

2009

Collapse

Mia Feuer

Virginia Commonwealth University

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COLLAPSE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Fine Art at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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This thesis is dedicated to my parents, Kim and Glen Feuer.

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Abstract

COLLAPSE

By MIA FEUER, MFA, Sculpture and Extended Media

A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Art at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2009

Major Director: Gregory Volk
Associate Professor, Department of Sculpture and Extended Media

“Young poets found nothing more admirable than the love of violence, the symphony of explosions and the insane sculptures that our bullets carve out of the masses of our enemies.”

Tommaso Marinetti- father of Futurism, 1911

Through large sculptural works that are often caricatures of representational objects, my work explores the complicated moments and tangled histories of childhood Jewish schooling in Winnipeg and travels to Israel and Palestine as an adult. My thesis exhibition

Collapse, as well as most of my graduate work, examines my investigation through manmade constructions that control and restrict or unite and connect the movement of others. Sculptures about a destroyed bridge's imagined longing for exotic places, a giant onion serving as a resuscitation mechanism against tear gas or a construction crane to Armageddon are some examples of work that explore the poetry I find in dichotomies, and serve as a series of recollections that negotiate experiences beyond full understanding.

Recent Works, Displacement, Israel/Palestine

I recall a moment moving through the Hawara checkpoint in Nablus.

Nablus is one of the most violent Palestinian cities in the Israeli occupied West Bank. In the spring and summer of 2007, I lived in the West Bank. It was an attempt to find a deeper understanding of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict and challenge most of what I learned in private Hebrew elementary and high school. I hoped this investigation would bring clarity to how I understood this conflict, the history, and values of my community.

Talmud Torah Elementary School and Joseph Wolinsky Collegiate were where I received the majority of my pre-university education. I only associated with other Jewish children and had no exposure to anyone outside of this community. We studied Hebrew, Jewish Law, Jewish History, Holocaust Studies, Israeli History and the Tanach. The Tanach are Jewish Scriptures which consist of three divisions; The Torah, The Prophets and The Writings. We studied proper synagogue conduct and once a week sat there and listened to a Cantor read from the Torah. Every weekend we had someone else's Bar or Bat Mitzva to go to where there would be a constant ongoing competition for whose parents were wealthiest and could afford the biggest and most glorious cheesecakes. To avoid my own

parents' humiliation in being one of the least wealthy, I was the only student who refused a Bat Mitzva when I turned twelve.

My entire experience in this system was altogether awful. The approach that was taken to educate us on the legitimacy of the State of Israel was based on a Zionist, ignorant, unilateral view of the situation. The State of Israel was legitimized to us by fear. We were constantly under the impression that at any moment another Holocaust would take place, and because of Israel, and its mighty army, the global security of the Jews was protected.

I remember one day, perhaps I was in grade five, I arrived at school, to see that Talmud Torah Elementary School was covered in spray-painted black swastikas. This anti-Semitic incident was one of many that drove home the notions of fear and insecurity that the Hebrew School system handed to us on a daily basis.

When I was around 18 years old, I remember reading Tanya Reinhart's "Israel/Palestine, How To End The War Of 1948". On the first page Reinhart points out that what we (Jews) associate with the celebratory anniversary of the founding of the Jewish state in 1948- Israel- known as "Yom Ha Atzmaut (Hebrew for Israel's Birthday or Israel's Day of Independence)." Is also referred to as "Al Nakba". In Arabic, "Al Nakba" means the "The Great Catastrophe". This is one of my earliest moments recognizing that there was an alternative viewpoint to this conflict.

In the summer of 2003, I went on a Zionist sponsored tour called “Birthright” through Israel. This was my first time there. This is an organization in which extremely wealthy Jewish philanthropists sponsor Jewish youth to travel through our “homeland.” We visited Jerusalem, The Dead Sea, and the spot in Tel Aviv where Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated. We climbed Mount Zion, scaled the Negev Desert, slept in tents with Bedouins and even got to listen to the Prime Minister Ariel Sharon invite each and every one of us to “move to Israel, marry a soldier and have many Jewish babies.” At no point did we visit a checkpoint, the gigantic apartheid wall/security fence that was being built along the ever-changing Israeli/Palestinian border or an Israeli prison.

In the spring and summer of 2007, I returned to this controversial part of the world. I moved to Neve Shalom/Wahat Al Salaam. This village in Hebrew and Arabic translated to “Oasis of Peace” (Isaiah 32:18). It is a village, jointly established by Jewish and Palestinian Arab citizens of Israel, that is engaged in educational work for peace, equality, and understanding between the two peoples. It is situated equidistant from Jerusalem and Tel Aviv in Israel “proper”. It was founded in 1970 by Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Jewish citizens in an attempt to demonstrate the possibility of coexistence based on mutual acceptance, respect and cooperation. Neve Shalom/Wahat Al Salaam has just barely held it together as a united village over the past thirty-five years having survived several wars, two Intifadas and endless suicide bombings. It does not add to the unification of these people that it is mandatory for every Israeli Jew to serve in the Israeli Defense Forces- or

the more controversial Israeli Occupational Forces. I was the art instructor at the youth club. I facilitated art projects with Palestinian and Israeli children together. I was fortunate to be there during the simultaneous Yom Ha Atzmaut celebrations and the Al Nakba grieving period. I began to really understand the complexity of this conflict while living there in this village. While some families celebrated on this day, had barbecues in the park and parades celebrating Israel's Birthday, their Palestinian neighbors were in mourning for relatives killed or living under Israeli occupation in the Palestinian Territories. They grieved for all the Palestinian villages burned and destroyed in 1948 so that the earliest Jewish settlements could be built.

