

In order to judge the world favorably we must first come to terms with the ~~conch~~ ^{Continues} of the place: in a place where horror is spectacular and pain is poetic, even injustice can wear an enchanting face. After the war ends (the decisive war about meaning), we will remain surrounded by heaps upon heaps of orphaned weaponry, a shattered vision, and perhaps a little hope. At that time, logic will suggest that we naturalize for ourselves all kinds of instruments that will train the heart and the eye to feel and to see the utopian miracle that has come true. Welcome to the festivities of the ultimate answer: there is a world, and it has a continuity, and, most importantly – it has a meaning.

All the good that flows from a conch that carries a child or a young boy steals the heart and prevents it from noticing important information, which in this context is anomalous with its prosaic functionality: swimming goggles (see p. xx). I am describing a work which seems to have come from the gods, from the fantastic and the mythical, in order to tell another story, a story from here: somewhere, in Sri Lanka or some other remote place, young boys dive to the bottom of the ocean. To put it differently: somewhere, they are risking their lives to earn money for their families. Or: hundred of children are being exploited, while risking their lives, in the pearl trade in the lands of the South Sea...

This image charms us no less than it arouses our indignation. It is romantic and mythical, it is erotic and political, and yes, it is spectacular. It can stir us: the sun penetrating through the water that enwraps the boys' bodies... a hand reaches out, gropes in the sand of the sea-bottom – the breath is held bravely and with measured economy, accompanied by the flexible movements of the young body... and then, from the sea-bottom, this marvelous beauty ascends...

Not without purpose is this abundance laid out before us. It prepares the ground for the laying out of the price – the work *The Pearl Diver* has a conscience, and it has a moral heart; this abundance is a crafty agent of political consciousness. It wants, it is of its essence, to touch the world – not only by signifying the yearning for this longed-for beauty but also by alluding to the constant motion of the wheels of its well-greased machine of injustices.

A scrutiny of the work *The Pearl Diver* is an efficient way to begin a discussion of Gur-Arie's works, because of the polarity with which it actualizes values that exist in all of his works. It is striking for the decisiveness with which it positions each one of the variable values within the intersection of the political and the fantastic, the ecological and the erotic, which are the building blocks of the world that he creates. It harnesses a maximum of beauty to the creation of an ecological fantasy about the ocean depths, and its political sting is a double one – not only a critical fiction about the exploitation of the Third World countries, but also a critical signifying of the sexual climate constantly being constructed around the native body for advertising and commercial purposes of the World of Plenty, here and now.

Accessibility has a logic. It is dependent on the familiar, the lucid, the immediate, the commonplace. When the political chooses to manifest by means of a fantastic rhetoric, it makes a sharp turn, which may be unexpected or self-evident, to the practice of estrangement. Estrangement is an efficient tool for looking at or saying something about the world. It possesses a facilitating structure. It slips its argument into the throat of consciousness, and facilitates a slow digestion.

Gur Arie's works stretch the strangeness to the uttermost limit, and produce what at first glance are sated objects, objects that celebrate a rich existence, that possess an aesthetic resilience, a hermetic visual economy, bounded by beauty made extreme, imprisoned in an appearance that at first glance nullifies every kind of consciousness: too beautiful to ask questions, too spectacular to be troubling. On this basis begins the strange negotiation that Gur Arie's works conduct with the world.

To claim something, one either has to equip oneself with facts or to produce facts. These are two different values. Gur Arie's works lean simultaneously on both procedures (which mistakenly gives them the appearance of a spoiled Surrealism, and more on this below) – they create quotations and they invent the existent. Perhaps because of this conflicted tactics, they sometimes take on a quasi-scientific appearance, a technological savor, a fade suffused with reason. That is, they take on a solid alibi for the freedom of invention, for a license to create in delight (or to delight in creating), in a fade of analytical clarification. What are these instruments being prepared for? And what profit do they promise, with such decisive persuasive power, to the user?

