

And there was evening, and there was Panda—the first day

Dvir Cohen-Kedar's works, which are presented in this exhibition, follow a mythological world, in which the heroin, *ikooki*, is a vertex of a fascinating psychoanalytical triad. The body of work is mainly made of paintings and drawings of the main characters, *Panda*, *ikooki* and *Her Friend*. They are all depicting situations that imply, in a more or less manifest fashion, about their characters, about their complex relationships and their conscious and unconscious worlds, while bearing a message regarding their future. Welcome to the exhibition *i love ikooki*. A bright neon fuchsia sign announces an entrance to a different kind of world, a possible mythological world, in which the characters are the psyche of each and every one of us.

At first glance, it seems that Cohen-Kedar's characters are influenced by the Japanese manga and anime. They evoke the superflatness of Takashi Murakami's work, and the hyper-realistic sculptures by Patricia Piccinini, who sculpts hybrids of humans and animals, futuristic/mythological characters. The works focus in the characters themselves, without a real landscape. Each line is in its place, and each composition seems carefully planned. The visual treatment tends to minimalism, one that stems from the desire to deal with the metaphysical, the spiritual. The world is still in its primal coming into being and is divided to the basic elements of the universe: sky, land and sea, which appear in the "*Untitled*" painting (2014), in which *ikooki* is seen hugging *Panda* and standing on a tower of *Furs* (autonomic creatures, who are the solid ground in this world). In front of her, some waves are breaking, reminding us the famous waves by Hokusai Katsushika.

The works introduces us, face to face, to Cohen-Kedar's characters. Each of them appears in a large central portrait, oil on canvas painting. The characters are portrayed in poses taken from classic paintings: semi-profile, a straight gaze towards us, with a clean background. In the painting "*ikooki in Furs*" (2012), Cohen-Kedar introduces us to the heroin of the myth. On her head, a pink furry "hat" with Mickey Mouse ears and in her hand she holds a *Fur* that looks terrified. The pop-art decision of the hat, being a part of *ikooki's* body, is a classic technique of the pop-art era. Artists like Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol made wide use of it. Of course, differently from the pop-art era, the emphasis here is more on usage of images from mass media, more than the creation of a contrast between "high art" and "low art". The culture that floods us daily is prominent in the exhibition, both in the artist's use of many media and in the amusing popish characters, which looks like available images out of a comic character catalogue.

ikooki's head is reminiscent of Mr. DOB by Murakami in its earlier version. *ikooki* looks simple, monotonous, sad-happy and scarcely sexual, unless in the presence of *Her Friend*. The animation "*The Ride*" (2014), in which *ikooki* is seen riding the sexual organ of *Her Friend*, is the climax of the sexual contact between the two. Cohen-Kedar knows how to portray the act in a lyrical, childish and even a poetic manner. The words out of the almost-Hollywood soundtrack sound like a foreign-familiar language. Cohen-Kedar recites *ikooki's* story in a language composed in a logical manner, and only the hero's names are tangible. The reading sounds like a story from one thousand and one nights, in a foreign language, both very pleasant and intimidating. Dramatic music, almost Hollywood-like, accompanies the narration. As in the whole exhibition, in this work too, the relationship between the revealed-hidden, amusing-dramatic, attractive-repellent exists and strengthens the unsolved circularity of the myth.

At first, Cohen-Kedar's world exists in space, as *Panda* is free falling. After a process of acquiring consciousness, the scene continues to a "place", a land created from *Panda's* tears, the *Furs*. This reminds us of the "non-place", a term made by Marc Augé. Augé describes places of transience, empty of all content and identity, like the ones created by humans in the previous century. Airports, shopping malls and autobahns function as "non-places", places that are designated to achieve a specific goal. At the basis of his thought, Augé distinguishes between spaces and places. A "place" is charged with history and identity, in the anthropological sense of the word. In contrast, a "space" is free of all identity and history and it activates the places it is made from in an independent manner, for the sake of its own needs. In a similar manner, all events in the exhibition exist in a space beyond – a spiritual and existential place of transience, without any identity or history. Is the focus more on the characters and less in the space? Does the "non-place" emphasize the metaphysical planes of the myth?

Panda is the Creator. A teddy bear with a divine power, but also a toy that reminds us of kawaii from the Japanese visual culture: the cute, adorable and childish. It appears in several works, among them in its portrait. In many drawings *Panda* is found in situations that signify its status in relation to the myth's heroes, regarding decisions that *ikooki* must make and regarding its mental state. Cohen-Kedar thus criticizes the act of turning amusement into the mainstream culture. Reality TV and an array of cheap entertainment material, seemingly soft and amusing, are punctured and devoid of any substantial content. Thus, in an aquarelle on cardboard sketch, "*untitled*" (2012), *ikooki* is seen in an art exhibition with *Her Friend*, looking at works consisting of images of *Panda*. In this sketch, there is an auto-reflection of