Emily Jacir, a Palestinian artist, created *Memorial to 418 Palestinian Villages Destroyed, Depopulated and Occupied by Israel in 1948*. She acquired a Red Cross refugee tent and stitched in thick black thread the names of 418 Palestinian villages destroyed the year of Israel's conception.

"For two months I opened my studio to anyone who wanted to sew with me on this memorial. Over 140 people came, the majority of them I had never met before. They came as lawyers, bankers, filmmakers, dentists, consultants, musicians, playwrights, artists, human rights activists, teachers etc. They came as Palestinians (some of whom are from these villages), as Israelis (who grew up on the remains of these villages) and people from a multitude of countries.

-Emily Jacir (http://www.stationmuseum.com/Made_in_Palestine-Emily_Jacir/jacir.html)

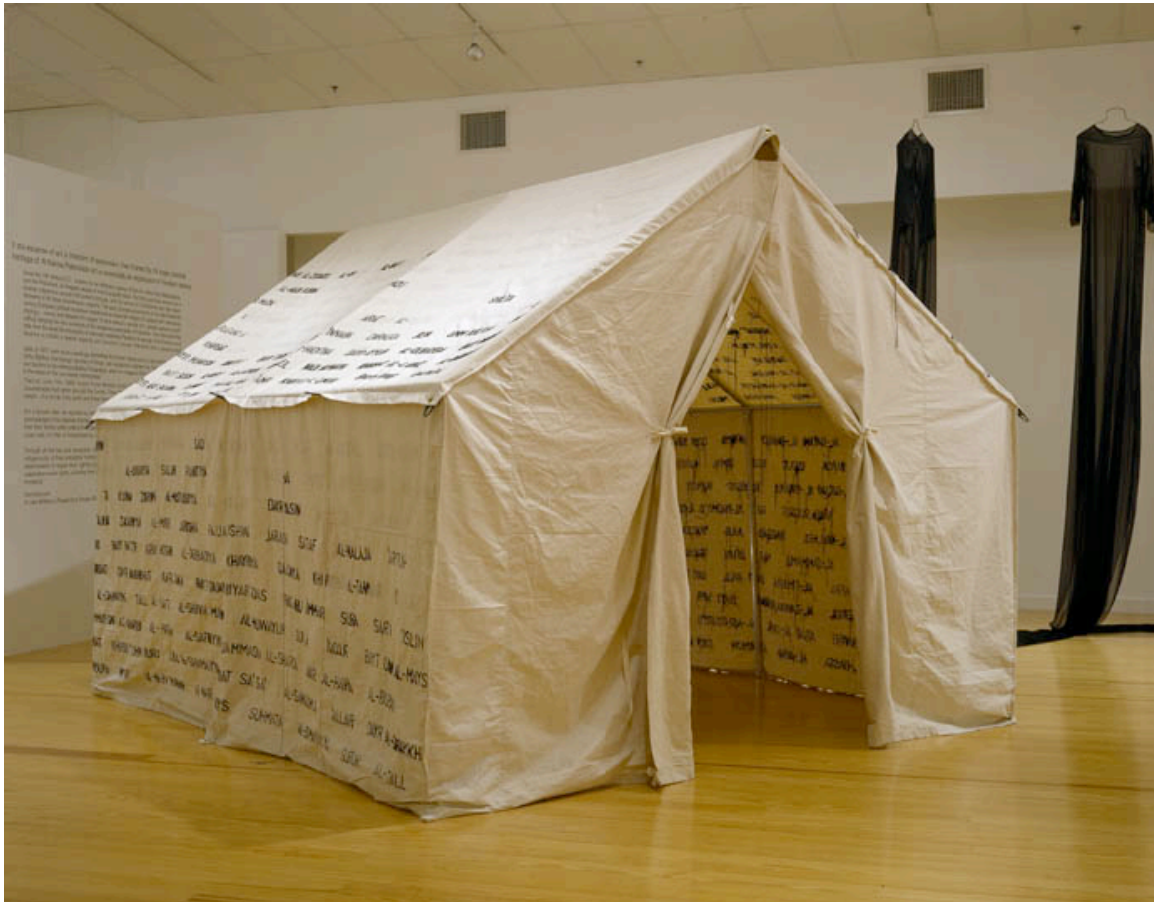


Figure 1: Emily Jacir, *Memorial to the 418 Palestinian Villages Destroyed, depopulated and occupied by Israel in 1948*

In 2001, this piece was shown at PS1, right at the peak of the Israeli/Palestinian violence of the second Intifada.

After living in Never Shalom/Wahat Al Salaam I decided I needed to explore the conflict further, and headed directly into the Occupied Territory, The West Bank.

