



HOLY LAND:

Diaspora and the Desert

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Breaking Ground: Diaspora's Current Shifts from the Body to Geography

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I live today neither in this world nor the last, neither in America nor Astrakhan. Also I would add neither in this world nor the next. A woman like me, she lives someplace in between. Between the memories and the daily stuff.¹

The "Other" is the subject borne from 19th century colonialism who today continues to play a vital role within society as the subject who possesses no membership within it. Falling into the cracks between nations, ideas, economies and citizenship, his identity survives because his questionable status of citizenship is indispensable to the self-realization of Eurocentrism and dominant ruling forces. Over the last 50 years, as the world has become smaller through transnationalism and globalization, the "Other" has not



GUY BEN NER, B. 1969, RAMAT GAN, ISRAEL. "TREEHOUSE KIT," 2005, WOOD CONSTRUCTION, VIDEO. COURTESY OF POSTMASTERS GALLERY, NEW YORK.

and Other Science Fictions re-examines the history of Utopia as understood throughout modernity. For the sake of brevity here, Utopia has become the idealistic alternative construct to Western dominant powers for the last 200 years. Jameson sheds light on the dark economic corners of globalization and how crucial aspects of Modernism and its descendent ideas are weak from the ground up because of unstable ideological structures integral to Utopian philosophies. Like the "Other," Utopia was a concept that came to life as an equal and necessary alternative to the dominant forms of Western governments.

The Holy Land exhibit uses the metaphor of the desert to represent the wilderness as a site that remains permanently untouched by human hands due to its tough environment, but also as a place where, when resourcefulness is used, life can exist.

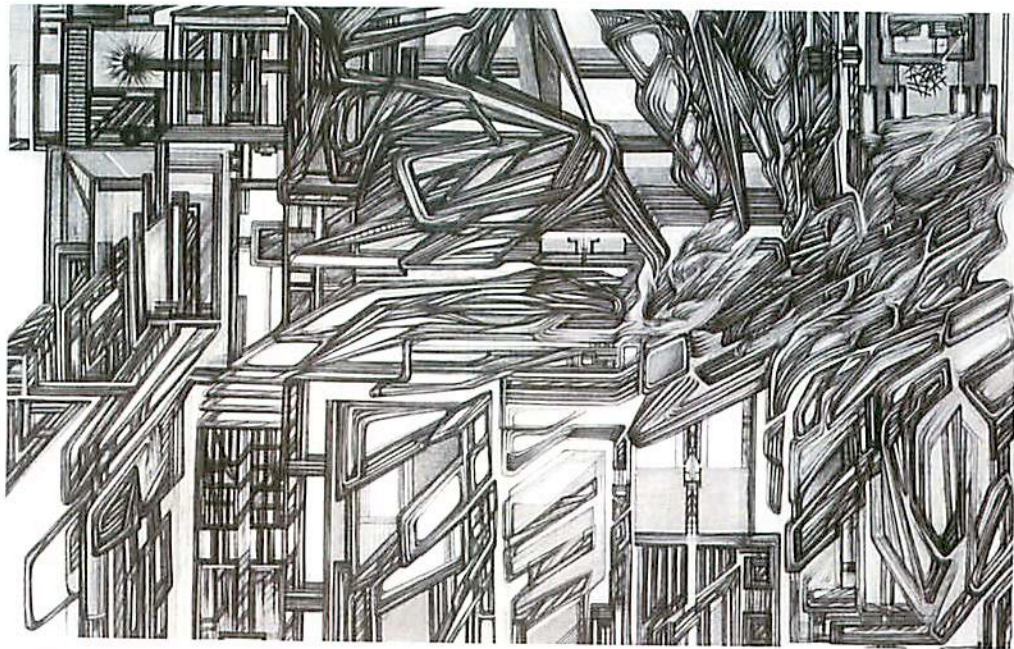
Jameson asserts that globalization is "the consolidation of the world market" and that culture, a given insertion into any global economic transaction, is fraught with ideological blind spots for which "Utopian politics (or of any political Utopianism)" is responsible for supplying the foundations of its belief systems.³ Thus, Jameson re-examines ideas of the identity of the "Other" to make both a critique of the influential Utopia in critical cultural thinking as well as to point out that an alternative to the social imaginary of Utopia has already been at work in popular culture through the imaginary of science fiction.

Resting on the popular assumption that fantasy and imagination are merely notions of the whimsy or flighty, imaginative daydreaming maintains strict boundaries that are hyper- or hypo-flexible. It is always gauged by the needs and desires of the dreamer. Desire is a natural force that never requires a disciplinarian to fully realize itself.

"[H]umans remain the prisoners of an anthropomorphic philosophical system" in imagining ourselves to be attempting contact with the radical "Other," we are in reality looking in a mirror and searching for an image of our own world.⁴

Within the different "Other," Jameson asserts, is not an entity separate from the person looking at him, but rather a reflection of that person. A man can only relate to other man-like things whether in the physical universe or here, more simply, on planet Earth where human beings are also stamped and relegated as Aliens and/or other worldly within social parameters. The ideal and usefulness of the "Other" is typically relegated to celebratory, performative or an aesthetically revolutionary cultural discourse that is typically disregarded as having any kind of agency other than its value as entertainment.

