

RL16

“A Moment That Is Still and Unmoving, but Shows the Rhythm and Flow of Motion”

Email-Interview with the artist Ben Dabush on the occasion of the exhibition *Sky Longs to Meet Water Like Sand* at RL16, Berlin, Juli 9 – September 19, 2021, Interview by Barbara Buchmaier

Barbara Buchmaier, May 13, 2021, Berlin

Hi Ben, let's start our written exchange in advance of your exhibition at RL16 in Berlin. Knowing you sitting in quarantine in Jerusalem – unexpectedly at the time of a new militant escalation – to where you basically travelled to meet your family and get vaccinated, does not make it easy. I hope you'll be able to work on it. I come back to the reason why invited you to exhibit at RL16. After having seen some of your works in a group show in 2019, I did not forget them: Most of all the folding-screen, titled *The Water Doesn't Break and the Sun Doesn't Get Wet* (2019). I remember that your exhibits affected me like “windows”, like openers to an atmosphere of freedom, nature, vacation ... After re-reading Georges Perec's *Things. A Story of the Sixties (Les Choses. Une histoire des années soixante, 1965)* a few month ago and deciding to use it as a loose frame for a series of exhibitions, I immediately came back to your work. So the first question is: What is the story of/behind your paravent – for me a desirable, ‚want to have`-object, hovering in between art and furniture? How did you come up with this idea and how did you realize it? Could you give a short insight? Later on, we should also talk about the book by Georges Perec ...

Ben Dabush, May 17, 2021, Jerusalem

The work *The Water Doesn't Break and the Sun Doesn't Get Wet* was conceived by following an instinct, using a wave like plexiglass structure that I first encountered as a readymade used for construction. At the time, 2018, my creation process was mostly a quick (time-wise) intervention following an idea. I can say that this work marked the beginning of a new creative process for me. The arc structure and the sea image ideas came as waves of instincts that gathered together while planning the work at first as a 3-D model. It was important to me to learn and combine different producing techniques, wood, hand craft and machine intervention during the process and to achieve a complete and defined structure, and that each of its parts contributes and compliments to the full image and experience of the work.

The work takes its form of a classical functional design object which has both – useable as well as decorative qualities. A paravent, made of a wooden structure, framing a wave-like plexiglass board containing a triptych sea image that can be viewed from both sides of the structure.

A mobile piece of architecture, a sliding wall, that allows a given space to be divided but at the same time to share a parallel view.

Talking with different people about the work in the last years, I was happy to learn the different narratives that they were experiencing from it.

In a way it became almost a goal for me to trust an instinct and follow the process, making the idea, allowing it to transform itself in the eyes of the beholder.

As you experienced a sense of desire towards it, it completes the circle for me.

Barbara, May 19, 2021, Berlin

Could you please add some notes on the title of the paravent: *The Water doesn't Break and the Sun Doesn't Get Wet*?

I noticed that most of your works have titles that kind of prompt an intellectual game, what I perceive as inviting – also the textile installation named *Land(e)scape* (2020) which is planned to be part of your show in a site-specific version, or *Blind Skies* (2020), a three-part stand-up display with printed blinds ...

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Ben, May 25, 2021, Tel Aviv

I think that titles are, as this interview, a written opportunity to slide into my work.

I use them as a platform that can take the work towards its visionary starting point.

The group of works that will be in the show are capturing a familiar scene, as if nature is a film that constantly begins again. It allows you to think about a moment that is still and unmoving, but shows the rhythm and flow of motion.

Titles are like guides. They invite you to get lost in the possibilities of their meaning, and contribute and spark some lightness to and on the finished objects. For me a certain humoristic aspect is definitely a part of them.

Barbara, May 29, 2021, Berlin

Talking about the potential of titles it would be interesting, if you already thought about a title for your show?

And how does it feel being connected with Georges Perec's novel *Things*, a story being located in the 1960s in Paris/France and in Sfax/Tunisia – and in between these two very different locations. A young couple working as freelancers for the advertising industry is described as being slave of products, especially vintage items, furniture and clothes. But finally they do not have the money and the strong will to climb up socially, so they seek refuge and salvation in an "escape" to North Africa, where they hope to find a happier, a more relaxed and relieved life ...

