Evil Root
Regev Amrani, Ron Asulin, Yaron Attar, Roy Cohen, Ido Gordon, Daniel Kep, Lee Nevo, Lihi Nidiz, Jonathan Ron, Itamar Stamler, Uri Weinstein, Ana Wild

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The exhibition Evil Root delves into the dark side of human nature, with its unbridled impulses and instincts and the malevolence animating in it. It points to the unbearable, at times arbitrary lightness with which moral deterioration occurs and ethical boundaries are crossed.

Evil has many faces. It is not only one arm of a binary opposition, which stands in direct relation to goodness and raises momentous ethical questions. Whether intentional or resulting from a loss of control, evil is evil is evil. It is present in our lives in different ways and involves ignorance, manipulation, lies, exploitation, bullying, subjugation, as well as physical and mental harm.

The source of human evil has occupied thinkers and scholars in diverse disciplines from time immemorial, presenting many questions, including whether evil is innate to human nature, as maintained by Nachmanides in his exegesis of Genesis 8:21: "for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth." Philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, on the other hand, regarded man as a "noble savage" who is innately good at birth, and held that it is civilization and the environment that corrupt him, while Freud argued that human beings are born with a set of instincts and impulses, and as a social creatures they must learn to control them by means of acquired laws and rules of conduct.

Alongside the desire to shed light on personal and collective responsibility, the featured works also touch on various aspects of human evil, and on instances of injustice and infliction of pain and suffering through physical or verbal violence. Without judgment, they indicate the immanent presence of evil in every society and in every person, and to behavioral patterns that fix and even normalize it within social, cultural, and political structures.

Works from recent years are enmeshed with site-specific works created especially for the exhibition. They address murder in the family, class racism, the subjugation of women and misogyny, hierarchies of domination in gay sex clubs, the exploitation of animals for financial gain, evidence attesting to acts

of violence from Israeli court protocols, etc.—issues that represent only an inkling of the malice that prevails around us.

The thoughts and work on the exhibition *Evil Root* began over a year ago, before the October 7 events. Despite the complexity and the difficulty in dealing with this subject in light of the harsh, tragic events we experienced, we chose to hold the exhibition and direct our gaze at the evil, which was present in our lives before, and will sadly be present in the future as well.

Roy Cohen, LIVEVIL, 2024, jute, adhesive, threads, neon sign

In the installation LIVEVIL, Roy Cohen expands his study of historical and contemporary cultural images of latent violence. He focuses on the attire that heretics and converts were made to wear during the Spanish Inquisition, perpetuated in Francisco de Goya's painting The Inquisition Tribunal (1812–19), which depicts a public punishment. The attire as an attribute that represents the victim reappears in a slight variation two hundred years later in a series of snapshots documenting the brutal abuse of detainees in Abu Ghraib prison by US soldiers during the Iraq War (2004). The aesthetic similarity between the attire of the convicts and detainees and the uniform of the KKK (American racist terrorist organization, the Ku Klux Klan) members, points to the potential for reversal between victim and victimizer. The installation is centered on a neon sign with the palindromic inscription "LIVEVIL." A gaze at the sign is like a gaze in the mirror that does not let go, indicating that evil is inherent to life, and its source lies in life itself. Next to the sign, three sculptures of the same attire transform into a nondescript human body. The sculptures' installation and the body postures they portray make it difficult to determine whether these are victims or victimizers. The sculptures are made of itchy synthetic burlap fabric, and the sensations evoked by the touch of the fabric on the body reinforce the sadism inflicted on the condemned. The costumes were sewn according to Cohen's measurements, acknowledging that the ability to do good or bad lies in each of us. Colored light projections emanating from the neon sign land on the sculptures, lending the installation the appearance of a spectacle, where there are those who derive pleasure from abusing and watching the suffering of others.

