

The Ethical and the Aesthetical in the Photography of Rose Klabin By Hagai Segev

Rise and Fall and *Corporate Identity* are two series of large photographs by Brazilian artist Rose Klabin, in her first show in Israel. The exhibition includes two series of photo-manipulations. One series is printed on roof insulation material, and the other on the papers produced at the paper factories the series depicts.

Both series of photographs demonstrate how art allows key issues laden with consequences, reaching beyond the boundaries of the artistic medium, to be raised and discussed. Klabin's photographs raise questions for an aesthetical discourse, which in itself, is the foundation for an ethical discourse, without stooping to slogans and purely political or economical discussions. The advantage in facing the major issues in life in this way is the formation of visual connections which, in an everyday discussion, usually remain unsaid, not being perceived as 'true' expressions of a concrete reality.

Klabin invites the viewer to face pivotal questions concerning contemporary global economy and society. The works address the conflicts man and nature have to confront but not in the political sense but rather in an ethical perspective.

The series, *Rise and Fall*, documents abandoned buildings in southern USA, left empty, following the real-estate crisis that has been impacting the housing field in recent years. The depression and financial difficulties have forced hundreds of thousands of residents to leave their homes, after failing to meet their mortgage payments. The crisis left many neighborhoods desolate, the houses standing empty. In the rich looking photographs, the houses appear ghostly, as the cranes penetrate them, filling the void the residents left behind. These cranes, creating the second layer of the photographs, represent the flourishing Brazilian housing industry and the financial boom that has occurred while in the US the market fell into depression. The title, *Rise and Fall*, is also a symbol to the cyclical nature of the economy as well as that of nature.

The second series presented at the exhibition, entitled *Corporate Identity*, exposes the destruction wrought by the enormous paper factories of global conglomerates in the Brazilian rain forests. These giant factories cause millions of trees to be cut down, as they race to meet the ever growing demand for paper products. In this process, extensive areas of evergreen trees are devastated, contributing, among other things, to global warming. The photographs show how the industrial structures penetrate and conquer more and more green land, harming nature.

Reality, however, is not as one-dimensional as it appears at first glance. Understanding the background of Klabin's work on the photographs reveals a

different story, more multi-layered and no less fascinating. The photographs of the series, *Corporate Identity*, were shot at a paper factory owned by the artist's family. Moreover, the forests depicted in the works, where trees are cut down to be processed in the factories, were planted by man, destined, once grown, to be processed for the paper industry, a vital part of Brazil's economy.

As part of her work on *Corporate Identity*, Rose spent two weeks at the paper factories in southern Brazil. During this period, she had photographed the industrial architecture of the factories, focusing on their structural foundations: pillars, industrial roofs, pipes and other metal parts. Alongside these, she photographed the deep green forests surrounding the factories.

Understanding this state of affairs and creating two parallel lines of thought, those of a viewer unaware of the background story and those of a viewer who is, is the foundation to another discussion Klabin aims at: it is not her intent to cast blame or throw rocks at the industry; rather, it is her hope to raise and discuss the topic of sustainable development. According to Klabin, her interest in this series stemmed from the very real issue of whether and how sustainable industrial development could exist in Brazil, and how an economic vision for a better future might be implemented.

The two series attempt to examine and suggest integrative schools of thought that make simultaneous use of the images, planted in the world of mass media, which often perceives reality as one-dimensional, seen only through a single quick glance at a TV or computer screen; and the much more multilayered and complex reality found in the field. This multi-layered view is symbolized by the multi-layered nature of the photographs. The images are comprised of layer upon layer of concrete reality: houses, gardens and power lines in *Rise and Fall*; rainforests penetrating or integrating themselves into the looming industrial structures in *Corporate Identity*.

Digitally manipulating the photographs in her studio, Klabin placed one photograph on top of another, merging the layers together. In spite of this merge, one can still spot the various characteristics of each separate component, through the collage. And yet, the distinction becomes more complex, and this complexity raises questions concerning the multi-layered nature of things, and suggests that signs and traits do not always coincide.

