

LITTLE

Eitan Bartal:

a stable

HORIZONTAL

collection

FALL

of unsettling

moments

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Eitan Bartal →

Artist, designer, senior lecturer at the Design
Faculty of the Holon Institute of Technology.

Jan Van Woensel ↓ →

Curator and researcher at the Faculty of Design
and Art at the University of West Bohemia.

Eitan Bartal: activationism →

With a background in advertisement and (political) campaigning, both of which require progressive strategy and targeting skills, Eitan Bartal understands that each contemporary artwork activates something: an opinion, an influence, an emotion, an ambience, a conversation, a financial transaction, recognition, indifference, a selfie opportunity, a critical reflection (...). At first sight different from directing a commercial campaign, branding or lobbying, creating an artwork implies that it will belong to, move around in, and exist first and foremost in the domain of art, and the same is true for the artist. Oftentimes it is proven that those who explore the boundaries and the crossovers of art with other fields, or those who approach art from a much-different perspective, succeed in transforming art and its discourse. In the case of Bartal, he works in a project-thinking manner. One project can be politics, another can be feminism, and yet another can be street culture. He approaches each topic considering the product, its place in the (exhibition or public) space, its effect (on the expert or the passerby), and its (growth) potential, and he does it in such way that the product, the artwork, enables an elaborate and stimulating rhetoric. It is this hard to control and difficult to predict form of activation (-ism) that ought to be recognized as a strong quality in the oeuvre of Eitan Bartal, one that guarantees an ongoingness, a forward movement, even if that may be a "horizontal fall".

Yael Eylat Van-Essen ↓ →

Curator, researcher, senior lecturer at the Design
Faculty of the Holon Institute of Technology.

Stable Collection of Unsettling Moments ↓

Stable Collection of Unsettling Moments is a solo exhibition by Eitan Bartal, a designer and artist whose works have been prominent on the Israeli scene since the 1990's. He sees art and design as a critical tool that calls for change and undermines existing ways of being and living in society. His professional experience in strategic design, political campaigns and branding, are reflected in the subversive messages embedded in his artistic projects. Through his sophisticated understanding of the impact of media and the role of technology in constituting our being as humans acting in the world and as agents for conveying messages, he meticulously chooses the technologies he integrates into his works. With his personal

discovery of how mass consciousness is formed, he acts as a Trojan horse in the system: experiencing, investigating and studying the nature of commercial activity in the professional arena and then acting upon it. As referring to the media "as a massage", he uses new media practices – surveillance technologies, robotics, image processing and machine learning – together with prints, videos and physical objects which were produced using "low" technologies.

Although addressing substantial existentialist questions and presenting what can be comprehended as a nihilistic approach to life, his works are full of humor. They deal defiantly with mechanisms of control, with neo-liberal power structures,

with the cultural discourse around sexual objectification and fetishism, as well as with cultural stereotypes. He brings up clichés and, at the same time, ridicules them and deconstructs them to the point where they are emptied of content. His messages are at once political and a-political, concrete and abstract, deal with global issues and touch on the most delicate threads of the social and political local reality in Israel. His works consist of embedded contradictions: They span between the abject and the poetic, the ideal and the ludicrous, robust militarism and fragility, and high technology and archaeological remains.

The exhibition's title *Stable Collection of Unsettling Moments* denotes an essential dissonance present in Bartal's

works. They depict unstable moments of collapsing entities, portraying a failure of a moment where the whole reality can crumple in no time. Indeed, time is an essential element in Bartal's works, and his relation to time is multifaceted. In addition to the strong impact of discrete moments, some works are based on cyclical movement, detaching them from a specific time and place. They present meditative movement, which huddles into itself and within itself sustains different mechanisms of disruption: textual disruption, spatial disruption and cultural disruption. His video work, "The Future is...", draws from Martin Heidegger's *Being and Time*,^[1] in which he argues that the basic existential state means to be thrown into the world where

