

## Removing Comments

Artists: Guy Aon, Eliya Cohen, Eden Yilma, Gil Shmerlin, Lia Tzigler

Curated by Barak Rubin and Livia Tagliacozzo | Idris

Asking questions, interrogating truth and commenting on the state of things have for centuries met with forms of censorship. Well known is Socrates' trial and conviction to death by poisoning as a consequence of his philosophical teaching, considered a "corruption" of the mind of Ancient Greece's youth. Contemporary questions on the role of the state in monitoring society and restricting freedom of speech certainly abound worldwide, increasingly transcending national boundaries as technologies present new venues of expression. While imagination continues in its boundless efforts, top-down efforts to control, regulate and categorize thoughts and action persist.

The exhibition title takes its name from the Israeli 43rd Annual Report of the Ombudsman, which discussed the need to establish guidelines on deletion rules, hiding and removing comments, and blocking people's web pages. The burning issue also made headlines in October 2019, when the European Union Court of Justice ordered that comments on social networks considered harmful to its reputation could be removed. This opened the door to national control over transnational freedom of expression, and raised questions about the role internet companies and states have with regards to both monitoring, interpreting and censoring individuals' modes of expression.

This group exhibition brings together different forms of visual techniques to reflect upon the concept of freedom of expression, and mechanisms of exposing and hiding.

Eden Yilma presents three bright colored illustrations: a group of Muslim women, three aboriginal women and a woman from the Ethiopian Mursi tribe. The four Muslim women are wearing different colored jilbāb (long and loose-fit garment) and sunglasses. They appear to be looking directly at the spectator, posing comfortably. Yilma transcends western conceptions of veiling and loose clothing as a lack of freedom of expression and instead pursues the idea that freedom is subjective, and clothing which covers one body may allow women to express themselves in a distinct and markedly confident way. The three aboriginal women sit closely on a patterned fabric. Aboriginal art patterns abound in symbolism, each shape used to express an element existing in their environment, traditionally these are produced using natural colors. Confident and comfortable as they sit, they too face the spectator. The third illustration is an individual woman from the Mursi tribe, she too, imperturbable, looks towards the spectator. Traditionally, marriageable and child-bearing Mursi women wear the lip plate as a sign of beauty and fertility. Here tribal visual elements and western fashion influence are merged: together with the traditional lip plate and headdress, the woman is clothed in a bright colored western-styled suit. Significantly, the facial features and expressions of all these female multi-ethnic figures are erased, and their bodies concealed by fabric. Transcending notions of social

constructs of gender and ethnicity, these figures are as anonymous as they are familiar. The lack of facial features, coupled with their frontal positioning endows them with an empowering and conciliatory impression.

In Guy Aons' work "Composition for a Kimono," facial features and expressions play a background role, as the physicality and configuration of the human body is manipulated and takes center stage. In the 1931 poem L'Union Libre [Freedom of Love], the body of Andre Bretons' wife is described as sexually desirable and threatening, combining animate and inanimate features: "My wife with the hair of a wood fire / With the thoughts of heat lightning / With the waist of an hourglass / With the waist of an otter in the teeth of a tiger..." The title of the poem celebrates freedom of amorous union as much as the freedom of expression. Deconstructing his wives' body, Breton endows it with numerous unexpected features. Aons' kimono hanging from the ceiling, also upsets the conventional body image, as he presents a complex photographic combination: free, intimate, and graphically raw. Boundaries are crossed in the images presented, as well as in their materiality: the three dimensional body is photographed in a two-dimensional format, and then re-proposed as a three-dimensional object, a kimono. Aon appropriates the traditional Japanese clothing item, and while this is meant to cover a body, he prints convoluted nude hybrid bodies on the garment. The photographic manipulation and composition enables the creation of a new freakish and provocative reality. Aon dismantles the perception of photography as a means to immortalize 'reality' and the world as we see it. Archetypal body images are used to create a new yet familiar image, an original corporeality which lends itself to interrogate established gender, sexual, racial, and ethnic renditions. Rather than separation and grouping, he proposes a process of integration.

Lia Tzigler presents black and white pencil drawings of landscape layouts and architectural remains, tracing a source which no longer exists. The transparency of plexiglass presents layered substrates of different materials, allowing for perspectives of multiple layer depths. The use of transparent materials deals with mechanisms of visibility and elicitation. The labor-intensive format is hidden, and visible through the use of transparent perspex and hanging aids that function as an additional meaningful layer in the works. A drawing is displayed on both sides of the perspex, which becomes an exposed and vertebrate sculptural object, creating a new relation and space between 2D and 3D. The works hang by screws, which perforate and traverse the drawing and the plastic material in an act of wounding and removing. The hole which is created, what is missing, enables visual connection and re-collection for compositional purposes.

Eliya Cohen presents two works made out of a deconstructed umbrella, acrylic and spray on canvas. The umbrella, which is meant to shield the body from rain or sun, serves as a metaphor for protection and unity. In addition, the term 'umbrella' is used to speak of different parts coming together (ie. an umbrella organization). On the other hand, the umbrella is an object prone to damage, strong winds for instance can bend and deform it, and its internal mechanism may get stuck. The umbrella parts Cohen presents are not only deformed, but also displaced—what is

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meant for practical use in the outside environment is placed indoors. The background of the canvas leads the spectator to imagine the outside, yet the shape of the umbrellas have brings to mind physical intimacy. The umbrella fabric alludes to human skin, with the piercing metal representing a sort of skeletal form. The umbrella, which has the identified purpose of shading, covering, and protection, thus becomes an extended metaphor for what is exposed.

Gil Shmerlin presents a series of light sculptures. In nature, light has the functional purpose of making things visible, to shine, reveal and expose. However, in these sculptures the artificial light design and its fluorescence indicate other implications, from contemporary consumer culture to gender markers. The sculpture light is not a mere illuminating object, it performs a mediating function that connects the artist to the viewer and the display space. Each of the sculptures contains different light, which affect the sculpture, the viewer and the space differently. Furthermore, their shapes can be interpreted as expressions of numerous associations, which the spectator is free to construct. While prone to the traditional symbolism which associates light and darkness to good and evil, their production and appearance invite the spectator to go beyond clichéd interpretations. One of the works is composed of a solid white background, with the word “highlights” cut-out of it revealing a mirror. It is a metaphorical reference of covering, uncovering, and reflection. The term “highlights” as a verb can signify adding light, or to attract attention and emphasize something important; as a noun it is used to refer to the best or most interesting aspect of something. In this work, the definition of the word matches its effect. In these sculptures, light is the ultimate subject of the work, rather than a means to present it.