Within the literary complex of this so very literary work, it is fitting to ask: What is the boy bringing up in the swimming goggles? What within the work becomes an axis of meaning and a central image? The work's seductive demonstration of materialism leads us to understand the essence of the heroic and romantic activity of. The Pearl Diver as the person who, from the depths, brings up the material. Material as a concept, as a specific value. The material functions as a means (for actualizing the work/idea), as an image (pearls, precious stones, etc.) and as a subject: material as something possessing a symbolic value and as an object for seduction and desire. The artist is the agent of its emergence.

Material is the central subject in Gur Arie's art, and its status is extremely beyond that of a means. Major fields of meaning intersect in it, depend on it, or experience fundamental shifts by means of it. In an early pair of works by Gur Arie (see p. xx), a pair of complete teeth (head plus root) make clear the particular way he relates to material: material as a type of being, of existent, possessing a real value and a symbolic value – health and physical resilience. In American culture, for example, good and healthy teeth symbolize and signify social status. Teeth, with their potential associations – sensual, health-related, violent and bestial – are perceived in American culture as first of all a financial investment.

The flawlessly made casts and their glazes (surface as material) produce a material fluency that engenders a fetishistic climate towards the material. A unity is created between the literary image and the material that actualizes it sculpturally. In the same way that tooth is a name for a concept and a material, there can be no separating the thing from the material it is made of. The signifying of this unity is critical for a clarification of an art that leans entirely on material lies, on casts of one material that simulates a different material, on a materiality that exceeds or surpasses the usual presence of the material it simulates. Opposite an art that leans on the similar to... on practices of models and simulations, on a dubious ethic in its relation to the authenticity of the material, it appears important to direct the gaze to the way the material becomes so central an idea skeleton.

Within the plethora of material appearances interspersed through Gur Arie's works, an action of embalming the simulated material is taken. All the mucous, the sticky, the wet, the liquid, is frozen in a sculptural stasis and suspended in a glittering and spectacular radiance. The numerous types of recoil that might be aroused on seeing such materials in life are replaced by a tranquil stance; the sense of revulsion is converted into seduction and enchantment. The finish becomes a protective rhetoric. The repugnant feel of the clammy skin of a snake or a frog, for example, remains a distant memory when viewing the connections of these wet presences as they float towards us from a protected, glazed and jewelry-like place. The patina produces a distance and an inaccessibility, which negate the recoil and create a seduction. The recoil from the biological strangeness is replaced by a negotiation that is based on a desiring gaze.

The surfaces of the works (a product of spray painting and various epoxy varnishes) are also responsible for an element that is of the essence in Gur Arie's works – their opticality, which is in excess of their sculptural existence. They are experienced more as a phenomenon, as a kind of appearance, than as a mass of material that takes up space. There is a feeling that the works first maltreat the eye and only then address themselves to establishing relations with the scale of the viewer's body. The way the surfaces are processed and painted brings the works closer to the world of three-dimensional simulation and computer processing, arenas in which the body and the world of relationships that it activates are pushed to a place of no relevance. The severance of the images (in the works) from any kind of surroundings, circumstances or contexts, accords them, more intensely, a virtual savor that is not dependent on a concrete space. This is a presence of cut and paste. This severance produces an emergence of the image, and augments the moment of its appearance over its continuous presence in the space. I want to claim that in Gur Arie's works, the luster, for example, is a more critical element than the scale. The next part of the claim is that their presence is actually anti-sculptural, and close to the medium of photography and to language.

Surprisingly, the very vulgarization of the material presence, as well as the extremity of the luster and its optical power, draw the works towards a quasi-metaphysical existence. Something in the connection between the fantastic literary images and their embodiment in a material which has no clear identity and is covered with a coating that gleams in a variety of changing hues, robs the works of any kind of solidity. It departmentalizes them into a state of not from here, not now, and certainly not of any promise of constant presence.