"Time is conceived as a preliminary name for the "thrown-open domain"". [2] In Bartal's latest work, the "Suicides Cuckoo clock", the object characterized by its repetitive and cyclist nature leading to eternity, simultaneously contains the mechanisms for the end of life, when a human-like figure falls from the door of the clock each full hour. In this case, man is thrown out of the world through the very machine, which represents the ultimate metaphor of time. →30

Although full of playfulness, this exhibition enfolds suspended violence, which is camouflaged by deceiving aestheticization. Images such as a crashing aircraft (The Plane), porno scenes (Cumming Soon), a woman walking on deformed →20

- 24← high hill shoes causing her to stumble (Anti Heels), a man spit-
22← ting (100 grams black), an amputated hand of an artist begging
34← 36← for recognition (For my Art) an artificial slit in the earth (Cut),
32← and the serial suicidal platform (SuicideS), are designed in
a clean, minimalistic manner. The sense of violence is also
manifested by the presence of cultural coercion and various
forms of ordering. Actions are presented whose motive remains
unpredictable. There are no relations of cause and effect: things
happen thus because this is the world, and these are its rules –
it is a surprising world that does not obey a coherent sense. The
unexpected combination between a violent reality, ironic and
humorous, places the works between the contemptuous and

shameful, the heroic and full of pathos while slipping towards the pathetic, banal and unrealistic.

A deeper look at the works presented at the exhibition reveals an obsessive occupation with the theme of Death. The works deal with death anxiety, the sense of living on borrowed time as the determinant of being, suicidal acts in situations with no hope for recovery. In his reference to this theme, Bartal draws from philosopher Alexander Kozev ^[3] who interrogates the role of Death for the living in reaching self-consciousness. He claims that consciousness can be achieved through a dialectical process based on desire, originating from a basic feeling of lack and the search for completion and satisfaction. According to Kozev,

what characterizes man in contrast to other animals that find their satisfaction in nature, is that for mankind, the search turns to something that does not exist, to something that will take him out of the confines and shackles of being. In an age where there is no more God, soul or Platonic ideal, Death is what is left for humanity. It is what saves us from the suffocation of being and distinguishes between the human and the animal within us. While the body wants nothing more than to live and survive, consciousness alone strives for Death, which is its unique desire. But this kind of consciousness is one way to look at the world. Bartal's works always provide the viewers with a double gaze: they look at the surrounding world, acknowledging its repetitive

mechanisms that collapse into themselves but simultaneously invite involvement and interaction, leaving the space also for a laughable view at the world.

The work "Life is a Horizontal Fall", shown as a text on the gallery wall, is a quote from poet, playwright and author Jean Cocteau's book *Opium*, which he wrote in the process of his withdrawal from using this drug. For Barta, this approach to life is not hallucinatory but a conscious existential state. It is based on perceiving life as a continuous process of collapse where every moment can lead to the collapse of the next. In each of these moments, what is near seems to be at a distance, and what appears far becomes closer, as he stated in an earlier

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work titled "Soon I will get Far Away". Yet, there lies optimism in his works derived from the understanding that the moment of collapse is as well the moment of absolute freedom. Accepting the possibility of liberating freedom leads him to an ironic look at the pompous efforts invested in the various mechanisms that characterize the media and technology-based society we live in, to produce meanings which he sees as empty of content.

[1] Heidegger, Martin. [1927] 1980: *Being and Time*, trans. J. Macquarrie and E. R. Robinson, Oxford, Basil: Blackwell.

[2] Sheehan, Thomas. "What does Heidegger mean by 'time'?", Stanford University, retrieved 7.2.2022.

[3] Alexandre Kojève, 1980: *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel: Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, edited by Allan Bloom, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980.

Let's get our dreams unstuck

**The grain of rye
free from the prattle of grass
et loin de arbres orateurs**

Jean Cocteau, Preamble
(A Rough Draft For
An Ars Poetica)

Noah Becker ↓ →

Artist, writer and editor-in-chief of Whitehot Magazine of Contemporary Art.