Daniel Kep, East of Eden (Bezalel Gates), 2024, inkjet print on archival paper (diptych)

In East of Eden (Bezalel Gates), Daniel Kep returns to the biblical story of Cain and Abel. Consisting of two large-scale photographs, the work corresponds with Zeev Raban's stone relief *Cain and Abel* (c. 1929) displayed at the entrance to the Artists' House, where the two biblical figures are depicted as described in Genesis (4:2): "And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground." Unlike Raban, Kep omits Abel's figure, and focuses on Cain. The photographs perpetuate different moments in the murderous plot, following which basic moral and ethical codes between fellow human beings were formulated. Through the fire, Kep underscores the mental gap between these two moments of action. In the photograph on the right, Cain is seen in a decisive moment—holding the stone in his hand, his proud, upright figure looks straight ahead without remorse, as the flames lick his eyes. In the left-hand photograph, on the other hand, Cain appears defeated, leaning against the building wall, gazing pensively at the rocky landscape, a cloud of black soot billowing over his head, as if bearing the mark of Cain. It is a figure well-aware of the gravity of its actions and their consequences, awaiting the punishment of banishment and eternal wandering, to be imposed on it. The photographs block the two small gates that flank the entrance gate to the Artists' House. Cain, portrayed by Kep himself, is a combination of opposing forces, operating in unison in one body, pointing to the human condition, where good and bad, strength and frailty, are entangled inseparably.

Yaron Attar, Stoning, 2014, video, 3:20 min, loop

Stoning is a cinematic postcard, documenting a prosaic moment: girls and boys playing on a beach in a resort town in Montenegro, spontaneously coming together to carry out a common task. With great passion they start chasing a small cockroach rising from the sand. The random chase provides the group of children (and some of the parents who join the pursuit) with entertainment, revealing primal phobias. Through the artist's lens, as an accidental tourist on site, the gap between the picturesque, bustling setting of the beach and the children's obstinate determination is highlighted. With great devotion, they chase the cockroach, throwing more and more stones at it, wishing for its death, refusing to yield when it reemerges from amid the stones. The action repeats itself with uncompromising persistence. Against the blinding rays of the sun and despite their innocence, the children's compulsive desire to succeed in the killing mission they have taken upon themselves elicits a strong sense of disconcert and disgust.

Ana Wild, Bad Girls, 2024, sound and lighting, 7:30 min

The installation Bad Girls explores the archetypal image of the "bad girl" and its manifestations in popular culture. A "bad girl" deviates from conventional femininity. Her "badness" is seen as a desirable quality, and at the same time—as a threat to the patriarchal social order and its representatives. As such, "bad girl" is also an expression of misogyny and fear of the consequences that femininity and female sexuality pose to society, the economy, and the family institution. The installation is a kind of audio-visual show, in which Ana Wild inserts the figure of the bad girl as an agent of morality, while looking into the stories of four women from different mythical, historical, and cultural worlds: Anat, the Canaanite goddess of warfare and hunting; the literary figure of Lady Macbeth from Shakespeare's play; Ulrike Meinhof, a member of the German terrorist organization the Red Army Faction (aka the Baader-Meinhof Gang); and the cinematic characters of Thelma and Louise from Ridley Scott's eponymous film. A stage collage, consisting of text, sound, and lighting, without visual images, it is based on cinematic dialogues, textual quotes, and sound samples from various sources, interwoven with body gestures and symbolic acts, representing decisive moments for the characters, dramatized through sound. Through a non-linear narrative process, the installation seeks to sketch a profile of "bad girls," focusing on the responsibility of each of the women presented in it and of women/girls in general. Wild raises questions concerning the subjective definition of good and bad: Who shapes the character of the "bad girl"? What does the evil attributed to her signify? Who does it threaten?

Lihi Nidiz, Paranoids!, b/w photograph, sound, speakers, Arduino platform, drywall

The installation Paranoids! delves into the world of organized crime, discussing poor morals and the ability to bully for no apparent reason. It explores the image of the robber's mask and its metonymic meanings. Each such mask has three slits, intended for the sensory organs. Although the slits lend the fabric a human appearance, the individuality of the mask wearers is blurred. The masking and the difficulty in identification draw attention to the potential of crime, rather than the wearer. The image of the robber's mask is duplicated several times, generating a gang which ambushes the visitors as they arrive on the second floor. Lihi Nidiz uses the "margins" of spoken language as an activating, warning, disciplining, and threatening medium. Six sound channels emanate from tiny speakers installed in the masks' mouth slits, producing a

