

Belu-Simion Făinaru

The Fullness of the Void

Opening: February 27, 18 - 21 h

February 27 - April 18, 2015

Tuesday - Saturday, 12 - 18 h

Potsdamer Strasse 77 - 87, 10785 Berlin

Galeria Plan B is happy to announce the first solo exhibition of Belu-Simion Făinaru (born 1959 in Romania, lives and works in Haifa, Israel and Antwerp, Belgium) in the gallery's space in Berlin, presenting object and installation works fueled by the concept of *The Fullness of the Void*.

Făinaru's work uses a wide range of media, such as sculpture, installation, drawing and video. The works contain several layers of meaning that touch upon Jewish-Romanian history, text, and issues of identity and territory. Although his predilection for these subjects is indisputable, Făinaru's oeuvre also unmistakably addresses several universal human themes. For instance comprehensive notions such as religion, sanity, memory and language are often employed in direct relation to their opposites: secularity, madness, forgetting and visual art. The 'result' of Făinaru's artistic, historical and philosophic interests can be seen as a complex tapestry of contrasts and contradictions that define life.

Dr. Daniel Wayman of Tel Aviv University writes on the practice of Belu-Simion Făinaru and the works in the exhibition: 'Over the years the artist Belu-Simion Făinaru has coped with issues connected to the concept of the *nothingness* that drives his creativity. The monastically compressed characteristics of the works, the sparing choice of materials, the limited forms and colors (chiefly black and white), as well as the use of Hebrew lettering, direct the viewer to symbolical spiritual meanings and to philosophical issues beyond the identification of the present physical object. In some of the objects derived from the ready made concept in art, the tension is created by disruption of the functionality and by the disconnection from useful purposefulness. These duality systems prompt us to engage in queries regarding the existing present, the identity or actual reality that we apprehensively embrace when facing the threat of the void and the nothingness.'

The central work in the exhibition *The Fullness of the Void* is titled *Rose of Nothingness (2015)* and refers to the collection of poems by Paul Celan that deal with Kabbalah issues. Făinaru has created an installation comprising a drip sprinkler system hanging from the ceiling. The sprinklers drip a black liquid that is collected on the floor. The black liquid refers to the image of the *black milk*, that appears in Paul Celan's poem *Fugue of Death* as a recurring theme:

„Fugue of Death

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at nightfall

we drink it at noon in the morning we drink it at night

we drink it and drink it.“

Like Celan, Făinaru combines contrasts creating a rich symbolic reality derived from the past and the present, from the sacred and the profane, from the soul and the body. Like Celan's meridian address that describes a symbolic search for a map of his childhood and an aspiration to find a place that is no place, as in the poem where he finds himself anew, thus does Făinaru combine objects and images, sights and memories that create an internal and external journey in search of identity and place.'

The exhibition's title - *The Fullness of the Void* - takes on the title of a book by Dov Elbaum, researcher of Israeli Kabbalah who was invited to contribute a text to the exhibition. Dov Elbaum describes the connection between Kabbalah and the practice of Belu-Simion Făinaru. *The Fullness of the Void* refers to an influential concept in Judaism that describes how in the process of Creation, God

had to withdraw from his infinity, creating a void (,an expanse that had been voided of the infinite essence of God') in order to make place for the creation of the world. ,The initial beginning of the Creation is the removal of God from himself. Only after the *fullness of the void* has been achieved does the project of creation begins... This spiritual concept comprises a new mythical image: the Creation began from a state of exile. In order to enable the infinite God to create something external to himself he had to exile himself. As one might imagine, the significance given to the notion of expulsion in this religious theory was extremely important for the Jews of Europe during the last hundreds of years.'

The contributing text of Prof. Dr. Dov Elbaum introduces several approaches towards this concept through the history and describes "The fullness of the void" as ,the source of renewal. It is not only a frightening or dangerous or dismantling or borderline place – it is the spring of everything, it is the raw material from which works are created later. It is the chaotic state from which we draw a line or a thought and bring it to a kind of word and deed. In the work of Belu-Simion Făinaru we can see the brilliant visual formation of this unsayable *the fullness of the void*. In a clean language of expanses, materials and words Fainaru succeeds in imparting expression to the large spring of the *fullness of the void*, a spring from which every new creation comes into the world. Fainaru has actually succeeded in giving the deep idea of *the fullness of the void* material reality and bodily reality.'