Judit is a peace activist in her mid-twenties from Germany that I met while in the West bank. She and I were trying to enter Nablus through the Hawara checkpoint. I was facilitating a weeklong puppet theatre-building workshop in a community center there with local children. The Hawara checkpoint consists of two long lines where Palestinians wait sometimes over three hours, in humiliating circumstances, to cross through and move either into the city or out of the city to another Palestinian city such as Ramallah. There are Israeli soldiers everywhere and the men and the women are separated into two different lines. It was really hot outside, and the Israeli Army issued a temporary restriction on all Palestinian males between the ages of 14 and 35 to exit Nablus. Every single male in this age group was turned away and not allowed to leave. As international citizens, with freedom of movement, Judit and I were frequently approached by Palestinians to have us try to reason with the soldiers. On this day, two boys, aged somewhere in their early twenties, came up to us. They were furious that they were not allowed through the checkpoint because they both had an exam to write in Ramallah. They were both studying to be engineers in a university there. One said to me: “I love Hitler! I love Hitler! I wish he would have killed all the Jews!” This is the very moment I will never forget. There we were, a Jew, a Palestinian and a German, all standing together trying to make sense of this situation. Judit was deeply offended by his Hitler comment. I was not. I felt guilty and ashamed that the people I identified with would not allow these boys to write their exam. I think about that moment and how three of us became this strange mangled bridge, spanning through history and condensed into this single complicated moment.

Each of us represented a different part of this very complicated situation. Judit carried the weight and guilt of her German ancestors and, in some way, felt an obligation to the state of Israel because of what had been done to the Jews. At the same time she saw that the existence of the State of Israel caused extreme difficulty to Palestinians and amounted to a humanitarian crisis. The Palestinian boy, living under an Israeli occupation, carried so much hate within him, that he verbally admitted to supporting the extermination of over 6 million Jews during World War II. I only felt confusion. I sympathized with the Palestinian boy, and wished he didn't have to live his life under these dehumanizing circumstances. When I really think about my own values and morals, I cannot agree with the legitimacy of the State of Israel, regardless of the Holocaust, because I cannot support apartheid and the displacement and murder of thousands of people from their homes. I also identified with the soldiers, protecting the land that they grew up in and cherish. I can identify with the grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. I hypocritically love that nonsensical place and the thought of Israel being obliterated frightens and saddens me.

In February 2009, I saw a powerful installation at The New Museum in New York by Israeli artist Michael Blum. His piece titled: *Exodus 2048* transforms the space into an

imagined future where the museum itself serves as a fictional camp for Israeli refugees.



Figure 2: Michael Blum, *Exodus 2048*

In this piece, the year is 2048. One hundred years since Israel's conception. Global politics have changed drastically and the U.S. no longer has such a prominent role. Because of economic crisis, the U.S. can no longer afford to give aid to Israel. There is enormous growth in Palestinian population in The West Bank and Gaza and eventually, the Jewish Israelis are forced to leave their homeland. They set up a temporary displaced persons camp in New York.

This installation deeply disturbed me. I recognized the Israeli brand names of food packaging scattered on the floor and could hear the Israeli pop music with lyrics I could never understand being played. I read the graffiti on the wall of familiar pro-Israeli slogans about “homeland” and “peace” and “struggle.” It looked real even though I knew it was staged. It felt real.. It is as if Israel is currently facing an existential crisis, which makes it conceivable that after 100 years after its establishment it may cease to exist. I found Blum’s installation ironic because while it is reminiscent of both the historic exodus and the confinement of the Holocaust experience, it is very contemporary and relatable to modern-day Jews, perhaps more so than the stories of Anne Frank and narratives dating back more than half a century ago. More importantly, the power of this piece to anyone who understands or experiences the Israeli-Palestinian impasse is that it is an embodiment of the Palestinian Nakba’s displacement and exile as imagined through the futuristic eyes of an Israeli Jew. It is the logical counterpart and counterpoint of Emily Jacir’s refugee camp tent installation mentioned above.

I recall teargas. For almost five months, I would march every Friday in the Palestinian village of Bil’in. After morning prayers at the mosque, the entire population of Bil’in, along with international and Israeli activists, would march through the villages to the olive grove. This olive grove is on the verge of being sectioned off and annexed to Jewish developers. The apartheid wall is in its early stages of being erected here. This erection will separate the village of Bil’in from the olive groves, which is one of the main sources of income for the villagers. Every single Friday we marched, sang, and demonstrated. The

demonstrations would always begin peacefully, but soon the Israeli Occupational Forces and border police, who would always be there waiting for us, would spray us with rubber bullets, teargas grenades and in some cases, would fire live ammunition. The children would stand on piles of rubble from bombed out or bulldozed homes and sling rocks at the soldiers with homemade slingshots. I remember the terrible sensation throughout my whole body the very first time I was gassed. My skin and eyes burned, my throat felt like it was closing and my lungs stopped working. I couldn't see and I couldn't breathe. I began to panic because I didn't know when this feeling would pass. A Palestinian medical aid worker, a volunteer for the Red Crescent, handed me a wedge of an onion. I held the onion to my face and took in a deep inhalation. The intense smell from the onion somehow cut through the effects of the gas. The smell went right to my brain and reminded me that if I can smell, I can breathe. I found the thought of an onion, which I normally associate with tears and crying, being used as a resuscitation tool against teargas to be quite poetic.

