



Project Gallery: Yael Bartana
December 4, 2013–April 20, 2014

Yael Bartana
b. 1970, Kfar Yehezkel, Israel; lives in Tel Aviv, Amsterdam, and Berlin
Inferno, 2013
Digital color video, with sound, 18 min.
Courtesy of the artist; Petzel, New York; Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam; and Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

This project is commissioned by Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM) and the 19th Biennale of Sydney, and organized by PAMM Associate Curator Diana Nawi. This film was conceived as part of a research project initiated by Eyal Danon and Benjamin Seroussi. This film is made possible by Contemporary Art Partners, New York, and Petzel Gallery, New York. Support is provided by Mondriaan Fund, Amsterdam. Additional support is provided by Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam; Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv; the Israeli Center for Digital Art, Holon; Centro da Cultura Judaica, São Paulo; Casa do Povo, São Paulo; and Netta. The presentation of this work at PAMM is supported in part by the Consulate General of Israel. Additional support for PAMM's Project Galleries provided by Jerome A. Yavitz Charitable Foundation.



Production Credits

Director and Editor: Yael Bartana
Producer: Naama Pyritz
Associate Producer: Friedrich Petzel
Director of Photography: Itai Neeman
Camera Operator: Mick Van Rossum
Coeditors: Thalia Hoffman, Daniel Meir
Sound Designer: Daniel Meir
Art Director: Fabio Goldfarb
Costume Designer: Yael Shenberger
Script Editor: Illa Ben Porat
Colorist and VFX Supervisor: Ido Karilla After Effects and Compositing: Eran Feller 3-D
Artist: Vuk Epstein Line Producer: Justine Otondo
Music: "Kadish" by Towering Inferno
"Avinu Malkeinu" composed by Max Janowski; performed by Keren Hadar; and arranged, adapted, and mixed by Amit Poznansky



A 1103 Biscayne Blvd.
Miami, FL 33132
305 375 3000
info@pamm.org
pamm.org

Accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM) is sponsored in part by the State of Florida, Department of State, Division of Cultural Affairs, and the Florida Council on Arts and Culture. Support is provided by the Miami-Dade County Department of Cultural Affairs and the Cultural Affairs Council, the Miami-Dade County Mayor and Board of County Commissioners. Additional support is provided by the City of Miami. Pérez Art Museum Miami is an accessible facility. All contents ©Pérez Art Museum Miami. All rights reserved.



Project Gallery

Yael Bartana

**Pérez
Art
Museum
Miami**

English

Inferno

Evangelism, Pentecostalism, and neo-Pentecostalism are the fastest growing religions in Brazil, transforming the social and cultural landscape of the overwhelmingly Catholic country. Part and parcel of the belief systems of these denominations is a strong relationship to Judaic traditions and Israel, which is cited as a historic progenitor as well as a continued spiritual homeland. This complex affinity has established new economic connections and immigration trends between the two countries. It has also given rise to extraordinary moments of cultural appropriation and displacement, wherein traditional Jewish symbols and customs have been adopted and translated as part of this “new” Christianity. In 2012, Yael Bartana was invited, along with a number of Israeli and Brazilian artists and researchers, to take part in a residency in São Paulo initiated by curators Eyal Danon and Benjamin Seroussi. This residency is part of a larger project that considers the rise of “new religious movements” in Brazil and their connection to Israel and Judaism. For her commission for Pérez Art Museum Miami, Bartana created a film in response to perhaps the most audacious example of this cross-cultural phenomena, the building of a third temple in São Paulo.

Inspired by a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, Bishop Edir Macedo, head of Brazil’s neo-Pentecostal Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), made a commitment to build a recreation of Solomon’s Temple in São Paulo. He promised: “If I cannot take all the people to visit Israel, then I can take pieces of it to them.”¹ This temple, the Templo de Salomão, whose construction includes material from Israel, is currently more than halfway completed. Templo de Salomão is envisioned as a replica of the temple that, according to the Hebrew Bible, was built in Jerusalem in the tenth century BCE by Solomon, son of David, and king of the Jews. Its violent destruction at the hands of invading Babylonians in the sixth century BCE marked the beginning of the first diaspora of the Jewish people. The Second Temple was built 70 years later on the same site, and was subsequently destroyed in 70 CE by the Romans, signaling another period of exile for the Jewish people. The only remaining architectural evidence of this building is the Western Wall, also called the Wailing Wall, which formed part of the retaining wall of the ancient structure. The Western Wall is now a Jewish holy site and a major destination for pilgrims and tourists in Jerusalem.

