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MIRI SEGAL
MORTALS
AND AUTOMATONS

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Galerie Kamel Mennour is pleased to present "Mortals and Automaton", the Israeli artist Miri Segal's second solo exhibition.

Like many modern-day artists, Miri Segal's academic background was initially unconnected with art, her PhD having focused on mathematics. Traces of this can be found in her present work. The nature of illusion, at once optical and psychological, is essentially the constant driving force behind the deconstruction and reconstruction of subtle and clever machinery, leading to a questioning of "the viewer" - so called by Marcel Duchamp - on the place of the subject in relation to the work and the setting. Several exhibitions have allowed us to understand and fully experience Miri Segal's work. Each one increased the number of situations in which the vision found itself caught up in a whirlwind of significations and interdependencies, giving prominence to the alienation of each of us from the world of images: a way of reminding us, as Paul Ardenne has intelligently underlined regarding the artist, that "we have a body" and that the practice of art is also there to help us to understand this. But if the art of Miri Segal, over the course of numerous exhibitions in Israel, in the USA, or previously with Kamel Mennour in 2006, constantly emphasises that we have eyes, and if the visible and appearances are undoubtedly her recurrent themes, I would also like to point out that sound and voice are unfailingly the constituent elements of her various devices. While this notion has become one of the commonest features of the art of our time, it is undoubtedly important to clarify the extent to which it allows us to describe the work of Miri Segal. With it, the work confronts the sensorial and mental chaos of our contemporary world. With it, each proposal is an interrogation of our relationship with space and time, with fixedness as with movement. Despite her training as a mathematician, Miri Segal is nonetheless a sensitive analyst of Erwin Panofsky's "perspective as symbolic form".

The recent works that she is now exhibiting have elements of constructions that are simultaneously clever and distinct. Miri Segal is reluctant to do anything makeshift from a practical and symbolic aspect. Bound by her education, she would rather seek precision, a point of exactitude from which a whirlwind of emotions and meanings can tempt us. The body, our body, is thus the receptacle of infinite experiences, a play on the meaning and meanings open to multiple interpretations. The present exhibition is made up of five pieces. To describe them would destroy their charm and demonstrate clearly, more so here than elsewhere, that experiencing the text is no substitute for experiencing the image and sound. Suffice it to say that they all conjure up the essential opposition Miri Segal intends to set up between "Mortals and Automaton", between the living and the artefact, between the real and its multiple forms of representation. A quotation from Shakespeare serves, both literally and figuratively, as an inscription and a reflection upon an optical and mental crossing of space. Language connects to science. Here, Shakespeare's meditation on humanity finds its illusory and illusionist extension.

Miri Segal « Mortals and Automaton » is on show at galerie kamel mennour Tuesdays to Saturdays, 9am to 7pm.

For further information, please contact Marie-Sophie Eiché, Jessy Mansuy-Leydier and Emma-Charlotte Gobry-Laurencin.

"Understanding", a second, recently-made device again catches language in the trap of its multiple significations. In a virtual space, which she sets up according to processes that are not without an echo of Richard Wolheim's analysis of Manet's use of space, Miri Segal constructs her statement according to a fundamentally theatrical logic. Games of inverted mirrors, behind the scenes; the process of understanding the world is always a process of projection. Here, it gives its title to the whole piece, playing with the literality between the construction of the work and its proper subject. Another device once again makes use of the highly significant relationship between language and its signification. "Understanding" and "standing" are linked together as two notions and two distinct states. Mental image and visual translation as a language and a science are the double-sided processes at work in the art of Miri Segal.

"Whatever you say", a parrot filmed by Miri Segal, shuffles back and forth on a perch, repeating the words spoken by the viewer into a microphone. Image and text, animal communication and human language. Miri Segal likes technological experimentations. Here, she extends them with this intriguing proposition, a paradigm of the mutual fascination between science and art. The experimental dimension - one, incidentally, which fascinates Emile Benveniste - is much cleverer than it appears, and doubtless echoes the complexity that comes with the unusual relationship between human race and one of the only feathered creatures able to repeat what it hears without (perhaps?) understanding it." (...)

One can think that Miri Segal's art takes after language games and their conversion into images. One can think that these visual and sound devices have something of a plastic interpretation of the world's complexity and processes. But we can only really grasp their scope by experiencing them in the flesh. In this regard, the extraordinary device that she entitles "Beam from between your eyes" (2008) can be seen as a paradigm. Condensing different forms of spatial rhetoric, making use of both optical and visual projection, she takes her inspiration from a Robert Walser novella that describes, in a single page, a creature's frantic goal of travelling to the end of the earth. Miri Segal turns this vision, trapped by language, into a spatial environment where theatre and projection come together, where distortions and anamorphic points of view allow us to see that we are all in the middle of nowhere. It is here that Miri Segal's art indubitably touches upon a specifically philosophical dimension: she wishes to talk about our condition and the inexorable "fantasy" of every traveller. The work bears witness both to the dream of being in the light of the image and to the promise of representation: once again, an art of projection - in every sense - yet also a sweeping take on the risk of not being able to settle at the core of the world about which we revolve and which, in return, revolves unfailingly around us.

Bernard Blistène
(Extract of a text to be published about the artist)
(Translation : James Curwen)

Born in 1965 in Haifa (Israel), Miri Segal lives and works in Tel Aviv. Her work has featured in numerous solo and group exhibitions: at PS1 in New York, the Lisson Gallery in London, the Pompidou Centre and the Maison Rouge - Fondation Antoine de Galbert (Paris), at Jerusalem's Biennale Art Focus, at the Chelsea Museum of Art in New York, at Vienna's Kunsthalle (Austria), at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, at the Tokyo Wonder Site (Tokyo), at the Musée de Lucerne (Switzerland), and at the Museum of Modern Art in San Francisco.