

DARK
אפלים **ימים**
TIMES

The Genia Schreiber University Art Gallery
Michel Kikoïne Foundation
The Yolanda and David Katz Faculty of the Arts
Tel Aviv University

Gallery Curator Irit Tal

DARK TIMES

Mirosław Bałka, Jenny Brockmann, Noa Giniger,
Roey Heifetz, Michal Na'aman, Tomer Sapir, Ryan Trecartin

December 11, 2014 - February 27, 2015

EXHIBITION

CURATOR Avi Lubin
INSTALLATION Tucan Design Studio Ltd.; Protech Integration Art Technologies, Tel Aviv

CATALOGUE

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION Avigail Reiner
TEXT EDITING AND HEBREW TRANSLATION Daphna Raz
ENGLISH TRANSLATION Talya Halkin
PHOTOGRAPHY Elad Sarig
ADDITIONAL PHOTOGRAPHS Avraham Hay (pp. ?-?), Ute Klein (pp. ?-?),
Ellen Ginton (pp. -)
PRINTING A.R. Print LTD., Tel Aviv

Measurements are given in centimeters, height × width × depth

SPONSORED BY



AND WITH THE SUPPORT OF

The Fund Established in Memory of the
Artist Nili Aharoni for the Publication
of Catalogues at the Genia Schreiber
University Art Gallery
The Varda Yoran Art Catalogue Fund

© 2014, all rights reserved
The Genia Schreiber University Art Gallery and
Michel Kikoïne Foundation, Tel Aviv University

ISBN 978-965-7160-40-4

DARK TIMES

Avi Lubin

The writing of Hannah Arendt, one of the most influential political thinkers of the twentieth century, attests to her own experience of a dismal period – which she refers to as “dark times” – while simultaneously identifying it as a decisive moment of opportunity for humanity. This duality of destruction and hope, darkness and opportunity, is central to the opening of her book *The Human Condition*,¹ which touches upon two groundbreaking events: the launching of the first space satellite (liberation from Earth) and the first nuclear bombing (the possibility of Earth’s annihilation).

This is Arendt’s point of departure for thinking the political and the human condition. She defines general categories whose relevance extends from Classical Greece to the mid-twentieth century, while at the same time – in contrast to many thinkers – writing from within a given historical moment and in relation to it. Arendt writes about contemporary events, totalitarian regimes, and failed revolutions, and attempts to

¹ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998 [1958]).

understand the political and the meaning of action within this reality. In contrast to the approach that privileged contemplation over action, and which according to her dominated Western thought from Plato's political philosophy to Nietzsche, Arendt sees action, rather than intellectual life, as what enables man to detach himself from the everyday, the repetitive, and the reactive. Arendt views action as stemming from the authentic urge to take initiative and put new processes in motion, as well as from the autonomous, critical thinking of individuals. The meaning of an action, she argues, does not depend on whether it was performed in order to change the world for the better, nor is it measured by its outcome or underlying motives; rather, its meaning lies in its performance.

The exhibition "Dark Times" sets out to perform an intensive, real-time inquiry into the spirit of a particular historical moment, in an attempt to understand the historical present and its relation to different types of time – including biographical time and mythological time. It also seeks to examine art's unique modes of action during a dismal period and dark times. The works in the exhibition challenge the relationship between past, present, and future and point to the importance of the encounter with a fragmented, disrupted present. They question the principles of causality and continuous development along a temporal axis and the presentation of reality as clearcut and unequivocal, and raise questions about the conception of a cohesive presence. The exhibition thus "leaps" forwards and backwards between different time periods, transitions between different places, and offers a combination of narratives that construct a "structured chaos" or "controlled chaos".² In this sense, the exhibition reconstructs the

2> The terms "structured chaos" and "controlled chaos" were used by the curator Harald Szeeman to describe his curatorial work, which centers on the tension between eclecticism and knowledge and between a direct encounter with the artwork and in-depth research. See, for instance: Hans-Ulrich Obrist, "Interview with Harald Szeemann," *Artforum International* (January 1996).

