

**Opening remarks for the exhibition “The Messiah will come only when he is no longer necessary...” by Andrea Morein, Kunstraum 21, Bonn, from April 9 to May 21, 2016**

The title derives from a text by Franz Kafka written in 1917, which reads in full: “The Messiah will come only when he is no longer necessary; he will come only on the day after his arrival; he will come, not on the last day, but on the very last day.” Andrea Morein identifies with Kafka, who closely studied and addressed the notion of the founding of a Jewish state even at that early time.

Let’s look for a moment at Andrea Morein’s biography: The artist was born in Vienna; her father came from Latvia. She studied theatre in Tel Aviv and London. Her work between 1975 and 1998 was devoted to dance, various experimental forms of movement and theater work in London, Amsterdam and Berlin, in addition to various teaching activities. In 1997, she shifted focus to visual art without completely abandoning dance, movement work and therapy. Her work since then includes video, drawings and photography. She discovered collage, layering or even drawing into existing material.

Looking at the title and works in this exhibition, it is clear that the artist has dreamed the dream of many Jews in the Diaspora – a dream of the homeland Israel, the house of Israel, where all are welcome and there is space for everyone – and now measures it against the reality.

Andrea Morein’s view of Israel differs of course from our own German perspective of this young country. Founded after the Second World War as a political consequence of the Holocaust and in a late colonial gesture, the founding myth of Israel derives from the memory of the Holocaust. It is a country of complex significance for us Germans, who as perpetrators of World War II and the Holocaust are uniquely entwined with its history. More than 70 years after the conflict, the Germany-Israel relationship is still far from a “normal” relationship between friendly nations.

So now to Andrea Morein’s perspective on, as she puts it, the “Holy and also Un-Holy Land”: it is no routine political position, but a fundamental questioning of the symbols and myths of Israel. For this exhibition – a different version of which was shown in a World War II bunker in Cologne in 2015 (adding yet another level of meaning) – Morein consulted her archive and condenses her own reflections and the visual material she found during her long stays in the Israeli reality into an aesthetic cosmos full of melancholy. She tells us the poetic story of a slow farewell.

One could call “the messiah project” an inventory, a résumé. It encompasses a variety of different materials and media. One special feature consists in the historical maps from the time of the British Mandate. Entrusted to her by an Israeli cartographer friend, they hold a great deal of significance for the artist. They were used by the Israelis soon after the state was founded in 1948, as there were no other maps in Hebrew at the time (hence the red stamp on the edge of the image, the Hebrew word for “classified”). They were the future settlement plans for the young state of Israel. “My collages are copied from other original maps, which I superimposed over the historical maps as second, ‘fictional’ layer. However, I deal with the historical material in a very fragmentary way, also as a way of showing the fictional inscriptions in the landscape as a ‘new homeland.’ After all, these settlements were not established on ‘empty’ land,” Andrea Morein has said. With this artistic strategy, she moves toward the same level of irony that characterizes Kafka’s Messiah quote describing a savior who will come only when he is no longer needed.

Works from the various creative periods presented here employ the miscellaneous media mentioned earlier: drawing, collage, documentary and staged photography, which are precisely interrelated both formally and in terms of content. Particularly important are Morein's own poems, which she has painted over with the same visual codification system marking the settlements on the maps. Or Morein voices the recollection of important Israelis with whom she feels connected.

Andrea Morein reveals and conceals in the same instant. Many of her works have to do with buildings, houses or ladders, or also guard towers like those found anywhere in Israel. She shows us the provisional, the yet-to-be-carried out, the unstable. Ladders, the artist told me, lead to heavens, but a fall from them can send you tumbling into the depths.

When I was first confronted with these works, I noticed how close many of them are to the concept of a building or even a real house, which I assume is central to Morein's reflections on the building of the house of Israel or also just the gradual deconstruction of this once so powerful utopia of a Jewish state. Since the country's founding, many Jewish intellectuals and artists have employed the house as a political metaphor. Such is the case with the Israeli filmmaker Amos Gitai, whose early film from 1980 tells the eventful story of a house in West Jerusalem: from its Palestinian builders to its occupation by new Israeli settlers and later various Jewish owners. The film left a lasting impression on me. I see Andrea Morein's "the messiah project" in this same tradition. It addresses the issues driving many of her contemporary Israeli artist colleagues, including Georg Büchner Prize winner David Grossmann: Will there ever be peace between the Palestinians and Israelis? And will a peaceful house of Israel have room for everyone?

Regina Wyrwoll  
April 2016

Translated by Amy Patton

Excerpts from the gallery-text by Dr. Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek, 2015  
Translated by Amy Patton

### **Shoot! Kafka Shoot!, 2014**

The first work is a photograph of an everyday object, namely a table. The artificial elongation of its legs make it appear unreal in the horizontal, as if weapons are drawn. The irreality of the object evokes the visionary, uncanny stories of Franz Kafka, which focus on the hopelessness of human destiny—usually through no fault of their own. At the same level in which people can transform into beetles, interiors can also be at war with one another. They are proxies for their owners, enforcing their absurd dealings and actions that will take them nowhere. Kafka, prophet of unsolveability, stands programmatically at the beginning of the installation, introduces her topic and accompanies it to the end.

The levels of meaning Morein gives her appropriation-based works are on the one hand acutely contemporary issues, and yet they also point to a tragic lack of history in eschatological hope. Franz Kafka pointedly describes the belief in a messianic—in other words just, fulfilled historical end-time as imagined in Jewish eschatology—as a reality beyond the historical: “The Messiah will come only when he is no longer necessary; he will come only on the day after his arrival; he will come, not on the last day, but on the very last.” In a radical way, he relegates Messianism to the realm of utopia.

Equally radical is Andrea Morein’s re-assessment of historical, quasi “innocent” artistic works, photos and maps from the 19th and 20th centuries, censoring them to expose the erroneousness of their underlying assumptions, ideas and hopes. Iconic, artistic and artificially constructed images such as David Roberts’ Jerusalem print from 1830 or Esther Lurie’s Jerusalem prints from the years 1963/65 are artistically, artificially deconstructed by Morein—not in an effort to defame them, but to awaken understanding and in doing so, bring us closer to reality.

### **Encoded Landscapes, 2010/15**

The path continues to topographical and geological, yet unspecific landscapes and structures, maps of Mandatory Palestine that are layered, superimposed and broken into collages in a codification ritual that pursues the question of how landscapes can be written, in order to reveal the code.

### **SH’KI’YAH – Dusk, 2015**

With “Dusk,” an installation-within-the-installation, the tour is almost complete. Morein leaves the visitor alone with the question as to which dusk it could be referring to, while provocatively placing it in the space.

### **Black Towers, 2004**

The journey with Franz Kafka through the “messiah project” ends with towers that can be interpreted as fortifications and defense facilities. They implicitly include the site of the installation, Hochbunker Ehrenfeld, where the multiple, underlying tensions in the project are charged with yet another:

Built in 1942-43 by the German Reich, the construction is a reminder of brutality and suffering, of perpetrators and victims of a war that incomprehensibly cost the lives of more than fifty million people. In the immediate vicinity of Ehrenfeld synagogue, which went up in flames during the November pogroms in 1938, it is also a reminder of the six million Jews who were murdered in the Shoah. Asking oneself questions about real political situations in a place like this, and approaching positions in the Middle East conflict from an aesthetic perspective, is brave.

And correct. The choice of location embeds Morein’s aesthetic critique in an actual, current condition, into the unquestioned right of Holocaust survivors and those who were saved to have their own state.