Two axes possessing a potential of contradiction constitute Gur Arie's artistic syntax: one is the fantastic axis, which has to do with the nullifying of obligation to any logic, to the diapason of existing forms, to physical, literary, and other conditionings; the second is the didactic axis, which attaches, as it were devotedly, to the act of transmission and to its maximal efficiency, while harnessing to itself the maximum of means that facilitate understanding and communication. A distinctive fusing of the two axes, which demonstrates the dependent and simultaneous existence of both, is actualized in an unexpected manner in the work that depicts a capsule being spilled onto the root of a hair (see p. xx). The source for this work is the quasi-scientific world of advertisements for dermatological products, which engenders graphic illustrative images of microscopic chemical activities. Apart from drawing on scientific credibility and authority for advertising purposes, these graphic images take on a seductive power of their own. They create a consoling belief in the direct connection between action and effect. They give a face to invisible (and in part non-existent) processes, and turn these sights of scientific truth into a datum, a given thing in the world, a component that has a place in the range of appearances which are given to us.

What at first appears to be present in Gur Arie's works as a world bustling with life, which exists under the rule of surrealistic logics, soon reveals itself as being opposite to such a rule: the plethora of strange, unexpected couplings, each possessing a credibility that is immediately refutable, are an outcome of borrowing from sources that are more familiar and accessible than seemed to be the case at first. The range of literary and visual proposals offered by science fiction, as literature and as cinema, the visions engendered by the advertising world and by graphic, fashion and product design, reveal themselves as a source for the works more than the depths of consciousness and the world of the psyche. In actuality, the relation of the works to this visualia is one of realistic translation. Sci-fi images created by man function as sources and as objects of the realism of the works themselves. In a strange way one can think of the works as a dreamlike reincarnation of a degenerated fantastic realism.

Surrealism engages in exposing sub-conscious connections and in raising them to the surface. The Surrealist artistic object is responsible for the endeavor to crack these hidden connections. The tactics of advertising has an opposite structure: it makes hybrid combinations of things that have no connection to one another, and connects them artificially so that they may produce sub-conscious contexts. In this way, it endows consumer products with values such as sexuality, eternal life, emotional growth and human warmth. The material syntax of advertising – which, for example, pairs shampoo or hair conditioner with eternity – denies the waning or the perishing of the body and its potential of crumbling, and magnetizes the consumer to itself by means of a primal tranquilizing of the fear of death. If the body, as depicted in the advertising utterance, is made of various kinds of silicone or other imperishable materials and is composed of kinds of three-dimensional graphic molecules that split and combine on the screen, then perishing poses no threat to us. It has nothing whatsoever to do with the fragility of organic existence; loss of hair certainly cannot affect it.

n effectiveness of pairing images. The way he sees into capitalism and adopts for his own purposes the inexhaustible arsenal of its insidious images produces the tone that characterizes his works. The works have a status of translation in relation to a text that is not given, a status of surrogate actualization. They possess a mediating and transmitting tone more than a constitutive tone that is connected with a source. The works have a savor of power of attorney: they exteriorize and foreground the transmission, the function of transmitting and communicating. They replace complexity with a code. The works contain not a secret but an activating system (of images). What merits being deciphered is first of all the mechanism, the activating system, and only afterwards the specific case of each work. This is their linguistic structure, and for this reason they can be actualized by means of almost any image or narrative. The method is tolerant and can contain almost any story.

