

Oren Pinhassi: After Pleasure

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Subjectivity needs movement, directional vectors, ritournelles, rhythms and refrains that beat time to carry it along.¹
Soft Subversions, Félix Guattari

In William Blake's poem *Auguries of Innocence*, Blake prophetically captures the fragility that characterises our being, emphasising that even the smallest elements of nature possess the grandeur of the entire universe. Oren Pinhassi shares in Blake's contemplation of the vulnerability of existence. Pinhassi's oeuvre poetically probes this idea, evoking fleeting glimpses of daily life – fragments of memory from an inventive tableau of found objects, landscapes, nature, architecture, body parts and household furniture. Whilst constructed from seemingly dissociative contexts, Pinhassi's compositions are elegantly intricate. His installations redefine our interaction with the environment, proposing an ecology of constructions and systems that are simultaneously confrontational and sheltering.

It can be argued that we are experiencing a shift in focus towards ecological concerns when it comes to exploring ideas of hope in the arts. As the topics of climate change, environmental destruction, and global conflict dominate worldwide discourse, artists are joining the urgent call for a change in our relationship with the natural world, gravitating away from exploitative power structures and towards mutually dependent, collectivised systems.

This plea is evident in Pinhassi's latest body of work, which examines the interdependence between body and landscape. *After Pleasure* investigates the enigmatic character of the natural world, urging us to look beyond the limitations of reality. Each of Pinhassi's ambiguous totemic figures evoke a fluid space in which rigid categories gently dissolve. Sculptures such as *Whole Hole Hole Whole* (2023) and *Tower of Babel* (2023) can be viewed as living ecosystems, growing and breathing, investigating the organic and architectural rhythm of the environment in a symbiotic and ambiguous relationship with landscape. In Otobong Nkanga's words: "We have to enter a space of resistance – we have to take care of our bodies; the waters, lands and our emotional and physiological states as resistance."²

From 2010-2012, wood featured heavily in Pinhassi's installations. The artist's "frustration with the rigidity" of certain materials compelled him to explore the shapeshifting potential of plaster, sand and burlap.³ These more fluid mediums were better suited for an exploration of human vulnerability and the materialisation of queer spaces – defined by Pinhassi "as areas where things don't sit exactly right, where individuals can become porous and vulnerable in ways that aren't possible in heteronormative spaces."⁴ Pinhassi describes further: "Queerness has to do with lingering in uncomfortable or ambiguous spaces, almost like a sacred state of being that can furnish us with new structures, if we are able to remain in these spaces."⁵ Pinhassi's installations consider both the obstacles that hinder social interaction and the environments that facilitate it, creating provocative spaces that intersect public and private exchange in hope of facilitating transformation and transgression.

Pinhassi meticulously crafted the totemic figures in *After Pleasure* by layering sand by hand over welded steel skeletons. A process of repetition, care and construction is evident as he builds the abstracted figures. Comparisons can be drawn with Ruth Asawa, an American modernist artist renowned for her abstract looped-wire sculptures inspired by natural and organic forms. Asawa expresses: "I am fascinated by the possibilities of transforming cold metal into shapes that emulate living organic forms."⁶ Pinhassi and Asawa share a commonality in their sense of repetition, contingency and impermanence.

The environmentalist Rachel Carson remarked, "In every curving beach, in every grain of sand, there is a story of the Earth."⁷ Sand is a raw, natural foundation of our environment, embodying the cumulative effects of the natural processes that form our planet. Similarly, as noted by Pinhassi regarding his sculpture: "Sand or dirt reminds us of the fragility and temporality of our bodies. It can be fertile, living and life-giving, whilst also dry and suffocating; a building material and the grave of civilizations. It is a material that beautifully holds together so many of the stories of life and death that we often experience as contradictions."⁸

1 Félix Guattari, *Soft Subversions*, ed. Sylvère Lotringer (Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e), 1996), 65.

2 Maja & Reuben Fowkes, Rebecca Solnit, Rachel Thomas, Greta Thunberg, *Dear Earth: Art and Hope in a Time of Crisis* (London: Hayward Gallery Publishing, 2023), 16.

3 Michael Yeung, "Oren Pinhassi presents 'non-binary' sculptures at London's Edel Assanti gallery", *Wallpaper*, 23 August 2022. Available at: <https://www.wallpaper.com/art/oren-pinhassis-second-nature-edel-assanti-london> (Accessed 9 December 2023).

4 Oren Pinhassi in a conversation with the author, December 2023.

5 Ibid.

6 Ruth Asawa, "Sculpture". Available at: <https://ruthasawa.com/> (Accessed 19 December 2023).

7 Rachel Carson, "Our Ever-Changing Shore," in *Lost Woods: The Discovered Writing of Rachel Carson*, ed. Linda Lear (Boston: Beacon Press, 1998), 113-114.