In the Israeli context, it is interesting, through Rose Klabin's unique photographs, to be exposed to economic and social issues that only rarely arise in the Israeli public's awareness. The relevance of Klabin's art at this time, following last year's social protests, offers a global perspective on issues with extensive social, economic and ecological impact. Klabin's art suggests that we recognize the responsibility we bear for the dramatic changes happening around us, both in our immediate environment,

and in a wider, more global context.

Rose creates an opportunity to discuss the meanings of this merge: can it occur in real life? Does one layer overshadow the other? Can the two be truly combined? Perhaps, in reality, even more layers exist, unseen by us? Klabin presents reality in all its complexity, without saying so directly, using only artistic representation.

What is corporate identity? Is it only expressed in impressive logos and enthusiastic slogans seen in corporate websites, or does it find its expression elsewhere as well – in places more real and concrete, in the field, away from the eyes of the consumer public? Klabin's answer to these questions is unambiguous: the complexity that exists in the numerous layers of ecology and economics cannot be hidden or simplified, cannot be avoided.

This series "Corporate Identity" works on many levels but the scale is key. You are transcended and disorientated, lost in the forests amongst an immeasurable number of greens one moment and then sent crashing through industrial structures that cut through these landscapes.

Listening to Rose describe the week she spent photographing & sleeping at the paper factory you can just imagine her tiny frame curled up under these massive sky scraping hunks of metal, the sound of the machines ricocheting through the forests. What Rose cleverly demonstrates through her work is that her interrogation obtains a response, challenging how we ourselves stand accountable in this increasing imbalance between corporate development and deforestation, man versus nature.

Its important to Rose that this series is printed on the very paper these factories produce, the colours on the paper are beautiful and have a better chance of surviving than some of the trees in the forests of Brazil.

Rose is an emerging force with great talent and strong opinion.

Written By Philippa Adams, Senior Director, Saatchi Gallery, London in August 17, 2011 (on Corporate Identity project)

The theme of constant innovation has long been a core tenet of both capitalist economies and Twentieth century art. Corporations consistently evoke the concept of innovation to link their values with those of artists, even in instances where artists believe their innovations are hostile to corporate ethos. By incorporating ideals of Nicolas Bourriauld's Relational Aesthetics and Postproduction into her practice, Klabin's performance works are concerned with the constant investigation of today's corporate cultural politics and it's impact on artistic production. As part of a larger ongoing project titled Rose Klabin, Inc. the London based Brazilian artist,

descendent of a lineage of highly successful corporate leaders, performed the piece *Untitled* (2006) for the first time at a show at The Barge House, London, this year. In the large group show "Quick and Dirty", curated by Jeremy Ackerman, Klabin's installation/performance – strategically placed in the centre of the first room of the compound while facing the viewer in its entrance to the space – stood as an uncomfortable addition to an environment where "art" seemed to have been invaded by the dryness and aggressiveness of corporate power. For *Untitled* (2006), the artist built a corporate stand displaying a large banner carrying the Rose Klabin Inc. logo on its forefront. During the performance Klabin, dressed in a business suit, sat in front of her Apple laptop computer alternating in between actions – numbering /signing the 200 pre printed Rose Klabin, Inc. business cards and standing up to introduce herself to the viewers by formally shaking their hands and giving away the individual cards. In addition to the Rose Klabin, Inc. logo – also printed on a mug from which the artist sipped on coffee from time to time, as well as on the mouse pad sitting to the right hand side of the laptop – the business cards carried a customer service number which the viewer was invited to call at his/her own discretion. For that number, Klabin set up an automated answering service in which a professional operator reads out a menu containing several options, which the caller can access by pressing numbers 1 through 5 in order to find out more information on the artist. Furthermore, for each individual option (from show reviews to the artist's resume) Klabin appropriates herself with information of other living artists, such as Jeff Koons, Damian Hirst and Andy Warhol, in order to make it appear as part of her own

history and identity. Another important aspect of Klabin's work, is the context in which she holds *Untitled* 2006. By doing this performance within the confines of a gallery holding a group show composed by more than 50 artists, Klabin's work also attempts to call attention to the notion of artistic creation as well as to what defines it from other modes of production. There is an undeniable humorous element in the way Klabin's work touches upon notions of creation, authorship and originality as she appropriates herself of pre existing modes of production (the process of outsourcing the printing of the Rose Klabin, Inc. logo on a whole line of products such as business cards, mugs, mouse pads, banners, etc) as well as by incorporating information of other artists identities into creating it into her own. Highly influenced by artists such as Carey Young and more recently Rikrit Tiravanija, Klabin's work points a finger at corporate culture while asking: how can artists produce meaning and singularity from this chaotic mass of corporate iconography, objects, names and references that constitutes our daily life?