The images that Gur Arie uses sometimes look as though they have been chosen in order to justify the patina, to suit the surface that he streamlines so diligently. Technology offers the image, which, after it is actualized, produces a footnote on technology. But the works do not celebrate abundance of any kind. On the contrary, what is seen through them is a scanty world that is need of continuous acts of invention, of enrichment with renewed eros. Marx's mistake, claimed Marcuse, was that he did not understand how successful capitalism is that is, how productive, activating, extending the imagination. Gur Arie's world, as we might expect, grasps the string at both ends. It avidly digests the achievements of progress and the coins of capitalism and technology which overflow their banks, and at the same time produces arenas that reflect on the price of these values and on a utopian extrication from them. This is the legitimation for the nave moments, or, in alternation, the romantic ones, that are interlaced like necessary components in the instruments of progress that he produces. This is the utopian mechanics of the worlds that he creates. The works, as Gur Arie declares, are models of models, they are sculptures of sculptures. It thus turns out that the project of simulation does not stop at the level of the imitation of the materials. The works establish for themselves an immaterial status of a diagram or a flow chart. Anyone who holds them will hold not the thing itself but only the most trenchant actualization of the thought about it. Even the creatures that appear like the fruit of an alert imagination touch, indirectly, on a limitation of imagination and knowledge – they do not produce entirely new forms; rather, they create strange variations of familiar life forms. In this way they actualize the sensation that is aroused when watching nature films on the television science channels such as National Geographic, which introduce the viewer to remote life forms. In the viewer's encounters with the esoteric life forms that are revealed in these documentaries, a sensation opposite to fiction is aroused – a sensation of limited familiarity with what exists in the world, of we didn't know such things existed. A further dimming of the sensation of a fiction is effected by the absolute dependence these creatures have upon the components and objects that are connected with the familiar. The world that Gur Arie's works produce does not contain any distinctive human presence, except in the form of used man-made products and representations. Within this conflicted world, where utopia and nightmare intermix, creation or growth are possible only on a symbiotic basis – each living creature appears in it as lacking a separate existence, after being totally assimilated in man's technological vision. Each work produces a closed system of existence, which builds a world that sustains symbiotic relations between man-made creatures and living things, and therefore does not produce something totally estranged from the human.

William Harvey, the English doctor who in the 17th century first described the role of the heart and the circulation of the blood (his description was accepted only two hundred years after his death), did not understand the structure of the heart's activity until the invention of the pump. Thinking about this fact can help us understand Gur Arie's works, which translate the world into kinds of mechanisms and systems of physical and ecological problems, as stemming from an optimistic motivation. They estrange dread, but they do so from (a belief in) a will to ameliorate. Likewise, the plots that Gur Arie invents as a motor for the works are suffused with a will to dream and to make things efficient. In the Civil Implementations exhibition, a technological salon was created, presenting civil implementations of military technologies. A desolate and degenerated world became fertile ground for revival of a new evolution that works diligently on repair [tikkun].

Gur Arie equips the components of this world with technical specifications that will assist in the meaningful activation of the works: an alien apparatus that looks like an unhatched chick in a space mask (see p. xx) is an invented actualization of a disposable incubator – efficient, cheap, convenient, and suffused with the joy of creation. A sculpture of a bony dog on arid earth (see p. xx) reaches its tongue towards 1000 c.c. of a bi-componential foam containing seeds, fertilizers and humidity adsorbents, employed to reactivate a degenerated food chain. Elsewhere, an old airplane propeller with a sprinkler affixed inside it is reactivated by an external pump, enabling new life for the creatures that drink from leaks in the closed hydromechanical system (see p. xx). New growth from the place of death also occurs in a work that depicts a spectacular carcass of a skinned goat that gives life to buds of new lawn beneath it (see p. xx), or in the work in which a revolver disintegrates inside earth on which new green life is active (see p. xx).

In following the operating instructions there is a happiness (on the assumption that eternal life really is a good thing). The plastic will be alive and kicking long after the bone disintegrates. Gur Arie's works demonstrate their durability. They do not fear death. Their molecular back can promise them much tranquility. As opposed to this, their ideational aggregate can promise only the temporary. It appears to be terrified of extinction. In contrast to types of redemption linked with metaphysical values and with a revising of the spiritual life, Gur Arie's art argues for a remedy that is linked with correct activation of the technological. In a work that looks strange, but has a poetic logic, three hairless hares gather around a fan heater (see p. xx). The animal, which appears here in frozen, static, sculptural form, bare of any protective covering, bespeaks absolute death. But one nuance in the work produces a mechanical-organic occurrence that generates a live moment, a fluttering moment of a remnant of life: a look at the work from close up enables us to discern an incessant quivering of the delicate mustaches of the three frozen hares. Something is active beneath the coupling of the animal and the technological. The animal's most sensitive and delicate organ of sensation is brought to life by the breeze emitted from the instrument. If we opt for an excitable tone, we can call this moment magic that works on electricity.

The world outside is bad and spectacular; it becomes corrupt, and spoiled, but it still gives rise, here and there, to rare arenas of living magic. So it's possible to think good thoughts, to shift the switch to have pity, and to hope for good.