

Art

Can not? Canal!

Tamir Zadok presents a brilliant and funny video work which solves the conflict (almost) naturally, introducing honed politics. Beware – spoilers below!

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It is not every day that something like this happens—*Gaza Canal* is a brilliant video piece of the type you encounter once in a lifetime, if you are lucky enough to live in the right time. Its sarcasm is built into the sinister, fundamental assumptions—in every frame, in the soundtrack, the structure, the implications. These are a pungent nine minutes, witty to the point of being venomous, rife with pastiches and parodies about a militarism loaded with money, about apolitical sweet talk which is, in itself, a crime of annihilation and denial; nine minutes interspersed with MK's (Knesset members) mannerist gestures, of lying to the people, of synthesizing a normalized history, cleansed of all elements of the phlebotomized bloody conflict.

It is a PR film on behalf of the Yitzhak Rabin Visitor Center in Gaza Canal. Zadok's stylistic replication is pure genius—against the backdrop of energetic documentation from a helicopter, satellite shots, and rhythmic music, the voice of radio announcer Ehud Graf hovers with guttural authority: “We invite

you to join us on a journey - the construction of the Gaza Canal (smiling female soldiers). The visit includes a virtual tour, historical documentation of the digging work, and interviews with the project initiators. 15,000 workers, both Jewish and Arab, dug the 61-km Canal over the course of eight years. Do not say can not, say: canal.

"A green island, an ecological island," the manic announcer rattles on, while the backdrop features a young German tourist traveling in the Middle East, gladly turning wind-powered turbines in the area of Beit Lahiya, and images of the Panama Canal, Suez Canal, and the English Channel, which render the Israeli project modest by comparison. "Until the end of the 20th century Gaza was known as a battered, battle savvy region (shots of Zaka Search and Rescue teams). In 2002, Operation "Still Waters" was launched. Graphs, maps, and sketches illustrate the digging process which cuts Gaza from the continent, a process which despite public skepticism (Englemayer type comics) was led and completed under the supervision of Melamed, Minister of Infrastructure (the artist's father), leading to one of the film's comic peaks. The Arab laborers are content, and so are the Jewish youth who declare that "the work is very hard, but we feel that something really important is being done here" (pickaxes in the sunset and the tune "The Sun will Stand Still between Gaza and Rafah" played on the piano). In 2008, the unexpected happened—an earthquake caused a further distancing of the island from the mainland. Here, the macabre reaches its height—Prof. Uri Abraham of Ben Gurion University of the Negev explains that the first, manmade process was "rather routine," despite the cutting edge

technologies which brought about an earthquake "we could not have anticipated," which led to casualties (shots of ruined houses in the Gaza Strip). "I wouldn't call it an artificial island," he says with technocratic academic distance, as someone bothered by a theoretical issue, reluctant to relinquish philosophical calm, "it is a perfectly natural island." As if to reinforce the drama of erasure-by-means-of-false-memory, we are also told that there is a commemoration site for the earthquake victims. The rehabilitated island turns out to be a lodestone for tourists. It is guaranteed that "the inhabitants of this island—may it be called Gaza?—will thrive," as the professor concludes (shots of happy people jumping into the sea). We also learn that there is regular ferry service to this wonderful spot from Paleshet Bay and Philadelphi Bay, as well as a display of flora and fauna from the canal area and changing art exhibitions on site.

The daring, outrageous fantasy about the dissociation of the Gaza Strip and its transformation into an island materialized in Zadok's work without running into any political, humanitarian, national, racial, and other problems. See for yourself—Gaza at sea, like a woolen stocking filled with goodies hanging above the fireplace on Christmas day, like natural continent drift, like something which can be positive and full of psychotic *joie de vivre* via a well-executed presentation.

Zadok created one of the most critical and powerful works about Gaza in general, and Operation Cast Lead in particular. Introduced as a type of an elusive propagandist response to the Goldstone Report, the short film

diagnoses and surgically reveals the materials from which state propaganda is made—cheap, bare, puffed up lies which insist on presenting themselves as common knowledge, always presented in an awkward, old-fashioned anachronistic style, obsolete from the very moment they are put forth, because their imagined addressee is a fictive character.

Zadok masterfully produces a daring transgressive implementation of the Israeli vision to throw all the Arabs into the sea, by using a mainstream national-state language, thereby demonstrating how war crimes are white-washed and how historical wrongs and repression are legitimized and harnessed to the current, nationalist, yet also greedy, Zionist discourse. He fully realizes a fascist fantasy—one which includes not only the actual implementation, the pure act, but also destruction of the evidence and elimination of the possibility to discuss the matter as a catastrophe and a war crime. Due to its imitative precision, the superb humor (Operation "Still Waters" indeed runs deep), and especially since Zadok has taken the video-art medium to the most regressive (namely, most up-to-date) pole of "footage"—this is the best political work of art I have seen in the past decade.

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