relations that exist in Arendt's writing between theory and concrete examples, so that the participating works do not exemplify the theory, but rather entertain a dialogue with it.³

SHELTER

The entrance to the exhibition space and its rear end both feature built structures: *255x200x91* (2009) by Mirosław Bałka, and *Shy Room* (2010) by Jenny Brockmann. The title of Bałka's work refers to its physical dimensions, which are far from arbitrary. The measurements in many of Bałka's works are related to his biography, to places he lived in and to the people who surround him; they often pertain to his own body, and to its abilities and inabilities. Thus, although the structure included in the exhibition appears abstract, its size was designed to offer shelter to Bałka's body, which measures 190 cm. in height, and 250 cm. with his arms stretched above his head (the maximum length that needs to be protected). Bałka added several centimeters to these measurements for comfort. For this and other reasons, Bałka repeatedly asserts that his works are not only abstract.⁴ For him, the relations between the title, the dimensions of the work, and his physical body (or biography) preserve the tension between coldness and warmth, distance and closeness. The point of departure is always emotional and relates to Bałka's personal history, and not only to questions of color and form. The works thus lose some of their pseudo-abstract presence, and are charged instead with a meaning pertaining to reality.

Bałka relates his biography to the collective history of Poland, with an emphasis on the Second World War and the Holocaust; he points to the impact of personal memories on collective memory, and examines the translation of personal traumas into collective histories, and vice versa. Bałka's structure thus constitutes an encounter of sorts between a personal shelter constructed according to the dimensions of his own body, and between a monument – a cross influenced in part by the profession of his father, an engraver of headstones, and of his grandfather, a memorial mason. The materials the work is made of (steel, wood, an electric bulb) are perhaps

3> On the relationship between theory and concrete examples in Arendt's theory, see: Julia Kristeva, *Hannah Arendt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), p. 50.

4> See: Robert J. Preece, "The Shadow of Life's Mechanisms: a Conversation with Mirosław Bałka," *Sculpture Magazine*, 23:9 (November 2004), pp. 36-41.

standard in the context of contemporary sculpture, yet in this case they are saturated with history: the wooden beams that make up the structure's ceiling were once part of the floor in the Zamoyski Palace in Warsaw, where they survived the Second World War (since the 1960s, the new wing of this building has been home to the Foksal Gallery, one of Warsaw's most important contemporary art galleries).

Jenny Brockmann's *Shy Room* is a white cube measuring 2x2x2 meters. When one stands at a distance from it, its door remains open and light emanates from it; when one draws closer, however, sensors are activated and the side doors close, so that the building shuts down and becomes inaccessible. Ironically, the viewer can see the light, yet cannot reach it. We are tempted to think that our inability to reach the interior of the cube (or the light) is caused by temporary physical obstacles (a sensor and a mechanism that closes the doors), yet the light in this work also has a metaphorical meaning, revealing the reasons for its inaccessibility to be deeper and more essential. Like K., the land surveyor in Kafka's *The Castle*, Brockmann's viewer discovers that turning to the light, to the truth within the cube (or the castle on the mountaintop) is futile and hopeless.⁵ K.'s failure in *The Castle* stems from his inability to think beyond the conceptual system of the old order, a clearcut hierarchical order ruled by a sovereign power. The inability to reach Kafka's castle or the interior of Brockmann's cube thus does not stem from the physical conditions (fog and darkness in Kafka's story, a mechanical mechanism in Brockmann's work); it is rooted in the understanding that there is no reachable source of truth, no authority capable of supplying an answer. Brockmann thus attempts to turn the viewer's attention to the personal dimension of his sensory experience, rather than to the

objective truth seemingly located within the illuminated cube.

5> Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, translated Mark Hazman (New York: Schocken Books, 1998); for a discussion of Kafka's three novellas as three models of action, see Avi Lubin, "The Trial. Illustration - Following Three Novels of Franz Kafka," *Et Lacan* (2006), p. 47 [in Hebrew].

Located between these two structures is a third structure whose interior is similarly lit from within: a paper work by Tomer Sapir titled *Svalbard Global Seed Vault* (2014). Sapir created a multilayered collage based on a landscape photograph of the distant Norwegian island of Svalbard, the largest island in the archipelago bordering on the Arctic Ocean. This work centers on an image of the entrance to a plant-preservation facility established by the Norwegian Ministry of Agriculture, where a multitude of seeds from around the world is preserved for future generations in the event of a global catastrophe. At present this facility, whose subterranean interior is largely quarried into a frozen mountain, contains hundreds of thousands of types of seeds.

THE MONTAUK MONSTER

According to Arendt, history is composed of disruptions, of those individual moments that stem the flow of the everyday.⁶ "These single instances, deeds or events," she adds, "interrupt the circular movement of daily life in the same sense that the rectilinear bios of the mortals interrupts the circular movement of biological life. The subject matter of history is these interruptions – the extraordinary, in other words."⁷

One such moment of interruption was the appearance of "The Montauk Monster" on July 12, 2008. According to the testimony of three women, the body of an unidentified creature was swept ashore on one of the beaches in Montauk, Long Island, in the state of New York. The injured creature – a hairless mammal with a beak – was documented in two photographs released to the press. According to the witnesses, it rotted and disintegrated



Tomer Sapir, *The Montauk Monster*, 2009, screening at the exhibition "The Answer Is within You," Sunstitut, Berlin

6> See: Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1968), p. 10.

7> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Six Exercises in Political Thought* (London: Faber & Faber, 1961), pp. 42-43.

shortly after it was first apprehended. Despite doubts concerning the credibility of this story and of the photographs, this event led to a flood of media reactions, and the creature was quickly nicknamed “The Montauk Monster.”

The appearance of “The Montauk Monster” serves as the point of departure for several works by Tomer Sapir, two of which are included in this exhibition: *The Visit* (2009 / 2014) and *Montauk Lighthouse No. 3* (2014) – a work on paper from a series based on an image of a landscape with a lighthouse in Montauk. Sapir states that he was interested not in the question of “What really happened there” with “The Montauk Monster,” but rather in the amount of public attention and the media commotion it triggered; in the fear provoked by the arrival of a threatening, unidentified creature from the sea; and in the numerous theories to which it gave rise.⁸ One of the theories that Sapir came across was that this creature had escaped from the Animal Disease Center in Palm Island – an isolated, top-secret government facility on a small island also known as Monster Island. This facility, which once served as a military base, was transferred in 1954 to the Federal Ministry of Agriculture, which was charged with studying the diseases of animals outside the United States. In 2003, the management of this facility was transferred once again, this time to the Ministry of Internal Security; it is now being used to house a counter-biological terrorism program.

The Visit is a new version of a work presented in 2008 as part of “Industry” (*Haroshet*), the graduate exhibition of the Bezalel School of Arts and Design’s MFA program (curator: Sarit Shapira). This work features a disintegrated creature, a sort of cryptid⁹ composed of four separate parts. In preparation for the current exhibition, Sapir worked on the original work by

adding layers of color, material, and texture; in doing so, he created what can be described as a new work, which effaces its predecessor while preserving

8> See: Helen Bartley, “Inspired by a Monster: a Conversation with Tomer Sapir,” *Guernica: a Magazine of Art and Politics* (August 2012).

