

Guy Bernard Reichmann: Defragmentation

05.02.26-21.03.26

Curator: Maya Frenkel Tene

The exhibition presents two distinct bodies of work linked by a common, yet elusive, bodily gesture: the smile. This evanescent facial expression, where more is often hidden than revealed, can convey a spectrum of emotions - from joy and affection to embarrassment, feigned politeness, or cynical aversion. Through two series - bas-reliefs of "settlers smiles" and miniature paintings based on documentation of the Demjanjuk trial - Reichmann weaves together personal and family biography with collective historical memory and local political reality.

Reichmann's first exposure as a child to the image of Demjanjuk - dressed in prison uniform, large-bodied, wearing thick glasses, and smiling at the camera - was accompanied by a startling realization: the (alleged) Nazi criminal bore a disturbing resemblance to his own cheerful and beloved grandfather. This encounter, which shaped his sense of identity, is represented in a series of miniature paintings that blend family album photos with court documentation and televised coverage of the era. Alongside these paintings is a series of reliefs that juxtapose children's literature and fables with grotesque nightmare imagery, from which the smiling face of "Ivan the Terrible" emerges.

The choice of the miniature format, evocative of old family albums, creates a tension between the private and the public, highlighting the friction between the subject matter and the act of observation. Scholar Susan Stewart argues that the miniature represents an internal, closed world; it demands physical proximity and a detective-like concentration from the viewer, akin to probing the artist's private memory. In doing so, it "stops time" and creates an experience of control and belonging. This minute scale allows monumental historical traumas to be processed within an intimate, containable space.¹ The small paintings - fragments of biography and history - are organized in the space at rhythmic intervals, as if waiting to be reassembled into a coherent narrative.

Contrasting with the historical and elusive smile of Demjanjuk, Reichmann presents reliefs of "settlers smiles" captured from videos documenting physical and verbal assaults on Palestinians. Here, the smile does not signify embarrassment or survival; rather, it expresses dominion and sovereignty in a space where the law is suspended. According to Emmanuel Levinas, the ethical turn occurs in the encounter with the face of the Other - the site where they are revealed in all their vulnerability.² In these works, this ethical bond is severed; instead of revealing a vulnerability that evokes compassion, the smile becomes an opaque mask. The settler smiles depicted in the reliefs - many of whom were never brought to justice, while others hold positions of power in Israel - are smiles of revenge and satisfaction.

Historical justice is presented in the exhibition as a moment of ethical integrity - an instance where the system ruled against populism and public sentiment, finding in the acquittal (due to reasonable doubt) the ultimate expression of truth. This justice, rooted in moral integrity rather than mere procedure, is the exception that proves the rule.

¹Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

²Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1969).

Guy Bernard Reichmann (b. 1983) lives and works in Tel Aviv-Yafo and Paris. He holds an MFA from Bezalel and a BA in History and Literature from Tel Aviv University. He has presented solo and group exhibitions, including *Chanson de Geste* (solo) at Artists' Studios Tel Aviv (2022); *How's it Hanging?*, at the Center for Digital Art, Holon (2023); and *Staycation* at the Nahum Guttman Museum (2019). His works are included in private collections in Israel and abroad.