Three Questions for Zvi Goldstein Asked by Yigal Zalmona

Q: Whereas in the past you based your artistic activity mainly on written texts, your recent works have the addition of constructed objects. What is the nature of these objects and what place do they occupy in your artistic system?

A: In my recent works I have attempted to return to the creation of objects which operate on an additional communicative level. In contrast to ready-made objects like those of conceptual artists Kosuth ("Chair") and Bernard Venet ("Pipe") these objects are hand-made. They are not important in themselves — they are not "sculptures" and do not relate either formally or expressively to space. I regard them as a medium for the transmission of content, of ideas. I have no intention of using them to create a code of language and, in contrast to the conceptual artists I mentioned, I am not involved in language analysis. I move in the realm of ideology: for some years my works were in a sense a critique of western society in crisis and of its dominant ideologies. Since my return to Israel after ten years absence, I have been presenting more constructive and less critical artistic concepts. I am trying to comprehend my environment through my work, a natural activity both on the personal level for me, a so-called "newcomer", and in terms of Israeli reality which is relatively new to this area.

Q: The objects you create relate to the world of technology. Why?

A: This particular work is intended to recall an industrial show. The objects that I create resemble archetypes of technological forms. They are not necessarily derived from modern technology, but are rather based on "ideal" technological shapes. This allows me to treat terms such as "progress", and present them as a utopia. The idea of "progress" is undergoing a crisis in the West, where it seems to have become increasingly outdated. I thrust it into a different geographical environment where it may assume new meaning. Thus I express a single optimistic reaction to the "culture of disaster".
While contemporary western art is characterized by individualism or regionalism (such as German and Italian art) my idea is to solve the dilemma between the search for identity and universalism by creating a new universalism based on a number of precepts shared by the entire Third World. True, this can only be hypothetical given today's reality. However, its utopic potential exists.

I attempt to define a new paradigm, to construct a basis for possible artistic forms in developing countries. My activity resembles that of a bulldozer which flattens the ground in preparation for new buildings. It would be naive to think that mere cosmetic changes in the international language of art would suffice to create an artistic language having both an individual or collective identity and a relation to the environment. For that to be achieved, the entire set of assumptions on which artistic language is based must be changed.

Q: When you speak of artistic identity, do you mean that your work is part of the typical Israeli artistic experiments to formulate an "Israeli" expression, like the Bezalel School Orientalism, through Danziger and up to the art of our times?

A: The search for identity is reflected in my work in the reaching out to the Third World, an orientation which echoes this country's political aims in the fifties. It is difficult to create culture from nothing; in Israel there is still too little basic data; the continuing search for identity, an essential condition for the development of a historical awareness of culture-building, is missing. The transference of principles and cultural assumptions intact from one social-cultural environment (the developed West for example) to another, with no critical testing, is precisely what prevents the possibility of building such a cultural basis.
The question of identity was central to American art as well. The creation of so called American Art can be identified in two processes: the drawing on and intensification of reductionist elements in European art. At the same time, it was not artists, such as Benton in the thirties, whose art was figurative and related to landscape and environment, who represented American art, but rather those who after World War II set themselves universal targets in materials and language.
In Israel, conditions are not conducive to transitions of the kind that occurred in American art. Historical artistic layers, like those from which modern Italian art has succeeded in deriving its own unique identity, are also not available. In a cultural reality such as ours, characterized by the lack of a single artistic theory, I propose seeing the artist's task as examining functions and defining paradigms for the building of potential artistic structures.

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Zvi Goldstein was born in Rumania in 1947 and immigrated to Israel in 1957. Between 1969–1978 he lived in Italy. He has resided in Jerusalem since 1978, and had a one-man show at the Israel Museum in 1975.