A third temple is described in the Book of Ezekiel in the Hebrew Bible, and its construction is prophesied as part of a heralding of the Messianic era. This end-of-days time will usher in a return of the Jewish people to Israel, along with many other events, including the coming of the Messiah. Certain sects within Judaism hold to this doctrine and believe the third temple, built on the Temple Mount, the same site as the first two temples, will be part of a new era of peace and heaven on earth. The Temple Mount, however, is not only home to



2

the Western Wall, but also to structures held by other major religions as sacred, notably the Islamic shrine, the Dome of the Rock. The temple of the UCKG being built in Brazil, while not meant to supersede or replace a third temple in the Holy Land, is a sort of transposed religious site— one which will be revered in its own right while appropriating the history (and possible future) of another people and place.

Using a narrative woven together by iconography, Bartana takes on this project in her new film *Inferno* (2013), questioning the strange conflation of histories at issue. Her film opens with aerial shots sweeping over a canopy of trees and moving into the dense outskirts of São Paulo, the shadow of a helicopter cast across the buildings as it flies above. Soon, we are on the street and people begin to populate the screen; we see friends smiling and laughing, families walking from their homes, and men leading goats wearing floral garlands. Helicopters bearing massive religious objects—a menorah, a Jerusalem stone, and the holy ark—are signals, and at their approach, the crowd gathers and processes through the city. The mood is celebratory. In the distance, we hear the sound of the shofar, the ram’s horn trumpet used in Jewish religious ceremonies, summoning the faithful to worship and to consecrate their new temple with offerings and sacrifices.

The people make up a beautiful, multicultural, and intergenerational group. Their clothing style combines Grecian and biblical garments with the simple, uniform clothing of kibbutzniks and socialist workers. As they move through graffiti-covered streets and among traffic, they seem an anachronism, out of time. Some of the women in the crowd wear ornate headdresses covered in fruits, plants, and flowers, modeled after Carmen Miranda’s iconic, now cliché, fruit headdress. This hybrid style plays with identity and boldly borrows from several cultures and histories, invoking antiquity, the free love of the 1960s, tropical kitsch, and the artist’s own recent work.² Bartana’s conflation of seemingly disparate symbols appropriated from many contexts in this instance parallels the culturally destabilizing reality of the temple-building endeavor. In previous projects, in which the artist trained her camera on the

¹ “The Vision,” Temple of Solomon, accessed October 15, 2013, <http://thetempleofsolomon.org/a-inspiracao.html>.

² I am grateful to Bartana for bringing to my attention Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz’s revisitation of Hélio Oiticica’s text “Mario Montez, Tropicamp,” in which Hinderer Cruz posits Oiticica’s notion of “tropicamp” as part of a larger strategy of oppositional politics. Max Jorge Hinderer Cruz, “Tropicamp: Some Notes on Hélio Oiticica’s 1971 Text,” *Afterall: A Journal of Art, Context, and Enquiry* 28, no. 1 (Autumn/Winter 2011): 16–21.



3

preexisting rituals of contemporary society, or fictionalized them, she has created a space of political and cultural imagination. She gives the viewer open-ended propositions loaded with mixed signs and signifiers through which they are able to see, alongside the artist, other possible realities.