In my sculpture *Bil'in Onion*, I constructed a giant toxic onion-like form. Sprouting from the onion was a wonky ventilation system. From the mangled ductwork were the sounds I recorded, on June 12th 2007 of the Palestinian village of Bil'in being gassed.



Figure 3: Mia Feuer, *Bil'in Onion*

I recall the Israeli/Palestinian border and the enormous Israeli “apartheid wall/security fence” slithering along it. I remember seeing this 8m high concrete wall snake through Palestinian yards and circle around almost the entire perimeter of one family’s home. I recall entering and exiting Bethlehem. The Bethlehem checkpoint is the largest of all the checkpoints along this border.



Figure 4: The Bethlehem checkpoint

A huge curious banner from the Israeli Ministry of Tourism hangs from this monster, wishing everyone “Peace Be With You” in English, Hebrew and Arabic. There are endless turnstiles and lines and checkpoints within the one massive checkpoint. Through the never ending lines the turnstiles and bars, one could see Palestinian children begging you to buy gum and Palestinian men begging you to buy beaded necklaces or chickpeas. One could see fragments of mothers, babies or entire families move through this tangled mess. In my 2008 Candidacy piece titled Turnstile, I recreated the sensation I felt as I moved through and saw others move through what felt like a nonsensical labyrinth. The entire sculpture is made from steel and from afar, I wanted it to appear like an insane three-dimensional line drawing. The viewer is invited to move through it even though some of the turnstiles work, and some lock and jam and are non functional. This sculpture can be broken apart

and reformed to create a restrictive construction that would respond to any space. The piece is meant to appear confrontational and intimidating while simultaneously chaotic and illogical.



Figure 5: Mia Feuer, *Turnstile*

In June 2005 Belgian artist Francis Alÿs created the piece: “Sometimes Doing Something Poetic Can Be Political And Sometimes Doing Something Political Can be Poetic.”

Francis Alÿs walked along the Israeli/Palestinian border trailing behind him a delicate green line streaming from a punctured can of green house paint. This symbolic gesture of leaving a painted green line on the land reflects the contestations and complications of the actual political “green line”. The term “green line” comes from the green line drawn on the original map to indicate the 1948 borders of the new state of Israel. Since that time, the border has changed significantly including the Israeli capture in 1967 of the Golan Heights from Lebanon and Syria, The West Bank from Jordan and The Gaza Strip from Egypt. The original 1948 borderline was the route Francis Alÿs took while creating this piece.



Figure 6: Francis Alys, *Sometimes Doing Something Poetic Can Be Political and Sometimes Doing Something Political Can Be Poetic*

I recall another moment hitchhiking in northern Israel, somewhere near Nazareth. It was blaring white hot out and I was lost. I had been let out of a car at this particular

intersection and was waiting to get picked up by another. I stood beside the road and waited. There was a large green sign behind me. It read: “Megiddo Junction.”



Figure 7: the Megiddo Junction, Israel

This very strange sign, in this silent eerie location is where, according to the Book of Revelations, the final apocalyptic battle, between God and Satan is set to take place. Armageddon is derived from the word Megiddo. This curious location was the inspiration behind *The Megiddo Intersection*.

This sculpture, reaching almost 30 ft in the air, is meant to create a looming, threatening and ominous feeling in the space and for the viewer.

There were no construction cranes or snakes at the Megiddo Junction. There was nothing, --blankness. It was one of the most desolate locations I have ever come across, and in its emptiness, it felt as if something that was once there now isn't. A crane can be used in a demolition, for destruction, or used to assist in construction when building something new.

A mysterious tool hovering over the viewer, which simultaneously is used to destroy and rebuild, seemed a fitting start to recreate the sensation I felt in this intersection. This crane also does not have a base or touch the floor, it protrudes from the wall, I want this crane to appear as if it is coming from a different space than the ground that we stand on. The snakes, which are cast in a black foam rubber, hang like a wrecking ball or a pendulum from the crane in a mysterious, festering stillness.



Figure 8: Mia Feuer, *The Megiddo Intersection*

I find poetry in recalling certain dichotomies, experiences, injustices and circumstances that I cannot understand. Accidentally happening upon this dreadfully charged intersection, using an onion to prevent teargas suffocation or recreating a feeling I got while trying to move through the Bethlehem checkpoint are some examples of what drives me to create sculpture. My thesis exhibition is inspired partly by a very different landscape; my hometown Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

The Arlington Bridge, Winnipeg and the Nile

The Arlington Bridge was built in 1909 in Birmingham, England by Cleveland Iron Works. The bridge was originally designed to cross the Nile River in Egypt, but due to a calculation error the bridge's dimensions were incorrect, and it ended up being sold to Winnipeg, Canada. This bridge, which was once destined to span, for me, a magical and exotic place, was sentenced to cross a snowy and lonely train yard in my hometown.