Born 1959 in Romania, Belu-Simion Făinaru lives and works in Haifa, Israel and Antwerp, Belgium. Fainaru's work has been presented frequently in collective exhibitions all around the world, most noteworthy are the 1992 Documenta (DE), the 1993 Venice Biennale (IT), the Sonsbeek Biennale (NL) and the 2006 Biennale in Havana, Cuba. Fainaru also had several solo exhibitions in acclaimed institutions such as: Israel Museum in Jerusalem, S.M.A.K. Museum in Ghent, M HKA in Antwerpen, Lehmbruck Museum in Germany and Saitama Museum in Japan.

Next to his activities as a visual artist Făinaru is also a guest lecturer at universities in Belgium and Japan, and he has been professor at the Department of Architecture at the Wizo Academy in Haifa (IL) since 1984. In 2010 Belu-Simion Făinaru founded the Mediterranean Biennale of Contemporary Art in Israel, where he is also the director and curator.

In 2015 he founded AMOCA the Arab Museum Of Contemporary Art in Sakhnin. The museum is the first of its kind in Israel in the sense that it aims to promote co-existence between Arab and Jewish communities by means of cultural collaborations.

For more information, please contact the gallery at contact@plan-b.ro, and +49.172.3210711 (Mihaela Lutea) and +49.151.64617845 (Mihai Pop).

Make Room for Nothingness

Dr. Daniel Wayman of Tel Aviv University on *The Fullness of the Void* at Plan B Berlin

"Whoever knows and knows not is no other than the supreme will, the blocking of all blocks, nothingness.

(Wisdom of the Zohar, 119)

The first verse in Genesis begins by noting a point in time at a specific distinctive moment within complete chaos. The common Jewish philosophy regarding the Creation casts an eye at the divine status before the Creation and the processes and reasons that led to that action. The theory of the occult and the Kabbalah developed a model of the divine that relates, under the name of the *Infinite*, to the status of the Deity before the Creation that describes a boundless divinity with no dimensions of material or of time. The Infinite describes an experience that is too painful for human containment and indicates the enormous gap between man and God that concurrently encompasses everything and nothing.

The model of Creation describes a process that out of the totality of fullness, room is made not by subtraction, but by reduction in order to contain and enable a new separate reality that is an integral part of the whole but undergoes a separate process as part of a divine decision. The first stage focuses on that selfsame unoccupied place, a space within the infinite that is the secret place that serves as a womb that gives birth to a world in the image of its procreator.

The infinite, like the *nothingness*, is based on denial of the distinctive, negating the end or the *now and here*. Already in the 6th century BC the pre-Socratic philosopher Parmenides referred to the difficulty and impossibility of coping with the concept of the *nothingness*.

For you shall not know that which does not exist, it cannot be done;
Let it not be uttered by you; yes, what is conceived does exist.
One must speak and think of the being. Reality does exist.
But nothingness does not exist. Think of these words I order you.

(The Poem of Parmenides, Verses 3-5. Translated from the Hebrew by Amos Riesel)

Parmenides blazed the trail for the Greek philosophers who followed him in focusing on the world of phenomena, on the *there is*, the existence and the present. The philosophical challenger is focused on the ability to find in this world a system of principles and values that govern its arrangement and division into categories. The human aspiration to understand divides the world into a system of forces and values that are chiefly dual and compete or integrate dialectically in a dynamic manner. Greek philosophy and diverse theological concepts focused their attention on the values of dualism that create tension and struggle, the best known of which is the discussion on the body and the soul. The Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle were the first who dealt with these questions systematically. Christian theologians adopted this separation and widened the ethical gap and the struggle between the two categories. Descartes returned the discussion on soul and body to a secular theoretical discourse in an effort to understand the world without the intervention of God.

Over the years the artist Belu-Simion Făinaru has coped with issues connected to the concept of the *nothingness* that drives his creativity. The monastically compressed characteristics of the works, the sparing choice of materials, the limited forms and colours (chiefly black and white), as well as the use of Hebrew lettering, direct the viewer to symbolical spiritual meanings and to philosophical issues beyond the identification of the present physical object. The viewer has to make a connection between the plastic object with the iconic symbolic meanings of letterings or texts, and between physical accumulation situations and lack of tangible materialism that undermine the concreteness of the object and increase the viewer's interpretive role. In most cases, dealing with questions of the *nothingness* occurs in covert layers of the work and is expressed in formal characteristics of want versus fullness, continuity versus interruption, cleanliness and aesthetic sterility versus the choice of natural materials worked freely by hand. In some of the objects derived from the ready made concept in art the tension is created by disruption of the functionality and by the disconnection from useful purposefulness. These duality systems prompt us to engage in queries regarding the existing present, the identity or actual reality that we apprehensively embrace when facing the threat of the void and the nothingness.