You've sent me a few quotes from Perec's novel, for instance: "They [the young couple] would cross all of Paris to see an armchair they'd been told was just perfect." And an excerpt from a passage about their new life in Tunisia: "Their own world of loneliness, their own dry desert." For me these two quotes function like a kind of script for your show ...

Ben, June 9, 2021, Berlin

I've read *Things* some years ago and it was my introduction to Perec's writings.

I think that what stroke me within the first chapter of the book is the obsessive desire that the couple shares for objects, together with Perec's detailed writing. I felt so amazed by the descriptive approach that was building up a vivid image on the protagonists' surroundings.

When we started to chat about the exhibition and the context of your invitation, I decided to re-read the book, firstly looking for the parts that were floating on my memory surface.

As the book is divided into episodes following the couple's life, I used it in a way as a script or a guide for positioning the works within the room, at first a vitrine and later more of a theatrical path towards an endless view.

The works on display are indeed a part of my desire for objects, familiar interior pieces that perform and celebrate the outdoor. I am interested in how we perceive spaces as images, a frame that turns into both, a barrier and a threshold, which is in a way very close to the approach of the book and to what the protagonists experience in it.

As for the show title, I am confident that an idea will reveal itself while building up the show, having in mind the script and discovering the scenario IRL.

Barbara, June 18, 2021, Berlin

I'm curious about your title. For now, let's talk about the material "composition" of your artworks. Where do and did you get your image material from, for example the sea images printed on both sides of the wavy plexiglass panels of the paravent? Is it generic photo material? And how do you perceive the material contrast with the dark wood that you've selected for the framing structure. In my perception this contrast gives the piece an "eclectic" flavor, what I like. And what about the images of sunsets in *Vacation Piece* (2018), which we plan to present in a focused version as a paper stack on the window board ... People are invited to take an image, a moment of the sunset with them. In this context, please also let us know about your idea of authorship?

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[Ben, June 25, 2021, Berlin](#)

The image of the sea is taken from an open source, an image bank where people upload images of almost everything. I always go for images that are free to use and posted anonymously.

Millions of images are taken globally a day and I think it might be almost a rebellious act to work with images that come from "nowhere" and claim nothing but a moment. The image of the sky that appears on *Blind Skies* is from a similar source, too. This interest in using different image sources is present also in other works I did in the last years. The publication *Skies by friends* is a collection of images taken by my friends with their mobile devices – I asked my close circle to look at their photo albums on their devices and send me the first pictures of the sky they encounter. Later I mixed them all together blindly on a new folder, chose the images that stood out and curated them intuitively in an assumed chronological order, revealing a trajectory of gradience.

The video for *Vacation Piece* was taken by me. After traveling for a long period, I came back home and saw that I have so many of those sunset videos – and it was then when the idea to work with them arrived.

Framing the paravent structure, I chose to work with wood, because I felt that a contrast to the other materials would work well. While looking for the wood, I found out about Thermo Ash wood, which is a heat-treated timber. The process, which is completely chemical-free, uses only heat and water, and the energy for the kilns is generated from wood waste, that gives it this dark rich color. It completely made sense for me to work with it – together with the plexiglass and the image of the sea.

[Barbara, June 26, 2021, Berlin](#)

Thanks for this excursus. Coming back to what we'll see and experience in the show ...

[Ben, June 26, 2021, Berlin](#)

What do you imagine?

[Barbara, June 26, 2021, Berlin](#)

I imagine very accurately produced unique objects, that appear like items of movable furniture, installed in a way that transforms the gallery space in a stage- or studio-like scenario. They will invite people on one hand to relate themselves physically to them, and on the other to immerge mentally into their easily approachable pictorial surfaces of splashing water, a blue sky with fair-weather clouds, a desert landscape – to reflect and to use them as a projection screen for their affects and associations to come – potentially in a state between illusion and disillusion.

[Ben, July 1, 2021, Berlin](#)

My idea is to explore the bright facade of escapism and to offer a moment of ease of mind. At the same time the show might also remind us that reality is inescapable.