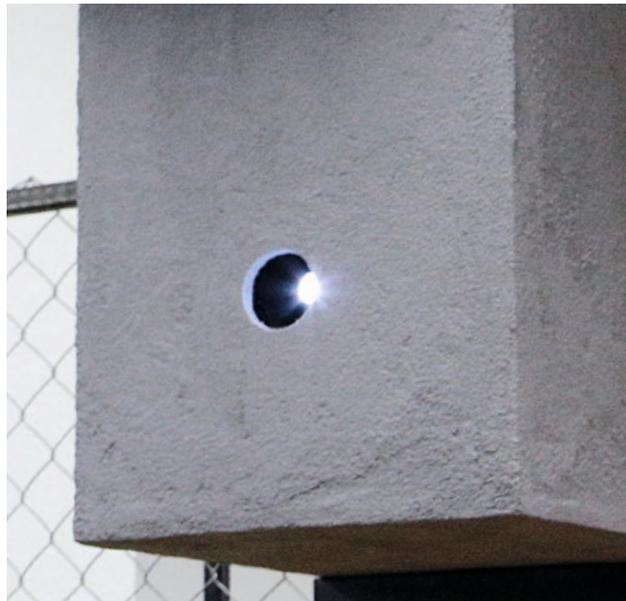


Amit Goffer – Ecce homo



Places, spaces or sites, transitional sites and non-sites; the seemingly or perhaps even real existing, ever-increasing constriction of space; irritation, anxiety and feelings of discomfort and unease; curiosity about events that affect us and, at the same time, not wanting to know what has actually occurred; a desire to distance oneself from all of this – Amit Goffer’s paintings, objects and installations confront the viewer with for the most part cryptic borderline situations, both literally and metaphorically. Architecture plays an essential role here – already existing spaces, as well as those constructed by the artist himself. In all cases, we are dealing here with predominantly mental spaces, i.e. with the *experience* of space – or perhaps the space that develops within our imagination, a product of our mind’s eye. The viewer is thus an integral component of the works of this young Israeli artist, who has been living and working in Düsseldorf and Neuss for three years now.

Can one stockpile sleep? Can you prepare yourself for – not to mention protect yourself from – something which is unknown? Or is all that, which lies in the future, not actually, by its very nature, uncertain? And is uncertainty automatically something negative? With his installation “Sleep for Tomorrow”, Amit Goffer offers us a kind of ready-made, which, freely adapted from Marcel Duchamp, takes on a whole new meaning through the simple process of relocation, that is to say through a contextual shift. In this case, however, the shift in context is not only spatial, but also and especially temporal. A so-called “one-man bunker” or “protective cell” from the Second World War is transformed into a contemporary “experiential chamber”. Like a small and compact guard house with narrow horizontal slits at eye level, through which one has an almost panoramic view onto the surrounding area – and through which one could also shoot a weapon, protected by the thick concrete walls of this curious miniature architecture. Although the bunker is not equipped with electrical lighting, the interior space of the cell is covered with fluorescent afterglow paint, which stores the sunlight and lights up in the dark. The result is a curious “light-space”, such as those used in esoteric therapeutic treatments or for meditational spaces inspired by Zen Buddhism. One might also be reminded of James Turrell’s “Perceptual Cells”, enclosed, autonomous spaces built specifically for one person at a time, which addresses issues such as isolation and claustrophobia. The outside world slowly disappears, so that one is automatically left alone with oneself and one’s own thoughts. Goffer’s cold protective space comprised of heavy, raw concrete is transformed into an atmospheric mental space, which transports the viewer/participant into another dimension – to a space of personal introspection, i.e. self-observation.

Amit Goffer addresses everyday social and political challenges at the dawn of the third millennium. In his works, architecture stands proxy for the people for whom it is built. The result is a kind of dialogue – but, as so often in real life, the great question is whether or not one is prepared to take part in this dialogue, or if one would rather simply carry on without contributing anything and thus remaining completely uninvolved. Like a visionary premonition of the increasing self-isolation of mankind in the age of digital post-industrialism, Goffer's one-man bunker stands for the seemingly omnipresent bulk heading of individuals in lonely self-sufficiency and self-despising egoism. "Save yourself" as the sad motto of an entire generation.

The concept of the necessity of protection – and especially self-protection – is characteristic of contemporary society. But against what or whom are we actually protecting ourselves? The so-called "Pegida" movement in Dresden and other (not only East German) cities, for example, fights against the "Islamization" of Western culture. On the other hand, there is also a counter-movement, which fights for diversity and integration. But what does this much vaunted word "integration" actually mean? When one consults a dictionary, one finds the following definition: "incorporation as equals into society or an organization of individuals of different groups; the combining and coordinating of separate parts or elements into a unified whole". Under the heading "integrate", one finds "to unite with something else; to incorporate, to join together". Both words stem from the Latin word *integrāre*, which translates as "integrate, refresh, renew". Synonyms for the word "integration" include "addition, combination, amalgamation". Much more important in this context is, however, the definition of the adjective "integrative"; here, one finds something, which is probably surprising for most people, namely "essential for completion". The word "integration" is also closely related to the virtue of "integrity", i.e. with "the state of being complete; the quality or state of being of sound moral principle; uprightness, honesty and sincerity". There is social integration, as well as political and economic integration; there is, however, also scholastic integration with regard to races and handicaps, as well as medicinal and therapeutic integration and so on and so forth.