The central work in the exhibition *The Fullness of the Void* is titled *Rose of Nothingness* (2015) and refers to the collection of poems by Paul Celan that deal with Kabbalah issues:

Psalm

Praise to you, No-man
For love of you
we will flower.
Moving
towards you.

A Nothing
we were, we are, we shall
be still, flowering
the Nothing-, the
No-man's-rose

Făinaru has created here an installation comprising a drip sprinkler system hanging from the ceiling. The sprinklers drip a black liquid that is collected on the floor painting traces of activity. The black liquid refers to an additional image, *Black milk*, that appears in Paul Celan's poem *Fugue of Death* as a recurring theme:

Fugue of Death

Black milk of daybreak we drink it at nightfall
we drink it at noon in the morning we drink it at night
we drink it and drink it.

The connection between Făinaru and Celan lies in their mutual Jewish identity, in their joint origins in Romania, in the effect of the Shoah on their families, as well as their creativity and their preoccupation with Judaism and the inspiration they derived from Jewish sources. Făinaru emphasizes his attraction to the visuality of Celan's images and to his ability to unite opposites and create a metaphysical reality that avoids the familiar dualistic divisions.

Făinaru attempts to bridge contrasts, to create new realities and qualities of symbolism based on meetings to discuss cultural issues as well as symbolic and formal commentaries. Although the drip sprinklers spray a rain of 'black milk', the installation nevertheless expresses the grace of God in the plenty falling down upon the earth and thereby supplying nourishment, like the Miracle of the Manna that supplied food to the Israelites in the desert in contrast to the pagan plenty growing out of the earth, the sea or the river i.e. the internal might of nature. In Făinaru's work the abundance is external or from the upper regions and is as miraculous as the connection between the nutritious milk and the black color.

Planning the irrigation system in the work is based on Kabbalistic principles of rhythmic and cyclic numbers that express a divine code, the cracking and understanding of which, according to the Kabbalistic perception, would enable the world to be recreated anew.

Some of the works in the exhibition include containers, such as a pitcher and basin holding liquids that freeze a new reality onto their combinations, as for example a house on top of a pitcher changes the setting into a landscape, a place, a symbolic microcosmos (*If The World Aleph*, 2015); or a wash basin containing a black liquid on which floats a paper boat is turned into a sea, an unknown expanse of sea – *Mare incognitum* – connected to an internal journey and a search process (*Black Sea*, 2015). The work *Fullness of the Void*, 2015, revealing a hat in the freezer, is connected to Făinaru's lengthy occupation with articles of clothing such as dresses, clothes and shoes etc. that mediate between the object and the subject missing from it, but is present by means of traces that remain or its physical pattern. The hat is revealed to us as a gaping black hole threatening to swallow us up from the whiteness of ice in the commercial freezer. Our look fills that selfsame absence, the *nothingness*, with symbols and significances regarding the owner of the hat, regarding the values of head covering rustling out of a frozen item of memory.

Like Celan, Făinaru combines contrasts creating a rich symbolic reality derived from the past and the present, from the sacred and the profane, from the soul and the body. Like Celan's meridian address that describes a symbolic search for a map of his childhood and an aspiration to find a place that is no place, as in the poem where he finds himself anew, thus does Făinaru combine objects and images, sights and memories that create an internal and external journey in search of identity and place.

The Fullness of the Void Takes On Material Shape

On the work of Belu-Simion Făinaru, exhibition in Berlin 2015

By Dov Elbaum

The principal idea in this ancient philosophical-Kabbalistic myth that has been passed on through the channels of Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah tells a tale of a unique process of Creation. When the infinite God wanted to start extricating himself from his infiniteness and anonymity by means of creating something totally different from himself, he initiated a process that has been given a mystic term – *Butsina Dekardenutta* – in the Aramaic language of the Zohar (*).