In 1903, the Black American cultural historian/critic, W.E.B. DuBois was one of the first to link the subject of the "Other" to a unified global body under the rubric of the Black Diaspora. In his seminal book *The Souls of Black Folk*, DuBois links Black peoples



DETAIL OF: RAHA RAISSNIA, B. 1968, TEHRAN, IRAN. "HYPOTHERMIA," 2005. GRAPHITE ON PAPER. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND THOMAS ERBEN GALLERY, NEW YORK.

throughout the world under the single physical characteristic of skin color. This facet of identity becomes the signifier that communicates across national and economic borders to connect people and their cultural similarities through simple visual recognition. DuBois' proposition of the Black Diaspora is still a template referred to today by compromised peoples throughout the world to peoples of various race and color. In the 1980s and 1990s, diaspora and identity theories rigorously use the human body as the site of harm and healing in society. The early 21st century, however, has shifted overwhelmingly to view the geography of actual land masses as sites in which to discuss these issues.

The *Holy Land* exhibit uses the metaphor of the desert to represent the wilderness as a site that remains permanently untouched by human hands due to its tough environment, but also as a place where, when resourcefulness is used, life can exist. Shifting the diaspora discussion of identity from the site of the body to a physical site makes room for the flexibility of fantasy in a landscape setting where personal desires are the starting point. Ideas become fluid, mutable and guided by individual will. Boundaries



DETAIL OF: ODILI DONALD ODITA, B. 1966, ENUGER, NIGERIA. "PAN-AM," 1999, ACRYLIC ON CANVAS. COURTESY OF THE ARTIST.

begin to flex with a single desire.

For the artists of this exhibit and others like them, culture workers and theorists (like Jameson) show, there is a frustration with the lack of methodologies that seek options outside of Eurocentric thinking. In their work, the artists are among people who have begun to explore in the wildernesses, using metaphors, physical boundaries and fantasy to exist beyond civilization.

Metaphor "as the etymology of the word suggests, transfers the domain of home and belonging across the middle passage; or the central European steppes, across these distances and cultural differences that span the imagined community of the nation-people."⁵ Metaphor and fantasy become the engine in the mind of the artist, the culture worker and/or the person physically moving between or through nations. Physical characteristics and their cultural givens are no longer the only invisible passports of recognition between migrant, displaced peoples. Those subjects who fall outside of a cultural mainstream recognize shared circumstantial experiences, ideas and dreams at

all levels of society.

"The language of modernity reveals a politics without duration, as Louis Althusser once wrote: 'Spaces without places, time without duration' aptly expresses the movement of diaspora through today's imaginary."⁶ Thus, today's diaspora is a worldwide recognition that has expanded its prime focus from physical characteristics to ideas borne of circumstance and experience.

Land and space, whether imagined or real, indicate the agency that comes with ownership whether it be of sanity or property. What is holy has become personal space and time that may be discovered and explored in a safe realm. Every artist in this exhibit approaches diaspora with an open ended tool of fantasy whether through abstraction or memory or both. They are breaking ground with an urgency that accompanies the search for relief.

Holy Land: Diaspora and the Desert is generously sponsored by TCB Consolidated Management, LLC, Mr. Charles King and Mikki and Stanley Weithorn.

NOTES:

Desire, Seeking Reflective Spaces in Diaspora

1. Gilroy, Paul. *Post Melancholia*. Columbia University Press, New York, 2004. page 3.
2. Augaitis, Daina. *Brian Jungen*. Douglas & McIntyre Ltd. 2005. page 33.
3. Nottage, James H., ed. *Into the Fray*. University of Washington Press, Seattle and London, 2005. page 19.
4. Storr, Robert. "The Art Newspaper," no. 164, December 2005. page 13.

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1. Rushdie, Salman. *Shalimar the Clown*. Random House, New York, New York. 2005. page 9.
2. Breckenridge, Carol, A. Pollock, Sheldon, Bhabha, Homi, K. and Chakrabarty, Dipesh, eds. *Cosmopolitanism*. Mignolo, Walter, D. "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism." Duke University Press, Durham & London. 2002. page 174.
3. Jameson, Frederic. *Archeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*. Verso, New York & London, 2005. page xii.
4. Ibid., page 111.
5. Bhabha, Homi. ed. *Nation and Narration*. "DissemiNation: Time, narrative and the margins of the modern nation." Routledge, London & New York. page 291.
6. Ibid., page 294.

Guy Ben-Ner, *Israel*

Ambreen Butt, *Pakistan*

Thomas Joshua Cooper, *Cherokee,*
United States/Scotland

Einar and Jamex de la Torre, *Mexico*

Brian Jungen, *First Nations, Canada*

Odili Donald Odita, *Nigeria*

Raha Raissnia, *Iran*

Hulleah Tsinhnahjinnie,
Seminole/Muskogee/Diné, United States

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and Independent Curator Lara Taubman*