

Barak Ravitz | Curtain Call

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By Smadar Sheffi

In “Curtain Call,” Barak Ravitz’s new exhibition at the Dvir Gallery, he created a sensation of disruption and temptation, fantasy, elegance, and dash of humor. The name of the exhibition, referencing the deep bow by a cast to the audience at the end of a performance, frames it, despite the art being static. As an action, this leads to viewing the art as performative. Beyond duration, the exhibition is conscious of the power relationship between it and the viewer, being a pause from reality and the essential need to be brilliant and capture the audience’s heart.



Downfall, A2, Curtain Call – השתחוויה
Barak Ravitz, , 2023

The works touch upon three subjects moving from an idiosyncratic discussion of the world of art: the encounter of art history and contemporary art. As for issues from the very core of the present: the presence of religion and faith in daily life, and the quest for redemption. Both diptychs, each bearing the title “Downfall” depict photographs of the

Doge's Palace and the Libreria Vecchia Biblioteca Marciana adjacent to the Piazza San Marco in Venice, beautiful sites familiar to millions of tourists, especially to the "tribe" of international art visitors to the city every two years. Polyurethane foam emerges from the slits in the photograph, material which is extremely alien to the nature of the depicted structures. In one panel the polyurethane creates pearls of material in the windows, which



at first glance look like architectural decorations. In the second panel, the material leaks, looking wild and almost animalistic, emerging from the cuts and around the frame of the image to disrupt the order and threaten to cover the splendid architectural elements.

Two deconstructed cardboard boxes bearing the company name "Kitov" also create a sort of diptych. The boxes are attached to what seems like metal supports but are made of MDF. They bear the kosher stamp of the Jerusalem Ultraorthodox Court and a notice stating that the products are free of worms and insects. The title, *Twice as Good*, touches upon the commercialization of religious concepts. They have an interesting connection to Micha Ullmann's sculptures of "Secular Books" (2000). He referred to religious books

through secular books, in a razor-sharp encounter between an abstract idea and the earth, between spiritual and material. Ravitz, in an absurd, ironic, sad work, speaks of the instrumentalization of the spiritual. The name of the company refers to the Third Day of Creation which has become a brand name (the day on which "God saw that this was good" twice).

A certain sadness and absurdity also hovers over the neon installation, with roll-up blinds on which are images of neon lights and grey blocks in which glass mugs are sunken. "Upper Roll, Lower Roll" is the title of the piece referring to the form of the neon lights and areas in Israel suffused with biblical and Zionist myths. Light in art is associated with Divine light, revelation of truth, yet here it is condensed into illumination and the image of a neon light – an especially cheap type of light.



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The use of neon is associated with artists from Bruce Nauman to Glenn Ligon, creating an interesting conceptual link to their oeuvre. Four of the chains for the rolls are placed in the handles of the cups sunken into the clay block (which is actually a cinderblock covered in clay). The cups can be thought of in terms of the shattered kabbalistic vessels which were supposed to contain light, but when they were shattered, chaos resulted. The blocks/weights almost beg to be read as the four basic elements (air, fire, earth, water). The airy, precise exhibition is full of references and insinuations. It may be interpreted as homage to Israel's current crisis, which is creating a reinterpretation of symbols (such as the flag). The gallery staff, when distributing a page with the names of the works – there is no gallery text) proposes this reading. It seems that such a reading reduces the works, despite the desire to show engaged art. With its dry tone and clever aesthetics, Ravitz's exhibition, were it to take a curtain call, would have been greeted with a standing ovation.

27 Schocken, Tel Aviv

Photographs: Smadar Sheffi