The Artistic Inventiveness of Eitan Bartal ↓

Israeli artist Eitan Bartal is an existentialist. He probes and questions existence through humorous and complex performances, sculptures, video installations, interactions and interventions. Bartal is open to using horror and the absurd in his work. Horror mixed with frivolity and its effect on unsuspecting viewers is a challenge – and a proposition.

In general these days, humor is a dangerous path to cross – but Bartal is an intensely serious artist at the same time. Bartal's aesthetic is not a North American aesthetic because Americans don't understand horror mixed with absurdity or frivolity. Bartal's works have a sense of leisure and activism working in tandem. This is unusual and would normally be inter-

preted as passive-aggressive ideas for conceptual art. But the technical virtuosity and emotional control Bartal employs in the production of his ideas transcends a kind of one-liner reading of his oeuvre. Bartal has a background of skateboarding around Tel Aviv – this is an example of a leisure activity. But skateboarding is also a perfect example of an activity that employs physicality, performance and activism.

Another aspect of Bartal's work is how he never offends the intelligence of viewers. Artist Maurizio Cattelan is an example of an artist whose works offends one's intelligence with a one-liner, jokey, conceptual approach. It feels like Cattelan is lying at you instead of lying with you – or perhaps Cattelan is just a liar.

The honesty of Bartal's ideas are also refreshing and in a material sense, he uses just enough material for his ideas to bloom. Jeff Koons' work is an example of materiality over idea. I'm a fan of Koons and Cattelan but I find Bartal more elegant and intelligent in his approach to the line between ideas and objects.

Bartal works with a certain freedom evident in all his works, which creates a hypnotic sense of irresolution. This sense of needing to resolve his works comes from the secret puzzle imbedded in them by the artist. Some works of conceptual art laugh with you and some laugh at you and some don't laugh at all – Bartal's work seems to laugh with you more so. There is a menacing realism in his art but it is more of an after-effect. There's a balance between humor and content, nihilism and confrontation one feels after.

Bartal worked in politics at a point in his career. I can connect with that in terms of how politics uses propaganda and optics to push its message forward. Bartal uses military objects like planes and banners – slogans for political campaigns of the mind. His works bring us into the dream world and pull loaded imagery and information with us.

The activism evident in Bartal's investigations ponders the dysfunctional situation of urban life. He's interested in cities and how a city or a society could improve. He wants to know how a city or society will progress through social change brought forward and reconsidered through art, humor, intervention and activism.

Noah Becker ↓

Eitan Bartal ↓

If the world ended tomorrow, what would you do on the last day before Armageddon? I'll probably be sitting at my neighborhood coffee table and drinking espresso with the sketchbook in hand, and when Armageddon arrives, I'll ask where you've been all this time.

Can you explain what your feelings are towards the human race in general, are you excited by people or feel like an outcast? As an existentialist I enjoy constantly questioning life and doubt also the human species. It seems better to consume them as low-proof dose alcohol. I find myself really in the position of the observer on the margins, like a painter in front of his subject.

Do you feel that the phrase "Life is a Horizontal Fall" summarizes your feelings towards life? Or is it somehow a humorous way of confronting viewers and triggering their thoughts?

In my opinion, this sentence of 'Jean Cocteau' evoked in me an association of life as an inconceivable collection of moments that collapse on each other along the timeline like dominoes. From the moment we are thrown into the world and the first cube falls it set in motion a series of events that ends in our inevitable end. Awareness of this absurd situation gave me sense of irony and a sense of release.

What does the term "visual rhetoric" function like in your art making or thought process?

Since I created my first works of art, which can be described as urban activism, I have been interested in the ability of visual language to inspire real action in the urban social space. At the same time I worked as an art director specializing in designing national and international election campaigns. I was fascinated by the rhetorical manipulative ability of the image to evoke and influence public opinion, which I learned from my professional work and I use that knowledge as a disruptive raw material in my artistic creation.

