

Israeli Art Now .

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Boaz Arad is a unique artist in the Israeli landscape. Starting out as a painter in the 80s, his work was first validated through his influence on younger generations of artists – as a teacher and an artist who promoted video art in Israel in the late 90s together with Guy Ben Ner and Doron Salomons.

Arad's first video works are a series centering on the figure of Adolf Hitler. These works were made between 1999 and 2002 using archival material. These short films are exercises in editing and duplication, a kind of privat revenge of Arad who allows himself to show Hitler masturbating (100 beats, 1999), apologize in Hebrew (Hebrew Lesson, 2000) or play with his mythic mustache (Mustache, 1999 and Marcel Marcel, 2000).

Later on, in his video Immense Inner Peace (2001) Arad himself disguises as Hitler and states analogies in the painterly and physical aspects, relating to Hitler being a painter and the esthetics and masculinity of the national-socialist era. Arad's preoccupation with the figure of Hitler peaked in his installation The Nazi Hunter's Room (2007), a room in the center of which is the figure of aging Hitler whose skin turned into a rug like the fur of a hunted bear. Around him are oil paintings of swastikas, photographs of objects that relate to the domestic environment of European bourgeoisie and a fake wood linoleum floor which heightens the air of the 30s that surrounds the space. In this installation Arad deviates from the discussion

about the media in its form in the previous works and uses the figure of Hitler as a starting point for discussion about the internal Israeli conflict between 'Sfaradim'(North African and Middle Eastern Jews) and 'Ashkenazim'(Eastern Europe Jews). In this context, the defeated and exhibited Hitler is the beginning of the saga, the symbol of the defeated European Jews in the face of the eastern and north African Jews.

Arad developed these themes farther in the video work *Until When?* (2004) and *Gefilte Fish* (2005). In the first Arad does lips sink to the voice of the eastern singer Zohar Argov whose singing a song about solitude written by the Ashkenazi composer Uzi Hitman. As a ventriloquist duplicated by a doll in his image Arad created a kaleidoscope of doublings and reflections of stereotypes.

In *Gefilte Fish* Arad serves as a ventriloquist for his mother who is teaching how to prepare the dish that summarizes the Ashkenazi Jewish experience in the format of a television cooking program.

Arad's latest works combine installation, video and painting. The paintings are portraits of cultural icons: Freud, Agnon, Van Gogh and even the artist's dog become validated, like Hitler and the doll of the double before, representing the artist's alter-ego and defining his cultural and historical position.

Sergio Edelstein