9> Cryptids are unrecognized creatures that do not appear in official zoological indexes, due either to the lack of sufficient scientific evidence for their existence or to their status as fictional creatures.

its basic form and chromatic scale. The existence of this earlier version as a layer within the current work, moreover, seems to be charged with special significance. For Sapir’s move does not merely involve an abolishment or cancellation of the original work, but also its preservation at a higher level as an act of Hegelian sublation (*Aufhebung*). This move augments the tension that exists in many of Sapir’s works between the suspended presence of a secreting, live creature, and between an imaginary past presented in the form of geological layers that enhance the tension between history, mythology, and fiction.

Sapir’s decision to install this version of the work on elevated wooden plates topped by mirrors imbues it with another important dimension. The first version of this work was set down on the floor, which was covered with stains resembling chemical secretions. As Sarit Shapira wrote in the accompanying text, “A cryptid queen invaded or was swept into one of the spaces in the ‘station.’ She appears at the center of the space, stationary, seductive and poisonous; an alluring trap surrounded by an organic or chemical secretion.” In the current version, Sapir has abandoned the narrative dimension of the earlier work, detaching the creature from the story of the invasion and from the arena in which it unfolded; the placement of the work on a mirrored platform, meanwhile, blurs its ontological status and raises doubts as to whether we are presented with a fictive event, an exhibit in a natural history museum, or an artwork in a gallery. The use of mirrors endows the work with additional depth, while presenting internal spaces and concealed surfaces that remain invisible to the eye. The mirrors thus not only reflect and replicate the sculpture, but also extend its presence into a subterranean world, into the realm of what lies beneath the surface.

PERPETUAL MOVEMENT

The concern with layers is also central to the work of Roey Heifetz. His multilayered drawing technique functions in two contrasting manners: on the one hand, the figures are created layer upon layer; at the same time, with every additional layer, Heifetz seems to penetrate their body through their skin and wrinkles. This double movement reveals what the body cannot contain – the internal collapse and disintegration of the figures, which are concealed beneath their precise appearance and strong facial expressions.

The Teacher's Nap (2011) is the first horizontal drawing created by Heifetz after a long period of creating vertical drawings in a unified format. It features a recumbent woman who appears to be suspended in a state between wakefulness and sleep or between life and death, at the threshold of losing control and detaching from reality. The decision to portray the teacher in a recumbent position is significant in terms of the development of Heifetz's work – standing as it does for the artist's renunciation of self-imposed constraints and of his control over the figures he draws.

The issue of gender seems to have played a central role in this process of relinquishing control: for whereas the male figures that Heifetz drew previously echoed the appearance of the late-eighteenth-century dandy, the appearance of female figures, or of ones whose gender identity remains unclear, severs them from a local, historically specific context and strips them of a clearly defined identity, enabling them to exist in a state of constant flux and change.

The work *Frau L.* (2014) was included in Heifetz's exhibition "Confessions," which opened earlier this year in the central space of St. John's Cathedral in the Mitte district of Berlin (curator: Mark Gisbourne). For this exhibition in Berlin, Heifetz created a large, octagonal confessional composed of large-scale drawings, portraits hung from the ceiling of the church down to the floor.

These portraits were created following conversations Heifetz entertained with various clergymen in the year preceding the exhibition. Visitors to the exhibition were invited to enter the "confessional" in order to confess to the artist; while Heifetz listened to them, he drew their portraits and later integrated them into the installation.

In the course of his conversations with Frau L., a transgender born in 1948, Heifetz heard about the lengthy process she underwent in order to change her sexual identity; about wearing women's clothes as a child; about the hormones she took in order to remove her body hair; the changing form of her chest; and, finally, her sex-change operation.¹⁰ After this longed-for operation, however, Frau L. began to feel imperfect and lacking and was filled with regrets and guilt concerning her decision, which was taken in order to change her life for the better. Her regrets concerning the operation did not have to do with a desire to regain her identity as a man, but rather with the loss of her transgender identity, which both Frau L. and Heifetz perceive as an existence in a space between the two sexes, in a state of constant flux and change.