musical polyphony comprising voices of the artist's family members. Each sound channel plays a single syllable or the end of a word, which coalesce into a repetitious non-textual sequence. The family score presents a dubious bunch that takes over the exhibition space and disturbs the visitors with voices and calls. If that's not enough, the title, Paranoids!, with its exclamation point, adds an aspect of mockery, presenting a distorted dialogue with the visitors: in addition to the bullying inflicted on them, they are also accused of paranoia. The installation is supplemented by a graphite cast of a baseball bat taken out of context as a sports accessory, ostensibly waiting to be used. Its passive presence is filled with explosive potential for violence and vandalism: either striking and hitting or blackening the installation with graphite. By juxtaposing it with the mask images, the bat points to the fragile line between self-control and calamity.

Uri Weinstein, The Great Hoax, 2024, digital print on PVC, microphone stands, cigars, cigar ashes

The Great Hoax alludes to the character of Steve Frankel from the Israeli TV series *The Steve Show* (2003; produced and directed by Yigal Shilon). The series was inspired by the film *The Truman Show*, which traces the protagonist's life from infancy to adulthood, a life that is conducted in a cinematic set that simulates a town, populated by dozens of actors and extras, and many hidden cameras that follow and record his every move. While the film seeks to challenge its viewers with questions of ethics and morality, in Shilon's TV series the ethical codes are abandoned entirely. Over the course of three and a half weeks, Frankel, who is convinced that he is playing a leading role in the Israeli telenovela *Love around the Corner*, is tricked by the television crew and actors on air, becoming the subject of a vulgar prank. In the installation, Frankel's face was stretched and distorted almost unrecognizably. The concrete stretching of the face print on the floor is a perfect metaphor for Shilon's hoax, as the Hebrew word for hoax (*metiha*) also denotes an act of stretching. The facial distortion recalls the anamorphic skull in Hans Holbein the Younger's painting, *The Ambassadors* (1533), which at first glance seems to be a portrayal of an elliptical plate, and only on closer look and from a very specific angle, the skull is revealed, encrypted, as it were, within the painting, symbolizing life's transience (*memento mori*, "remember you must die"). Microphone stands are placed on the surface of the flat, distorted image, stretched across the floor of the space, holding cigars whose smoking was cut short, echoing Shilon's trademark. The cigar ash falls on

Frankel's face, intensifying, alongside the act of trampling, the sense of humiliation and insult.

Ron Asulin, A Shoe without a Soul, 2023, leather and shoelaces
This small wall sculpture in the shape of a hoodie is part of a series of sculptures in which Ron Asulin uses readymade men's leather shoes, unstitching the soles and performing a simple, effective sculptural manipulation on them: he folds the leather and the lining in half, turning the shoe inside out. The hoodie, originally an item of clothing associated with American laborers, was appropriated by groups representing fringe cultures, such as punk, metal, and hip-hop, who sought to challenge the social order, morality, and behavioral and aesthetic codes deemed "correct." Vis-á-vis the decent appearance complying with these codes, the hoodie allowed them to hide and assume a different, defiant and opposing position, one that takes its place on the margins of the social order. But the potential for concealment, made possible by the shape of the hoodie, also worked against them, as the anonymity of its wearers gave rise to an almost immediate tendency to treat them in a generalized, racist manner as suspects. The hoodie indeed obscures the wearer's individual identity, but it intensifies the prejudice, discrimination, and oppression often directed at members of minority groups. With this sculptural move, Asulin extracts the "criminal" appearance from the businessman's shoes. The inversion between the toes and the head seeks to overturn the violent social and economic order that determines the hierarchy between businessmen (the shoe wearers) and street boys (the hoodie wearers). In the absence of a head to wear it, devoid of face and gaze, the hoodie appears demonic and menacing. The anonymity and blurring of identity, which are now the lot of the businessmen, strive to expose the violence and evil inherent in a distorted, racist social order.