Tell me more about the social change that your work has inspired?

In the early 1990s, "The Walking Man" was an artistic protest project that was the first of its kind in Israel. It challenged the establishment's control of urban space and paved the way for urban activism. The project had many installations and actions throughout Tel Aviv and sparked public awareness of urban issues, such as the city's ecology, aesthetics, and conservation. During this time, a worldwide movement had begun that brought to the fore urban concerns that had not been addressed until then, such as the neglect of property (and people), loss of population, and the right to use public space, as well as a general awareness of what it meant to live in the city.

How did the project come together in the end?

The culmination of the project was the launch of the "Walking Man for Mayor" election campaign in 1993. The two-dimensional virtual silhouette of the Walking Man faced real flesh and blood experienced politicians. The bold and demonstrative street presence

of "The Walking Man" became a major theme of the municipal election campaign in 1993.

Did it ever happen again? Yes, its resurgence started with a new ceremony "THE WALKING MAN AWARD FOR URBAN ACTIVISM" (2016/2019) that would acknowledge and honor the city's social and political activists that made positive changes for Tel Aviv-Jaffa. The Walking Man Award is given to those who embark on their own journey – not waiting for others to join or approve; people who make the city a better place for all of its inhabitants – the heroes of the city.

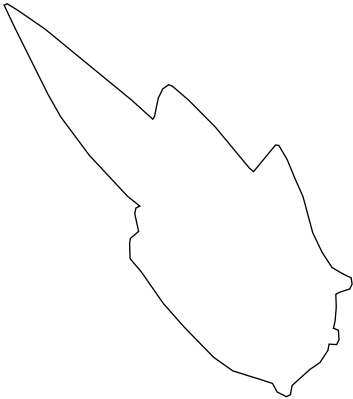
If you could do your art all over again would you? I might have incorporated math studies into my work, since I am thrilled with the way the universe gets an abstract representation of it. In addition, I would listen to the advice of my friends who told me to travel to New York, since the place I was in when I was studying at the Bezalel Academy of Art in the 1980s did not really understand my work – and the poor possibilities in Tel Aviv at that time did not allow extensive work.

Skateboarding is a theme that appears in your work. How do you feel that skateboarding relates to conceptual art or functions as a subject for art? In the skateboarding culture that I grew up in as a child in the 1970's, we felt like angels on wheels in the streets of Tel Aviv. The desire to devour the city to travel in the urban space without borders plays a part. It is a culture that speaks the language of the street – in direct and unapologetic actions. These are experiences that are reflected in my work even today.

What are your plans for the future? The future is perfect, because it has not happened yet. I intend to continue to create projects in which I research myths and concepts that form the basis of our knowledge. As a former philosophy student and political campaigner, I was interested in epistemology, the way our consciousness perceives things. I intend to continue to explore and create from these cognitive spaces. Today I combine complex digital and electronic technologies in simple analog objects to create my works. My next project will be called "Holyganism".

↓ The Plane





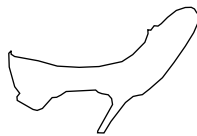
↓ 100 grams blacks





↓ Anti Heels





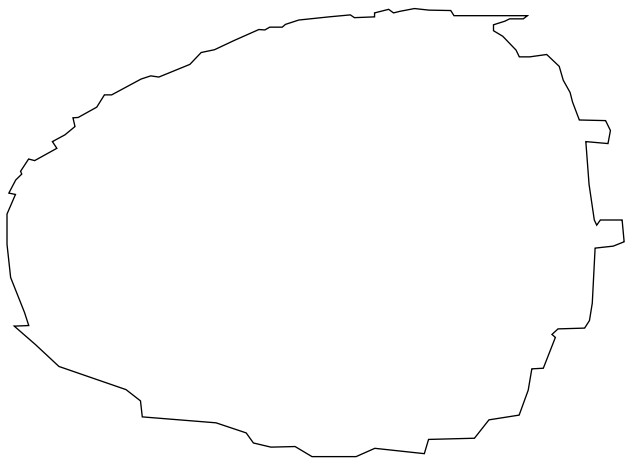
↓ Life is a Horizontal Fall



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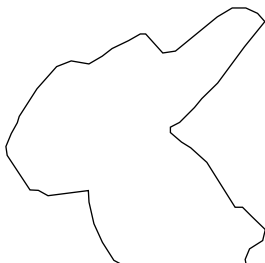
↓ The Future is...