What is also interesting is what one does not find when investigating the meaning of the word "integration", namely "to conform, to assimilate oneself; to relinquish one's own culture, traditions and customs in an effort to fit into a new situation". Integration is thus not a one-way street, but rather a process of give and take; one does not adapt unilaterally, but rather both sides come together reciprocally. It is, as discerned from the above, a "consolidation of parts to form a whole".

"Integration" is also the title of what is probably Amit Goffer's most important installation from the past several years. What lies behind this; what is he referring to with this title? Goffer places great value on the fact that, as an artist, he is not the "author", but rather something akin to a "catalyser"; this means that, as an artist, he instigates something – something which we, as viewers/participants have to pick up on and carry further. Joseph Beuys' concept of the "social sculpture" comes to mind, whereby Goffer places equal value on both the social and sculptural aspects of his works – his art can thus never be confused with politics, but remains consciously embedded within a specific artistic tradition. "Integration" consists for the most part of a large wire mesh fence – a fence, which encloses, or perhaps excludes, something. What or who is being protected here? Who should be kept out? Who is excluded? Or is the fence there to protect the viewers from something? If so, what could this be?

In contrast to his readymade installation "Sleep for Tomorrow", which focuses on the individual experience of single viewers/participants, "Integration" addresses itself to the collective. One is reminded perhaps of a detention camp – one thinks of refugees from northern Africa, who risk their lives to find a new, better and more democratic existence in Europe. Or – from another perspective – perhaps the same refugees, who threaten our economy, our affluence, our values. It is all a matter of one's own personal point of view. For are these refugees really so different than the guest workers from Turkey, Italy or Greece recruited offensively, that is to say *invited*, by the Federal Republic of Germany during the course of its economic development? How do these two situations (i.e. that of the refugees and that of the guest workers) stand in relation to the current expansion of the EU into Eastern Europe – an expansion, which arouses a sense of fear and caution in many Western Europeans?

Goffer's construction could also be understood as a kind of prison. Guantanamo Bay or perhaps even a concentration camp *en miniature*? Or does it mark/defend a border? A fence that separates two countries or cities, as used to be the case in Berlin or as this still exists between North and South Korea or between Israel and Palestine. Will such a fence soon be installed in Ukraine, as a kind of preliminary stage before the complete secession of the pro-Russian eastern territories?

What is going on in Goffer's installation? Who or what is being threatened and must thus be protected? Who is the evil one here, who tries to threaten the viewers or whoever else? Or is the installation completely and utterly harmless? Playgrounds – especially but not only in large cities – are often enclosed by fences in order to protect the children playing there. Perhaps this thing that Amit Goffer has constructed for us is actually a kind of playground for adults.

What's going on here? Question upon question – and hardly an answer in sight. With his installation, Amit Goffer does not present a *site* in and of itself, but rather much more a kind of *in-between site*, a temporary architecture, which, in principle, could be installed anywhere and everywhere. Seen in this way, Goffer's "Integration" is somehow related to the "Portable War Memorial" created by Edward Kienholz in the fateful year of 1968. Portable, since war exists everywhere and at all times, soon perhaps also in (Eastern) Europe. And where there is conflict, one needs fences and camps to keep out or detain the evil enemies, or to separate and distinguish ourselves from the "other", whoever these may be. And temporary architecture is ideally suited to this purpose.

What do the viewers/participants feel when confronted with Amit Goffer's installation? Threat or protection? Anxiety? In any event, a high degree of emotionality. More than anything else, the space or site presented here is a mental space. But it is also a cage – an interpretation, which is underscored by the sounds that are, in some cases, reminiscent of animal sounds. Cages are also meant to guard and protect, but also to confine – it all depends on the respective situation. A cage in a zoo, for example, protects the visitors from the wild animals, while a birdcage serves less to protect humans than to provide a "home" for beautiful birds, while at the same time detaining them and keeping them from flying away. And what about the rotating object in the centre of the installation? And the construction in the corner, which looks like a kind of birdhouse, but could also be interpreted as a watchtower or elevated perch for hunting. Emitting from this curious construction is a bluish-white light, which blinks at apparently irregular intervals. Associations are evoked of the blinking lights of airplanes in the nocturnal sky or of the rotating beacons of lighthouses that provide guidance for ships at night. Or is a message being transmitted in some encrypted form of the Morse code? Similar lights or flashes can also be discerned on the long, thin, panoramic painting hanging on the fence near the entrance to the installation. In all cases, especially today, in our age of ubiquitous NSA observation, from which not even the German Chancellor and other international heads of state are exempted, one inevitably also thinks of surveillance.

Amit Goffer's works are located somewhere between political art and social sculpture – for his primary goal is to instigate discussion. Like Joseph Beuys, who coined the term "social sculpture", Goffer places great emphasis on the fact that he is not merely appropriating images or objects from daily life, but is actually und utterly involved in the process of artistic creation, in which aesthetics obviously play a significant, albeit not central role. The inclusion of one of his dark, enigmatic landscape panorama paintings in the

"Integration" installation is but one case in point, as is the fact that the sculptural elements within this installation can actually function as independent sculptures. For in the final analysis, Goffer is not an activist, but rather a visual artist. This is perhaps also the reason behind the fact that his politically and socially oriented statements can never be pinned down to singular events and issues. Goffer's works are generally participatory – the reactions and active involvement of the viewer/participant are thus essential and determining. They are thus closely related to the early installations of Bruce Nauman, which are also extremely subtle and go far beyond the political in order to address the *conditio humana* in general. Like Bruce Nauman, Amit Goffer is interested in psychological moments, during which one is forced to confront one's own fears and anxieties. *Ecce homo!*

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