Regev Amrani, Locked Doors, 2024, video, AI, wood, 2:00 min, loop
Incidents of arbitrary shootings, which have occurred in recent decades in schools across the United States, were a source of inspiration for the video installation Locked Doors. As in a story foretold, these acts repeat themselves over and over. The ease of owning and using weapons turns children, teachers, and staff members into at-risk groups, and schools into mass murder scenes. In his video installation, Regev Amarni focuses on two dramatic situations that occur following shooting incidents: escaping from the scene and practicing emergency procedures. The escape is done under police supervision in an

effort to catch the shooters. The exit from the building is carried out in a controlled manner, according to a predefined protocol. The multitude of incidents and the failure to predict their occurrence in advance have led many educational institutions to incorporate the practice of emergency procedures (basic, effective actions, such as blocking and locking doors, turning off all lights and maintaining silence, finding a hiding place, etc.) in their daily activities to prepare staff members and pupils for such events. The video was created using artificial intelligence models, trained in visual data analysis based on dozens of photographs documenting similar situations. AI's ability to probe past cases and thereby predict the future, enables it to produce formal projections. Based on the processed information, databases of quasi-human images are built, which present chaotic choreographies of resistance and submission. All of these illustrate the madness, perpetuate an aesthetic of survival and fear, and, unfortunately, paint the picture of the next incident.

Lee Nevo, Ready When You're Ready (or The Justifications of the Solar System), 2024, mixed media

Sitra Achra (Aramaic: the other side) is a Kabbalistic term used to describe all the forces of impurity and evil in the world. Lee Nevo's work borrows the idea of contradiction as an oppositional force from this concept, embracing the positions of movements and organizations struggling against the consensus. Dozens of posters are displayed on the wall with neither hierarchy nor structured order. They portray images, phenomena, and archetypes which metaphorically and/or concretely describe diverse aspects of the "other side" in various fields, such as criminology, forensics, psychology, popular culture, architecture, cinema, music, etc. The eclectic display randomly juxtaposes, among others, an image of a solar eclipse, a mention of the Unabomber (a mathematician and terrorist who operated in the US in the 1980s and 1990s), and symbols of terrorist groups and organizations. The arbitrary whole invites us to examine the double meaning and internal contradiction underlying things associated with the "other side," thus expanding the scope of "evil" and dwelling on issues of moral judgment. The display on the wall attests to the attraction and fascination with the "other side," which sometimes coexist with rejection and fear. Planted within the array of posters are faux *pashkevils* (street posters prescribing "appropriate" behavior for the ultra-Orthodox community) created by the artist. Their presence generates a different textual and ideological space, as if they themselves were *Sitra Achra*.

Ido Gordon, Moreover He Saw a S*kull* Floating on the Face of the Water, 2024, colored pencils on paper

In this work, Ido Gordon resumes his engagement with the skull image, which appears in many of his works, via reference to the Mishna verse (Avot/h 2) "Moreover he [Hillel] saw a *skull* floating on the face of the water. He said to it: because you drowned others, they drowned you. And in the end, they that drowned you will be drowned." The verse point to a cyclical existence of reward and punishment, to the absence of coincidence in the world, and to the fact that a murderer is bound to end up being murdered. According to Maimonides, bad deeds haunt the perpetrators' hearts and minds eternally. Those who do evil will receive their punishment according to the principle of measure for measure. Gordon creates an image of a skull, which is revealed only on closer look. The eye sockets consist of dozens of images of the hands of a cartoon character in different positions, which together "write" the title of the work. He uses the sign language of children's play and the pop aesthetic of cartoons, thus deepening the gap and the contradiction between the amusing figure and the grave message the verse seeks to convey. The work addresses the cyclical quality of evil, which is present not only in the act itself, but also in the retribution that will follow. It carries a moralistic message, which allows a choice between good and evil, and thus differs from the other works presented in the exhibition. For Gordon, the verse in the title is a kind of spell, which has the power to change destinies. Repeating it and pointing at the cycle of murders are powerful acts that can bring redemption closer.