PROGRESS AND DISASTER

Arendt's book *Men in Dark Times* is an anthology of essays that each focuses on a single figure – including Walter Benjamin, Bertolt Brecht, and Rosa Luxemburg. Arendt borrowed the term "dark times" from Brecht's epic poem "To Posterity," which speaks of disorder and hunger, of the perpetrators and victims of massacres, and of rage and despair in the face of injustice. In choosing the figures she wrote about in this book, Arendt sought out neither representatives of their epoch and of the spirit of their time, nor thinkers who interpreted or sought to explain history; rather, her essays attempted to understand how these

¹⁰ A short text including conversations with Frau L. is included in this catalogue.

specific individuals were influenced by their historical period – a period of political catastrophes and moral disasters, as well as of incredible developments in art and science.

This tension between progress and disaster is touched upon in two drawings by Mirosław Bałka included in the exhibition – simple, direct drawings that each features a black stain. These stains appear abstract, yet are in fact drawings of the engine of a T-34 tank, the central weapon used by the Soviet armored corps during the Second World War. This tank, which was superior to all other similar tanks in use during that time, contributed decisively to the Soviet Union's victory over the German army. The invisible connection between the stain and what it represents gives rise to questions concerning memory and history, above all in the context of modern Europe.

In contrast to Bałka's simple stains and direct approach, Ryan Trecartin presents chaotic, colorful, exaggerated stories. Trecartin's films are concerned among other things with the loss of individual identity in the context of digital-age consumer culture, which is controlled by processes of duplication and reproduction. The film *CENTER JENNY* (2013) is a journey to an imaginary future in which a group of girls called Jenny participate in a never-ending competition-audition. Their ultimate goal is to imitate or become equal to the paradigmatic or archetypal Jenny, who has been promoted to a higher level of being. Their rating is based on their degree of becoming Jenny; ironically, then, their individuation is dependent upon total homogeneity. In this work, which appears as a hybrid cross between a video game, a reality show, a quiz show, and a competition, Trecartin presents a disintegrated and incoherent dialogue composed of numerous fragments, a non-linear plot that has no causal logic. His work is characterized by a chaotic energy, vertical connections, and a blatant lack of hierarchy. Within this state of anarchy, Trecartin creates an imaginative temporal axis that anchors the viewer with relative stability in

a seemingly-apocalyptic future. Like Bałka's past, Trecartin's future collapses into the present and enables us to think of one's location in time in terms that are not subordinate to the concepts of continuity, linear progression, or progress.

A similar conception of the present is also at the heart of Noa Giniger's *NOON* (2009 / 2014). While wandering around Berlin, Giniger noticed a two-minute difference between the two clocks on a church façade. She returned to the site to photograph the façade at precisely 12:00, when one clock showed 11:59 and the other showed 12:01. The symmetry between the clocks and the work's palindromic title underscore both the fundamental absence of a non-disrupted "present" and the excessive presence of the past and future. While Giniger's camera seems to freeze and preserve the moment, this moment is not at all represented visually within the image, since neither clock shows the time 12:00.

A KID IN ITS MOTHER'S MILK

In 1974, Michal Na'aman participated in the exhibition "Five Young Artists" at the Kibbutz Gallery in Tel Aviv. Na'aman inscribed the words "A kid in its mother's milk" on the gallery wall, while removing the negation "Thou shalt not cook" from the prohibition "Thou Shalt not cook a kid in its mother's milk," which appears three times in the Torah (Exodus 23:19, Exodus 34:26, Deuteronomy 14:21). Reviews published at the time of the exhibition made no reference to the Yom Kippur War that had ended several months earlier, and centered instead on the principles of conceptual art and on Na'aman's didactic attempt to analyze the role of writing in



Michal Na'aman drawing *A Kid in Its Mother's Milk* on the wall of HaKibbutz Gallery, Tel Aviv, 1974

visual art. Over time, however, various interpreters pointed to the resonance of the war in this work; relating the kid to the “burnt offering” in the story of the Sacrifice of Isaac, they drew a parallel between religious sacrifice and the secular offering of the soldiers sacrificed to the god of war.¹¹