8 Oren Pinhassi in a conversation with the author, December 2023.

The sculptures' permanence is uncertain: while the use of sand as a sculptural medium evokes a sense of agelessness, it also hints at the sculptures' eventual return to the earth through natural erosion.

Upright and alert, Pinhassi's figures stand at an imposing 6 feet in height. Perched like sentinels, the figures taper down to expose the positioning of their feet. Curled, gripped in tension over the grey rocks' edge, they infer a return to a horizontal orientation, as if caught in a liminal precipice, hovering precariously between evolution and extinction. Pinhassi's installations encourage us to value the delicate equilibrium of power and fragility, and to explore the beauty in the temporary essence of life, drawing on the dynamics of grief as a source of rejuvenation.

A tender feeling of protection emanates from the work *I Do Not Fear Time (Guardian)*, 2023. We encounter this work as an architecturally circular, gender-ambiguous matriarch, coalescing in a multitude of suggestive shapes: rounded breasts, lumps and exposed large bumpy genitals. Is this an armour of sand-covered limbs, or an intricate arrangement of biomorphic forms defying conventional geometries and merging architectural forms?

Bursting with life, the totemic figure of *Tower of Babel*, has agglomerate cone clusters engulfing the sculpture representing endless growth around a tower-like structure. Pinhassi's interpretation of biblical literature in referencing the Tower of Babel invokes the ongoing conflict between the divine, mankind, and the natural and social order. The tower itself stands as a symbol of mankind's aspiration to excel, achieve the unimaginable, and push the boundaries of construction technology by continuously surpassing limitations of collective imagination. Nature takes on the dominant role here, as the repetitive circular motif defines the sculpture like a pod. Comparisons can be drawn with the sensual forms of Barbara Hepworth, Hans Arp and Henry Moore, whose exploration of biomorphic form captured the imprint of living organisms on the shape of the physical world. Their inquiries encompassed both the impermanence and changeability of matter, as well as organic systems of growth and decay, and how these might inform the vitality of sculpture as a medium.

Hepworth once emphasised that "for the imaginative idea to be fully and freely projected into stone, wood or any plastic substance, a complete sensibility to material – an understanding of its inherent quality and character – is required. There must be a perfect unity between the idea, the substance and the dimension: this unity gives scale... Vitality is not a physical, organic attribute of sculpture – it is a spiritual inner life."⁹ Pinhassi's delicate figures reveal restless and erotic biomorphic combinations, embodying an ancient aura while hinting towards an uncertain future in which traditional categorisations no longer hold significance.

Pinhassi's works often involve experimentation with materials and forms, creating installations that evoke a visceral reaction whilst avoiding easy categorisation. Initially he could be seen to share the same expressive and poetic sense of purpose as the artist Mark Manders. Manders' work spans installations, sculptures and drawings, featuring figures that resemble rough-hewn, wet or peeling clay. Combined, these elements form a private iconography of forms, sculptures and images that are continually repeated and repurposed. Pinhassi's work is replete with movement of form and connection. We can also observe this by emphasising the significance of movement, rhythms, and refrains in his sculptures. Similarly, the French psychoanalyst Felix Guattari emphasises the necessity of actively engaging with the world and the social, cultural, and political influences that shape our subjectivity. In this dynamic concept, the emergence of subjectivity is viewed as an ongoing process that develops and reveals itself through our interactions, experiences and relationships. Pinhassi's works convey a restless onslaught of thought, in which the dichotomy between subject and object is constantly revisited.

At once seductive whilst hinting towards the abject, *You In Me Without You* (2023) highlights the complex solidarity that can be found in the midst of separateness. Ecofeminist Charlene Spretnak claims that "there are sacred moments in life when we experience in rational and very direct ways that separation, the boundary between ourselves and other people and between ourselves and Nature, is illusion."¹⁰ Pinhassi and Spretnak respectively affirm that this lack of separation acknowledges the fundamental interconnectedness and interdependence that permeates existence.

After Pleasure explores the aftermath of desire-fulfilment, when all longings have been satiated. In a world driven by economies of attention and distraction, Pinhassi beckons us into a confrontation with our mortality, imploring us to envision the alternative realms we could inhabit.

9 Barbara Hepworth, "Sculpture", in *Circle: International Survey of Constructive Art*, ed. by J.L. Martin, Ben Nicholson, Naum Gabo (New York/ Washington: Praeger Publishers, 1971), 113.

10 Charlene Spretnak, *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece: A Collection of Pre-Hellenic Myths* (Boston: Beacon Press; revised ed. edition, 1992).