

of the author, the waning of the artwork's aura, and the shattering of the ethos of heroism underlying modern art.

For **Effi & Amir**, an artist pair highly conscious of the totality of implications of two artists working together, this is "a type of counter-reaction to the perception of the hero-artist." They met as students at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design and started working together in 1998 when they became a couple in real life. Effi says that each reached a dead-end in his own art, and thus they found themselves, in the last year of their studies, making art together. The first work they created as a couple was *The Torch Lighting Ceremony* (1999).

In this short video they are seen standing upright, dressed identically (in tight-fitting azure leotards with white margins), holding in their hands burning torches, lighting each other's head; festive, serene, aware of the significance of the ceremony.

"This ritual act is a declaration of independence, through which we create an autonomous system with all its intricacy (a self-operating, self-consuming system)", they explain.

Like many first works of artists, in their case it is also amazing to see how this first work unknowingly laid down patterns that would characterize their work in the future: they are not only the main but the only actors in their performances and video works; they are dressed identically; their Israeliness is emphasized (they are dressed in the colors of the national flag, inspired by Independence and Memorial Day ceremonies); their faces are frozen and their look – robot-like and futuristic.

The fact that a large part of **Effi & Amir's** works is based on performances which they carry out (some before an audience, others while adopting the characteristics of a performance) is linked to their perception of the

artist in the context of freak show, a prevalent phenomenon in the 19th and early 20th centuries: performances of midgets, giants, Siamese twins, hermaphrodites, bearded women, and various other human beings deformed by nature who became a spectacle, to the horror and amazement of an excited audience. Today, in the era of political correctness, the freak show is deemed a reprehensible inhuman phenomenon. **Effi & Amir** maintain that the freaks were in fact filled with pride and a sense of uniqueness, and did not feel humiliated at all.

As artists operating in duo, dressed identically, performing uniform gestures, adopting a body language which seems extracted from science fiction movies, and as Israelis living abroad – they regard themselves as fundamentally anomalous, antiheroes, foreign and exotic, a spectacle to an enchanted audience. In a long and fascinating essay

("Alive and Freaking by Effi and Amir") they link the freak show and freakdom phenomenon to the performance *When We Were Kings* that they held in May 2004 as part of an alternative art event in Amsterdam.

The main structure in *When We Were Kings* was a fair stand in which **Effi & Amir** stood dressed in blue Lycra suits, with half a falafel ball stuck to their foreheads. Attached to the stand was a pair of bicycles, and the audience was invited to pick a card with the name of a song (a Hebrew song whose name was transcribed in English), to sit on the bicycle and pedal. Once the pedaling commenced, **Effi & Amir** started singing at the pace dictated by the pedaling rhythm of the random spectator. A mesmerized audience stood around, laughing and enjoying the sight. **Effi & Amir** turned themselves into a freak show of artists in an Amsterdam park.

Following the performance in the park they photographed themselves riding a bicycle built-for-two, Effi sitting in front, Amir in back. Ostensibly a pleasant ride on a tandem (the photograph is entitled *Recreation*), Effi, however, has no legs, and Amir – no hands. The photograph is, in fact, a quotation of a famous photograph from the freak show world – British brothers who were indeed born one without legs and the other without arms, who used to perform as comedians. The photograph's shock value lies not only in the symmetrical deformities, but in the harmonious perfection created between the two: they truly become a closed unit that can only exist in two.

In *All My Sons*, an installation and video work, **Effi & Amir** imagine themselves as a futuristic couple, both sporting pregnancy bellies. On the computer they created forty possible crosses between their facial features, forty virtual variations on

the coupling between them. Of the forty children who applied to come into the world, eight were selected, and they are embodied as digital black-and-white portraits reminiscent of identikits: figures devoid of an identity, similar yet separate. It is not by chance that the aesthetic selected to characterize the artists' children is associated with suspicion and crime. The modern artist is always perceived, in some vague manner, as dubious.

The pair of Dutch artists, **MariaMaria**, always operates within staged situations of a performance without an audience. They have worked together since 1995, producing photographic images, in all of which they are depicted in open landscapes, rooms, or near swimming pools. Some of the photographs are presented in series of two entitled *Two Take*: the two photographs are similar, but not identical. In each *Two Take* the same location and the same shooting angle are