

Siah Amarjani - An exile dreaming of Saint Adorno - 2010 . 2010..22

The Artist

Born in Teheran , Iran -1939 to an intellectual family - well to do.

Left 1960 to study at Macalester in StPaul - majored in Philosophy - but dreams of becoming an artist.

Visited Iran 5 years ago and had rockstar status reception -now persona non grata in IRan.

World renowned Sculptor whose work articulates both his life long passion for art and ideas - and experience of living in a culture that is not his own.

Possibly one of the most prominent artists living in Minnesota at the moment - Studio in Warehouse district but very private - In receipt of Mcknight Foundation Grant of \$50000 in 2010 with the Distinguished Artist award, for his significant contributions to the quality of the State's cultural life.

Neo minimalist?

Interest in Early American Houses and vernacular architecture. Also conceptual Art.

Known for his interest in communal art and spaces. Footbridges, benches, reading rooms, gazebos. " Neighborly " sculptural spaces.

His studio : (in Minneapolis)

As always, Armajani is a generous host of old-school propriety, offering fresh berries and insisting that visitors share a rich chocolate torte even at 10 a.m. The shelves of his white-walled studio are lined with decades' worth of project models, many resembling rustic Midwestern buildings -- silos, corncribs, grain elevators, railway trestles. The down-home architecture is central to his notion that sculpture should be functional and accessible as well as intellectually complex.

"When I was a public artist between 1968 and 1999, I was harnessing my personal emotion and ideology," he said. "I was always very discreet, but in 1999 and 2000, I just could no longer withhold my personal feeling, so I became overtly political."

In the center of his studio stands a huge glass-and-steel sculpture containing a desk, a folding chair and a kind of picnic table attached to a gigantic wheel. Part of the sculpture is draped with black curtains. Called "Classroom for an Exile," it is an autobiographical piece he's been working on since 2002. When it is finished, or perhaps before, he will embark on what he calls "my last phase." That will be a series of tombs honoring thinkers he admires, starting with St. Augustine. Asked if he felt himself to be in

exile, even after half a century in an adopted country he deeply loves, he said, simply: "Right."

This work :

- explores exile as a physical , political and emotional condition
- made for Museum style exhibition - unlikely that a member of the Public would buy such a piece. SO intended as Public Art -

“Art in PUblic places should be accessible and should foster dialogue, debate and learning among the whole community.”

- quotes Alberto Giacometti’s surrealist masterpiece - the Palace at 4.00 am 1972
- Who is Theodoro Adorno : see full notes below and reference to link .

German philosopher born 1903 died 1969 lived until 1934 in Germany expelled by Nazis (he was of jewish origin though converted to Protestantism) Spends time in Oxford, UK and California. Returns to Frankfurt in 1949 - Heads up the Frankfurt School - main interests are social theory, sociology psychoanalysis and aesthetics as well as studies of mass media and critics of musicology. He wrote that exile was an ethical choice : “ It is part of morality not to be at home in one’s home.”

things to notice -

3 doors locked in the inside with keys in the locks

absence of legs of the character with his head in his hands

Prison like looking environment - a cell within a cell? Mattress in ticking no sheets.

Character above like a guard or a guardian angel? Adorno? has a gold halo.

Strange almost urinal looking structure. Or is it like the backbone of a squid that one feeds a bird?

How to interpret this work :

In Siah Armajani’s words :

The boundaries of an exile dreaming of Saint Adorno are well-defined. As outsiders we look inside with no prospect of ever turning “in”. All doors are closed. We are habitual outsiders looking inside. The surface separates the region of the “same “ from the region of the “other”. Inside withdraws from outside and leaves it behind . But both regions are two faces of one , and of the same character. Our attempt at union is resisted by the passive separation of the spaces.”

ALso reference to Alberto Giacometti’s surrealist masterpiece - The Palace at 4.00am - 1972 (photo on wall next to label of the art piece) . which resembles a miniature stage on which a mysterious play is being enacted.

Ask questions : how does this make you feel? basic VTS techniques - what is going on here etc..

My interpretation is as follows : it seems to me that Armajani may be showing that as immigrants or in general as members of our culture within another culture - we erect our own walls, create our own prisons... if we could just find the keys to walk with we would find that the keys are there in the door. We need to form bridges between cultures - to free ourselves from our own anxieties and our own prisons..."

But also fragility of glass ? = insecurity , fear, ephemeral?