Figure 9: The Arlington Bridge, Winnipeg, Canada

Like The Arlington Bridge in Winnipeg, I feel as though I identify with two different parts of the world. My journeys between Winnipeg, Canada and the Middle East inspire my work. I find the dichotomy of moving through these two places powerful: one ancient and spiritual and exotic, controversial and dangerous; the other familiar, secular, new, safe and still. I am inspired by the Negev Desert at night. I am inspired by the intensity of the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem or my friend Majdi's balcony in war torn Nablus where one could see the entire city turn gold and purple when the sun sets. One of Israel's largest military bases hovers over the city on top of a huge hill, and from his balcony I would watch Israeli arrests and raids of Palestinian homes. I am equally stimulated by the frozen stillness of my hometown. Quiet, lethargic, frostbitten Winnipeg.

In my thesis sculpture titled *Collapse*, I recreate a section of the Arlington Bridge. I then collapse it, make the handmade wreckage appear as if it is levitating-- resisting its fall to the ground and even trying to escape and relocate itself elsewhere. I am interested in not only the paradoxical history of this bridge, but it's imagined longing for another place.

I find it difficult to make a sculpture in 2009 about a bridge that is intact. I consider contemporary events, headlines and issues while creating my work. A bridge to me represents unification, a connection, a link or a relationship. I believe art should be a reflection of our times, and a collapsed, or exploding bridge, a mess of wreckage and deformed girders seemed a much more appropriate way to reflect our current state. I am interested in the word "collapse"- a word I feel has been used over and over again in the

media pointing to global economic collapse or societal collapse. The terrors of September 11th 2001 forever scarred our minds with haunting images of destruction, structural collapse and global instability.



Figure 10: The World Trade Center, September 11th, 2001, New York NY

Last year I created sculpture fueled by my experiences within restrictive constructions- barricades and checkpoints. This piece is about the opposite-- connection; what gaps can bridges-- whether they are physical or metaphorical-- attempt to span? And what happens metaphorically when this bridge spans nothing- because it has violently been destroyed?

The first version of *Collapse* is a rat's nest of twisted steel girders and riveted I-beams mangled together and suspended in the air, cantilevered off the wall. Where the blue steel forms meet the wall, there is a painted orange glow. The way I was physically able to allow this piece to protrude 18 feet from the wall without any suspension supports, was to make almost the entire form from foam. This lightweight material allowed me to create the illusion that this heavy wreckage was for a moment hovering in the air.

