

# TIME STATIONS

EREZ ISRAELI (b. 1974) – graduate of Hamidrasha Art School at Beit Berl College and Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Israel. In his works – in which he employs sculpture, installation and video – he raises the issues of contemporary Israeli identity, hugely impacted by the 20<sup>th</sup> century experience of the Holocaust. The artist takes on board religion, war and terror – the subjects of the main controversies and cause of tensions in Israel. He lives and works in Berlin.

In 2009 at the Givon Art Gallery in Tel Aviv, Erez Israeli opened his first individual exhibition devoted in its entirety to the Holocaust. On that occasion, he asked himself what image first came to his mind when he thought about the Holocaust. The answer was *Friday Night*. There is a table set for the Sabbath dinner: half-eaten chicken broth and some already-nibbled chollah bread. The artist has evoked the ambiance of a family gathering, where the participants are missing – they have been taken away from their home by the Nazis. The silence and void is counterpointed by the noisy toy train – painted black and with the Nazi insignia – that goes round on the table; it is a contemporary object that one can buy today.

In his other Holocaust-related works, Israeli uses the Star of David – a symbol often trivialised in mass culture. It has provided the title for his first video work (2003), which shows a star-shaped monument made of human bodies; the image is an illusion, if only because although the men appear to be standing, they are in fact lying on the floor. In the video *Jewish Lesson* and in the photographs *Before & After*, we watch Israeli make his own copy of the Star of David, reminiscent of a ‘Do it yourself’ instruction video. The artist proceeds to sew the star directly onto the skin of his own chest. As he has commented, this was his way of literally experiencing the pain of past events. His installation *My eBay Collection #1* consists of ready-made objects bought on eBay. Besides the armbands of prisoners of concentration camps and ghettos and their everyday utensils, a large part of the collection consists of cheap, mass-produced Stars of David, which can nowadays be personalised at will.

Browsing through the Internet, Israeli has come across many sites dedicated to jokes about the Holocaust. In his series of drawings, the artist quotes and illustrates some of them, at the same time asking where the boundary of humour lies, as well as putting it to a test: who has a licence to tell such jokes? What reactions do they evoke? On the one hand, this confrontation is a challenge to the viewer; on the other – it references a sense of humour – a strong characteristic of the Jewish identity.

In his work *Human and the Sun*, Israeli reaches for a book that was popular in the 1920s and 1930s, written by Hans Surén, a German officer who also wrote about sports. Surén declaims the benefits of a healthy, active lifestyle in accordance with nature. In 1936, the book had a second edition, augmented by fragments from Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*. This was a manifestation that literature had been taken over by ideology and made to service the authorities. Israeli copies the gestures of the figures in the photographs from the book and – juxtaposing himself with the original representations – enters a discourse with the Aryan ideal of male beauty.

Israeli’s two works – *Two Jumping Jewish Skeletons* and *Jewish Skull* – take on board the facial feature that has been considered stereotypically Jewish: a characteristic, prominent nose. In an unnatural and exaggerated manner, the artist has elongated the nasal bones of the skulls to the point where they become reminiscent of the male genitalia. As the background to the *Two Jumping Jewish Skeletons*, Israeli has used packing boxes, on which his own name has been misspelt. The apparently joyous, smiling puppet clowns – skeletons – have been draped in the shape of the swastika, implying that some stereotypes can become fodder for dangerous ideologies.

Delfina Jalowik

Photographs courtesy of Givon Gallery in Tel Aviv and Crone Gallery in Berlin



Star of David, 2003,  
looped video



Jewish Lesson, 2009,  
video, 4 min 10 s



My eBay Collection #1, 2009,  
ready-made objects bought on eBay



Before & After, 2009,  
photographs, 60 x 50 cm each



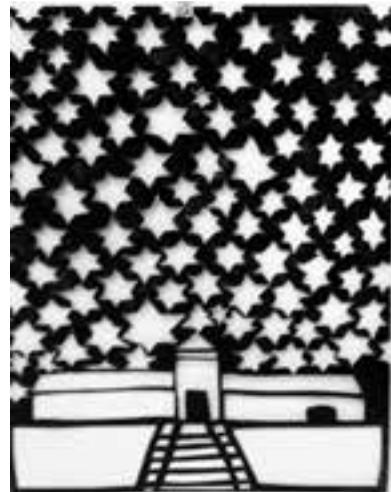
Friday Night, 2009,  
installation (detail)



