



In the Thicket of Reality: On Mythical Femininity in Yigal Ozeri

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From a thicket of twisted branches and dried leaves, a female entity emerges with an engrossed gaze, wild and untamed, as if surfacing from the depths of the earth. In the hyperrealist painting *Priscilla with Vines* (2007), Israeli artist Yigal Ozeri continues a theme from earlier series, weaving matted blonde hair with honey yellow twine, thus again focusing on the subtle homogenization of natural material and human hair. In *Sasha with Fortune Tree* (2005–06), the haptic riffled chestnut brown bark and the lush dreadlocks of his model fuse together, but this becoming one with nature is constituted in the context of an allegory for the Roman goddess Flora before a backdrop of the metropolis New York; as always, it is a carefully staged thicket in the midst of an urban utopia turned real.

Icelandic artist Guðrún Friðriksdóttir formulates contingent chaos and the excess of the postmodern in her multimedia performative installation *Versations/Tetralógía* (2006). Zoomorphic features that seem to fuse with the earth, far from any feminine connotations of Mother Earth, are seen emerging from the quagmire, thus participating naturally and unaesthetically in reality. Friðriksdóttir's fearsome mud creatures from her contribution to the Venice Biennial can be decoded in two ways: first, in terms of Scandinavian mythology as more or less female ogres—which can hardly be distinguished from kobolds—and attributed to old folk narratives; and second as Fylgjur, represented in the epic sagas of Northern Europe as an animal or female figure.

Ozeri picks up a different historical longing for nature and the originally “feminine” in his current series *Priscilla in Ecstasy* (2007) now on view at Vienna's Galerie Charim. Here, with his passion for photorealistic painting, he turns to John Everett Millais' *Ophelia* (1851–52). Since the 1970s the representatives of hyperrealism have worked in terms of subject matter far from portraiture or landscape



links / left
YIGAL OZERI
*Untitled (Priscilla in the
Middle of the Day)*, 2007
Öl auf Papier / oil on paper
40,64 x 60,96 cm
Courtesy of Mike Weiss Gallery
New York / Charim Galerie
Vienna

painting, focusing on everyday, brutal representations of American cities in their quest for what constitutes our reality. In painting, these artists took recourse to a traditional medium with its own technical virtuosity at a point in time when traditional painting was considered overcome in the aftermath of abstract expressionism. In this context, Hanno Millesi remarks, “The confrontation with a work from the hyperrealist art context usually does not presume specific knowledge. The spectrum of concepts within the ‘new realisms’ has next to no basis in philosophical systems.” Like today’s hyperrealism, for which photography is a tool—Ozeri presents here for the first time the photographs he used in creating these works—Millais pursues, in his realization of reality, a meticulous observation of nature. Twelve years after the invention of photography, the Pre-Raphaelites’ painting generates a romantic-mythical feel to set itself apart from idealized nature according to the prescriptions of art academies at the time.

This suggestion of eternal femininity is shared by Millais’ *Ophelia* and Ozeri’s video, *Priscilla in Ecstasy*, in which the budding muse feels her way across steaming ground through wild ferns; thus the longing for the original is formulated as paradigmatic for modernity.



rechts / right
YIGAL OZERI
*Untitled (Priscilla in the
Cloud Forest)*, 2007
Öl auf Papier / oil on paper
40,64 x 60,96 cm
Courtesy of Mike Weiss Gallery
New York / Charim Galerie
Vienna

In nineteenth century imaginative, mystical worlds, women's images are associated with nature and art (with aesthetics), the figures dislocated from space and time, the feminine is typified on a cultural level of development as original. Alexandra Karentzos states in her phenomenology of art gods of the nineteenth century, "In this context [femininity] stands for unfragmented unity, ahistoricity, and timelessness [...] The situation of the myth in an archaic primordiality further expands the topographic distance by adding the dimension of time. Through this distance, mythical femininity is marked as the other, the foreign." If Ozeri allegorically reconstructs Millais' *Ophelia* in the rainforest of Costa Rica in the midst of his own personal reality, with the help of appropriated utopia and exoticism, this constitutes a paradoxical component as a result of the motivic and stylistic appropriation, as well as in relation to a feminist shaped present. For our postmodern reality is characterized by the realization of an absence of originality and authenticity. □