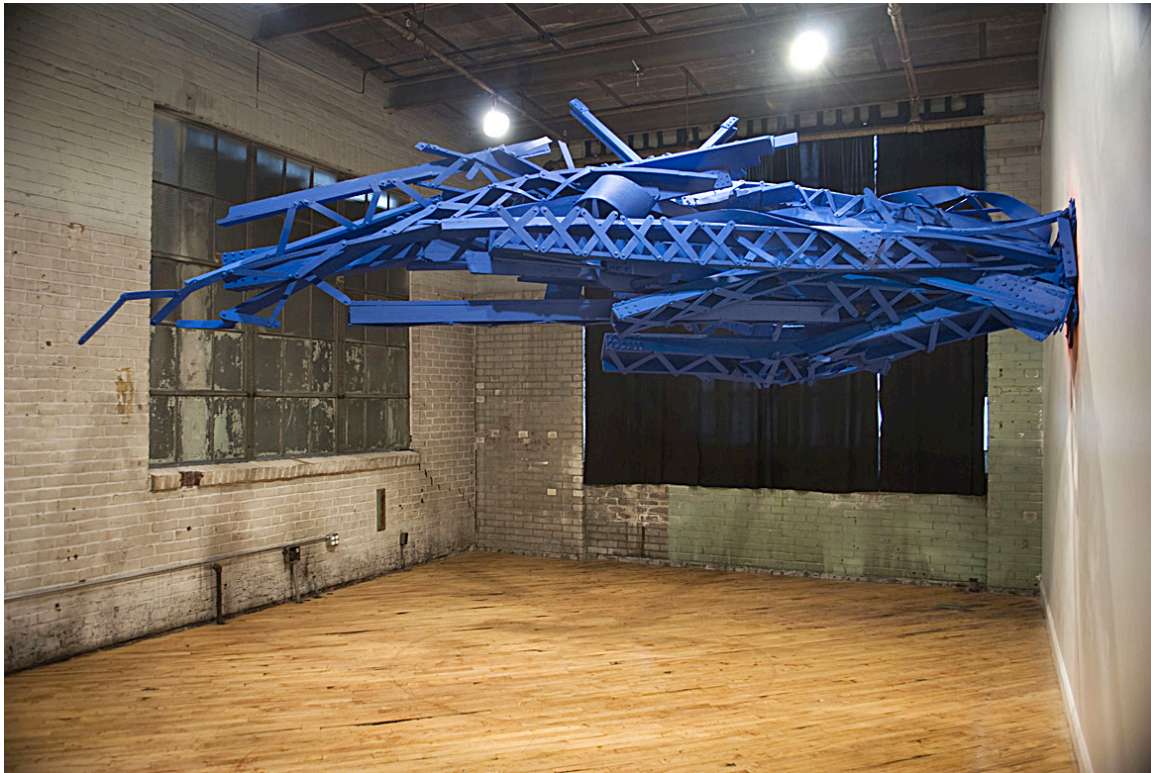


Figure 11: Mia Feuer, *Collapse (version I)*

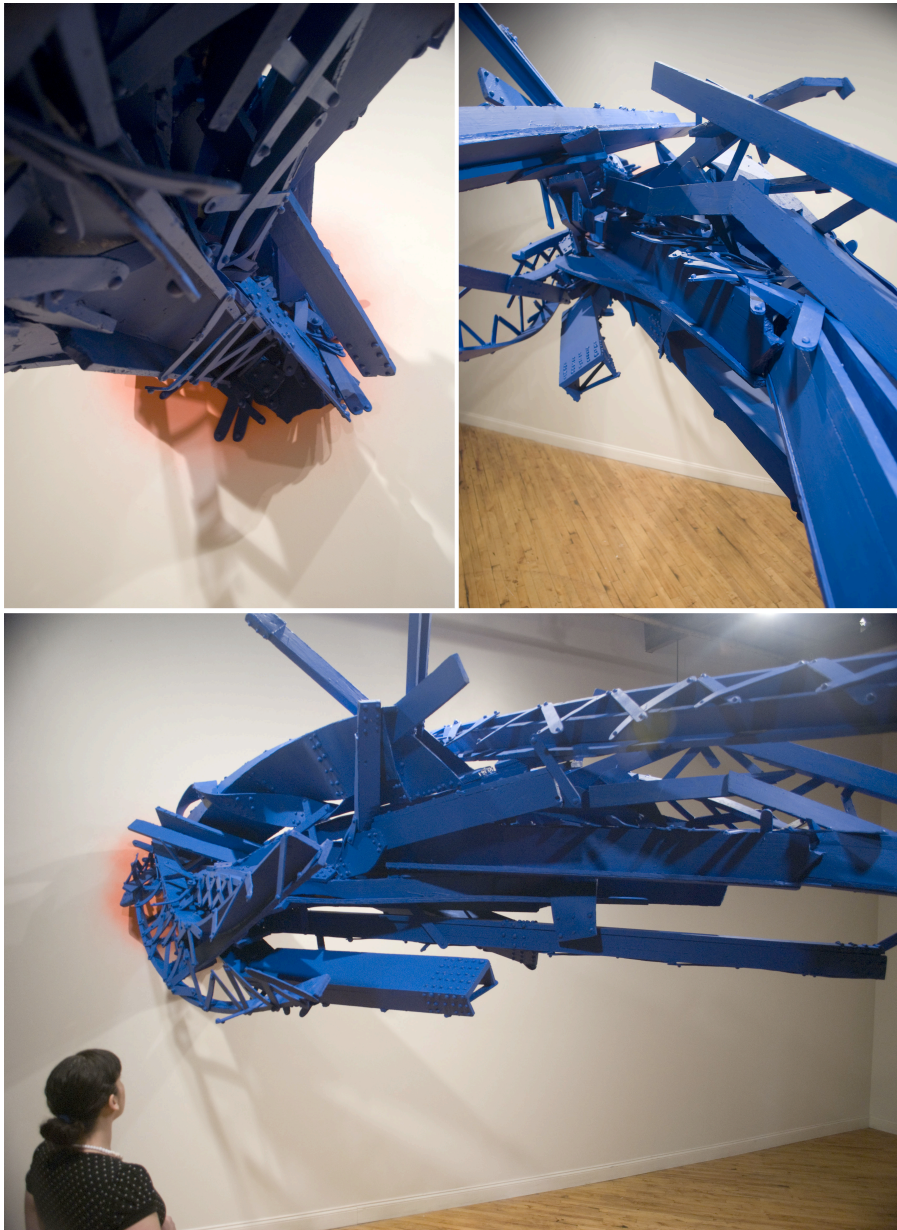


Figure 12: Mia Feuer, *Collapse*, (version I, multiple views)

The Theatre, Escapism, Magical Realism and Les Misérables

I have seen the musical *Les Misérables* at four different times in my life, once when I was 7, once when I was 16, once when I was 22 and then again when I was 27. Based on French author Victor Hugo's novel, the musical follows the lives of several French characters over a twenty-year period in the early 19th century, focusing on the struggles of an ex-convict named Jean Valjean as he seeks self-redemption. The musical examines the nature of good and evil, the law, French politics, moral philosophy and justice. It is classified as historical fiction because it contains factual events including the Paris Uprising in 1832.

This beautiful revolutionary story ends with tragedy and defeat as the revolutionaries all get killed on their homemade barricade. This scene, showing the rebel fighters lying dead, sprawled out all over this magnificent set piece resonates in the aesthetic of much of my recent sculpture. In *Barricade*, I constructed a barricade made of mangled donkey corpses, painted blue with bright hazard orange hoofs. This sculpture acts as a blockade and restricts the movement of the viewer in a space from crossing to the other side. I am very interested in infrastructure and constructions that control, restrict or connect the movement of others. I am drawn to the *Les Misérables* set piece's formal qualities and I remember having an intense response to this object even at age seven. I am attracted to the high drama spectacle that musical theatre uses. I am interested in its ability to introduce

escapism and magical realism into terrible moments in history. The scene looked like a three-dimensional painting, but with intense lighting, gunshots, and an orchestra. The barricade consisted of faux planks of wood, wagon wheels, wooden furniture, and junk. Atop this tangled mass of debris was a fighter with a rifle waving a glowing fiery red flag- and after a few moments, he was shot and killed.



