

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts

For Immediate Release: April 15, 2014

GIL YEFMAN

TO ME YOU ARE BEAUTIFUL {BAY MIR BISTU SHEYN}

May 10 – June 14, 2014

Ronald Feldman Fine Arts presents the work of Gil Yefman in his first New York solo exhibition. Most known for his ambiguous knitted sculptures and animated films, Yefman aims to give a voice to the unheard and bring their stories to the center of attention. By creating characters with elusive gender and sexual identities, and fantastic realms in which they can exist, Yefman challenges society's traditional definitions of gender and how we portray the people who fall outside of them. In his short but prodigious career, Yefman has created a new language for himself out of the human form and wielded it to examine the connections between violence, sexuality, and "otherness."

Featured in the south gallery is Yefman's largest sculpture to date, "Tumtum." Etymologically, the source of the word "Tumtum" is a combination of *sealed* and *unclear*, used to describe an androgynous individual with unclear genitalia that not only looks but also performs differently than the norm. Though historically linked in the Torah to the idea of those who are "unclean," with this project Yefman aims to show that the outcasts are actually in all of us. Humankind has a long history of casting aside, often times violently, those whom we view as different, but as the artist points out, the strongest agent for change and progress in this area is the recognition of the other within ourselves.

Yefman takes this idea even further in another installation simply titled "H," where during performances he actually becomes part of the knitted doll that he's created. For Yefman, the letter "H" stands for Holocaust. It stands for Hitler, Himmler, and Heydrich, whose names he never wants forgotten in the annals of history, and their monstrous acts never simply glazed over by future generations. The installation represents a copulation chamber in a concentration camp brothel. The skillfully crocheted "sex slave doll" lies on a small bed, with the artist hidden underneath performing as her head. The doll's wistful gaze is focused on a monitor playing images of the beautiful natural surroundings of Ravensbruck, the Nazi female concentration camp from which many of the forced sex slaves came, and which was also the training ground for female SS-auxiliary guards. The domestic nature of the craft speaks to the normalization of sexual violence against women during wartime. Yefman invites visitors to interact with the doll, putting the viewers in the role of aggressor, bringing into question, even as bystanders, our responsibility to prevent these kinds of horrific acts from happening.

This question of responsibility is a consistent theme in Yefman's work. Also on display in this exhibition is a set of screen prints entitled "Time Table," which are designed to be a take on a pinup calendar, using key Nazi female figures mixed with pornographic images. The logos of companies that made a fortune during the Holocaust by either cooperating with or turning a blind eye to the Nazis are incorporated into the imagery. With these striking prints, Yefman does not shy away from holding accountable those who have blood on their hands.

Violence is part of the human experience. Every society and culture throughout history has its skeletons, and the only way to understand this part of ourselves is to acknowledge it. Only then can healing really begin. The act of knitting resembles writing, with its rapid, calculated, and monotonous movements. With his crochet hook and yarn, Yefman rewrites the history of both personal and collective traumas with a deft touch, luring us unwittingly into difficult topics that greatly need and deserve our attention.

A press kit with more information can be found at: <http://bit.ly/1hldPxX>

Opening Reception: May 10, 6 - 8. Gallery hours are Tuesday - Saturday, 10 - 6. Monday by appointment. For more information, contact Michael Ahn at (212) 226-3232 or michael@feldmangallery.com.

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