In July 1995, several months before the Rabin assassination, the curator Tali Tamir reconstructed the exhibition “Five Young Artists” at the Kibbutz Gallery, including Na’aman’s wall inscription. According to Tamir, this reconstruction allowed for a more careful reading of the writing on the wall; in the exhibition catalogue, she compared the combination “a kid in its mother’s milk” – that is, a combination of milk and meat – to the hybrid image of the fish-bird that became a central motif in Na’aman’s work. These hybrids, according to Tamir, undermine the taboo against the creation of a monster, resulting in “a sort of Frankenstein-inspired horror story or statement about the boldness of art, even at the price of deviation and of breaking the rules.”¹² In this context, Tamir interprets Na’aman’s inscription as a female version of the Sacrifice of Isaac, in which the child sacrificed by his father is replaced by a kid slaughtered and cooked in its mother’s milk – and thus as a protest against the use of soldiers as pawns in the game of death played out in the course of the Yom Kippur War and of Israel’s wars more generally.

In addition to the political reading of this work, the distance from the war, and Na’aman’s varied use of the expression “a kid in its mother’s milk” in her works over the years, have led Yaara

Shechori to argue that this work touches upon the relations between mother and child, transforming “the milk back into a form of maternal protection that envelops the newborn – into ‘the milk of human kindness.’”¹³

11> See for instance the site for educational technology. An interpretation undertaken in the same spirit appears in Ellen Ginton, *Aspects of Israeli Art from the 1970s* (Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 1998), p. 138.

12> Tali Tamir, “July 74 – July 95: A Reconstruction, or the 21st Year,” in *Five Young Artists: A Reconstruction of An Exhibition* (exh. cat., Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Gallery, 1995).

13> See Yaara Shechori, “Michal Na’aman’s Hour of the Wolves,” in *Michal Na’aman: A Smile, a Cat, a Cut* (exh. cat., Tel Aviv: Gordon Gallery, 2010), p. 210.

The current reconstruction of this work is taking place in the aftermath of the war in Gaza this past summer (Operation Protective Edge), which involved an unprecedented level of destruction and killing in the Gaza strip, while leading to an escalation in the violence against Arab citizens and Jewish left-wing activists within Israel. In the current exhibition, a plaster wall whose dimensions are identical to those of the wall on which Na’aman originally inscribed the text in 1974 has been affixed to the gallery wall. Once it was installed, Na’aman inscribed it with the words “A kid in its mother’s milk.” The choice to replicate the wall and rebuild it as a kind of prosthetic presence underscores the special place given in Na’aman’s work to repetition, or more precisely to a discussion of the possibility and impossibility of repeating what has already occurred. Paradoxically, the attempt to recreate the same thing underscores how – as in the case of Pierre Menard, the Borges protagonist who rewrote *Don Quixote* – the re-inscription of the work reveals its nuanced and multilayered quality, the charge accrued by the passage of time, the historical events that elapsed in its course, the biography of the artist, and the comprehensive body of works created by Na’aman since this work was first exhibited.

Since 1974, the expression “A kid in its mother’s milk” has reappeared in Na’aman’s works in different variations in both Hebrew and English, and in a range of techniques. Its most recent appearance, in a work from 2013, is in a photograph of a whiteout bottle and a red nail polish bottle bound together by a rubber band, with the words “a kid in its mother’s milk” inscribed above them on the glass. This version is also included in the current exhibition, alongside two additional ones: a small drawing on a notebook page (which was also included in the original exhibition in 1974), on which the expressions “a kid in its mother’s milk” and “a land that eateth up the inhabitants thereof” are penciled in Hebrew on the left and right margins of the page, with a jagged line running above them; and a similar

drawing (from the same year) with the same expressions written in English. These drawings underscore the complex relations that exist in Na'aman's work between writing (as a material presence in visual art) and its content, while blurring the gap between the sublime and the quotidian, emotion and estrangement, the personal and the universal.

