

Critical Review, ARTCO Magazine, June 2010

Solo Exhibition, Ohad Matalon: North True, South Bright

Contemporary by Golconda Gallery, Tel Aviv

Negative Positive Static Projections Installation

The Political Play of Poetic Images: Ohad Matalon's North True, South Bright

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I know that to make you hear me, to make you believe me, I must sing. Even if you hide your ears behind a stone, I must raise my voice so high, that my song will blast the golden seed you hide there. — Dan Beachy-Quick, from the poem "North True, South Bright"

The linguistic and semantic dualism inherent in Dan Beachy-Quick's poetry uncovers a lingering philosophical tension. Rather than framing it as a binary opposition constructed entirely of photographic surface effects, this tension operates as a dialectical play between light and dark, wherein the authentic reality points toward nothingness and light signifies a void. Stated differently, it exists in an in between state of dualities a space where the subject shifts within the emptiness of the image. How then does the dialectic of void and nothingness reveal the actual core of a landscape's existence?

The 2010 solo exhibition by the renowned contemporary artist Ohad Matalon manifests a parallel intellectual trajectory. By infusing his poetic imagery with a profound formal austerity, Matalon simultaneously detaches and reconstructs the subjective relationship between the viewer and the medium, exposing the flawed logic of voyeuristic optics. Consequently, this body of work can be understood as a meticulous exercise in structural destabilization not merely a presentation of a refined inner vision, but an externalized, medium specific deconstruction that mounts an incisive internal political critique against the lyricism of the photographic frame, all while maintaining a radical aesthetic atmosphere.

The Poetics of the Photographic Image: Radical De-realization

This exhibition compiles a vast itinerary of works captured across unstable geopolitical and territorial frontiers, including Israel, Taiwan, Germany, Austria, and Jordan. Yet, through the artist's sophisticated post production language, these landscapes are systematically stripped of their immediate indexical connections to historical reality. The referential skin of the landscape is severed; its indexical fragments are isolated and computationally re-engineered to be reborn with an entirely new structural urgency.

In a definitive piece such as *Not a Clue*, Matalon directly engages the surface plane. By denying the image any transparent, narrative indexicality, it transforms into an opaque site that reflects back upon the technical architecture of representation. Through this reflective inversion, the photographic medium is purged of all functional rhetoric, operating as a subversion of classical mirrors. It actively resists the predetermined program of the camera apparatus, thereby short circuiting the spectator's passive ideological consumption.

In his canonical text *The Politics of Images*, the philosopher Jacques Rancière posits that the only viable form of artistic resistance against the omnipresent spectacle lies in a deliberate inversion of inversion. This strategy unmasks the structural mechanisms of how we see, and how we are concurrently transformed into passive consumers of simulated imagery. By deploying this precise methodology, Matalon manipulates the latent structures of the apparatus. Through his calculated subversions, the photographic field shifts from direct referential truth into an abstract, simulated landscape that evades the naked eye.

What we confront is not a literal depiction of reality, but what Guy Debord theorizes as the alienated abstraction of the Society of the Spectacle a capital driven matrix that enforces a totalizing simulation by substituting concrete material life with its commodified representation. It is precisely within this crack between landscape and image that Matalon stages his critique, rendering the exotic spectacles of global tourism utterly inaccessible. In works like *An Unseen Land or It Is All Gone In Reality*, the picturesque landscapes of idyllic alpine lakes and majestic mountains are reduced to weightless, faded phantoms. The ultimate authenticity of the image is perpetually deferred; it exists as a volatile, non-linear trace, akin to a postcard floating detached in time.

Furthermore, the imagery frequently features derelict architecture, post industrial skeletons, military ruins, and decaying schools. These structures are rendered completely obsolete, stripped of their original socio political functions and suspended in a cold state of rigor mortis. They have lost their functional anchor in reality, becoming purely semantic husks. Matalon captures these architectures precisely at the moment of their historical collapse, exposing them through a meticulous process based technical hybridization.

By merging the negative and positive configurations of the exact same exposure, he traps these fading structures within a dense ontological limbo of representation. Concurrently, this technical strategy reinforces the symbolic death of the architectural object. Consequently, the photographic object ceases to function as a transparent document of historical ruins; instead, it behaves as a material monument to the ultimate failure of indexical memory. The image becomes a site of structural refusal, where the historical referent has vanished, leaving behind only the cold,

mechanical traces of computational sight rendering the spectator a witness to an absolute loss of subjective meaning.

