



Ori Gersht: This Storm Is What We Call Progress

25 January-29 April 2012

Press View: 24 January 2012

10.00am – 12.00pm

This Storm Is What We Call Progress is a significant new exhibition of work by the Israeli-born, London-based artist Ori Gersht. The display, opening in the week the UK marks Holocaust Memorial Day, consists of two recent film works that reflect on individuals' life experiences shaped by the Second World War, alongside a series of new photographs.

The exhibition is being presented at IWM London in partnership with the commissioning agency Photoworks (photoworks.org.uk), and is Ori Gersht's first major solo museum show in the UK. Gersht's work often deals with conflict, history and geographical place, and the three central works in this new show each disguise dark and complex themes beneath seductive, beautiful imagery.

'Will You Dance For Me?' is a film depicting on an 85-year-old dancer, Yehudit Arnon, rocking back and forth in a chair as she recalls her experiences as a young woman in Auschwitz. Her punishment for refusing to dance at an SS officer's party was to stand barefoot in the snow, and she pledged that if she survived she would dedicate her life to dance. The film explores ideas about time, memory and movement. Towards the end of the piece, the elderly Yehudit begins to dance in her rocking chair; although her movement suggests she is suffering, Gersht's film captures her spirit of defiance. This work was developed by Gersht in association with Photoworks.

The two-screen film 'Evaders' explores the mountainous path of the Lister Route, used by many to escape Nazi-occupied France. The film references the ill-fated journey of Jewish writer and philosopher Walter Benjamin who fled Nazi persecution along this route, and whose own words give the exhibition its title. Benjamin crossed into Spain but as he tried to continue his journey he was challenged by border officials. Distraught at the threat of being sent back to France he committed suicide. The other members of his party were allowed to continue to Lisbon the following day. Strongly referencing Benjamin's texts, Gersht raises questions about history and progress. He uses the writer's story and struggle with this dramatic environment as a means to explore ideas of transition and of physical, cultural and psychological borders.

Finally, Gersht's photographic work 'Chasing Good Fortune' results from the artist's recent journey to Japan and examines the shifting symbolism of cherry blossoms. Initially linked to Buddhist concepts of renewal, the blossoms came to stand for Kamikaze soldiers during the Second World War. The photographs were taken at memorials to the Kamikaze, others at Hiroshima where the trees grow in nuclear contaminated soil. Many were taken with a digital camera at night and as a result of low light conditions, they often have a strange, fragmented quality, raising questions about the nature of their medium.

Gersht's work frequently deals with the difficulty of representing violent histories. His previous works include a series of cityscapes from post-conflict Bosnia as well as landscapes from the contested territory of the Judean Desert. He has also explored his own family's experiences during the Holocaust

through film and photography.

Ori Gersht says: "Scars created by wars on our collective and personal memories are at the essence of my practice. In my work I often explore the dialectics of destruction and creation, and the relationships between violence and aesthetics. Showing at IWM London felt like a unique opportunity to position my work in the context of this remarkable institution that reflects on wars, while attempting to draw a careful line between historic heritage and the horrific nature of violence"

Kathleen Palmer, Head of Art at IWM London, says: "This is the first time that any of these works have been shown in the UK and since so much of Ori's work deals with conflict, it's fitting that his first major UK museum show should be here at IWM London. The films and photographs in *This Storm Is What We Call Progress* each pose powerful questions about memory and history which will stimulate contemplation and debate among our visitors.'

Related Events

- Introductory Talk

10 March 2012

1.30pm, 2.45pm, 4pm

IWM curator Sara Bevan and Celia Davies from Photoworks will present a short introduction to *Ori Gersht: This Storm Is What We Call Progress*. There will be an opportunity to look around the exhibition with a question and answer session with the curators afterwards. Free admission.

- Artist Talk

28 January 2012

2pm

Ori Gersht's films and photographs often explore the relationship between violent histories, representation and geographical place. As part of IWM's annual Holocaust Memorial Day commemorations, Gersht will discuss the works in *This Storm Is What We Call Progress* and set them in the wider context of his practice. Free admission.

Admission to *Ori Gersht: This Storm Is What We Call Progress* is free

– ENDS –

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Notes to Editors

About Ori Gersht

Ori Gersht was born in Tel Aviv in 1967 and has lived in London for over 20 years. He moved to the UK to study Photography, initially at the University of Westminster, and later at the Royal College of Art. He is represented by Mummery and Schnelle in London, CRG in New York, Angles gallery in Los Angeles, as well as galleries in Tel Aviv and Milan. He has exhibited at several significant institutions in the UK, including his 2002 exhibition *Afterglow* at the Tate's *Art Now* room and an exhibition at the Photographer's Gallery entitled *The Clearing* (2005/6). Gersht has also had solo exhibitions at several important international institutions such as the Hirschhorn Museum in Washington in 2009 and Tel Aviv Museum in 2002. 2012 will see two important new exhibitions of his work opening in the UK and USA, at IWM London and at the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

About Photoworks

Photoworks is the UK's leading commissioning agency for photography. We publish books and produce new work, exhibitions, events and the Brighton Photo Biennial. Collaborating with a broad range of artists and organisations, engaging the widest possible audience, Photoworks encourages debate and inspires new thinking about photography.

Visit www.photoworks.org.uk to find out more.

IWM London

IWM London is IWM's flagship branch thanks to the breadth, depth and impact of our exhibits and displays. We share people's experiences of war through our First World War and Second World War galleries, the Holocaust Exhibition, the Lord Ashcroft Gallery, as well as many other displays and temporary exhibitions. Our family learning sessions and events encourage debate and challenge people's perceptions of war.

Open daily from 10am – 6pm except 24, 25 and 26 December. Last admission 5.45pm
IWM London, Lambeth Road, London, SE1 6HZ. T: 020 7416 5000

IWM

IWM (Imperial War Museums) tells the story of people who have lived, fought and died in conflicts involving Britain and the Commonwealth since 1914.

Our unique Collections, made up of the everyday and the exceptional, reveal stories of people, places, ideas and events. Using these, we tell vivid personal stories and create powerful physical experiences across our five museums that reflect the realities of war as both a destructive and creative force. We challenge people to look at conflict from different perspectives, enriching their understanding of the causes, course and consequences of war and its impact on people's lives.

IWM's five branches are **IWM London**, with six floors of exhibitions and displays; **IWM North**, housed in an iconic award-winning building designed by Daniel Libeskind; **IWM Duxford**, a world renowned aviation museum and Britain's best preserved war-time airfield; **Churchill War Rooms**, housed in Churchill's secret headquarters below Whitehall and the Second World War cruiser **HMS Belfast**.

2014 - 2018 marks the centenary of the First World War, a landmark anniversary for Britain and the world. IWM will mark the centenary by leading a vibrant, four year programme of cultural activities across the country, including the opening of brand new First World War galleries at IWM London in 2014. For more information visit www.1914.org