



PRESS RELEASE. 01

**World history to be read on cork
Palermo hosts the works by the Israeli artist AVNER SHER**

BRIDGE PALERMO JERUSALEM

Curated by Ermanno Tedeschi and Flavia Alaimo

Sala delle Verifiche | STERI | 14 June - 31 August

A “Visual Esperanto” to be read on multiple levels of comprehension: graphic signs, gestures, emotions, bodies to dismiss all cultural differences. Perhaps this is why Avner Sher has chosen cork as the main material of his works. Rebirth can be found between the cracks and wounds of the outer bark of the cork oak. The bark is peeled off from the trunk once every nine years, a repetitive trauma that the oak tries to forget. The Israeli artist uses cork to create an inner world which sinks into origins and feeds on desires. Through his art Avner Sher wants to decode the present and observe the points of collision between civilizations flooded by beliefs, despair and hope. The solo exhibit “**Bridge Palermo Jerusalem**” by Avner Sher will be inaugurated Thursday, 14 June at 18:30 in the Sala delle Verifiche of the Steri monumental complex in Palermo, where it will remain until August 31st. Created by Ermanno Tedeschi, international curator with many years dedicated to the enhancement of Jewish and Israeli cultural excellence, and Flavia Alaimo, art historian already engaged in exhibits on the theme of exodus, the exhibition is organized by Acribia in cooperation with the University of Palermo, under the patronage of the Embassy of Israel and is included in the program of **Palermo Italian Capital of Culture 2018**. “The site-specific project realized for the University of Palermo is particularly significant,” explains the Rector Fabrizio Micari, “because on the one hand, it is linked to the poetics of Avner Sher that is deeply linked to Jerusalem and to the concepts of destruction and rebirth associated with the history of the Jewish people; and on the other, because it digs its roots into the host city as it springs forth from an original process that uses reproductions of ancient maps of Palermo.”

Avner Sher handles cork, he marks it, it makes it his own; he etches it aggressively, he burns the bark, floods it with unusual materials like wine, laundry soap, ink and ketchup. He creates an archeology and a history for the material, as if it were a parchment tortured by stains, tears and scratches. In his works that have the colors of the desert or wine, or on a high row of obelisks, he looks for answers, capturing the fears and hopes he shares with his people.

For this exhibition which unwinds between the *Sala delle Verifiche* and the courtyard of the *Steri*, Avner Sher is designing a site-specific project that is linked to a previous one: **"950 square meters: Alternative Topographies"** curated by Smadar Sheffi at the Tower of David - Museum of the History of Jerusalem. As he has already done for the maps of the Old City where the sacred sites to the three main monotheistic religions are concentrated in less than one square kilometer, Sher will work on reproductions of ancient maps of Palermo on which he will trace the signs of history, fusing them with the new contours of modernity. The result will be an illusory map on cork that will tell a fictional tale, full of desire and anger, about the Sicilian capital. The artist wandered the narrow streets of the historic center of Palermo to grasp transversal feelings, religious axioms, historical data and personal histories and weave a hybrid representation of living things and inanimate objects that move between different periods and utopias. The courtyard will accommodate four obelisks, two red and two black, that, like columns, reflect the current cultural overlay of Palermo. Sher operates in a symbolic space between meaning and history; the two red obelisks which depict images that refer to the Judeo-Christian creation myth, stand like the tree of knowledge of good and evil and the tree of life. The two black obelisks refuse to be deciphered, at least in the eye of a non-African beholder. Sher has etched African symbols on them which he has absorbed without assuming any knowledge of the cultures of Africa. The ground and the floor are punctuated by small black pieces of wood which convey requests for help written in African languages. Are they messages in bottles that never reached their destination? As the son of Holocaust survivors, the nightmare of being marginalized, persecuted and being denied political asylum is still alive in the memory of the artist.

In the works of Avner Sher we find references to the Biblical figures of Christianity and Islam, like in the recent **Jacob's Ladder** (2013), **Jonah** (2013) or the ten "plagues" on obelisks (2014). Sher weaves together the marks and wounds of matter transforming them into forms and letters, curating them to build a world of broad philosophical and formal gestures that are often surprising and moving. On boards of cork mounted on wood he creates works that evoke the world of painting, engraving and carving; he draws from ancient visual languages, cuneiform and hieroglyphics, he refers to the Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites and Egyptians, but also to the American **action painters** of the mid-20th century (Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning) and the childish doodles of early Modernism (Joan Mirò). Violent scratches and delicate areas of minimalist rhythmic crosshatch range from the ancient Near East to Muslim and Persian ornamentation. And here and there are images reminiscent of the aesthetics of the first computer games, Nintendo, Pacman or Tetris. We are not asked to decipher or understand, they are not complete sentences; Sher tells a story and captures moments of per-

sonal and cultural ambivalence. His twofold look is related to early Modernism, to pioneering artists like the sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891-1915), Jacques Lipchitz (1891-1973), and of course, Picasso who drew inspiration from ancient civilizations as a source of his language.

You can think of the work of Avner Sher as a sort of Rosetta Stone that includes both text and translation; works of art that contain keys of comprehension, a meeting between cultures and histories and a visual statement of independence.

In the picture: SHER AVNER "Past Present Life No. 4" | 2017

EXHIBIT CARD

BRIDGE PALERMO JERUSALEM
by Avner Sher

curated by Ermanno Tedeschi and Flavia Alaimo
Sala delle Verifiche | Steri monumental complex
Piazza Marina | Palermo, Italy

14 June - 31 August

Vernissage: 14 August at 18:30

Hours: Monday - Saturday 10:00-18:00; Sunday 10:00-13:00

Free admission

Catalogue: Palermo University Press

Organization: **Acribia** in cooperation with the **University of Palermo**

Patronage: **Embassy of Israel | Academy of Fine Arts Of Palermo**

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