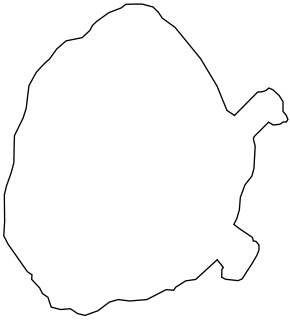
↓ Suicides Cuckoo clock





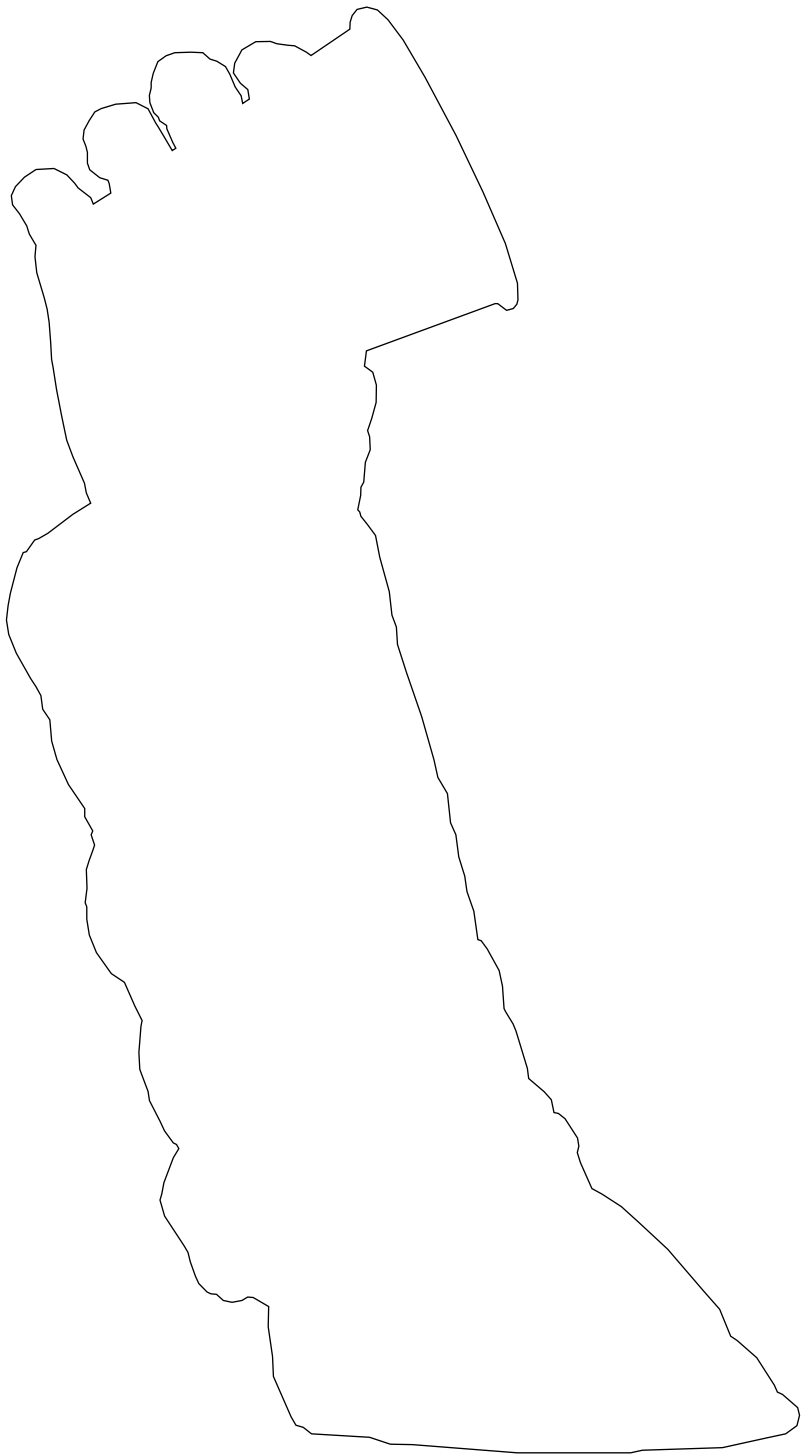
↓ SuicideS



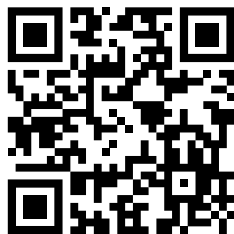


