

## ***Post-Colonialism?***

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The complex ***Post-Colonialism?*** project is motivated primarily by the desire to evoke a discussion within the ceramic field regarding broad cultural questions related to our life in Israel here and now. The importance of holding such a discussion in the field using sociological and cultural research terminology cannot be overstated; an independent discourse that enables its multilayered interpretation. *Now*, upon the fifth anniversary of the Benyamini Contemporary Ceramics Center located *here*, in Tel Aviv, Israel, we believe it is most appropriate to venture into such a discussion.

Beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, colonialism has been instrumental in various forms of imperialist control over vast territories worldwide, whose effects are painfully felt to this very day. This control extended to practically all areas of life: land and natural resources, labor, culture, education, and religion. Empires have consolidated their control using both covert and overt aggression until their structural and moral collapse. Closer to home, the colonialist character of the Zionist movement is subject to internal debate. Some view Zionism as embodying the return of Jews from the diaspora to a sparsely inhabited Land of Zion as a national solution particularly after the Holocaust. Others view Zionism as a colonialist movement that has occupied a territory and expelled its indigenous Palestinian population.

While we are preoccupied with this debate, new mechanisms of control have been created that are once again transforming the socioeconomic power relations across the globe. In recent decades a combination of a global capitalist economy and an instrumental democracy has generated profound processes leading to the demise of localism and authenticity and to the erasure of entire traditions and cultures, and so transforming the relations between humans and their natural habitat.

These new mechanisms of control are some of the issues of the post colonialism discourse that examine the effects of such processes. Central for our purposes are the effects on local material culture, particularly in Israel. These in turn suggest new cultural trends in the craft and ceramic field that deserve to be studied. For example, the closure of factories designing and producing ceramics accelerates the erasure of local cultural identity. Reflecting the global trend, this process challenges the very concept of "localism", which becomes increasingly elusive as globalism takes root.

The realization that these processes are occurring simultaneously all over the world has led to the acknowledgment that diverse perspectives are essential as a grounding for this project. In other words, the obvious conclusion is that the attempt to discuss the changes in material culture affected by post colonialist processes must be informed by global developments.

Given this reasoning and with reference to the ceramic field in particular, the Benyamini Center Gallery initiated an international event designed to discuss the individual, artistic and design implications of global events on ceramic art and design. The project has evoked a dialogue between foreign and local ceramic artists and designers focused on a relevant issue with worldwide manifestations that are examined from diverse perspectives.

We found the opportunity to examine these perspectives particularly edifying at this time and place, where global trends – global economy vs. local production, issues of sustainability and the erasure of local idioms – coalesce with local geopolitical issues (settler-colonialism, occupation, migrant work, refugees).

The choice of Wendy Gers (France, South Africa) as the project's curator was motivated by the identification of an essential element in her curatorial approach, which interprets and examines the ceramic field with an understanding of economical, gendered and cultural power relations. The international ceramics exhibitions she has curated clearly suggest her broad-based and critical perspective on local and global questions that preoccupy us as individuals and as a society. Post colonialism has been selected as an all-embracing theme for examining these multicultural questions.

***The Post-colonialism?*** project culminated in an exhibition at the Benyamini Center Gallery at the end of 2016, beginning 2017. The project was undertaken in an exceptional collaboration between the Benyamini Center and eight Israeli academies, colleges and art schools that have ceramics facilities. At the same time, these institutes hosted nine international artists on residency programs, during which they gave lectures and master workshops to students and members of the public. Ten local artists participated in the project together with the international artists.

Beyond the large-scale and complex production – which included residency programs, lectures, symposiums, research and an exhibition – constructive discussion was generated among thousands of participants, including artists, students and members of the public. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the project facilitated a broad-based and relevant discussion on the nature and future of the ceramic field, its context as part of material culture and its humanistic significance.