



TOPSOIL (video installation)

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About Topsoil

The desert both as a concept and a concrete geographical site plays a crucial role in Israeli communal identity. Since the famous 40 years of wandering through a desert as a preparation journey before entering the promised land of milk and honey, the desert occupies a significant space in Jewish collective memory as a place of transition, both dangerous and promising, sacred and scary, not compatible for actually living in, and basically quite an opposite to financially and culturally prosperous life.

When the Zionist movement had put the foundations for the current Israeli state, despite its rejection of all that is traditionally "Jewish", the desert still symbolized the same romantic duality of spiritualism and death. A major component of the Zionist project was, and still is, the battle against the desert. Forestation and implantation projects are part of controlling the desert, of disarming it from its deadening features.

The video installation "TOPSOIL" starts with the fascination. An empty, virgin landscape of a warm yellowish white lies at the feet of the viewer. It is seen from a bird eye view, distant, out of reach, therefore, exotic. There is no activity on the surface, which might interrupt contemplation, no details which might ruin the ultimate temptation.

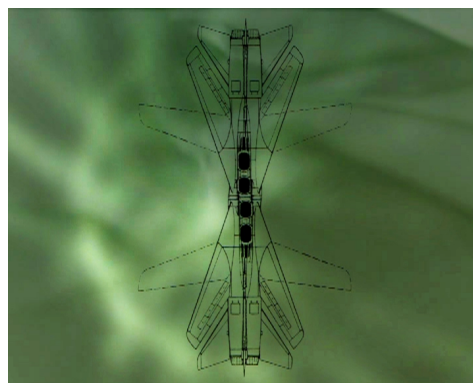
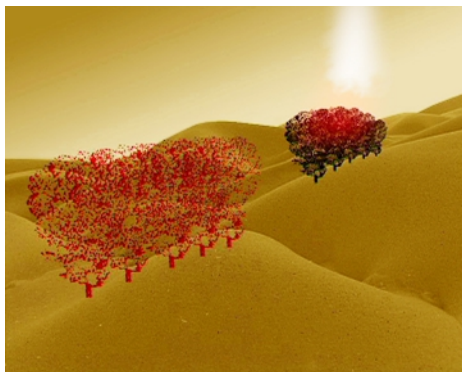
The videos, 3 chapters displayed in three different monitors, attempt to fill the gap between the faraway gaze and the reality. Ironically, the videos show no "real life" footage but were all shot on

the scenery of this artificial polystyren-made landscape. The reality they depict is pure manipulation, an out-of-nothing creation of digital technology, a reality at the edge of hallucination. The three videos are made as a loop, in terms of a subtext plot the third chapter end's brings us back to the first's starting point.

"Come With Me" refers to the optical illusion common in deserts - the mirage, in this chapter the view is still dominated by the distant and the indirect encounter.

"We Are Busy Creating A Desert, Which We Can Then Call Peace" describes the incident of shooting down a Libyan civilian aircraft that mistakenly strayed over the Sinai desert in 1973. This chapter confronts the reality of the desert and its possible consequences.

"A Report Of An Affected Country" is a scientific analysis of a state fighting the desertification of its landscape, a barren effort, which encourages exactly what it aims to negate.



Stills from video

Description:

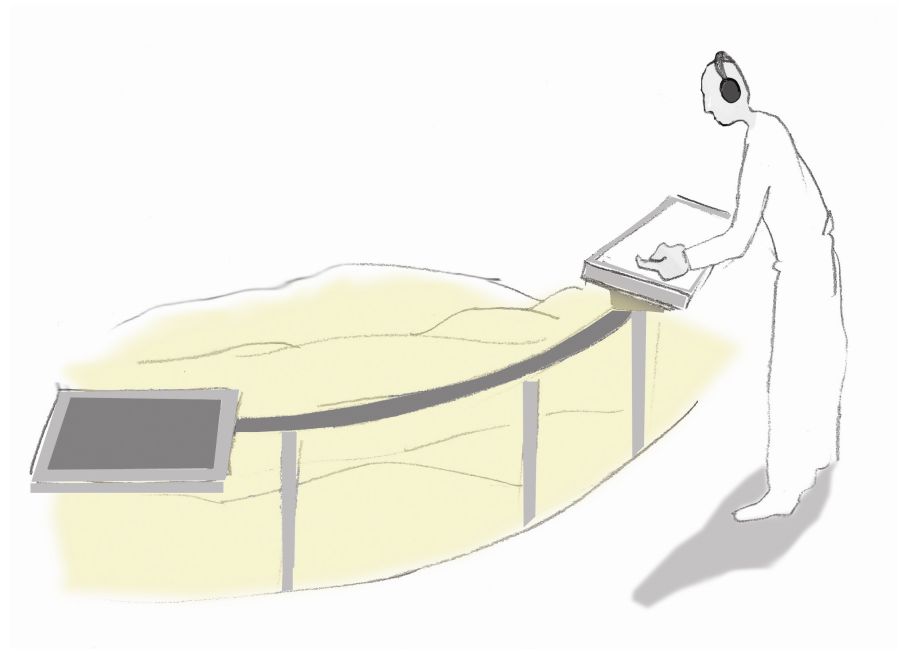
* See also attached illustration

The installation Topsoil consists of two main parts; a video trilogy displayed in three individual monitors and a sculpture- a model of desert landscape made of polystyren sheets, which served as a set for the video pieces. The video is completely artificial; the landscape is a synthetic model of a desert, and all other visuals in the video are either images downloaded from internet or pure digital manipulations. The three monitors (flat screens) form a circle, and the "loop" which is immanent to the content of the work is imitated in the actual experience of the viewing.

