

Ironic Historiography: On Art, Nationality and In-Between Identities

Authors : Sigal Barkai

Abstract : 'Ironic Historiography' is a hybrid notion combining criticism of historical narratives concerning the Israeli state with ironic artistic expression. The paper will deal with questions of identities of native Israeli visual artists who chose to live out of the country, or to move back and forth to and from it. It will examine the ways these wanderings are reflected in their work. The paper discusses the work of 4 contemporary artists who produce artworks in diverse techniques and media, such as video, performance and installation art. Yael Bartana, Erez Israeli and Tamir Zadok are artists who constantly deal with Israeli nationality and history in their artwork, using ironic components. In comparison, the paper will review the works of Mika Rottenberg, who is now a New York based artist. She is concerned with global social issues and neglected specific national identity altogether. All of them use visual irony as a means of reflecting and criticizing society. The analysis was done in awareness of the life stories of the artists, in an attempt to trace the ways they establish their identities through their art. It was pre-supposed that these identities will be shaped in the in-between space of being an Israeli citizen and a citizen of the world. The study asks how ironic expression appears in their work, what kind of irony do they use and in what ways does it serves them. The methodology combined visual analysis, interviews with the artists, and analyzation of secondary discourses in the media. As theoretical background various fields of knowledge were used, such as literature and language studies, Sociology, and Visual Culture studies. The findings point out that visual and artistic irony has many different goals in the use of historiographic fiction. It can bind an artist to his homeland and native society, or it can help her to detach. It helps healing breaches in the in-between space, or it can be used as a means to completely detach from any identification with a native origin.

Keywords : visual art, irony, identities, Israel

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