I AM WRITING YOU TOMORROW
PENNY HES YASSOUR

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On Chinese cartography as an inspiration

Old Chinese cartography made use of pictorial representation: they had no fixed scale or quantitative characteristics, yet they showed clear signs of intentions to convey knowledge of place. An inscription on a Ming dynasty (1368-1644) map says that the map was made as an aid for the visitor to the mountain. Bearing this out, the map depicts climbing paths, steps cut into the cliffsides and bridges over creeks. It could emphasize “supernatural” features and include depictions of man-made objects. They had a strong relation to the arts and a complementary relationship between image and text. These maps are inclusive of the human experience.

I couldn’t find a better description for my activity as an artist–cartographer.

Those characteristics of old Chinese maps are reflected in my net-works as well as in the serial works titled Cartographies. My maps are ensembles of experiences, traces of activities, his-stories, images and unreadable texts, where the distinctions between the psyche, the social and the environment collapse, so as to create spatial and temporal assemblages, via serial formations, which are constantly in the process of creation.

Old Chinese maps, like the one I described above, are exceptionally exciting and inspiring. They touch my soul in a very personal way; I experience their beauty, rhythms, intensities and signs as an invitation for journeys yet to be taken.

On the I Am Writing You Tomorrow viewer experience

The net-works are a hybrid formation of sculpture and drawing in space. They become mental cartographies which are unfolding in the performance of drawings and automatic writing in the stream of unconsciousness. The text is unreadable and the perceiver is invited to participate by projecting his/her own associations and stories on the “screens,” but also to lose himself/herself in the labyrinth. It is an attitude providing a means to negotiate with the constantly changing cultural-mental experience and the fragile affairs between oneself and the other.
On the relationship between the installation and paintings

There are dynamic relations between the two-dimensional works and the three-dimensional installation in space. They are complementary ways of working and inquiring as well. They are not systematically consecutive; each of them has its own value, but when they share the space, they inspire each other and can be performed simultaneously.

On landscape as an inspiration

The face of the “Sacred Landscape” of my homeland: Israel and Palestine are scarred from wars, deportations, deserted houses and fields, archaeological excavations, extensive development, and so forth. Therefore, it is impossible to hold an illusion of naïve and pure, romantic nature.

The elusive Israeli landscape has always contained elements of camouflage, not only in the physical and practical sense as employed by the army, but also in the geopolitical sense, blurring distinctions between “real phenomena” and its coverings. These ideas are reflected both in my drawings and the net-works.

On the role of language in her work

I invented a secret language
Lost as soon as it is written.

Writing as a gesture of an intimate activity has long been part of my artistic practice. The act of writing as an artistic activity is somehow a refusal and negation of the image, but at the same time, it is an image of language, in my case an unreadable one.

I assimilate myself into sessions of automatic writing in the stream of unconsciousness, while de-scribing ephemeral reflections and visions, with a liquid material that expands, diffuses and is then frozen. The results are that the transitory thoughts disappear and transform; their meaning is concealed and sinks into oblivion, enabling new spaces of potentialities and possibilities of subjectivity and creativity to open up.
Writing has nothing to do with meaning. It has to do with land surveying and cartography, mapping of countries yet to come.

–Gilles Deleuze

Israel-based multimedia artist Penny Hes Yassour pays homage to Chinese painting tradition in this exhibition. Tactility, texture and elasticity, which emanate from the installation made with rubber-like material, echo the kinesthetic expression of gestural, rhythmic brush strokes embodied in Chinese ink painting and calligraphy. As with the adjacent paintings, the double surfaced net-works also reference the maps of traditional Chinese cartography. The works are mental cartographies—accumulations of one’s memories, relationships and cultural upbringings—thus, deeply resistant to a specific interpretation or reading. Hung from the ceiling, the net-works create continuously shifting shadows, mirroring the ever-changing mental cartographies of one’s cultural, social and political experiences. Intended to be seen through the installation, Hes Yassour’s cartography-paintings question the concept of physical spatiality inherent to maps since the viewing experience of these paintings changes with the shifting shadows cast from the net-works. The installation, embedded with unreadable words, also explores the boundaries between word and image and challenges viewers to consider how meaning is constructed and conveyed in visual art.

The three-dimensional net-works and two-dimensional paintings in I Am Writing You Tomorrow are autonomous in their own values. Yet, the two complement each other, seeking a new identity—a hybrid of sculpture and painting in space. Viewers are invited to create their own cartographies but also to lose themselves in the labyrinth with no organized structure, defined exit or entry point.

The exhibition was conceived by Simcha Moyal of Israeli Visual Arts with support provided by the Pasadena Art Alliance.