Quote Kate Wolford Mcknight Foundation president :” *Siah shines a spotlight on life’s challenges and inequities. He unites humankind’s hardest truths with the optimism that we can do better , if we acknowledge and understand the bridges that brought us here>*”

Other work by Armajani :

Irene Hixon Whitney Bridge between Walker Sculpture garden and Loring Park. A poem is contained on the bridge dealing with ideas of motion , stillness and place. Also a bridge between two cultures?

Fallujah - a critique of the US destruction of the town of Fallujah during the Iraq war- containing references to Picasso’s Guernica - this is the first time that Armajani has in public critiqued the US - previously his works have shown a reflection and celebration of US democratic ideals and much optimism. This work has been censored - to date only exhibited in Spain .

Fallujah shows the destruction of a home and family through the collapse of a vertical rectangular structure (similar to our piece in style) into a room scale cube. - quote : “ Johnny be good is dead in Fallujah”. Violence is not shown but hinted at.

Murder in Teheran : But were Armajani to land in Iran now, he said, he would be arrested and imprisoned. The reason? His radically new political sculpture, "Murder in Tehran." More than 11 feet tall, "Murder" is a cage-like box of glass and wood holding casts of dismembered hands and topped by a hooded and blood-stained figure. The severed limbs represent Neda Agha-Soltan, a young woman killed during protests following the 2009 reelection of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. The artist's contempt for Iran's present regime is evident in a quotation printed on the sculpture: "Satan, drunk on victory, squats at the feast of our undoing." References to Goya’s work.

Comment by critic :” Armajani’s triumph here is his relentless economy of means, through which he brings a faraway conflict home and permits his audience a timely and unnerving chance to bear witness’

How to use this piece :

On any tour discussing immigration

Made in America

Parallels Islam /West

Modern/contemporary Art

I have also used on VTS but warning - only with well behaved group as impossible to control the group all around the structure. Advantage - not used by many!

Adorno - 1. Biographical Sketch (<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/adorno/>)

Born on September 11, 1903 as Theodor Ludwig Wiesengrund, Adorno lived in Frankfurt am Main for the first three decades of his life and the last two (Claussen 2003, Müller-Doohm 2005). He was the only son of a wealthy German wine merchant of assimilated Jewish background and an accomplished musician of Corsican Catholic descent. Adorno studied philosophy with the neo-Kantian Hans Cornelius and music composition with Alban Berg. He completed his *Habilitationsschrift* on Kierkegaard's aesthetics in 1931, under the supervision of the Christian socialist Paul Tillich. After just two years as a university instructor (*Privatdozent*), he was expelled by the Nazis, along with other professors of Jewish heritage or on the political left. A few years later he turned his father's surname into a middle initial and adopted "Adorno," the maternal surname by which he is best known.

Adorno left Germany in the spring of 1934. During the Nazi era he resided in Oxford, New York City, and southern California. There he wrote several books for which he later became famous, including *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (with Max Horkheimer), *Philosophy of New Music*, *The Authoritarian Personality* (a collaborative project), and *Minima Moralia*. From these years come his provocative critiques of mass culture and the culture industry. Returning to Frankfurt in 1949 to take up a position in the philosophy department, Adorno quickly established himself as a leading German intellectual and a central figure in the Institute of Social Research. Founded as a free-standing center for Marxist scholarship in 1923, the Institute had been led by Max Horkheimer since 1930. It provided the hub to what has come to be known as the Frankfurt School. Adorno became the Institute's director in 1958. From the 1950s stem *In Search of Wagner*, Adorno's ideology-critique of the Nazi's favorite composer; *Prisms*, a collection of

social and cultural studies; *Against Epistemology*, an antifoundationalist critique of Husserlian phenomenology; and the first volume of *Notes to Literature*, a collection of essays in literary criticism.

Conflict and consolidation marked the last decade of Adorno's life. A leading figure in the "positivism dispute" in German sociology, Adorno was a key player in debates about restructuring German universities and a lightning rod for both student activists and their right-wing critics. These controversies did not prevent him from publishing numerous volumes of music criticism, two more volumes of *Notes to Literature*, books on Hegel and on existential philosophy, and collected essays in sociology and in aesthetics. *Negative Dialectics*, Adorno's magnum opus on epistemology and metaphysics, appeared in 1966. *Aesthetic Theory*, the other magnum opus on which he had worked throughout the 1960s, appeared posthumously in 1970. He died of a heart attack on August 6, 1969, one month shy of his sixty-sixth birthday.