LANGUAGE

The possibility of acting, if only subtly, within and by means of language, is also significant in the works of Noa Giniger, whose video work *The Sorrow the Joy Brings* (2013) sums up a five-year-long journey undertaken in an attempt to cause a weeping willow to laugh. This journey, which began in the summer of 2008, was documented in an online log.¹⁴ It included encounters and conversations with specialists in the fields of neuroscience and aerodynamics and with special-effects experts, a search for sites to be photographed and for funding sources, and the collection of images created or found in its course. At various points along this trajectory, Giniger created collages out of landscape photographs featuring a weeping willow (postcards, stamps, prints); in these works, the treetop was cut off with a fine knife, inverted, and pasted back atop the tree, so that the willow appears to be laughing rather than weeping, while seemingly revealing the landscape previously concealed by the drooping branches.

This project culminated in the video work included in this exhibition: On July 3, 2013, a team of 17 people arrived on a farm in British Columbia, in Canada, where they used powerful industrial fans and other physical and mechanical means to try and cause a weeping willow's branches to rise up in the wind. Giniger chose to avoid digital interventions or manipulations

and subjected an actual tree to this experience, eschewing the use of

14> <http://the-sorrow-the-joy-brings.tumblr.com>

editing or animation. She filmed this event using 35 mm. film (a technology that is falling into obsolescence), in a single shot without editing – a choice that forced her to come to terms with the constraints imposed by reality: the difficulties involved in choosing the site, the surrounding landscape, the size of the tree (which was neither small nor young), the number of available fans, the need to find the most effective point of view for shooting the work, and above all – the fight against the force of gravity, a struggle fated to end in failure.

Giniger's work process alludes to the structure of language, which shapes our experience and understanding of the world by employing certain physical terms to describe emotions and organize our emotional experience – for instance, by associating the position “up” with happiness and “down” with sadness. Our discomfort with sadness and the human urge to dispel it (even when it is feigned) underlie Giniger's chosen action; upon closer observation, moreover, its poetic quality appears as a violent attempt to change the willow's natural state of being, much like the more general human attempt to control both nature and emotions.

Arendt similarly viewed language as mediating and conditioning the manner in which we think and understand the world. Her report on the Eichmann Trial, for instance, pointed to Eichmann's use of a bureaucratic language filled with clichés and flowery phrases.¹⁵ Arguing that this limitation, or the inability to speak differently, was related to an inability to think from the perspective of the other, Arendt formulated her view of “the banality of evil,” extricating it from the realm of deviancy, radicalism, or demonic associations.



Noa Giniger, *The Sorrow the Joy Brings*, 2012, collage with a copper engraving of Napoleon's grave (1838)

15> Hannah Arendt: *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, New York: Viking, 1968 [1963].

In Arendt's thought, language also plays another important role. She positions speech at the heart of the political, viewing speech and action as one monolithic entity. Action and speech enable man to appear as a distinct "who," in distinction from "what." Speech, like action, must be autonomous in order to initiate something new and catapult forward a given process, enabling man to free himself from quotidian, repetitive, reactive patterns.

Giniger's work *Years Go by and More Words Are Forbidden* (2014) is based on this point of departure. Giniger isolated this phrase out of Leah Goldberg's poem "Years Go By"; due to its isolation, however, the origin of this prohibition remains unclear: is this an internal interdiction imposed by the speaker (the poet or the artist), or perhaps an external one? Giniger copied this sentence by hand onto a page from a moleskine notebook she has used in recent years to keep a personal journal. This is one of a series of notebooks in different colors that are each dedicated to a single month – one page per day.

DARK
אפלים **ימים**
TIMES