

From Dirt

An exhibition by Brothers of Light

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At the end of a rainy day, as they were searching for inspiration outside their studio in the industrial part of a small town in northern Israel, a piece of old, flattened metal appeared to the Brothers of Light. Dusty but still shiny, fallen off a truck on its way to a waste site, this scrap on a dirt road appeared to the Brothers like an archeological treasure. After that first revelation, they discovered that the area around their studio was full of similar objects: old metals like spray cans, road signs, satellite plates, pans, etc., which had fallen from garbage trucks been thrown away and were run over by those trucks again and again until they were completely flattened and covered by dirt.

The Brothers had until that point mainly done large-scale street murals. Now they took the first pieces of metal that had sparked their interest along to a residency program in Mexico City, still not knowing the major role these would eventually play in their artistic practice. They started to explore and address the passage of time and the life-cycles of industrial metals, the kind of decaying objects one finds littered throughout Israel's outskirts. Thousands of miles away from where they had first picked those scraps up, they found inspiration in ancient Mexican culture and its psychedelic influence. When they returned to Israel, the Mexican imprint upon their art was pervasive, and this way of working with metal became a major part of their practice.

The transformation of the blight of pollution into appealing works of art is compelling on a human and emotional level, and it raises questions about our ability to appreciate beauty in whatever object it is found. Although what we are presented with in those metal pieces are two-dimensional works of art, we know that they used to have another life, another purpose. When they could no longer serve that purpose, they died, losing their place in a meaningful human world. Yet the matter itself remained solid, and through the Brothers' repurposing, gained a new life.

This project continues to refer to urban spaces and the relation between structures and buildings and the people who use them, just as street art does. The new work is

small-scale, but like the external walls that serve as a canvas for muralists, the original surface is wrinkled and full of defects which interfere with the image and thereby become inherent parts of it.

It is not the first time that the Brothers have tied different cultures together through their work. Their own origins are mixed: with an Argentinian father and a Moroccan mother, their multicultural home influenced their art tremendously. They grew up without a television, meaning they spent their childhood reading and looking through books about ancient cultures, art and architecture from around the world. That cultural melting pot is important for reading and understanding their art – for instance their own take on the Hamsa, where they combine a number of different tribal signs in this traditional symbol.

The paintings on the metal pieces are vivid, with bright colors and clean, precise lines. Much like in pop art, there is an iconic, centralized image or pattern in many of the works, an assembly of symbols. Although as viewers we find ourselves in front of a clear image, it is hard to say what exactly it is we are looking at. There is a sense that a deeper meaning lurks deep inside, yet it is vague and difficult to pinpoint. In the repetition of symbols, an aesthetic language seems to be at work, but we are not given a key for decoding it.

The Brothers work with their own set of symbols which includes a figure with a beak, oftentimes walking up and down stairs. They use imagery evocative of mind-altering experiences, cactuses, vases, flames of fire, a joint, and an ancient, anthropomorphic building. That building – a square structure which resembles a sacred shrine – symbolizes a portal through which we can enter another dimension of consciousness.

Guided by intuition and a keen attention to the material, they paint in a way that addresses the shape and texture – as well as the history – of the individual pieces. There's no attempt to refine or conceal the materials' original qualities; on the contrary, the artists adopt and perpetuate their idiosyncrasies, letting them be part of the work.

Through repetition of those symbols and icons, they not only develop a new style, but reenact the cyclical nature of the world and human life. Most obviously there is

recycling – taking an old object and giving it a new life in a new context. This connects both to ecological art and to pop art and ready-mades. It's almost as if Warhol's famous Campbell's Soup can has been run over, and reclaimed and repainted by the Brothers. Other paintings hint at astronomical cycles, through compositions like an imaginary solar system, or cycles of images repeated with small variations. The idea of the cycle suggests that progress is not linear and unidirectional. Rather, events and socio-historical stages repeat themselves.

There's no doubt that the Brothers of Light want to bring attention to the threat of pollution that results from the consumerist culture that defines the anthropocene. The use of waste as the defining feature of this exhibition makes a clear statement by itself. In addition, the works can be construed as speaking simultaneously about particular ecological problems and emotional human conditions. One typography work even states this clearly: "One day I will decompose and only these letters will remain." This suggests the work of art glues together an idea, a time, a humane need and material. By coloring these metals, the Brothers make them stronger. The painted areas of the scraps will not corrode; they will be saved by art.