

ARTNEWS

IN THE COMPANY OF JACKALS: MICHAL ROVNER'S PACE SHOW IS CHILLING

BY ***Robert Ayers*** POSTED 10/18/16 3:11 PM

A thrilling experience awaits you in the rear gallery of Pace's West 25th Street location. You will find yourself in darkness, keeping company with a pack of desert jackals. Against the sounds of the semitropical night, the wild dogs move around you, and slip in and out of the shadows. This installation, a continuous video projection around three walls of the room, is the key work in Michal Rovner's latest exhibition, "Night."

The nocturnal jackals are everywhere in this show. In other works they are seen singly and in pairs in both large-scale photographs and single video pieces. Their presence is unsettling and mesmeric.

Rovner regards this body of work as marking a new direction in her art. She sees its content as far less politically charged than we might expect given her entire development since the 1990s. Instead she wants us to see its principal subjects as isolation, uncertainty, and the sense of foreboding that comes with being alone at night. Still, this would hardly be Rovner's art were these wild dogs not carriers of a rich range of cultural meanings.

The rear gallery installation is called *Anubis* for the jackal-headed Egyptian god who accompanies the dead into the afterlife: thus these animals might be seen as our fellow travelers on the most significant journey of all. Ragged and skinny in the darkness they seem at once threatening and vulnerable, and their outsize ears and

glowing eyes give them the air of both observers and observed. It does not require a great deal of imagination to add a geopolitical reading to their circumstances in the heart of the desert.

This is most obvious in the other large-scale video projection here. *Alert* is the first piece you see on entering the gallery, and it is projected at monumental scale. A single jackal observes the world around it, turning its head from side to side, and repeatedly seeming to stare directly at us, its eyes given an extra glow in Rovner's editing. What seems at first like digital noise that tracks across the image turns out on closer study to be lines of those anonymous human figures holding hands and moving forward that Rovner has used repeatedly to suggest the nature of human progress.

Still, Rovner's art would be far less engaging were it merely political. It allows enormous range for imagination and interpretation, but around its edges there is something inexplicable. This, of course, is the territory where these unknowable jackals roam.

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Michal Rovner, *Anubis*, 2016, video projection, dimensions variable, installation view.
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Michal Rovner, *Night #1*, 2016, archival pigment print, 79 x 59¼ inches.
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