

**SHE LOVES YOU YEAH YEAH
YEAH ...**

**EHS SEVOL UOY HAEY HAEY
HAEY ...**

Jacob Mishori on Arik Miranda's *Night Drawings* , 2003

BOY AND GIRL

In Arik Miranda's private lexicon the following definition appears under the entry "beauty": a boy and a girl embrace and kiss beneath Menashe Kadishman's three circles sculpture.

What sort of bullshit is Miranda dishing out to us? A photograph of a loving couple from Haifa, Saturday-morning-tourists? A photograph of an art monument? Or is it possible, god forbid, that Miranda wants us to think of simplistic representation of the course of history configured as the shattering of Modernism over the head of two lovers?

Pure formalism stretches obliquely on top of a romantic scene – a convergence point of extremes. Miranda tries to be authentic and direct: to glorify the photograph and extol true love. The result is a complete sham, which is a total truth; artificiality equals nature; for the most part his own nature. Undoubtedly the sculpture and the couple are holding on to each other, but the three are held firmly by Miranda himself, aware as he is of their implosive potential.

ROOTING FOR LOVE

Miranda roots for love. He is repelled by and consciously avoids analytic irony and the typical cold fastidiousness of art practices labeled as elitist and sophisticated. As such, it is only natural that we define Miranda as a pop artist. And indeed, Miranda is a plastic-pop-artist, although more in the sense of "pop music" than of "pop art" per se. Let me explain:

- Pop music usually propounds a light-hearted world view: something sweet, nostalgic, lacking depth and simple in the manner of 'I love you, you love me.'

- In pop culture the packaging is everything. Unequivocally cover essence are equivalents, and consequently one might say: (1) Judge a book by its cover; (2) Listen carefully to the cover and you'll find what lies within it.

- A pop song is a highly charged explosive; a crammed art capsule, wily and approachable; a manipulative 'bomblet,' deliberately and directly aiming at our two fundamental art-receptors: the heart and the intellect.

- A pop song is an optimal means for fulfilling time gaps, embarrassing moments, passages and liberated indolence. A pop song is everywhere: at home, in schoolyards, in industrial halls, in truck cabins and in academic hallways.

- A pop song is the only vehicle by which one may set out on a voyage through time, in a transparent sweet-tasting sound tube. Who hasn't experienced, while listening to a pop song, the effect of an amazingly precise taking off toward a specific point in time and space?

- Listening to a pop song is an experience which involves all senses. An experience that causes us all, simple-minded and sophisticated alike, to momentarily lose our sense of orientation.

- A successful pop song sounds familiar upon listening to it for the first time, it is easy to hum and devoid of any avant-gardist pretensions. In many ways, one can say, that its strength lies precisely in its unoriginality.

LIFELESS LIFE

Miranda of course is indebted to pop music. The raw material, the first visual text to which he was exposed were CD casings, and soon after he found himself enchanted and mesmerized by the silvery, magic, holographic glare of the disk itself. His work is like a sandwiched spread: its upper layer, its ceiling, is a decorative illustration of the wrapping. While its lower layer, its floor, is the jewel-like dandified and industrialized beauty of the disk. Pop minimalism. A soft modernism.

Miranda is an obsessive slave of packaging, of the wrapping culture, of the surface. Not in its hard and strict modernistic aspect, but rather in its delicate beauty that is soft and romantic: the first touch of a boy and girl. Such a sense of repletion, such a saccharine-like mixture, should send a shudder down the spine of any civilized person, who perceives him/herself as fastidious, critical, sophisticated.

Miranda is a romantic, a two-dimensional pop songs producer. What underlies such a romantic world view?

Certainly not Life. But rather substitute lives, which we are supposed to conceive as Life itself, the taste of life: dogmatic, radicalized representations that display life that was swollen up by synthetic hormones, unblemished, untainted life, lifeless life. A raspberry is sweet, but raspberry syrup is sweeter. The ultimate love is summarized, or rather satisfied, by the potency of the piercing and straight gaze of a male model

into the eyes of his female counterpart. Who needs love when you have a poster of Love?

Sports aren't necessary – a sportive look is good enough. She loves him and he loves her, Yeah, Yeah, Yeah. In the last catalogue of Castro-Man a male model plays Jackson Pollock better than Ed Harris, and most probably is more photogenic than Pollock himself. That's it! Clement Greenberg's support is no longer needed! Pollock-free Pollock, soap-free soap, love-free love, fuck-free fuck. But how does the whole damn thing stick together? How come it doesn't collapse? On what does it stand?

STRESS AND RELAXATION

Brian Eno's ambient music was inspired by his stay in a hospital, confined to his bed after a car accident. The origin of the music is the enforced sound, monotonic and ongoing, produced by the life support systems that kept him and other patients alive. On what did the recognition and the exposure lean? On intuition, or on acquired knowledge? In artistic professionalism knowledge and intuition is one and the same. A musician was lying there. And that musician's ear arranged the environmental noise as music or perceived it, to begin with, as a musical sequence.

Similarly, a plastic artist would surely differentiate a ceramic tile wall of an operating room from the one decorating a fashionable kitchen. What keeps Miranda's works alive and prevent them from collapsing is the artistic act – the artistic craft.

Miranda's encounter with plastic arts created the possibility of fresh encounters with pop music. No longer the innocent and loving encounter of an adolescent with the love of his youth, but rather that of an artist filled with the same love. On the one hand, a distance (of an researcher, of a professional). On the other hand, an intimacy (nostalgia, revealing sensuality, a link to an authentic, living and psychologically charged dimension). Distance and intimacy. Stress and relaxation. Art in a nutshell. The formula which bridges over the nonexistent gap between Van Gogh and Donald Judd.