Once the joyous crowd of *Inferno* has entered the temple, the tone of the film changes dramatically, focusing on the activities of those on the sanctuary altar. Ten figures dressed in white appear as if to be high priests from a transgender retro-future. The crowd stands in rapt attention and a man’s voice begins to recite the Mourner’s Kaddish in Hebrew — a mourning prayer extolling God’s virtues. Suddenly, flames leap out and the dazed crowd jumps back in terror. In the ensuing scenes, Bartana has envisioned apocalyptic ruin, beautifully rendered in exquisite detail and captured in high-definition. Windows shatter, fireballs explode, and the ground opens up; people flee frantically, clutching their offerings, plundering the temple, and trying to escape the mounting devastation. At the end of the scene, a high priest walks out, unscathed by the trauma around him, and the camera pans across the victims sprawled on the floor in a smoldering haze of destruction. A Portuguese voiceover recites the biblical passage defining the construction details for the temple—reminding us of its strange origins. This scene is the biblical version of a Hollywood action epic—dramatic, spectacular, and over-the-top. It quotes from multiple sources, juxtaposing and citing art historical, cultural, and religious imaginings of this event.³

³ These sources range from the reliefs on the first century Arch of Titus to 17th- and 19th-century European painting, all of which depict the destruction of the Second Temple in vivid detail. Notable among these examples are *Destruction of the Temple of Jerusalem* (1683) by French painter Nicolas Poussin, which places the viewer in the courtyard of the Second Temple as it is being pillaged and razed, and *The Destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem* (1867) by Italian artist Francesco Hayez.

⁴ Yael Bartana, “Project outline and synopsis,” February 2013.

For Bartana, the destruction played out in *Inferno* “reenact[s] the catastrophic past” in overwhelming and detailed terms, bringing it into the future.⁴ The transposition of time and place playing out in São Paulo has proven ripe territory for Bartana to explore the inescapably interconnected nature of past and present. In her film trilogy *And Europe Will Be Stunned* (2007–11), Bartana takes on the 20th-century histories of Israel and Poland. The trilogy knits these histories together, illuminating their related present moments, and suggesting the potential for a shared future. This work employs what Bartana has termed “historical pre-enactment”—a methodology that gives form and visibility to a commingling of fact and fiction, prophesy and history. This process allows her to imagine and depict alternative political and social realities. She has employed this methodology in *Inferno* as well, which while circling around the controversies surrounding the UCKG and delving into Judaic tradition and messianic theory, is ultimately about none of these—they are starting points for a larger meditation. In this work, she has capitalized on the strange blend of cultures and histories already underway in São Paulo to realize a vision of a future embedded both in the past and in the present dystopia inherent to the invocation of a utopian heaven on earth.

The final scenes of Bartana’s new work bring us into a sunny and once again joyful present, at a facsimile of the Western



4

Wall. Tourists snap photos while the faithful pray, wrapped in religious shawls. The menorah, a symbol that is woven through each scene, now appears in the form of tchotchke souvenirs and stamped on the sides of coconuts. In Bartana’s film, we see not only apocalyptic ruin, but also the phoenix-like emergence of a new place of worship and a bolstered tourist economy. When we invoke particular histories to give shape and form to our own identities, are we simply living out the adage that those who don’t know history are bound to repeat it? The Holy Land and its fraught history are being displaced, relived, and appropriated in São Paulo. Bartana’s film suggests that we may already know how the story ends, only to have it begin again.

Diana Nawi
Associate Curator

Biography

Yael Bartana was born in Kfar Yehezkel, Israel. She currently lives and works in Tel Aviv, Amsterdam, and Berlin. Bartana received her BFA at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem, and her MFA at the School of Visual Arts, New York. She also studied at the Rijksakademie van Beeldende Kunsten, Amsterdam. Her work has been the subject of solo exhibitions at the Wexner Center for the Arts, Cleveland; Secession, Vienna; Tel Aviv Museum of Art; Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, the Netherlands; Art Gallery of Ontario; Museum of Modern Art, Warsaw; and MoMA PS1, New York, among others. In 2011, she represented Poland in the 54th Venice Biennale.



5

Cover, 2–4 Yael Bartana. *Inferno*, 2013 (production images). Digital color video, with sound, 18 min. Courtesy of the artist; Petzel, New York; Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam; and Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

5 Yael Bartana. *And Europe Will Be Stunned, Mary Koszmary (Nightmares)*, 2007. 16 mm color film, with sound, transferred to video, 10 min., 50 sec. Courtesy of Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam