, I'm happy to count myself among the people who continue to benefit, though indirectly, from the important knowledge and the brave connections forged by the truly pioneering project that was *Liminal Spaces*.

Notes

1. I joined the Israeli Center for Digital Art in Holon (near Tel Aviv) for three summer months in 2006, between the first and second parts of *Liminal Spaces*, to fulfill my internship requirement for the master's degree in curatorial studies at Bard College. Born in Israel but raised in Canada, I always had a distant but strong relationship to my home country, and I was curious to learn about contemporary culture there. Although I wasn't directly involved with *Liminal Spaces*, the

overall programming at the center fundamentally altered how I saw cultural work and its potential to influence the world.

2. A wonderful book, also titled *Liminal Spaces*, was published in 2009 consisting of lectures, talks, and discussions that took place during the conferences. And the project's website, liminalspaces.org, has recently been restored.

3. Both Artists Without Walls and *Liminal Spaces* took form in the shadow of the Second Intifada, which began in 2000 and ended in 2005. Up until 2000, travel from one side of the Green Line to the other was much easier. People would commute to work and business was much more fluid. After 2000, the separation wall was built, effectively imprisoning Palestinians within it, while entry permits to Israel proper became, and continue to be, extremely hard to obtain. For Israelis it remains illegal to enter most parts of the Occupied Territories (except the settlements).

4. The Tanzim officials even gave the participants a tour of the area and treated them to a large lunch, during which shooting broke out at the nearby Qalandia Checkpoint.

5. Author interview with Eyal Danon, currently director of the Israeli Center for Digital Art and a *Liminal Spaces* organizer, September 24, 2013, in Holon.

6. Author interview with Galit Eilat, founder of the Israeli Center for Digital Art, October 1, 2013, in Tel Aviv.

7. Between the first conference in March 2006 in Ramallah and the second one in Leipzig in October, Israeli forces withdrew from Gaza, Hamas won the elections, and the newly formed Kadima party took power in Israel based on Ariel Sharon's unilateral disengagement plan. In July 2006, a month-long war broke out between Israel and the Hezbollah in southern Lebanon that was overwhelmingly supported by public opinion in Israel. Since the dissolution of the Oslo Peace Process in the late 1990s, and the growing militancy on both sides of the Green Line following the Intifada, the Israeli left was shrinking dramatically, and support for the Separation Wall and military operations such as that in 2006 grew drastically.

8. Author interview with Galit Eilat, founder of the Israeli Center for Digital Art, October 1, 2013, in Tel Aviv.

9. The conference was timed to coincide with the Riwaq Palestinian art biennial. Many of the international participants who were invited by the Israeli Center for Digital Art also took part in the biennial.

10. This two-channel video installation uses, on one side, footage Bartana filmed in 2006 of Palestinian construction workers and international volunteers from the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions (ICAHD), who were rebuilding a demolished Palestinian house in Anata (East Jerusalem). This footage is edited to match the Zionist propaganda film *Avodah* (1935) by Helmar Lerski, showing on the other screen.

11. Author interview with Yochai Avrahami on September 24, 2013, in Holon.

12. Author interview with Reem Fadda on October 5, 2013. Fadda is now associate curator of Middle Eastern Art at the Guggenheim Abu Dhabi Project.



WACK THE CANON!

Hendrik Folkerts

My initial encounter with *WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution* was through the exhibition catalogue. Browsing the pages of this voluminous book, I engaged with a bold and extremely exciting universe of artists that would shape my view of art history from that point on. In 2008 I visited the exhibition at MoMA PS1 in New York, where it had traveled after its first appearance at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles. The works on the pages now unfolded in actual space. I encountered heroines I already knew, such as VALIE EXPORT, Eva Hesse, Lynda Benglis, Ulrike Rosenbach, Mary Kelly, Marina Abramović, Hannah Wilke, and Sturtevant, and artists whose work I had yet to explore. Both the exhibition and the catalogue became invaluable resources for me as a student, and, later, major points of reference in my practice as a curator. They proposed questions on the basic operations of a historical survey exhibition and its relation to art history's canon, the legacy of the feminist movement, and the ontology of performance documentation—questions that as yet I have only been able to partially answer or address, but that I hope to engage with much more in the years to come.

Gornelia Butler, the curator overseeing the vast selection of works and artists that together formed *WACK!*, borrowed from the performance scholar Peggy Phelan in establishing a premise

for the exhibition, defining feminism as “the conviction that gender has been, and continues to be, a fundamental category for the organization of culture” and that “the pattern of that organization usually favors men over women.”¹¹ Butler contended that feminism should be framed as the most influential international “movement” of the postwar era, deliberately invoking the word “movement” to emphasize its connection to the verb “to move” and liberate it from any static or fixed meaning the “ism” may connote. With these definitions in place, Butler presented a staggering array of works by more than 125 women artists working in the 1960s and 1970s, mostly operating in the Western hemisphere, with some notable exceptions. Marta Minujín, Cecilia Vicuña, Sonia Andrade, Mako Idemitsu, Léa Lublin, and Nasreen Mohamedi are only a few examples of artists featured in *WACK!* whose work had long been under the international radar.

Making a survey exhibition of any historical movement, certainly one as divergent and stratified as feminism, can be a problematic endeavor, as it constructs a junction or arrangement of a variety of artistic practices along a thematic and temporary axis, thereby shaping the very conditions upon which canon building is established. Feminist artists, art historians, and curators, from the very outset, have provided one of the

WACK! Art and the Feminist Revolution
Installation view, MoMA PS1,
New York, 2008, showing *Learning*
©Grady's *Mlle. Bourgeois*, *Yucca*
1980-82

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