

**GIL SHACHAR: LUNAPARK TRANSYLVANIA**  
**Semjon Contemporary, Berlin, from 22 August 2020**

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The world of light and the world of shade clash sharply. In the contrast between the two, Gil Shachar's works of art create the trace of memory.<sup>1</sup> Like "flashing globes"<sup>2</sup> float iconic illusions of moons cast in epoxy resin, moons that seem to have been painted onto crumpled paper. A deeper look reveals the deceptive. The work of art only reminds us of the two-dimensional paper surface. What remains is the three-dimensionality of crumpled paper, but in the resin image, as under Medusa's hardening gaze, it is not the paper itself, but merely the memory of a moment of a special paper. The torn, the temporal becomes wrested from time in its sculptural petrification. "The mysterious path leads within":<sup>3</sup> only the inward gaze is able to capture the moment. But what is captured at the point in time becomes distinct from "that when conceived".<sup>4</sup> Like memory, the remembered is subject to perpetual metamorphosis, even in entropy. The work of art treads the thin line of eye-deceiving resemblance to life in probing the abyss between life and death, between the impermanence of the moment and the permanence of a long-departed moment captured in wax and epoxy resin.

The difference of an unmasked illusion of identity conceals the uncanny: at the centre of the exhibition is a portrait bust in wax that can be mistaken for the real-life moment. At the same time, however, the view is obscured and veiled by a proliferating web of hair. Who is it? Who seems to be this werewolf? The hair is like shadows that cover and uncover the truth of the wax head as a trompe-l'œil, like the Veiled Image at Sais. The uncanniness of deprived life opens up in the semblance of life. At the same time, the pictorial layers of the werewolf evoke memories of Cranach's "Werewolf", of Cocteau's "Beast"<sup>5</sup> of the Beauty or, on a humorous note, of Morgenstern's punning in his werewolf poem<sup>6</sup>. The moment of the lived life of whoever the wax head may be intersects with the memory of many different images of werewolves.

In the cast of the wax head, the eyes are closed, so the work of art reveals not only a trace of its casting technique, but also a reference to its inward-looking theme of memory. Even more

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. the "distances of memory" in Novalis' *Hymns to the Night*, handwritten version, Hymn 1; in: *Rampolli: Growths from a Long-Planted Root: Being Translations, New and Old, Chiefly from the German*. Translated by George MacDonald. London; New York: Longman's, Green, 1897. Printed by Ballentyne, Hanson & Co. Available online at: <https://logopoeia.com/novalis/hymns.html> (last retrieved on 19.08.2020).

<sup>2</sup> Novalis: loc. cit.

<sup>3</sup> Novalis *Blüthenstaub*, Fragment No. 16, <https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Novalis> (last retrieved on 19.08.2020).

<sup>4</sup> Gottfried Benn *Wer allein ist –*; in: idem *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 3, *Gedichte*, ed. D. Wellershoff, Stuttgart 1978, p. 135, translated by Tim Chafer.

<sup>5</sup> Jean Cocteau *La belle et la bête*, 1947.

<sup>6</sup> Christian Morgenstern *Der Werwolf*; in: idem *Sämtliche Galgenlieder*, Zürich 1990, p. 93.

pressing in the image is the question of *who* is doing the remembering here? Who is remembered in the wax head? Who is it that, looking inwards, remembers? What did he see inwardly at the time? A werewolf? This creature of the night is here as a creature of art a mimetic head of wax, and at the same time a thing in flux between imago, moulage and werewolf fantasy.

As if between “glittering stars”,<sup>7</sup> this sinister werewolf wax portrait seems to keep watch between the sculptural paper illusions with moons in an “unspeakable, mysterious night”.<sup>8</sup> Is this the hour of Transylvania, in which the works of art, like vampires, suck out their own strange spiritual life through mimetic immobilisation? Visible are a round picture in the guise of the crescent moon with an inexplicable circular hole and sulphur-yellow light – a moon which, like the eye of a whale,<sup>9</sup> in three asymmetrically concentric circles, wraps a grey around a golden orange circle, centring them with a pupil-like black circle – a lunar constellation in which three black moons seem to come together to form the comical of a Mickey Mouse pattern – crescents illuminated in pink and red whose boundaries of light and shade condense into the illusion of a sea horizon. It is an illusory world of lunar phases in which “light and shade in unity / create a higher clarity”.<sup>10</sup> Between them configurations resembling veils draped before mirrors, and whose soft materiality, immobile like Lot’s backward-looking wife, has turned into solid epoxy resin. The mirrored seeing appears, as if in mourning, to be concealed beneath a pall and raises the question: “What holdest thou under thy mantle, that with hidden power affects my soul?”<sup>11</sup> Yet in the white folds of the fabric, the softness is no more than a memory, and in the epoxy resin it has become something other than itself. The trace differs from the imitation: the veil is not the same as the mirror, but the trace in the veil also diverges sharply from the veil trace image.

On a phosphorus-yellow moon sculpture, the time-marking phases of the moon between light and shade add another shadow image. It is the trace of the artist, it is the shadow of Gil, who in the act of seeing reveals himself as a shadow on his work. The seeing of the seen and the seen in the seeing are alternately visible in the simultaneity of the artist’s shadow and the phosphorescent moon sculpture. Shachar is close to the appearances, but the closer he approaches them, the more interconnected and condensed the open becomes.

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<sup>7</sup> Novalis *Hymns...*, loc. cit.

<sup>8</sup> Novalis *Hymns...*, loc. cit.

<sup>9</sup> The life-size cast of a whale by Gil Shachar has been on show in an exhibition at Kunstmuseum Bochum since July 2020.

<sup>10</sup> Novalis <https://www.flashlyrics.com/lyrics/novalis/wenn-nicht-mehr-zahlen-und-figuren-24>

<sup>11</sup> Novalis *Hymns*, loc. cit.