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The Eternal Sukkah Project

The Sala-Manca Group in collaboration with Itamar Mendes-Flohr and Yeshaiahu Rabinowitz

An illegal shanty structure from the Jahalin Bedouin community on the Jerusalem-Jericho Road purchased, dismantled, and reassembled as a Jewish Sukkah at the Jerusalem Hansen House for Art, Design and Technology in October 2014 was purchased by the Israel Museum for part of their art collection and going to be reassembled and exhibited in 2015 at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

In the lead-up to the 2014 Sukkot holiday, the Sala-Manca Group (Lea Mauas and Diego Rotman), directors of the Mamuta Art and Media Center at Hansen House, decided to create a public Jewish Sukkah on the Hansen grounds, a temporary dwelling for its activities during the holiday in collaboration with the artists Itamar Mendes-Flohr and Yeshaiahu Rabinowitz. Rather than construct an extravagant or innovatively designed Sukkah, the artists chose to delve into the sukkah's charged meaning in the Israeli context and to highlight the temporary nature of the structure and its associations with exile – thus evoking associations not only with Jewish history but also with the modern Israeli context, and proposing a contemporary reading of the sukkah, both as a concrete object and as a symbol.

The Jahalin first became refugees in 1949 when they were expelled from their lands in the Negev desert. They migrated to the region of the Judean Desert, where transience continues to be a part of their daily lives. The artists met members of one of the families and listened to their stories. They then proposed to purchase a structure from them, with the idea of dismantling it and reassembling it in the garden of the Hansen House and thus transplanting a piece of one reality within another one. Not only is the sukkah structure itself transplanted to the center of Jerusalem, but with it a different story of exile and desert-dwelling. The adopted sukkah proposes a re-reading of Jewish history, an observation of the state of exile, a search for a new ethnic-national-social space, a pursuit of freedom, and an exposure to the diversity of Israeli reality and the paradoxes of history.

The next step in the project was merchandising the Sukkah as an art piece. The artists decided to be intent on selling the Eternal Sukkah charging for it ten times the price paid for the original dwelling and then giving half of this sum over to the Al-Korshan as »copyright fee« for the design. In June 2015 the Israel Museum decided to acquire the piece for their collection. The museum is going to build with the acquisition a precise map of instructions for the dismantling and reassembling of this emblematic puzzle. What was formerly construction waste would become the object of a process of cataloguing and conservation meant to prevent the deterioration of this object of cultural heritage. Such preservation efforts would be among the most obsessive and meticulous processes of conservation and canonization of an illegal building ever undertaken. The Sukkah, further eternalized by the Museum, would stand as an iconic symbol of Israeli ethnic politics, a canonization process of the ephemeral.

Bilder: © Itamar Mendes-Flohr and Diego Rotman



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