

## **Hibernation**

In this installation Ben Ari combines various techniques – sculpture, video, and sound. The work consists of several sculptures extracted from an unidentified, mythic iconography, including a female figure, a bird, several deer, and stumps, installed in various compositions on wooden surfaces reminiscent of operating tables or workbenches. The sculptures are made of gilded aluminum and wax, and their glamorous appearance corresponds with a pathos-filled, luxurious Baroque aesthetics. As opposed to the highly expressive movement and emotional surplus characterizing Baroque sculpture, however, Ben Ari shatters and perforates her images, rendering them objects with emptied body, a hollowed, fragile and fragmented ornamental volume. Despite their glamour, the voided images appear defeated, transpiring in an intermediate state of slumber for the most part, as if they had lost their vitality and iconic power.

*Hibernation* is an elaboration of Ben Ari's images and artistic language, while employing new materials and diverse media. The deer image runs through many of her works (two installations of *Starkiss*, 2003; *Diana*, 2004) as a figure that always embeds the duality of sacrifice/victim and sacrificer; a figure representing a violent male force, power and beauty, but also the vulnerability of a hunted animal. Here too, duplicated in several variations, the deer is always gallant, yet it is beheaded, bereft of its major markers of identity – the antlers, and its potency challenged.

The female figure which heretofore usually appeared in Ben Ari's works as a two dimensional, duplicated figure within a torturing collective grid (see *Mechanized Flow*, 2003, 2004) emerges here as a single entity at the very heart of the composition (as in *Peep*, 2005). As in other works, here too the female image is passive and laid bare on display; this time, however, her posture is distorted, as if her body had been removed from the collective pillory in a state of exhaustion.

The repetition and the work with a duplicated image within a grid, which typified Ben Ari's works in the past, are replaced here with images that are given individual treatment, but they still resonate in the Sisyphean manual work of perforating and piercing the

aluminum and the wax. Ben Ari subjects the material to an act of subtraction which nearly nullifies it. The links between the aluminum units comprising the sculptures remain undone, like yet-unstitched bodily cuts. The two-dimensional aluminum surface assumes three-dimensional form, yet still corresponds with the flatness characteristic of Ben Ari's earlier works; while she uses it to sculpt figures of volume, the material nevertheless remains akin to a flat surface, and the holes expose its emptied content – a body devoid of an interior.

Blood is likewise a recurring image in Ben Ari's works, usually emerging as a flow that signifies female stigmata of sorts. In *Hibernation* this motif is incorporated into the videos that depict bleeding nature possibly representing the reservoir of vitality ostensibly taken from the sculpted figures. The blood flowing in the crevices with horrifying tranquility, like the birds' screeches and the crying in the sound pieces, signify the figures' absent pathos; they indicate the lost vitality, while reintroducing into the works unrestrained remnants of motion and emotion.

More than all of Ben Ari's works, *Hibernation* yearns for the miraculous, the legendary, for beauty and sentiment; at the same time, it embodies the disintegration of power, the emptiness and sadness inherent in their nonmaterialization. The myth no longer tells a story, the beauty and the body disintegrate and dissolve, and the pathos and sentiment underlying the art of the past can no longer be contained. One may seek consolation in the façade, in its ephemeral splendor soon to vanish, or alternatively – yearn for euthanasia.