Written By Jeremy Ackerman, Junho 2006.

When Rose asked me to write the introduction to this catalogue, I was first flattered then concerned that I would be able to do her work justice. I was hesitant to accept

the responsibility of speaking candidly enough, afraid that my feelings for her as a person would cloud my judgment. Of course, the truth is as a collector of art, and despite any sentimental feelings I have for Rose as a friend- I have a real appreciation and interest in the work she does, and I soon realized that writing in praise of her work would be easy.

There is brightness of color and image that infuses Rose`s collages with a radiant energy, and gives them an immediate sensory appeal. This warmth and richness strikes me as specifically Brazilian, and I am reminded of my first encounter with the Baroque altarpieces in the churches of Ouro Preto., which likewise provide a glorious feast for the eyes. Yet Rose`s assemblages also remind us that Brazil possesses a longstanding and extremely sophisticated tradition of avant –garde art. To North Americans, Helio Oiticica and Lygia Clark are perhaps the best-known practitioners of this particular kind of brazilian experimental art making, but there are many others like them, and it is possible situate Rose`s work squarely within this particular tradition. In these collages, Rose demonstrates her command of contemporary conceptual strategies, as for example when she blurs the line between fine art and craft, and demands that both be given equal weigh. Her use of found objects and appropriated imagery (such as Brazilian flag) signal to the viewer that she is working within what one might describe as an international contemporary art vocabulary, But although it is extremely worldly and cosmopolitan, it remains above all an expression of an individual sensibility – of Rose – so that each object is imbued with an intimate and poetic dimension, as well.

Rose has a political mind is driven to understand, analyze, and reinterpret. How she views the world is put on display for us as viewers, and we are asked to interact with the pieces, to dissect and involve ourselves with the truths they are trying to unearth. Trought this process, she is as gifted a communicator as she is a maker of things. Rose works hard to make sure that the art is meticulously assembled. I have had the privilege of knowing her, of being able to follow her work closely over the years, and it gives me great pleasure to see such a comprehensive selection of her work detailed herein from which a wider audience can enjoy and learn. Though her work appeals to those educated in the making of art and its history, I find that it is also easily accessible to the layman, which is most refreshing. It is wonderful to find work that appeals to a great to many people for various reasons, and on different levels; her marriage of ideas and beauty achieve a seemingly felicitous state. This body of work seems to me an important and much welcome contribution to the field of Brazil avant-garde art, and it is with great pleasure that we welcome this exhibition of Rose`s exceptionally wordly and sensitive work of art.

Written By Agnes Gund, President Emérita and Chairman of the International Council of Museum of Modern Art

Rose Klabin: Artist Bio

The theme of continuous innovation has long been a core tenet of both capitalist economies and Twentieth century art. Corporations consistently evoke the concept of innovation linking their values with those of artists. By incorporating the ideals of Nicolas Bourriaud's Relational Aesthetics and Postproduction into her practice, Rose Klabin's works are concerned with the constant investigation of today's corporate culture. Upon her return to Brazil in 2007, after having lived abroad for 13 years, Klabin started photographing factories around the country and became progressively interested in Sustainable Development as a corporate trend.

For her latest series "Corporate Identity" Klabin did a two week immersion in a pulp and paper company in the south of the country, where she had the opportunity to photograph both the reforestation reserves as well as the factories at work. In these photographs, the artist works with superimposition of images - the forests and natural elements of the reforestation areas versus the man-made steel structures and machinery - in order to come up with new images which bring forth the idea of integration between man, nature and corporate development in Brazil.

Rose Klabin was born in 1977 in Brazil, lived, studied and worked in New York from 1998 until 2003, got her MA in Fine Arts at Central Saint Martins, lived and exhibited in London from 2004 until 2007 and has been living and working in Brazil since then.