It has been determined that this mystic expression, with its numerous diverse interpretations throughout the development of the Jewish Kabbalah, holds within itself a deep and primal process whereby the infiniteness of God turns into a kind of state comprising a certain aspect of measure, of boundary and of differentiation that in itself is the initial beginning of the well known Creation in the mythical Biblical Genesis. The various images seeded in this special mystical expression enrich mind, imagination and creativity. For instance, the expression could be translated into "dark light that emanates from white light" or "black fire on white fire" and also the "measuring line" could refer to the vertical line used by builders in order to align the house they will build.

The move from infiniteness to finiteness occurs through the development of a very fine black line, or a primal covert measuring line that is the foundation of all the diverse worlds existing in the Creation. This line is the basis of the world we are living in – a world made up entirely of measures, borders, domains and fences, in which everything is precisely measured and counted and split to a high degree. However, the attempt to define this idea in philosophical words somehow misses the deep basic visual image confined within this myth. When I try to imagine this *Butsina Dekardenutta* I visualize the infinite God as though digging, mining and creating light out of the darkness, light that is in fact darkness, dark matter that is darkness from which God digs out the light. There is no light without engraving in the dark (see Făinaru's work *The Fullness of the Void*).

This philosophical Kabbalistic primordial myth does not remain a passé myth – it continues to develop in the literature of the Kabbalah and mysticism. A giant leap forward in thought on this idea takes place in Safed of the 16th century that brought forth from its midst the next great revolution in the field of Kabbalistic knowledge. The herald of this revolution was Rabbi Isaac Luria, commonly known as "Ha'ARI". It was he who developed the Kabbalistic "Contraction Theory" that is thought to be one of the most important intellectual revolutions of the Middle Ages, certainly in all aspects of Jewish culture.

The central question regarding the "Contraction Theory" revolution is a simple one: how did the infinite God create the world? Since anything that is differentiated and specific cannot be created in a state of infiniteness. The answer too is simple: in order for a world, a thing, to become, it is necessary first of all to create an expanse in which the infinite God is not present. Therefore, before God created anything, He opened wide a space and within it an expanse, "removed himself to the sides", as the pupil of the "Ha'ARI", Chaim Vital, terms it, and like a geometrical ball an expanse that the "Ha'ARI" called a "Fullness of the Void" opened up within it, an expanse that had been voided of the infinite essence of God. Namely, the initial beginning of the Creation is the removal of God from himself. Only after a "fullness of the void" has been achieved does the process of creation begin, in which God is described as pouring into that fullness of the void his creator light that forms itself and solidifies until it turns into a human, nature, material and anything else.

This is a new spiritual concept created from an earlier spiritual concept: the "Fullness of the Void" from the *Butsina Dekardenutta*. It comprises a new interesting mythical image: the Creation began from a state of exile. In order to enable the infinite God to create something external to himself he had to exile himself. Exile is the most basic existential state ever. It is unnecessary to explain just how important this idea was for the Jews of Europe during the last hundreds of years during which they were expelled time and again from nearly every place on earth.

The idea of the "fullness of the void" departs from Safed and returns to Europe and most powerfully influences the development of the Jewish Chassidic teaching – a social spiritual movement that engulfed the Jews of central and eastern European countries. One of the riveting figures in this movement is the great writer and thinker Reb Nachman of Breslov. When he and his tortured and restless soul come across the texts of the Safed Kabbalist there takes place an additional modern and existential breakthrough in the term "the fullness of the void".

Reb Nachman of Breslov wants to turn the issue of the "fullness of the void" on its head by asking: "Are we living in the Creation?". Meaning we are living in a space that God voided, therefore there is no God in the space where we are living – there is no God in the world. But that is impossible, since it is impossible for anything to exist without possessing a godly spark. So is there a God in the world or is there not a God in the world? A spiritual paradox, an existential bewilderment which Rebbe Nachman terms "the dilemma of the fullness of the void", leading him to create a unique perception of belief.

Rebbe Nachman in effect argues radically that this "fullness of the void" situation is not the problem – it is the solution when we are supposed to live all the time in a desolation of questioning. The question as a state of being is the state prior to the Creation. Anyone interested in living a life of creativity should live a life of questioning in desolation and even in paradoxical conditions where there are concurrently two opposite truths. He claims that within the hierarchy of the Creation there are dimensions containing only query zones, and these are characterized as being the source of all the abundance in the world. They are layers comprising the paradoxes and the great theological dilemmas in matters of belief in God, as well as questions without answers, such as 'the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer', man's free choice versus physical determinism and all the other questions of this kind.