Panda and of Cohen-Kedar regarding himself, his work, and the world he created. Is he not the product of the same vanity culture? It seems that in this exhibition the artist takes a few steps back and tries to look upon his work, his life, and his status in the society in which he lives.

i love ikooki follows *ikooki*'s mental processes and after her hard decisions, which lead her from childhood to puberty. Who is *ikooki*? What is her relationship with the two other characters in Cohen-Kedar's world? What are the values that are sent via the myth of *ikooki*?

ikooki's myth is a reflection about process by Cohen-Kedar. Aristotle said "The friend of wisdom is also the friend of myth". And indeed, in order to stay sane, each one of us has to invent for himself private myths. Nowadays, religious and national myths no longer guide us in our daily lives, as they did in ancient times, and so, the private myth is the means to cope with our lack of understanding the creation of the universe, our passage to the physical world and our coping with life and with ourselves. In ancient Greece, in which the myths were powerful, people could withstand hardships with ease and without superfluous guilt. The myth is the medium by which people can discover their identity as individuals and as social creatures.

"I must discover who am I and where did I come from?" called Oedipus as he answered the question "Who am I?" so does *ikooki*, led by Cohen-Kedar to a spiritual journey that includes questions of identity, belonging and moral values. The exhibition leads us into an endless spiritual journey. The narrative has no beginning or end. There are three characters that hold among themselves metaphysical dyads that simultaneously include truth and lies, presence and absence, exposure and concealment, copy and original. In the dyads, one term conditions the other, while the other is derived from the first and draws its existence from it¹. So do Cohen-Kedar's characters: *Panda* creates *ikooki* out of despair of his lonesome state in the world and she draws her existence from him. They both love each other and are dependent upon another. *Her Friend*, created out of *ikooki* and *Panda*'s thoughts, is dependent upon both of them, yet he is also more independent and free from them.

The trinity of *Panda*, *ikooki* and *Her Friend* signifies three mental states that compose the human spirit. *ikooki* was born out of *Panda*'s tears. He was in a state of utter loneliness, which he later discovered, after he became aware of his situation. The birth of consciousness is seen in the animation *Goodbye Panda* (2013). *Panda* is seen falling from the sky. At first he is in an endless movement in an empty blue space, without any direction of

The hand of the gaze: Heidegger between theory and praxis, Dr. Dror Pimental. ¹

movement. This hover instigates the birth of *Panda's* consciousness, which makes him feel profound loneliness, due to his static situation. Out of despair, *Panda* determines that he is in a descending movement. *Panda's* movement is discernible only in relation to the movement of his sex organ, fluttering in the wind. Cohen-Kedar does not reveal too many details in his work, and leaves many degrees of freedom to interpretations and other possibilities of realization.

In a way, *Panda* represents the unconscious, and each character created in the myth is a rise to a higher level of consciousness. We can collimate Cohen-Kedar's thought to the microgenesis thought process that tries to make assumptions regarding the information processing of the thought itself². It is based, among others, on one of Sigmund Freud's most amazing discoveries, upon which the division of thought is to an initial level, unconscious and irrational, and a second level, which is the conscious and logical thought. *ikooki's* world is a superimposition of the two levels of Freud: the unconscious layer, in the relations between *Panda* and *ikooki* and the unconscious relations between the two, and in contrast, *ikooki's* visual world, seemingly rational, in relation to *Her Friend*, who is conscious and worldly. The microgenesis thought, in contrast to Freud, sees the two levels as intertwined and thus creating one united thought process. In a certain manner, *ikooki* is the passage from the unconscious, which is *Panda*, to consciousness, who is *Her Friend*. That is, in the works displayed in the exhibition, *ikooki* herself is in a passage between childhood and puberty, but also in the spiritual passage between the unconscious and conscious. Thus, she is the vertex of the mythological triad presented.

ikooki discovers herself together with *Her Friend*. He accompanies her into those spiritual processes, and in time brings her to a place where she has to choose between him and *Panda*. It is a dramatic, existential, spiritual and impossible decision. In "The Flies" by Sartre, which is merely an interpretation of the mythological drama *Orestes*, Zeus claims that he created *Orestes* and therefore he must obey his orders and discontinue his plans to murder his mother. *Orestes* delivers a crushing reply, "But you made a mistake, you've created me free!" This freedom is manifested in the character of *Her Friend*, who confronts *ikooki* with a fatal decision. In contrast to others, in this myth there's no catharsis, but only a circular passage between metaphysical characters.

The exhibition has a tempo and movement of ups and downs, from the unconscious into consciousness and back, and the movement is made simultaneously in two planes: in the

myth itself as well as in revealing to the viewers what is concealed by the artist. Those up and down frequencies are endless and metaphysical, just like in Panda's video, in which he floats in the sky aimlessly. The movement towards the viewers gives rise, just like any myth does, to the fears, impulses and mental distortions that are mainly left in the unconscious. What can we learn from the exhibition about ourselves, about society and about our own anxiety from our existence in these times, in this "place"? The exhibition leaves space for interpretation and personal coping with the "self" of each one of us, in relation to his own abyss.

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