The specific arrangement of the space is flexible and initially depended on the specific location. In principal, the model of the landscape should be as big as possible (In the original installation it occupied a circle of 7 diameter, but this also was decided due to the unique features of the exhibition space), and placed low, at the viewer's fit.

The three-monitors piece should be also decided according to the space. It should be located in relation to the original "desert", and thus create an additional tension, between the physical desert, seen from a distant, bird-eye-like point of view, and the closer, inside, reflective gaze that is offered in the video. An optional setting is illustrated below- the monitors depict a scenery observation point.

installation view –sketch



Voice-over texts

Bellow are the texts (voice over) of each piece. All texts are based on real source, the main ones are:

Morgan Le Fay - a poem by Madison Cawein, (1865-1914)

The memorial website of flight 114

NASA

Ben-Gurion University, The desert institute,

UNCCD reports

islandnet.com -weather phenomenon and elements

(monitor 1: come with me)

With soft gray eyes she gloomed and glowered;

With soft red lips she sang a song:

What knight might gaze upon her face,

Nor fare along?

For all her looks were full of spells,

And all her words, of sorcery;

And in some way they seemed to say,

"Oh, come with me!

"Oh, come with me! oh, come with me!

Oh, come with me, my love, Sir Kay!"--

How should he know the witch, I trow,

Morgan le Fay?

How should he know the wily witch,

With sweet white face and raven hair?

Who, through her art, bewitched his heart

And held him there.

"We saw here, for the first time, a Fata Morgana ...to the south...as a sheet of water which all of us believed was a shimmering oasis...they who gazed upon it had never known what wondrous power it is capable of exerting... so strong was the impression of reality that disillusionment did not come until long after...."

Illusions are a result of our mind's interpretation of what the eye sees.

Only when we recognize that what we are seeing is an illusion can we make some mental corrections to the scene.

When light waves travel through one medium into another, they are bent or refracted from their straight-line path to a degree that depends on the density difference between the two media. Under certain refraction conditions a distant object is made to appear displaced from its true position. Objects hundreds of kilometers away can be seen, including those located beyond the normal horizon. The image is often very detailed, whereas in a careful look it would appear distorted, inverted or wavering.

Although the mind might misinterpret the image it receives from our eyes, the mirage is no figure of the imagination.

In the late 50's the Mirage had become synonymous with "advanced fighter", a product of Dassault. As a private company eager to promote its products, Dassault had invited Israeli Air Force personnel to visit its plant and fly the new aircraft. In 1959 Israel finally placed its first order for the Mirage.

(monitor 2: we are busy creating a desert, which we can then call peace)

On the 21st of February 1973, a forceful sandstorm rose up at the northern part of the Sinai desert. The storm arrived suddenly, in the form of an advancing wall several kilometers long and thousands of meters high.

On its way it encountered a Libyan aircraft. Commercial Flight 114 was on its way to Cairo, when it was struck by the blinding dust.

The crew was forced to switch to automatic pilot because the geographic features which ordinarily served as landmarks could not be discerned in the swirling tempest. A short time later, the pilot discovered that a navigational error occurred because of a compass malfunction.

The pilot radioed the Cairo air control tower with an urgent plea for assistance. The Egyptian flight controllers radioed back, giving him the information necessary to correct the plane's course and warned him that it appeared the plane might have strayed over the Sinai peninsula, which at that time was occupied by Israeli forces.

The pilot immediately corrected the course, and LN 114 was heading back to Cairo when the crew noticed two military jets approaching. They expressed relief, for they believed the jets were Egyptian fighters sent to escort their plane to safety at the Cairo airport. Such, however, proved not to be the case: The two jets were in fact Israeli fighters. Before the pilot of LN 114 was able to identify the "Star of David" mark on their wings, the fighters had directed three bursts of cannon fire into the Boeing 727.

On 21st of February 1973, a second cloud of dust was seen above the desert. A cloud so big and dense that it eliminated the sky.

(Monitor 3: a report of an affected country)

Activities that expose and disrupt the topsoil increase the amount of dust blown into the air.

Windblown dust can choke rain clouds:

The dust particles contain very little absorbing matter, therefore, more dust reaching rain clouds produce less rainfall.

This aggravates the drought conditions and contributes to the desertification of the landscape.

Thus, Development causes dust

And Dust begets dust.

Afforestation is one of the practices used rehabilitation of lands already affected by erosion and desertification. The most common afforestation species in Israel is the Aleppo pine with isolated indigenous populations in Israel restricted to specific areas. This restricted distribution may be due to the species' life-history strategy that is typical to pioneering species, fast to colonize after disturbances but with a low competitive ability. This species has been widely used, on landscape, rock and soil types and often with exotic seed sources. The major assets of this species are the fast growth and the high survivorship under difficult conditions.

The disadvantages are the relatively low long life span, the low resistance to certain parasites, and the high flammability.

Installation requirements:

Space: flexible

Equipment:

3 identical monitors or wide flat screens (depends on the general installation plan)

3 DVD players with the necessary cables

3 headphones

Further display conditions (hanging/ additional furniture etc. will be determined according to the space.

Working materials for the landscape:

Wood boards at least 5 mm thick, to cover the surface on which the model will be built. These boards (plywood or other) can be in various sizes, even painted or slightly damaged. They will be covered completely.

White (or slightly yellowed) **Polystyren sheets**; 1-2 cm thick, 150% of the model area.

Working equipment:

Staple gun + staples (few thousands)

Jigsaw

Budget estimation:

Depended on the dimensions and the materials available

The calculation is as follow:

Total model surface X plywood board per meter

+

Total model surface X 150% X polystyren sheet per meter