We do not fear "the fullness of the void", claims Rebbe Nachman, we adopt it. "The fullness of the void" is that which maintains experience and Creativity derives from it. Constant renewal takes place through it. It is the place where one can perform the process of the "Repentance" ("Teshuva") – to turn back into the deepest places within us that contain no words, into the soul, and from within it to relate the story of our lives anew in a completely different manner, creating a new narrative. These are the expanses of change, of art and of faith.

At this point Rebbe Nachman arrived at the pinnacle of his creativity – he redefined the concept of faith. Faith is usually defined by us, with great confidence, like one who claims or feels that with his clear knowledge he speaks in the name of faith. On the contrary, says Rebbe Nachman, that is not real faith – that is knowledge. Faith is precisely the place without knowledge and that, specifically, is the paradox. The ability to confine the live question marks within ourselves – that is faith. This is the place where there are only questions. The moment there are answers you have already been born out from there, you are already not there. Faith is a state of holding belief, as in the root of the Hebrew word for faith, derived from the Hebrew words for foster and hold – faith as the ability to contain and stay within the paradoxical issues.. The eternal question is the principle value.

Therefore the image of the womb, the condition of conception, is "the fullness of the void". This is like the first cells in the initial process of fetal development in the mother's womb, in which the cells are still in a state where they could differentiate into the development of diverse organs and in various directions. This is even a state of darkness because of so much mass or so much light we are unable to see. "The fullness of the void" is blinding light that has not yet penetrated matter and undergone reduction.

Indeed, one cannot really understand "the fullness of the void" as a spiritual expanse because it is in total darkness, an expanse that is not an expanse, that is not yet reduced in words or in thoughts or in matter. Consequently, it is also the place that comprises complete freedom, the place of infinite potentials, the possibility of possibilities; the place in which we see flashes and beginnings of numerous creative alternatives and yet we still do not decide or begin to go in any certain direction. There are still many options within a situation of chaos, this is a place where we can change one thing for another, a place where there are still no ethical values, a place that as yet has no opposites, goodness and badness, permissible and forbidden, true or false, everything is still possible, beyond words and beyond judgements.

"The fullness of the void" is the source of renewal. It is not only a frightening or dangerous or dismantling or borderline place – it is the spring of everything, it is the raw material from which works are created later. It is the chaotic state from which we draw a line or a thought and bring it to a kind of word and deed. And actually as the Reb Nachman of Breslov would say, in our conception and birth from "the fullness of the void" we experience and take part in the Creation. Whoever begins to draw down a work out of the dark chaos of "the fullness of the void" takes part in the Creation because he, like God – takes infinite chaos and begins to draw it down in the direction of expression and tangibility and deed and matter.

"The fullness of the void" is a chaotic situation where there are no clear paths, only silences, questions and storms. However if we succeed in gaining control and not get cold feet, but rather take a deep breath, dive deeply into the chaos and stay there, and slowly become born out of this situation, you are then fulfilling your mission in life as a person, you are then creating, you are then working, you are then worthy of the saying: in the image of God He made man.

In the work of Belu-Simion Făinaru we also see the brilliant visual formation of this unsayable "the fullness of the void" as it itself sometimes appears, so opaque and drawing the darkness in. In a clean language of expanses, materials and words Făinaru succeeds in imparting expression to the large spring of "the fullness of the void", a spring from which every new creation comes into the world. From a fertile dialogue with the literature of the Kabbalah and Jewish Chassidism, Făinaru creates in the darkness carvings of fashioned black roses that fertilize and make grow out of the darkness worlds of light and understanding.

The works of Belu-Simion Făinaru adopt the classical Jewish model of the question, of the constant paradox, of the want that is full, of the creation of vessels by means of the void, and of the absence. His works extricate from the material the insight that the void is potentially full, that the void is not empty, it is simply overfull. We find it difficult to bear "the fullness of the void" because, if we had been able to bear it, we would have seen that the void is full and also full of opportunities. Făinaru comprehends that there is really no gloom, the darkness is a cover that conceals the raw creative energy that could find expression in an infinite number of possibilities encoded in the explicit name of God that cannot be pronounced as such, but can only be presented in the existing alphabetic letters of the spoken language. Făinaru has succeeded in giving the deep idea of "the fullness of the void" material reality and bodily reality. He succeeds in containing the want, matter inside the matter...

* The foundational work in the literature of Jewish mystical thought – the Kabbalah – that was developed in Spain in the 13th century.

Translated from Hebrew by Amos Riesel