Two Jumping Jewish Skeletons, 2014,  
mixed technique / plywood, 127 × 130 × 6 cm



Jewish Skull, 2017,  
timber, 30 × 20 × 13 cm each



WHAT'S THE  
BEST CAMP  
IN HISTORY?  
AUSCHWITZ  
IT HAD OVER  
MILLION STARS

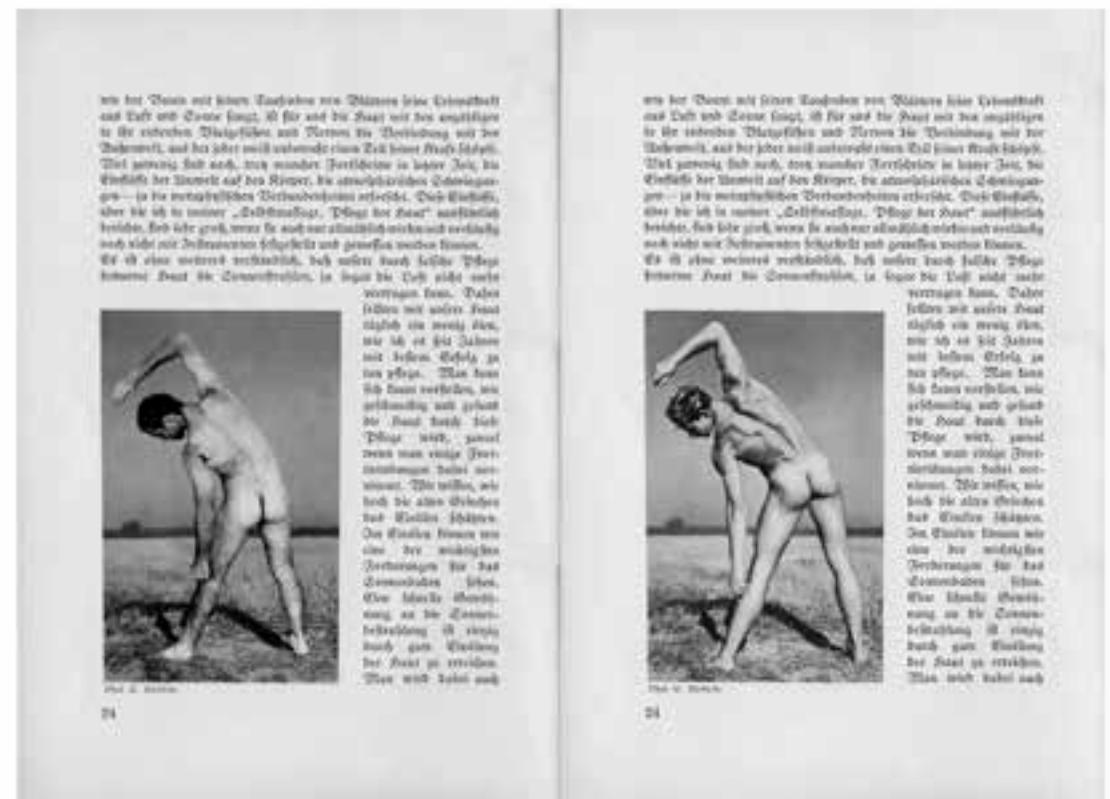


HITLER  
WASN'T SUCH  
A BAD BOY  
AFTER ALL  
HE DID KILL  
HITLER



THE NAZIS  
WERE WELL KNOWN  
FOR CARRYING OUT  
MEDICAL EXPERIMENTS  
ON CONCENTRATION  
CAMP PRISONERS  
THE MOST HEARIOUS  
BEING ANNE  
FRANKENSTEIN

Jokes, 2015,  
ink / paper, 48 x 72 cm each



Human and the Sun (or Show Your Jewish Body to the World),  
2014, digital prints, 60 x 42 x 6 cm each, homage to  
Mensch und Sonne by Hans Surén (1936)