

## Ground Floor

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It craves to go out into the open, to feel the waves deep in its bowels, yearning for the grace that might be found somewhere, between sea and sky. But Nadav Weissman's pink wooden ship in *Ground Floor* (2007) is chained like a prisoner. It blocks, virtually strangles, the entrance to the odd shipyard, which is made possible only through the narrow aperture that Weissman has breached in the museum wall – an uninviting entrance which inspects anyone crossing its threshold. On its back the ship carries its home, and a mast made of bones stands upright on its deck. The adjacent room contains a single figure and a dog. The naked figure is stuck in a wooden ramp, as if it were fixed to a splint; its gigantic head towers upward, and its small body, like that of a child tilts down, seeking solid ground. The figure is disturbing, possibly crucified, certainly tormented. The dog stands on the ramp next to the figure's head, and both appear to be inter-dependent, sharing the same terrible loneliness. Perhaps it is a wild, undomesticated dog, yearning for the realms of freedom and movement "behind the fence", beyond the wall, elsewhere. A black ladder climbs up the ramp, declaring a possibility of movement, yet leading nowhere. A trickling sound is heard in the background, possibly alluding to the events outside, to a great storm that has vanquished the ship, shattering the dream of a male quest into the horizon. There is something heart-rending, and at the same time nearly ridiculous about the stuckedness, the silence. It is a tough defeat.

A modern fairy tale by Jose Saramago recounts the story of a man who goes to knock on the king's door for petitions, asking for a boat to go in search of an unknown island. The local inhabitants all deny the island's very existence, but the man does not despair, insisting the opposite. The journey and the boat become the very purpose of his quest - the yearned-for destination, for whose realization the sailor must leave the "boat", and abandon the "unknown island" of his self. Weissman's ship also seems to relate to a lost, unknown place; a house forgotten far away outside, or possibly deep inside. It alludes to a space that could have accommodated life, couplehood, a family. But Weissman's house is never innocent or warm. It is a space of memory to which one returns, a place capable of generating the beginnings of things. It is not at all clear whether Weissman's ship can really sail off to the unknown island. For a split second it seems as though it has just been built, slowly woven as in a big dream, and perhaps time has already buried it deep in place. It is a ship which is the skeleton of a house, a ship which carries an overload of large-scale bones in its bowels, reminiscent of swollen penises. It is driven by the power of life and death, unable to find remedy or rest. It is rooted in the yellow silence engulfing it, in a highly personal sphere. Entering it, one seems to disrupt its sleep, turning the light on its frustration.

The house in Weissman's works is always an illusive locus; an empty, crumbling

space: a house of love deserted by its occupants (*The Lover's House, 2001*), a house of play-dice in yellow and blue; a seductive child's house that transforms into a realm of horror; a house mould shaped as a deserted kennel (*Behind the Fence, 2003*), or a car - and heart-repair garage (*Riding Lesson, 2004*). At times it is a pink house whose beams fall apart, which is far from being "rosy" - four walls that could have been a home, a place of love and intimacy, but instead elicit feelings of absence and desertion, of unfulfilled yearning.

Weissman continues in his indefatigable quest for a home. At times he carries the house on his back or inside him, like the house on the ship's deck and within it. He looks up to the space in bright pink hope, but the house always fails. In the animation film screened in Weissman's exhibition space, the house goes up in flame, becoming a fire trap, leaving behind only a line of pianos that run for dear life from this bad place. The music is silenced. The black-and-white keyboard transforms into a sooty grid, leaving a dead silence like the one engulfing the mute body of the pink ship, like the entire space with its two rooms, which is not really a shipyard, nor a protective home.

Weissman's work reveals itself through veils of enigma. It contains bittersweet humor. There is no solid ground, only doubt, sadness, foreignness. The story recounted by the work cannot be read from beginning to end. It remains obscure, shattered, yet it elicits insights about life, about the creative process powerfully evolving vis-à-vis the defiant stuckedness; it is the story of a repressed memory that doesn't let go, a story about uncertainty and pain, lack and loss, about the will to be.