

DAS
ISRAELITISCHE KRANKENHAUS
בית החולים היהודי

MERAV SHINN BEN-ALON

CURATOR:
DR. SMADAR SHEFFI

16.1 — 19.4.25

The Jewish Hospital in Breslau, Germany (today Wrocław, Poland), was inaugurated in 1903. It was a modernist project aimed to facilitate public access to the most advanced medical care of its time for Jews and non-Jews alike. Treatment was gratis, in brightly lit spaces with shiny stainless-steel equipment, expenses borne by the Breslau Jewish community, the third largest in Germany.

The Hospital's "Golden Age" ended abruptly when the Nazis requisitioned it. The exterior sustained damage during World War II, but the interior remained nearly intact. In 1970, it reopened as the Polish Railways Workers' Hospital – a historical irony. It ceased to operate in 2015, and is currently under construction as a luxury condominium.

"Modernism" as a mode of thinking, a historical era and cultural movement, encompasses contradictions, high hopes, and bitter disappointments. Progressive movements employed modernism to propose alternatives to hierarchical systems of the past, while totalitarian regimes used the term to erase histories and establish repressive mechanisms. The discourse is especially complex in the context of twentieth century German history.

Das Israelitische Krankenhaus is a site-specific installation relating trauma, based on visual research of two photographic collections documenting the site: the first, from the hospital's inauguration, the second documenting its closure. Shinn Ben-Alon deconstructs and reassembles the images through cutting and rephotographing. The interventions of varied collage techniques illuminate the fault lines.

The exhibition spaces in Liebling Haus – the beautiful home built for Tony and Max Liebling, who fled the Nazis – are transformed into a site of discourse on disruption – the "caesura." Freud (a refugee in his old age) made the term pivotal to his theory on transition from the prenatal state – the "pleasure principle" – to infancy. He determined that the continuity is greater than one may expect from the drama of the caesura. In his 1975 lecture, British psychologist Wilfrid Bion revisited Freud's hypothesis. Bion considered the caesura as that which simultaneously separates and connects states of being.

Das Israelitische Krankenhaus – The Jewish Hospital is installed in an International Style building which was a residence for physicians and their clinics. The exhibition is suffused with the grief of the past, but the hopes that the Hospital embodied are illuminated anew. This art exhibition expresses continuity and resurgence after disaster.

Merav Shinn Ben-Alon — **Das Israelitische Krankenhaus** **Curator: Dr. Smadar Sheffi**

THE LIEBLINGS' BEDROOM CLOSET

Photographic collage, 2024

The glass-fronted closet is a lightbox. Images of gleaming, silvery objects bask in its light. It takes a moment to decipher them as medical instruments and furniture. These images are from the 1903 Jewish Hospital inauguration album. The equipment, the most innovative for its time, embodied its modernist social vision — tools of progress and healing for all.

Shinn Ben-Alon made photographic collages, reversing the blacks and whites. The exquisitely beautiful, jewel-like images drenched in velvety black depict objects whose luster has faded and whose bright light seems to be the glow of distant stars.

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BRESLAU

Two-channel video loop, 3:35'. Video editor: Ofir Yeger

Photos of the hospital in Wrocław: M.Kujda, @Fundacja Art Transparent, 17. Survival Art Review, 2019

Rooms devoid of human presence glide silently across the screen. At first, the movement seems to be circular, but slowly it reveals its lack of trajectory.

In the illusionistic space, the ceiling appears at times above, at other times below; windows are cut out; light appears from unexpected angles illuminating what is not there. Shinn Ben-Alon recombined printed and cut photographs taken in the vacant Hospital to create the video. The alienation and disruption of space stands out: sterile surfaces of ceramic and metal mark memory's ruptured borders. Void becomes matter: absence floods the space, transforming it into an experience of suspense like awaiting the sound of approaching footsteps.

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THE CHIEF PHYSICIAN'S OFFICE

Photographic Collage, 2024

The Chief Physician's office conveys grandeur. A vase adorns the table; the chaise longue suggests rest, evoking associations to Freud's couch. Prominently positioned on the desk is a phone, symbol of modernity within a modern hospital. A closer look reveals that the image of the room is wounded, broken, and torn. Shinn Ben-Alon distorted the colors in an image taken from the Hospital's inauguration album to create a photographic collage. Empty spaces remain, as if lacunae emerged, lurking beneath the dense weave of an orderly reality.

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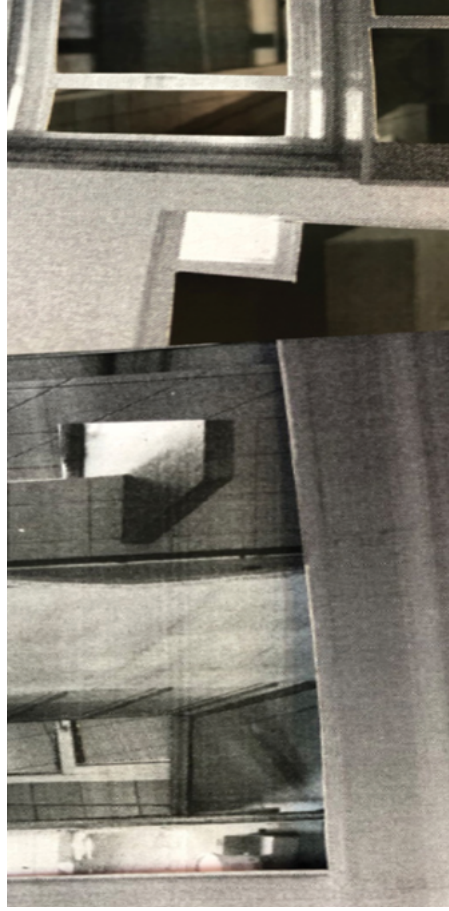
INNARDS

Photographic Collage, 2024

Photos of the hospital in Wrocław: M.Kujda, @Fundacja Art Transparent, 17. Survival Art Review, 2019

The built-in cabinet in the hallway blends into the wall. It is not an innocent piece of furniture, but evokes places of refuge during attacks, as in the Second World War. Here it is a hiding place for memory, a gateway into uncertainty. The collage behind the door is made from images of the vacant Hospital, cut and reshuffled into a collage, rephotographed, and once again cut into pieces. Shinn Ben-Alon's fragile connection commemorates a fleeting moment in which fragments morph into a new image.

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BILD

A series of 13 photographic collages, 17x17 cm each, 2024

Inconspicuous collages in close dialogue with scraped layers of paint on the wall evoke past moments. The works form a conceptual “Ariadne’s thread” facilitating the journey through the subconscious life of the unspoken strata emanating from the Liebling Haus to the historical Jewish Hospital in Breslau and its cultural heritage. Bild, the series’ title, means “picture” in German. The works are illusory, the small collages composed of fragments of photographs of the Jewish Hospital, like intermingled memories concealing more than they reveal. This is the locus of the tension between the “thread” leading from the labyrinth of memory to the present. Visitors walk through a Tel Aviv apartment that alludes to the fantasy of a new world and a just society that the Jewish Hospital sought to create. An internal labyrinth forms within the viewer offering options of revisiting the past and the present reality.

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