Roy Cohen, You are Like a Dream*,* 2024, mechanical music box, power amplifier, microphone, horn speaker, wood

The interactive work You are Like a Dream, consists of a mechanical music box, which invites visitors to turn the crank and listen to the sounds emanating from it. The music, coming from the box, is an adaptation of the melody of the fan anthem "May Your Village Burn" in the guise of a lullaby. Identified with Beitar Jerusalem football club fans from La Familia organization, the song becomes the soundtrack accompanying the team's games, as drama on the field intensifies. In simple, direct language, the lyrics of the song express hatred towards any opponent, primarily those clubs identified with the political left, and more specifically—clubs hailing from Arab locales. The verbal

violence concealed in the song, which includes curses and threats, makes it an effective tool to intimidate the opposing team and its fans. The racist song unites the fans in a community without inhibitions, conscience or morals, which regards victory as the one and only sacred goal, and virtually all means are legitimate to achieve that goal. When the music box is activated, the sounds are heard in the gallery space and in the garden of the Artists' House simultaneously. They rise from the garden, are disseminated to the public space, and from there to the street by means of a megaphone, which is used as a means of amplification and as a device calling for action. The innocent act of turning the crank is soon revealed as a misleading trick, which masks words dripping with venom and serving as a reminder of the rising violence pervading Israeli society in the streets, highways, schools and sports fields. The desire to surrender to the pleasant melody collides with the discomfort of being forced to join a violent and escalating discourse.

If you don't jump now
You son of a bitch
You are *Hapoel* fan

The *Eastern-Gate* are crazy
From Teddy no one gets out alive
Welcome to hell
If you don't jump you are *Red*

In the *Eastern-Gate*, everyone knows
There are a few *Arab-lovers* here
They went to seek reconciliation in *Sakhnin*
They don't represent us

Now listen well you Arabs
We do not reconcile
And the song always stays the same
Let your village burn

Shuafat is on fire

Itamar Stamler, Exhibition, 2024, iron, video, 7:00 min

In this installation, Itamar Stamler addresses the complex psychological affinities between sexuality, domination, and consumerism, by exploring two contemporary phenomena: darkened rooms in gay clubs and the profitable industry of purebred dog breeding. The installation is centered on a sculpture, which simulates a mating facility for purebred dogs, enhanced by adapting its dimensions to human scale and replicating it into several units, connected to each other. Adaptation of the apparatus, its duplication, and the arrangement of the composition are aimed at a web of associations concerning sex and mastery games as well as values of surveillance and social policing, inspired by the architectural model of the panopticon formulated by Jeremy Bentham (1787). The sculpture is accompanied by a video piece, filmed secretly in the aforesaid darkened rooms using a thermal camera. Like the supervisory control made possible by the structure of the panopticon, the video presents an external gaze at subjects, transforming them into objects of observation. Stamler examines the (fluid) line between exploitation and consent under the aegis of darkness, and art's moral boundaries. It seems that the consent to perform sexual acts sometimes stems from surrendering to sexual fantasy and a desire for closeness and warmth. The darkened rooms, like the mating processes of purebred dogs, are representations of destructive forces and the lack of empathy characteristic of capitalist societies. They introduce a hierarchy of strong and weak, questioning the value of free will and consent among those who are disadvantaged or who lack the words and ability to say no.

Jonathan Ron, Sing-Along, 2024, sound, video, microphones, Arduino platform, operating system

Jonathan Ron's installation Sing-Along combines textual evidence from court protocols in Israel documenting cases of violence, and the karaoke format, a combination that gives rise to an event with performative potential, allowing visitors to imagine and even partake in the reenactment of the violent incidents. Each of the testimonies was processed into a text reminiscent of a dramatic play, and an original soundtrack was composed for it. Visitors are invited to turn on the "karaoke machine" and read the text out loud or silently, as they follow a ball that bounces from word to word, marking the reading pace and guiding the event. The performative quality at the heart of the installation calls for active participation of the viewers, allowing them—unlike watching or reading a news report—to reconstruct the incident as if they were a part of it. Whether the participants read a text by the victim of the crime or by the perpetrator, they can feel in their bodies, on the one hand, the insult,

distress, and fear, and on the other hand—the power trip and sense of control. The installation thus seeks to undermine the comfort zone of "not knowing" and to emphasize the collective responsibility for social violence. The familiar pleasure of participating in a karaoke session fades, and is replaced by the understanding that the participants inevitably become accomplices, echoing cases of extreme violence in their own voices and reminding us to what extent Israeli society, throughout all its sectors, is saturated with daily manifestations of violence.