

frieze

Nevet Yitzhak

The Screening Room

For her latest exhibition, Tel-Aviv-based Nevet Yitzhak presented *WarCraft* (2014), an installation comprising a pair of single-channel animated videos based on Afghan rugs, or 'war rugs', in which the standard iconography of flora and fauna are traded for that of tanks and warplanes. The genealogy of war rugs can be traced back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 when women of the Baluchi tribes began incorporating images of the war they saw on a daily basis into their weaving.

Whether or not the rugs were a form of activism is unclear, but they certainly began to accrue a commercial value. Women of the Turkmen tribes even wove English language phrases into the rugs. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 and the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan by the US-led NATO forces further spurred production of war rugs, which now make up approximately one percent of rugs sold worldwide. Whether the rugs are acts of defiance, examples of entrepreneurship or both, Afghan women display a great deal of moxie – a trait that the West does not typically associate with them.

Curator Tami Katz-Freiman installed *WarCraft* in a darkened gallery: one animated war rug was projected onto the ground; directly behind it, another was projected against a wall. The exterior frame of the horizontal rug depicts multi-coloured tanks on a golden yellow background while the tanks and warplanes, as well as tiny automobiles and schematic representations of human subjects, are digitally woven into a rich indigo field. The frame of the rug that appears to float on the wall includes serially repeated bright-orange tanks stitched onto a brown-orange background: warplanes, helicopters and trucks populate the interior.

The rugs take on a political and aggressive edge that is heightened when the signifiers of war begin to unmoor themselves. Planes from one rug seemingly fly to the other and drop bombs that burn holes in it, and tanks fire across screens creating bullet holes. At one point, a helicopter drops what appear to be innumerable leaflets, presumably warnings

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WarCraft, 2014, two single-channel audio video installations, installation view

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of impending bombings: Israel dropped such messages in Palestine last summer prior to its attacks, as did the US in Afghanistan.

To be clear, though, there is no overt reference here to any specific war. Indeed, the animated rugs privilege a generalized, highly stylized depiction of the instruments of war, taking on something of the quality of a videogame. The soundproofed gallery space sharpens the whoosh of bullets speeding through the air, the crackle of flames burning and the swish of helicopter blades – all of which underscore the work's contrivance rather than any sense of realism. The absurdity of war, as much as the sombre reality of its ceaselessness, comes to the fore when the work loops after eight minutes with no clear 'winner'. By the end, both rugs have suffered various fires and plane crashes.

Yitzhak's *WarCraft* questions the facile categorization of woven works as expressions of the local and as not being responsive to broader transnational and global flows. The work highlights the complex – and often underappreciated – process of weaving by conflating digital technologies with the centuries-old practice of making rugs. While craft is becoming an area of scholarly interest for contemporary art historians, the focus has primarily been on North America and Western Europe; *WarCraft* indicates how much more there is to explore beyond these regions.

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