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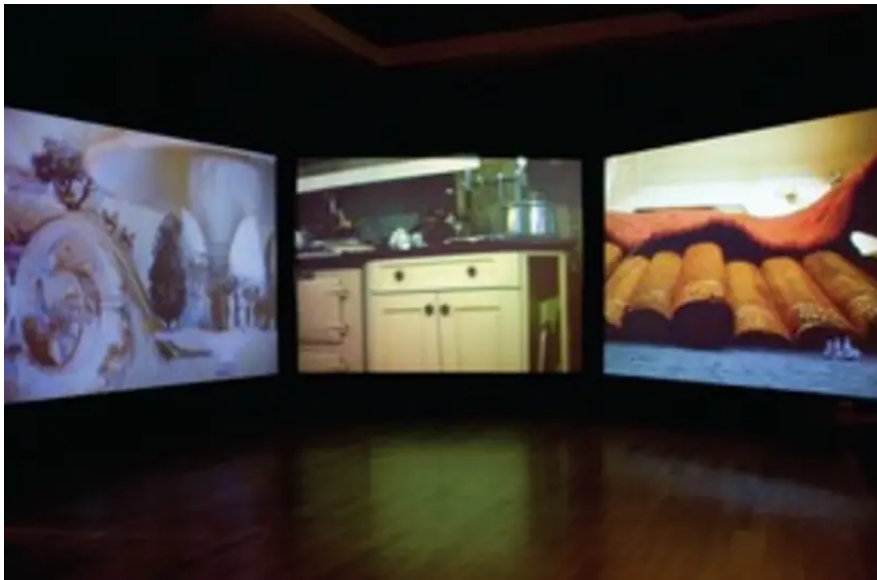
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The reality of illusion

The so-called real world takes on a wondrous aspect in the Israel Museum's 'Magic Lantern' exhibition.

By RUTH BELOFF DECEMBER 27, 2011 23:42



Going Places Sitting Down
(photo credit: Courtesy of Israel Museum)

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Visiting an art museum is always a venture into a world of enchantment, but the

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Gathering together 18 contemporary works from the museum's collection that had never been displayed there before, the exhibition hinges on illusion. Employing such modern methods as video art and manipulated photography, sometimes accompanied by sound or light, the pieces coalesce to create a fascinating forum of sheer fantasy. And what you see is not always what you "get" – at first glance. Be they landscapes, interiors or objects in a space, the focus is on the aura of illusion.

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In fact, it was the aura of a burning candle that sparked the idea for this exhibition in the first place, says curator Susan Landau.

British-born artist Jonathan Monk's piece entitled Candle Film (2009) is a six-hour and 20-minute film projected onto a white wall that chronicles the lifespan of a burning candle, from a thick, tall candlestick to a dwindling mass of melted wax.

The exhibit is comprised of a film projector, the image on the wall and eight 47-minute reels of 16-mm. film in sliver containers, which must be changed regularly by a technician to keep the sequence going to its ultimate conclusion – and then begun again from the start. By filming a static object as it changes slowly over time, Monk explores such issues as being and identity in relation to history, as well as the actual process of creating art.

Inspired by this idea, Landau looked through the list of the museum's recent acquisitions to find pieces that would fit into the theme of dream, fantasy, mystique and illusion.

Before she knew it, she had come up with the 18 pieces that comprise this beguiling exhibition.

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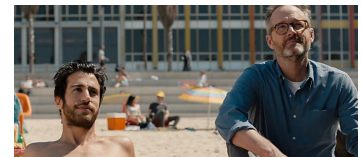
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assumes the diffuse contours of something magical.”

Another work in film, *Per Speculum* (2006), is an eight-minute 35-mm. piece by Albanian-born artist Adrian Paci. In it, we see a group of children frolicking in a picturesque landscape in England.

We soon understand that we are seeing them through a full-length mirror set up nearby.

A boy then aims a slingshot right at us, it looks like, releases a small stone, and the glass shatters into pieces, along with their reflection.

The children then take pieces of the mirror and, sitting in various parts of a large tree, dazzle us with sparkles of reflected light.

We no longer see any children at all, only glimmers of flashing light emanating from a tree. We know what we know – but we see what we see. And therein lies an essence of illusion.

In the eight-minute film piece on three screens entitled *Going Places Sitting Down* (2004), Japanese-born artist Hiraki Sawa takes us on a complete flight of fancy – and we never have to leave the house. Using the interior of an English country home as his setting and video animation as his technique, Sawa morphs ordinary furnishings into magical elements that float, fly and sail by on a fluid stream of imagination in this delightful experience of sheer fantasy.

As for pieces in the exhibition that don’t move in themselves but move the viewer all the same, Israeli artist Maya Zack’s piece *Living Room* (2009) is a good example. Using computer visualization on four panels, she recreated the interior of an apartment in Berlin just before it was abandoned by the owner, who fled to Palestine in 1938.

Based on current interviews with him and his description of his childhood home, Zack constructed four black-and-white large-scale photographs of his home in pre-war Germany.

There is no way of knowing what the interior actually looked like, but the memories of the man and the imagination of the artist combine to give it a life of its own – before the ensuing onslaught of death and destruction.

The title itself also speaks volumes. No matter what may have happened to the apartment during the Holocaust, the man’s recollections and the artist’s work have perpetuated this place as a “living” room.

In the piece entitled *Tree for Too One, The Keys, Window* (2010), Israeli artist Ilit Azoulay worked the other way around. She took thousands of photographs of various objects from various angles, from which she composed an integrated whole. At first glance, the two large unframed prints on the walls look like shelves in a home, filled with a random collection of objects – scissors, stones, snapshots, souvenirs, a pair of jeans hanging from a hook.

But, of course, nothing was random, and the artist, as the accompanying description

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Another reading of reality is experienced in German-born artist Ulla von Brandenburg's work entitled *Five Folded Curtains* (2008).

In this installation that consists of wooden floorboards and a series of five thick, rich red drapes, the viewer is free to walk amid the maze of curtains. But with every step, is he behind the curtain or entering center stage? Is he in the wings or in the spotlight? A stagehand, a star or a bit player? If all the world's a stage, then we are at some point any and all of them. So at every given moment, we'd better mind our actions because you never know who's watching.


And speaking of watching, as you meander through the exhibition watch out for USborn Tony Matelli's bronze sculpture entitled *Abandon (Double dandelion)* (2008). Part of an ongoing project called "Weeds," this intrepid little hand-painted plant looks so real, it seems to be growing out of a corner of the floor.

These and other fascinating pieces comprise the Israel Museum's "Magic Lantern" exhibition. While a picture may be worth a thousand words, experiencing these works of wonder firsthand is worth far more than a pageful of descriptions.

The exhibition is on display at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem until April 30.



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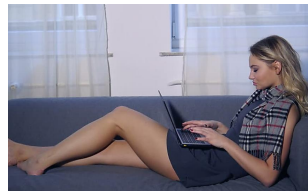
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