The Politics of the Photographic Medium: De-subjectifying the Spectator's Gaze

However, the photographic space never functions as an absolute, neutral site of subjective contemplation. The moment the viewing subject enters the narrative trajectory governed by the image matrix, they are immediately converted into a structured object of the apparatus. Concurrently, the original object of the photograph takes position as the primary narrative subject. The standard spectatorial relationship is thus violently inverted within the spatial architecture of the exhibition.

By highlighting the physical materiality of the projection medium over the traditional illusion of the photographic paper, Matalon forces the hidden framework of representation into the open. Throughout the darkened gallery space, the spectator's physical shadow is repeatedly cast onto the massive, luminous screens. As the viewer steps forward to decipher the image, their own silhouette intervenes, obscuring the projected light and rendering the picture plane temporarily blank. The viewer is caught in a loop where closeness eliminates visibility; they can only observe their own shadow self, while the original landscape recedes into a dark, ungraspable void.

By withholding the tactile, physical print and opting for transient, screen based digital matrices, Matalon strips the image of its material permanence. The traditional objectivity of the photograph is dissolved, dismantled by the active subjectivity of the spectator, who is forced to navigate an unstable informational threshold where the illusion of optical clarity is permanently shattered.

This spatial dynamic of light and obstruction inevitably recalls the foundational phenomenological allegory of Plato's Cave from *The Republic*. In that subterranean domain, bound prisoners are chained in perpetuity, forced to face a bare wall. Behind them, an artificial fire burns, casting the shifting shadows of moving objects onto the wall before their eyes. Having never known another reality, the prisoners naturally mistake these weightless silhouettes for absolute, objective truths.

When a lone captive is unchained and forced to turn toward the blinding light of the fire, the sudden optical rupture induces acute pain and confusion. If he is dragged out of the cave into the radiant domain of the sun, his sight is initially obliterated by the raw exposure of true reality. Should he return to the darkness of the cave to liberate his peers, his unaccustomed eyes fail to navigate the dim shadows, rendering him helpless. His attempts to explain that the wall shadows are mere illusions are met with ridicule and violent hostility by the prisoners, who choose to protect their comfortable, mediated blindness.

The photographic image is structurally generated through the exact same logic of fire, shadows, and projection. Thus, regardless of whether we analyze the light sensitive surface or the physical objecthood of the work, the ultimate truth of photography is bound to the political architecture of the spectator's gaze. It is a medium internal to the problem of sight itself. Matalon's project can be understood as an ideological architecture that stages a total capture of the viewing subject. Through works that lock the image into a state of structural paralysis, the installation mirrors the psychological entrapment of the cave. It exposes the internal vacuum of the photographic subject, utilizing the spatial limits of the gallery to reflect the wider cultural condition of automated, unguided vision.

The Dialectics of Being and Nothingness

The structural paralysis of the image functions as a profound allegory for dead images. This absolute breakdown of representation disrupts the romantic fantasy of the sublime, replacing it with a flat landscape of psychological fatigue and structural refusal. The visual surface appears completely spent, yet within these ghostly fields of simulation, an invisible, timeless eternity perseveres.

This dynamic is explicitly materialized in *The School*, where the historic architectures of institutional discipline are completely stripped of their social utility. The school building stands as an empty, monumental shell a skeletal phantom of a bygone era. Its physical death is total on the surface, yet underneath this material ruin lies an unyielding, autonomous monumentality. It points toward a past state of ideological authority, demonstrating that even when an image is reduced to a dead phantom, its structural ghost continues to govern the space. It enters a camera less landscape where the boundary between destruction and preservation is entirely blurred, removing the dead object from its functional history and suspending it within a pure, non possessable trace of light.

As articulated in classical Taoist philosophy: "Non-being names the origin of heaven and earth; Being names the mother of all things. Therefore, always without desire we must observe its manifestations; always with desire we must observe its boundaries." This profound ontological framework clarifies the dialectical core of Matalon's methodology. By operating precisely at the threshold where positive and negative exposure cancel each other out, his imagery moves fluidly between presence and absence, substance and void.

The technical execution of the work systematically purges the landscape of its documentary authority, dissolving the objective relationship between the spectator and the historical site. Through this radical subtraction, the work exposes the raw, unguided reality of the medium leaving the landscape to exist not as a commodified

object of ownership, but as a transient, volatile phenomenon of pure light operating within the autonomous field of view.

It is only within this highly controlled condition of structural suspension that the viewer can perceive the subtle audio installation nested deep within the exhibition space. The projector emits a continuous, mechanical white noise that fills the darkened room. This sensory blanket operates as a brilliant sonic manifestation of the poem's central demand: "Even if you hide your ears behind a stone, I must raise my voice so high."

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