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Museums

Israeli Nir Evron's visually rich, multilayered take on history

By **Menachem Wecker** November 21

When curator Lauren Ross first saw Nir Evron's film, photographic and video works in his Tel Aviv studio three years ago, she was immediately drawn to the "visually rich" ways he layered history upon landscapes and architecture. The works, she found, were "visually seductive but also incredibly complex."

"As soon as I saw that, I knew I wanted to work with him," says Ross, who became the inaugural curator at Virginia Commonwealth University's Institute for Contemporary Art in Richmond a year ago.

Ross brought "Projected Claims" to Virginia Commonwealth after first exhibiting the show — three projected videos and seven photo-based inkjet prints — in her former job as contemporary art curator at the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa. It's the biggest U.S. show to date for the 41-year-old artist.

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In the photographic series "Threshold" (2015), Evron superimposes doubly exposed architectural elements, s

doors and windows, on the cityscape of the new planned Palestinian city Rawabi in the West Bank, which re-opened to residents after water disputes with Israel. Evron's 2006 digital video "In Virgin Land," meanwhile, shows uncultivated landscapes devoid of human presence throughout Israel.

Evron honed his artistic process during his national service in the Israeli army's military police, where he conducted criminal investigations. He found himself "trying to construct a story from documents, from a name, and from places." He continues to exercise those investigative muscles in his art.

"I try to search for clues about the past and then to see how much they're important nowadays," he says. "I think history is not something that happens and it's over." Evron sees history as constantly reconfigured and negotiated, and his art explores those historical layers.

His works are also meditations on media. Evron makes a point of revealing on his Web site and exhibit wall labels what technology he used: inkjet prints, 16 or 35 millimeter film, or HD video.

By focusing on the nature of media itself, Evron questions how media conveys information, how the public relies on it for information, and how it shapes memory and understanding of events, Ross says.

Ross's encounter with Evron's work three years ago wasn't a coincidence. She was invited on a "curatorial research trip" by Artis, an independent New York nonprofit, which aims to broaden "international awareness and understanding of contemporary visual art from Israel," according to its [Web site](#).

Evron previously had a few exhibits in Europe and the United States but hoped to exhibit more widely in the U.S. In Richmond, where he is a lecturer at Virginia Commonwealth, he has found that the students have considerably different approaches than his film, photography and video students at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem, where he has taught since 2007. The differences, he says, are shaping the way he thinks about his work.

"My students in Jerusalem don't have a choice but to respond to the politics of the region — especially when they're dealing with photography," he says. "Here it feels completely different. . . . Reality is not pressuring them so hard. They have the privilege to look at themselves and their own processes."

Having come through the Bezalel system, which emphasizes political engagement, Evron says he has learned from his students in Richmond that his work can be introspective rather than entirely wrapped up in current events. (A show next June in Tel Aviv will feature five films, only three of them made in Israel, Evron says, and a new project he's working on about tobacco is based on his time in Richmond.)

Evron is well known in Israel for his attention to architecture, political identity and the history of photography and cinema, Amitai Mendelsohn, curator of Israeli art at Jerusalem's Israel Museum, said in an e-mail. "I think his

dealings with these questions are very original in the sense of his usage of photography and video.”

Ross originally curated “Projected Claims” for the Philbrook, where it ran from May to mid-October. When she accepted the job in Richmond at the Institute for Contemporary Art, she took the exhibit with her.

She has high hopes for her tenure in Richmond, saying she has been “really impressed and frankly buoyed” by the enthusiasm for the arts she has encountered. “There’s a really strong creative class here,” she adds, with “all kinds of interesting work being done around design and food and craft and art.”

She also thinks the Institute for Contemporary Art, which will open a 41,000-square-foot center in 2017, has a role in sustaining that culture. “We have these incredible, talented students who are graduating from VCU. I would like to see Richmond be a place where they feel comfortable staying, so that they can pursue a career in the arts — not feel like they have to relocate to one of the bigger cities,” she says.

“Projected Claims” will run until Jan. 17, 2016, at Virginia Commonwealth’s Depot Gallery.

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