

# Elements

Sharon Etgar  
Anat Gutberg

It is common to think about the origins of the moving image as if these were set in the age of mechanical reproduction. However, the roots of film are not exclusively historical, at least not in the conventional sense of the word. While motion pictures emerged as an extension of photography (as well as other related technologies) from the nineteenth century onwards, this development merely accounts for their technical history and does not offer sufficient insight into the ontological nature of film. Stanley Cavell, the American philosopher, addressed this issue when he wrote that science presents itself in the movies as if it was magic, but at the same time we must not forget that magic is one of the sources from which science was born, and indeed also film. Cavell's proposal raises a fundamental question: Does the act of exposing the technical or organic mechanism at the origin of movement (that of images as well as the body) spoil the sense of illusion or the magical power of an artwork, or can these two aspects coexist? The exhibition **Elements** at Hensen House in Jerusalem sets out to explore this dilemma. The show includes two filmic works and several collages and paintings by Sharon Etgar and Anat Gutberg that seek to explore the idea of creation as it comes into expression in the mythology of the moving image as well as the pivotal role of fragmentation and deconstruction in this mythology.

**Elements** emerged from an ongoing conversation and a collaborative inquiry conducted by Etgar and Gutberg into a range of visual materials and filmmaking techniques. The two video works in the exhibition offer a useful entry point to gain a preliminary overview of the exchange. Etgar's film, **Light, Nothingness, End**, began as an experiment in which the artist set out to translate her visual experience of familiar mechanical objects from the domestic environment into moving image using a video camera in Negative Mode. The film is based on documentation of a ceiling fan that generates unexpected formal and rhythmic compositions despite its fixed rhythmic movement in space. As a result of the object's speed, its intrusion to light and the Negative Mode of the camera, an unrecognised amorphous body emerges in the film, beating and changing shape. At some point in the film, a straight line appears as if from nowhere and begins to penetrate the circular surface, disappearing and re-emerging again. The repeated action resembles the process of fertilisation and eventually leads the main mass to split in two.

The absence of sound in Etgar's near-abstract film enables a link to Anat Gutberg's installation piece, **Arkhé**, whose soundtrack seeps through the gallery space and merges into the work. Gutberg's work includes three video projections, a large mobile and an original soundtrack. The multi-screen film combines photographic and animated imagery and explores a series of images borrowed from nature documentaries in which short moments of communication between animals are captured as well as several filmic fragments dedicated to the study of human bodily movement. In order to produce the work, Gutberg used a technical procedure known as rotoscoping, where a sequence of filmic frames serves as a basis for drawings that can then be reintroduced into the picture's timeline. In Gutberg's case, however, the filmic and the animated both remain part of the outcome, at times one overtakes the other, and at times both exist in parallel. Gutberg's explorations of the relationship between bodily and filmic movement alludes to the famous studies of Edward Muybridge, one of cinema's earliest precursors who documented human anatomy in physical action using multiple sequential photographs. According to Gutberg, the use of the process of rotoscoping enabled her to explore some of the most fundamental actions of live organisms – movement and communication – already in the production process. By freezing the images of found filmic fragments, Gutberg was able to study each frame through the act of drawing, before re-enacting the sequence anew. The mobile that accompanies the films is located at the centre of the space between the projectors and the walls, hereby interrupting and enriching the films, extending their formal as well as anatomical inquiry. The inclusion of shapes and elements from the film, such as stones and branches, in the gallery space, functions as proof of the relationship between moving image and moving matter.

Etgar and Gutberg's video works, as well as an array of collages and three-dimensional elements made of plywood which occupy the exhibition space, are reminiscent of the opening scene of the film *Werckmeister Harmonies* by the Hungarian filmmaker Béla Tarr. In this scene, a group of drunk men is gathered in the tavern of a remote town just moments before its closure in a late hour of the night. With the help of Valushka, the educated of them all, the men re-enact with their own bodies the movement of the solar system and the moment in which it freezes during a solar eclipse. Soon, the men find themselves moving in a dance-like manner through the space of the dilapidated tavern much like a mobile or a living ceiling fan. "Here" says Valushka to his friends, "we only experience general motion, and at first we do not notice the events we are witnessing." The questions facing Etgar and Gutberg in the current exhibition are closely related to this notion of "general motion": Why precisely do these objects that we are looking at constitute a world? Is the whole always larger than the sum of its parts, or can multiplicity be measured simply as such? It seems that the absence of a satisfactory answer to these questions is precisely what enables coexistence between the technical dimension of creation and that which is entirely magic.

**Yuval Etgar**