Figure 13: Scene from *Les Misérables*



Figure 14: Mia Feuer, *Barricade*



Figure 15: set of Les Misérables



Figure 16: Mia Feuer, *Collapse (version II)* detail

In *Collapse (version I and II)*, I use some of the same language as a set piece in the theatre. Trickery and drama are two elements that are used in this sculpture. The choice in material—mostly foam—disguises itself for a moment as steel, although upon closer investigation

it is obvious that it is fake. When discovered that these girders and beams in the sculpture are actually a lightweight fragile material (foam) and not a structurally strong and sturdy material such as steel, the piece begins to speak of how brittle and frail certain systems and metaphorical infrastructures are and how easily things can collapse.

Holocaust Aesthetic

From the age of 4 until 16, I attended a Private Hebrew school where learning about the Holocaust was a huge part of my education. The imagery I remember looking at haunts some of the formal decisions in my recent work. Piles of hair, glasses, shoes, bodies. Festering piles, multiples, masses of the same thing snarled and tangled together. Recalling my studying of this recent human catastrophe plays a part in my studio practice. I borrow this “pile” aesthetic in my work to convey a sense of nausea, anonymity and despair in certain forms. The image shown below is of mangled corpses from Auschwitz and is one that I associate with not only human suffering, but specifically to Jewish suffering. *Barricade* is an embodiment of the same predicament, of massive loss or degradation. The donkey references the rural nature of Palestinian life, the animal the Messiah is said to ride in on, and the whimsical animal flying over an impoverished Jewish Shtetl in a Chagall painting. I remember the endless roadblocks in the West Bank, preventing many Palestinians from driving cars and having to resort to riding donkeys to move through certain areas.



Figure 17: photo taken in Auschwitz



Figure 18: Mia Feuer, *Barricade*, detail



Figure 19: Mia Feuer, *The Megiddo Intersection*, (snake ball detail)



Figure 20: Photo from Auschwitz



Figure 21: Mia Feuer, *Turnstile* (detail)



Figure 22: Mia Feuer, *Collapse (version II) detail*

Blue

I recall the color blue everywhere. In Marc Chagall's *Blue Lovers* and the color of Winnipeg's snow banks reflecting the sky around two in the afternoon. A flame or a bruise. Blue is the color of the star in the center of an Israeli flag hanging limp at a temporary roadblock next to a parked tank. Lapis lazuli. The Nile. The matte blue paint I used in *Collapse* wants to be whimsical and ancient, heavenly and sad, sleepy, sexy and holy. It wants to feel close and distant, cold and warm, dull and glowing.

In *On Being Blue, A Philosophical inquiry*, William Gass refers to blue: “...Consequently the color of everything that is empty...then there is the cold Canadian climate and the color of deep ice....”

The color blue appears in much of my recent sculpture. In *Jerusalem Donkey*, I borrow the somber and enchanting palette from a Marc Chagall painting or stained glass window. I find these works of art and their colors nostalgic. I remember seeing them in print form on the walls of every Jewish grandparent I would visit. I wanted this animal to appear in pain and defeated, but at the same time, as if he had once existed magnificently on the canvas of a Chagall painting in a home that smells like *matza ball* soup.



Figure 23: Mia Feuer, *Jerusalem Donkey*



Figure 24: photo of snow banks, Winnipeg



Figure 25: Marc Chagall, *Blue Lovers*



Figure 26: Sailboats on The Nile



Figure 27: Mia Feuer, painting of Palestinian Sun Bird on Israeli Apartheid Wall near Qalandia checkpoint

While living in Occupied Palestine, I learned about the Palestinian Sun Bird. This bird is dark, almost black, but shines iridescent glossy blue in the light. I found it fascinating that Israeli bird enthusiasts continued to refer to this lovely desert bird as the *Palestinian* Sun Bird sixty years after Palestine became the state of Israel. I thought about the political implications of the bird, free to fly back and forth across the border at will. Was this bird named the Palestinian Sun Bird before 1948 when Palestine became Israel? I painted this creature blindfolded with its legs and wings bound on the Apartheid wall near the Qalandia

checkpoint which separates Ramallah From Jerusalem. While painting this blue bird on the wall I borrowed a ladder from a teenage boy named Yezan. He lived right near the Qalandia checkpoint. He told me that all these artists and activists come and paint these ridiculous images or slogans on the wall, and everyday he has to stare at them from his bedroom window. He told me he wished an artist would replace these images and slogans with a mural of the Mediterranean Sea—which, because he lives in Occupied Palestine, Yezan is restricted from visiting. I considered granting Yezan his request, but hesitated. Why sugarcoat this oppressive structure? Yezan should be able to visit the real Mediterranean Sea! And so I painted yet another weak, predictable anti-occupation image for him to stare at. Then I hopped on a plane and returned to my privileged life in Canada, and immediately regretted not painting Yezan his longed for blue sea.

