

Peephole into the Jungle, Noa Tsoran

Where does a painting begin? For artist Doron Wolf, it begins with life. Wolf captures snippets of life, which he translates into painting.

The work process, says Wolf, “is of slow, laborious, painstaking painting done with small brushes, against sources of inspiration created by painting together multiple smartphone snapshots or images from the Internet.” As an artist in dialog with the photorealistic style of painting, Wolf agrees to take part in reproduction,¹ the term coined by Walter Benjamin in the first half of the 20th century to describe post-Industrial Revolution culture, which generates countless reproductions, copies of real or “natural” originals. Wolf does so through the medium of figurative painting, inviting viewers to observe and interpret a reflection of their own world.

Into his paintings Wolf “hunts” everyday moments embodying the banality of the synthesis between artificial and natural. The environment evinces human intervention in the synthetic lighting, the structured indoor living conditions, the presence of the dog – a domestic animal – and the examination of humans’ gaze at “their” nature, the taxidermied nature in a museum. The darkened museum hall is lighted by display boxes of lifelike dioramas, the pinnacle of taxidermy. The dioramas, described by American taxidermy pioneer Carl Akeley as “peepholes into the jungle”,² presume to deliver wildlife habitats to the heart of the city, offering viewers a peek into knowledge and offering knowledge as truth.

The realistic reconstruction of wildlife is scientifically informed, and meant to generate awe, admiration, and appreciation in the viewer. Awe at the size of the animal within hand’s reach, awe at the primeval nature “untouched by man”, and appreciation for the artistic-scientific discipline capable of reconstructing the scene and deliver it to us. The excitement arises from the encounter between wild and domesticated, animal and human. The awe at the medium of reconstructive sculpture restores man’s ability for awe at himself and his achievements, rather than at the representation of flora and fauna. In fact, these works by Wolf depict scenes of “dead nature”, nature morte in French, echoing Wolf’s attraction to still life, which features in his work throughout the years, tempting with the eroticism of plentiful, succulent representations.

Wolf employs a technique used by painters since painting began, to realistically present an historical, religious, or mythical scene and create the illusion of lifelike imagery. Applying the same technique to paintings of his own domesticity, he turns the painting into a sort of diorama disclosing intimate moments – and the viewer’s eye to a peephole into his and his partner’s lives.

Like a taxidermist, Doron Wolf tries to find how best to describe a home inhabited by a couple of men of a dog. Through manipulations and transitions between moderators of reality, he seeks to challenge the viewer with a direct, voyeuristic gaze between his sheets – to provide a “peephole into the jungle”.

¹ Walter Benjamin, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*.

² Haraway, Donna. “Teddy Bear Patriarchy: Taxidermy in the Garden of Eden, New York City, 1908-1936.” *Social Text*, no. 11 (1984): 20–64.