

Oran Hoffmann (born in Israel, 1981) lives and works in Israel and Europe. He graduated from the Gerrit Rietveld Academy, Amsterdam, and holds a master degree from Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem. He received several awards and prizes among them the Young Artist Award from the Israel Ministry of Culture and Sport and a stipend from The Netherlands Foundation for Visual Arts, Design and Architecture.

In 2014 Hoffmann's work was exhibited at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art alongside works by the Bauhaus artist Josef Albers in the exhibition "Objektiv: Josef Albers, Oran Hoffmann," (curator: Dalit Matatyahu). He held solo exhibitions at Tempo Rubato Gallery, Tel Aviv; Broadway 1602, New York, as well as various in France: at Atelier Cezanne, he exhibited photographs made at the studio of Paul Cezanne, and at Fondation Vasarely, sculptures were created from the original material of Victor Vasarely, this following a year long research of the materials in the archive. A selection of photographs of the contents that make up the archive was published in his book Vasarely Material Archives, RVB Books, Paris, in 2019.

Love-Sick Heart

Oran Hoffmann

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text: Sivan Raveh



The question "What do we see?" which frequently comes up when facing the work of Oran Hoffmann, lies at the heart of his artistic practice. The captivating and engaging beauty of his work is accompanied by a disturbing feeling that we are looking at an optical illusion that conceals more than it shows. This sensation increases the closer we look at the photographs and is revealed not as an effect of the works but as an essential and integral part of them. Hoffmann's work explores surface, perception and composition in relation to the photographic medium. The collection of works displayed in this exhibition offers an overview of the photographic practice that Hoffmann has been developing and evolving. These photographs, that are composed from actual physical surfaces, allow Hoffmann to "interfere" with the camera's natural tendency to flatten the surface, and force it to act in a way that undermines its technical properties. Thus, by turning the apparatus against itself the camera magically produces optically illusive images that arouse and surprise the imagination.

The photographs in the flower series and the sculpted hands series touch on fundamental questions regarding the artistic imitation of nature, mimesis. An imitation that does not seek to present the visible world as it is, but a complex and sophisticated pictorial construction. It is based on linear perspective, on a learned selection of objects and on precise interrelations between the objects in the picture, and between them, the support, the space and the world. In both these series, the origin the camera sets out to imitate is itself an imitation of nature, and in more than one degree of separation: black and white photographs of the hands of David and John the Baptist in sculptures by the Italian Renaissance master Donatello, and artificial flowers made from synthetic silk. These subjects attest to Hoffmann's preoccupation with the foundations of art. And indeed, in both series resonates one of the constitutive debates in the history of Western art: the value of the "disegno" – the idea the artist explores through preparation drawings made prior to the painting's

execution, in relation to that of the "colore" – the lifelike imitation of nature achieved through color and the painting process itself. This discourse continued to serve as a practical and theoretical foundation for art, even after painting abandoned its traditional subjects and the ideal of the imitation of nature, and became relevant also to photography as an artistic medium. In its modernist transfiguration, this theme comes up in thoughts regarding the pictorial surface and the creation of depth and volume on a flat surface. Its traces are present in various theories that grant symbolic, spiritual and ethic significance to values of form and color. At the heart of these artistic and theoretical initiatives is, among others, an attempt to trace the Pygmalionic spark that breathes life into the image, attests to its existence, secures its authenticity and credibility. Hoffmann plays seriously with these ideas, when he draws a diagram made from colored tape that stretches and spreads over flowers that will never die; or when he stains Donatello's sculpted hands and forces us to really look at them, and see them not as the artist who sees in his mind's eye the form within the stone, but the marble block itself.

This process is inverted in another series of photographs which show corners that Hoffmann built from painted slabs of plasterboard. Whereas the models in the flowers and hand photographs are excavated from within the image, the corners are a construction made specifically to serve as the photographic subject. This act undermines the conception of photography as a cataloging and organizing medium. Hoffmann erects an origin-less and distilled model whose justification is granted by the photographic act. This melancholic act is also an act of love; the determined fate of the artist's heart. We can only wonder, where are these objects, and really any photographed body, in relation to reality?

Sivan Raveh, January 2020