COSMETIC CREAM

Art needs a raw material, but there is no raw material destined solely for art. Materials are dead corpses until the moment they meet up with the artist, at which point they are charged with energy and gain some sort of life. Miranda knew he had raw material at his disposal. But raw material is forever nothing but raw material: something neutral, devoid of intentions, and lifeless, like any material of which art is made.

And yet: if a pop song is nothing more than raw material, it's very hard to utilize it as an artistic springboard. Its components are simple and banal like those of a cosmetic cream, but this isn't the only issue at stake here, there is also the fact that from the very beginning a pop song carries with it a certain inferiority, a certain inborn deformity, a certain superfluous burden of prejudices. Such a stance obliges Miranda

– who chose the pop song as a main source of inspiration for his work – to proceed with extreme caution, for his room for manoeuvre is small from the very onset and in constant danger of slipping into the utterly banal. Consequently, the ability to produce a 'smart object' from such initial givens would be critically dependent on the correct usage that he makes of them.

This is the point of Miranda's passage from an emotional and somewhat banal boy to an artist concerned with both emotions and the banal. His first series of works, executed during and after his studies, revealed a new manner of speaking about abstraction, a geometric abstraction, and a soft and feminine minimalism. The surfaces shimmered with a perpetual moistness (the wet look) of silvery tones. Flirting dangerously with the banal, the imagery explicitly strove to create an erotic atmosphere, homo-erotic. The brushstrokes were choked and vanished completely under a thick layer of varnish sealing the surface. The movement of the viewer in front and by the works produced a sense of gazing at a hologram, resembling a frantic play with the movements of a shining disk you happen to hold in your hand.

To its credit, it should be said that such a body of work, in spite of its ability to join similar moves that took place in Israeli art of the last decade, and in spite of the convenient matrix it set up for discussion and the creation of new texts that surround it – there was still something enigmatic about it. On occasion, the falling in love and the treatment of beauty transcended the acceptable and left the body of work beyond the flexible perimeters of good taste.

AN INFINITE SUGARY CONTINUUM

In the latest series of drawings, presented in the current exhibition, legitimate points of reference are abandoned: those which enable you to slide gracefully toward the center of the artistic discourse. Gently as is his way, Miranda continues to abuse dogmatic Modernism and to turn it into a infinite sugary continuum.

His drawings look like negatives of African paintings that foreign office officials used to bring home at the heyday of diplomatic relations with the black continent in the early sixties – ethnicity for the masses. At times, they even look like ornaments forced between two mirrors in a local barber shop in order to upgrade, as it were, the shop's interior design; like the empty maquettes of mega department stores in a miniature shopping mall; or rather like 1:1 models of paper mats set on a table complete with silverware and a menu.

ACG

It is easy to elevate the drawings by evoking geometry and minimalism, but it is far better not to do so: to hitch one's wagon to a star lends too much credit to the star and, most importantly, robs the works of their power. It's quite surprising, but the power of the works derives from another encounter, between Miranda and three painters that one would hardly expect to find on a young artist's menu. It is also rather rare to

include them within any list of dominant influences: two of the artists are found often outside the narrow canonical territory and the status of the third is still unclear – being, as he is, with one leg within and the other without the canon.

Ardon-Castel-Gross – hereinafter: ACG – three artists who inevitably cause a certain derision whenever their names are mentioned in connoisseur circles. The ultimate pop songwriters and singers of the undying discourse about art. Proven successes and safe investments, hits. Strong characters, who survived despite the rejection by the canon, each according to his own way. What the three have in common is their ability to create soft and popular cover-versions of music that was originally hard and radical.

How does it happen that someone who considers himself 'a progressive artist' finds himself drawing 'middle of the road drawings'? The danger lurks for all of us, but the result is one and the same: visual flattery, which is supported by simplistic texts and projects a seemingly lofty air. For the most part, this is a process whose results can not be foreseen, but which is slowly turns into an uncontrollable car that has lost its breaking power and careens down the slope. The most interesting case, of course, is Michael Gross who continues to fool us all and succeeds in living a full and effervescent life in both worlds.

The ACG trio is the ultimate example, but there are others, younger artists of the middle generation, and, of course, the genuinely young, daring and sharp, some of whom will turn, quickly enough, into updated versions of the same phenomenon.

A POST FACTUM WORLD OF DEPTH

The unbelievable has happened: a young artist declares his love for Ardon, Castel and Gross. He claims to be neither cynical nor ironic; they simply turn him on. To declare one's love for Lavie or Kupferman – is fine and even commended. But to tell the world that Castel is part of your own artistic text – that's so weird, it actually begins to sound interesting. Lots of sophisticated people go around humming Abba's tunes. Few of them included them in their impressive collection of records; a kind of secret, forbidden love. Love, that appears far better when it is retro; when it is elevated by texts and by complicated new ties that construct a post factum world of depth for it.

Such a relation contributes to Miranda's works, but the ACG artists benefit from it just as much. Miranda is frank and authentic but not naïve. A bee line runs between his love for pop music and his ability to easily relate to the way Ardon transforms Kadinsky and Miró into decorative Formica. He is utterly conscious of the effect of otherness produced by a public and loud declaration of his love for the three. Miranda, almost like every other young artist in Israel, studied in one of the two select art institutions ("The Midrasha"). He was told there, you must decide "what is good art?" and "what isn't?", "who is an artist?" and "who isn't?", and "who is a very important artist?" "and who is less so?"

THE END

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So that's it, now Miranda shuffles the cards, slips them back into the pack and sets out on a voyage of introspection, all on his own.