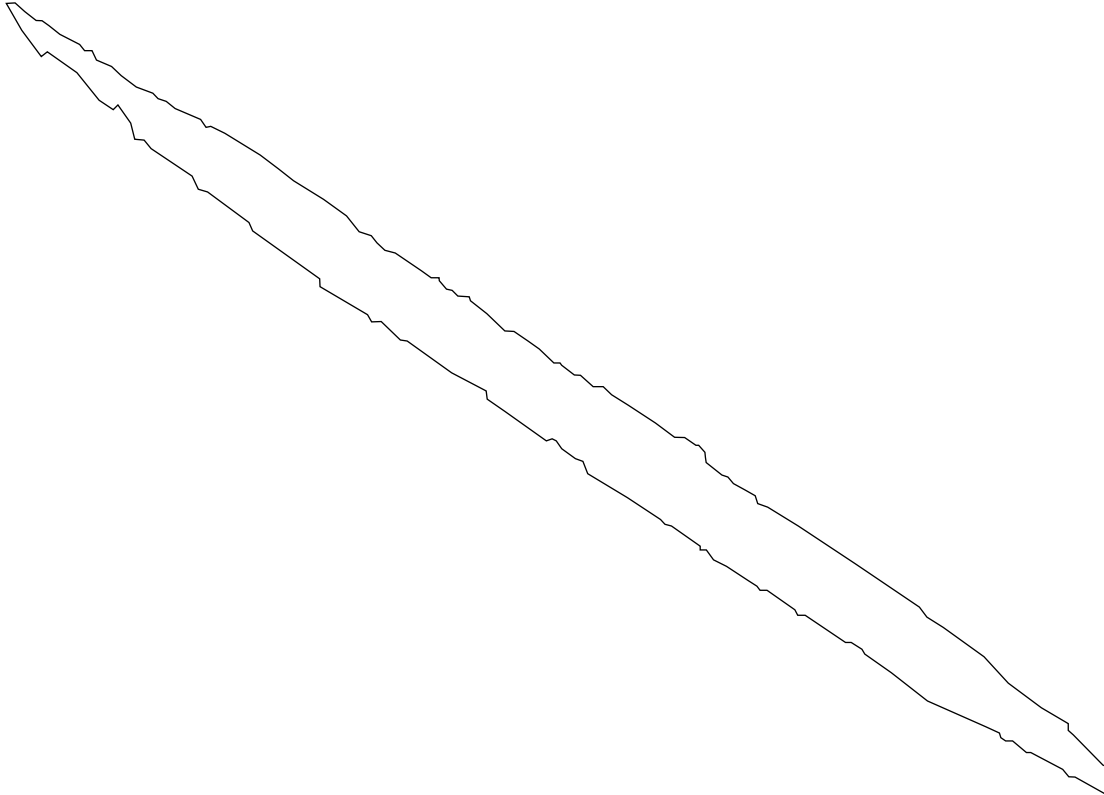
↓ For My Art





↓ Cut





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Curator Jan Van Woensel

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