Painting vs. Sculpture



Figure 28: Mia Feuer, *Collapse Study I*

The first step in my process of constructing sculpture is always painting watercolors. I use painting as a way to create blueprints or the earlier designs for my sculpture. I use paint on paper to defy gravity and physics. In most of my recent work, the initial sense of freedom and magic in the paintings tended to get masked in the making of the sculpture. The heavy and abrasive material choices as well as the aggressive labor efforts ended up giving the sculpture a very different, more brutish aesthetic.

Collapse is the first time that the same visual language that I use with painting is applied to the visual outcome of the sculpture. I built *Collapse* as if I was constructing a three-dimensional watercolor painting. The material choices in this piece (mostly foam) allowed

me to manipulate, twist, break, bend, alter and warp in ways that steel would never allow me to do. The freedom of this material allowed me to work in the same carefree manner as I do in the initial painting stages. The foam would dance and float almost effortlessly in the air like an I-beam would do in a painting. Below are some examples of paintings I created prior to constructing my thesis sculpture. While building *Collapse*, I would not only refer to images of collapsed bridges, or partially vaporized steel structures in Hiroshima, but I would refer back to the lines and gestures in these paintings to help determine the forms and gestures in the sculpture.



Figure 29: Mia Feuer, *Collapse Study II*



Figure 30: Mia Feuer, *Collapse Study III*



Figure 31: Mia Feuer, *Collapse Study IV*

Conclusion

I recall dragging over thirty cardboard boxes through a checkpoint in Hebron with a group of Palestinian children to build a puppet theatre. I recall making a balloon animal at a checkpoint for a little Palestinian girl whose father was detained. The moment when that balloon popped and created a sudden frantic upheaval with the soldiers at the checkpoint is burned into my memory. I think about strange moments like these when creating sculpture. I think about mistaking fireworks in the distance of the Israeli/Palestinian horizon for bombs exploding in the sky. I think about my earliest memory of my father coming home from a coffee shop in Winnipeg with blood all over his hands after having been in a fight with someone for making anti-Semitic comments.

I create caricatures of representational objects like donkeys, turnstiles, onions, bridges, construction cranes and snakes as a starting point toward evoking deeper, more metaphorical meaning. My thesis exhibition *Collapse* as well as most of my graduate work examines my investigation into manmade constructions that control and restrict or unite and connect the movement of others. I use sculpture as a tool to reflect, react, resist and ask complicated questions.



Figure 32: Mia Feuer, *Collapse (version II)*

References

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MIA FEUER

Born in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada 1981

Education

- 2009 MFA, Sculpture, Virginia Commonwealth University
2004 BFA with honours, Sculpture, University of Manitoba

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

- 2009 *For Lovers*, Kim Foster Gallery, New York, NY
2009 *MFA Thesis Exhibition*, Anderson Gallery, Richmond, VA
2009 *Displacement, Solo Exhibition*, FLUXspace, Philadelphia, PA
2008 *The Same Thing Is Happening Twice*, The Middendorf Gallery, Baltimore MD
VCU Sculpture + Extended Media 2009 MFA Candidacy Exhibition, Richmond, VA
Here and Now, Transformer Gallery, Washington DC
VCU at Pratt, Pratt Graduate Gallery, New York, NY
Grey Area Stake Out, Crane Arts Centre, Philadelphia, PA
2006 *A Land That Buries Its Children* (Solo Exhibition), Outworks Gallery, Winnipeg
2005 *Stretch, Stroke, Budge*, The Annex Gallery, Winnipeg
2003 *Emerging Contemporary Artists*, Asper Campus, Winnipeg

AWARDS/GRANTS/RESIDENCIES

- 2009 Seven Below Artist Initiative Fellow, Aug- Sept 2009
2009 Vermont Studio Center, Full Fellowship Award, Oct-Nov 2009
2009 Exhibition Travel Grant, Philadelphia, PA, Virginia Commonwealth University
2008 Vermont Studio Center, Full Fellowship Award, Sept- Oct 2009
2008 Readers Digest, Lila Acheson Scholarship Recipient
2008 Winnipeg Arts Council, Travel/Research Grant
2008 Exhibition Travel Grant, Washington DC, Virginia Commonwealth University
2008 Exhibition Travel Grant, Baltimore, MD, Virginia Commonwealth University
2008-2009 Graduate Fellowship, Virginia Commonwealth University
2008-2009 Graduate Fellowship, Virginia Commonwealth University
2007 Exhibition Travel Grant, New York, NY, Virginia Commonwealth University
2007 Mona Grey Scholarship for the Creative Arts, Jewish Foundation of Manitoba
2007 Readers Digest, Lila Acheson Scholarship Recipient
2007 Manitoba Arts Council Student Bursary Recipient
2007 Winnipeg Arts Council Creation/Research Grant
2007 Manitoba Arts Council Travel/Research Grant
2005-2006 Manitoba Arts Council, Emerging Visual Artist Grant
2005 Cecil C Richards Award, Sculpture Excellence, University of Manitoba
2005 Special Grant, Jewish Foundation of Manitoba
2002 School of Art Award, University of Manitoba
2001 Kenneth Finklestien Scholarship, University of Manitoba

PRESS

- 2009 "Displacement, Solo Show, Mia Feuer" www.artblog.org
- 2009 "Here and Now" Sculpture Magazine, January/February issue
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