

Eye of the Storm

Ilona Balaga

Curator: Yair Barak

20/12/18-20/01/19

Tiger Eyes - Porcupine Spikes

The Eye of the Storm is catastrophe's silent heart. It is a utopian center, perceivable to us only through satellite imagery. No one is present at the Eye of the Storm; it is the center that fends off, a propelling engine of destructive energy. Uncertainty and a constant state of threat and horror are the preconditions to the set of images and objects in Ilona Balaga's new solo exhibition - a reality created by a long-standing process of neo-liberalism and unrestrained capitalism.

Balaga is a young artist operating in a self-made artist compound, renovated and erected in a building designated for architectural conservation in the corner of Yehuda Halevi and Yavne St. just at the entrances to one of the light rail station construction sites. There is no set date for evacuation of the compound, thus the stay in it is accompanied by a constant threat of immediate evacuation, which hangs like a sword on the necks of the resident artists. Balaga's work stretches from the private residential struggle of daily economy and function, to thoughts of global domination and major themes of acquisition and supervision.

A row of cones stands as a barricaded wall and welcomes the viewer – an anonymous group of demonstrators, in the name of an unknown purpose; on top of each cone is a set of plastic white palms - motion sensors make these hands clap loudly. The viewer is under surveillance or even hunted at times - occasionally attacked by artificial clapping. A bunch of cheap looking leopard patterned plastic bags gathered from the street or random shops selling cheap items are gathered up in a corner. A light is reflected through eye shaped peeping holes made in the upside down bags - as a glow of light reflected off nocturnal predators. Nature's exotics, the enchanting wild is presented curtsey of a cosmetics shop, a South Allenby-style safari. Their skinny bodies are made of sticks and their foundations made of anything available to Balaga: plastic buckets, oil tins, concrete casts, etc.

At some distance, a blue-colored parasol hangs from the ceiling, showing a disjointed and generic image of what appears to be a flying eagle. The printed image is hanging high, forcing the viewers to look up in an unnatural posture. Like a skylight or a kite or a reminder of the constant danger that hangs over our heads, the wing spread eagle is on the prowl. In order to see a sharp image, the viewers must squint and strain their eyes. The eagle is there, not hiding yet not seen clearly. Just like the Tigers, the bird of prey has also lost connection to its wild nature; it is flattened and pixelated, a withered remnant of a bird, a faded image of repressed nature that has become an icon – and one cannot help thinking of the United States of America and a big brother watching over us.

A pile of soft clean sea sand out of which porcupine spikes erect - an actual danger lurking within a soft, inviting tactile bed. This piece, as do the plastic leopard bags and the image of the eagle hovering above the exhibition, constitute a collection of poetic minor actions, all merging into a critical-political position regarding the *Human Condition* in an era of market concentration and alarming monitoring capabilities that manage our present and dramatically affect our future.

A cross shaped sight randomly roaming the outlines of a dark wall, searching for purpose, waiting for the right moment. It is an archetypical intent, a scanning prototype, impotent, locating none; not shooting, not hitting a target. And whilst it roams time is running out. Within a transparent figurine, a sarcastic cup for winners, between an erect thumb opposing a stooped thumb, sea sand is trapped – calculating backwards its end and ours. It is a funny and horrible piece, as are the rest of the works comprising the exhibition; Eye of the Storm is a collection of comical notes on the subject of a quiet disaster.

Yair Barak, *December 2018*