

Isolated Remarks regarding Osnat Avital's "Fractions" / Eli Friedlander

*"If a bird were to paint would it not be by letting fall its feathers, a snake by casting off its scales, a tree by letting fall its leaves. (J. Lacan, **The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis**)*

Were it only possible – so goes the fantasy – to contemplate the passing without losing its rhythm, or even to slow or stop a familiar action, such as walking, without distorting it. We could then reveal something of its secret ephemeral nature. And how would a work bring to visibility what imperceptibly inheres in the brush stroke, in the drawing of a line or in the application of paint?



The works of Osnat Avital are not constituted by a naïve or expressive painterly action free of all obstructions. For the specificity of their appearance demands the arrest of such actions. The arrest of an action results in a gesture. A pictorial gesture does not appear as an image drafted on paper, but rather as the conjuring of a painterly creature.



The gesture opens a primitive dimension, as though reviving the memory of the body, or echoing primitive forms of life hidden in the action of the hand (Just as a fetus goes through the forms of life that preceded the human).



The imprint of a hand on a surface, as in cave paintings, can be taken as an origin of image making. In "Shaking hands" the black imprints of the palm already begin to metamorphose into brush strokes by way of the train of paint they leave on the paper. Is it the handshake or the shaking hands? Is it a blessing sign or a curse? Is it the waving goodbye or the hand that strives to become a wing?



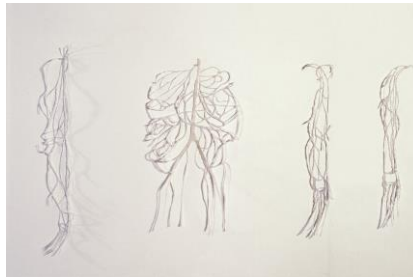
In many of Osnat Avital's works we find the drawing of a wing as though covered by the painterly traces of the wing's movement: At once an echo of Leonardo's wing drawings and of his childhood memory of the vulture's wing brushing against his face. The work quivers between the representative plane and the painterly gesture. Call this peculiar mimesis a painterly onomatopoeia.



Some earlier works, such as the drawing of the woman on whose head a bird is nesting, or the pole which grows a wing (a totem like brush) touch upon, the origins of art in magical practices. Wings are for sure the most common motif of the fabulous transfiguration of the human body (in the representation of angels). But the fantastic transformation of reality already originate deeper, embedded in the painterly gestures themselves.



The freezing of an action is also the arrest of life. Thus, the primitive, might appear in Osnat Avital's works as the fossilized. An early work resembles hanged blood vessels emptied of the living substance. Or, in an ironic variation: drips of paint, emptied from the painterly substance remain as hanged flabby transparent enveloping membranes.



In the late 19 th. century, Jules-Etienne Marey investigates the flight of birds by means of the capture of a rapid succession of fractions of their movement on one photographic film. Photography or film, allow us to rediscover the gait or gesture in arrested motion. Walter Benjamin calls the opening of a space in the apparently seamless human action the discovery of an "optical unconscious".



Four similar works are derived from a single photograph of the refraction of light on water: As though an impressionism without its *raison d'etre* (Because of photography? Because of its being black and white). The modern medium releases visual art from the craft of the hand, at the same time as it blows apart the unity of reality to smithereens and opens anew the sense of similarity in the world. The expanse of scintillating light resembles an astrological map.



The video work does not record a creative act. The figure emerges from the intensification of a pronounced vertical motion that leads to its own entropic effacement. An echo of the romantic attraction to ruins, of art returned to its setting.