

# Ishtar

My approach to the piece Ishtar is going to be very personal. But as here we are dealing with a piece of contemporary art, I think somehow it has to be, and it definitely will be a bit subjective. Reflections are always so subjective, even if do not want to be.

The piece I am going to write about -and know it sounds a little bit selfish and cocky- is not only Eric Parnes' Ishtar anymore. I'm writing about my Ishtar, in terms of how I see it. What does it tell me. As Gadamer wrote, art tells something different to everyone, so somehow I guess the piece itself becomes something different with every variant reading.

Since I have started dealing with art, especially contemporary art, I have been always so attracted to those pieces which had many layers. Layers, I could have spent time to discover. Also I like the ones, which are not impossible to fill with meaning, so you do not have to force yourself to see what it would like to show, in other words, I when it's not only self-serving/art for art's sake.

Also I like those, which are aesthetically admissible. Which "I would put on my wall", to use the sentence, used/utilized most often, after "I could also do that" - when people are talking about contemporary art.

Why I choose Ishtar was, because this piece totally meets all my criteria mentioned above, but still, somehow a bit different.

Ishtar is a piece made by typical characteristics of a culture I don't know so much about, and created by the logic of another culture, which I guess I know somehow.

Growing up with a strong Roman Catholic cultural background, I have always loved those pieces of art, with hidden biblical charge. It made my discovery more interesting and faster and deeper.

With Ishtar it is kind of different, however I could say that is one of the reasons I like it. For me that is what makes it more interesting. It is more difficult, because I know less, but not impossible, because I know something. Or maybe, just think I know.

First in Ishtar the multiplicity of ideas and layers, I loved so much. You can approach from any different ways, but you do not know where you will end up. Just like being in Berlin at Western Bahnhof searching for one train.

In the followings, it is going to be my way to Ishtar and backwards. How I personally see this piece, and how I feel about it.

First I am going to describe purely my feelings and associations, and later, I am going to link it with the fact I read about this work, and the things crossed my mind. Again, how I read Ishtar.

As we are talking about an exhibited piece of art, theoretically I would like to start like I am entering to the room where the picture is exhibited.

What I see first:

Colourful circles, linked to each other, on a dark background.

Harmonious pastel colours, regular geometrical shapes, and I - as many other human beings - am very much attracted to symmetrical patterns, so will definitely like it. Actually there are not so many unlikable things in its visualisation.

My brain automatically starts connecting this picture with memories, things I saw before, I fond look-alike. So very soon, I will see soap-bubbles, real ones, and others, from Japanese animes, or hula-hoops, and never ending rainbows with no treasure at the bottom.

How I am walking closer becomes clear, these are not simple circles, but made by small fighter-jet, or kite-shaped pieces, sharpened, tipped, so could hurt me maybe. And this is the point when Ishtar changes meaning for me.

The circles don't look that friendly anymore, but reminds me a bit to throwing stars, have been used since ancient times, and are still very popular in Hollywood movies when you want to create some really cool characters.

Secondly, they look like gear wheels, perfectly fit together, and keep the whole 'system' working on continuously. That is the first time, I imagine the circles moving. If I could complement one picture with others, I could create a whole related system, which is impossible to sustain itself if one piece secedes.

Also I see the colours are not that plastic anymore, as in the beginning they seemed like. Now I see damaged cover, something less coherent.

Then I put myself into the picture. Feels like being trapped in a circle, which is turning around you, and you have no way out. This timeless space party seems very stunning, but at the same time as a cooperation of senses, standing in the middle of the circle sounds exactly what I have imagined to hear, when once I was wondering about Andy Warhol portraits chatting with each other. Or the sound when you hear some kids playing and laughing together. Because of these associations it becomes friendly and stays still threatening in the same time. It safe, but also thrilling, because there is no way in, or out.

When I leave the picture, I imagine how the circles could easily change shapes, creating new connections, new, different circles. Like in a kaleidoscope. Something changes in the power relations and they change with it.

My background informations, very briefly.

is the East Semitic Akkadian, Assyrian and Babylonian goddess of fertility, love, war, and sex.

Flying in mythologies is mostly the god's gift or privilege to save one's life, and also something people always wanted to be able to do. Those who could fly were always privileged ones.

Eric Parnes is neo-orientalist constructivist artist.

This piece, Ishtar, is made by plastic toy-drones, arranged in traditional Islamic patterns.

How I see Ishtar for the second sight

My first impression about this work was, in connection with the fact, how many times my feelings changed about Ishtar, from being really nice, harmonic and playful to somehow thrilling.

It made me think about the importance of context.

At the beginning Ishtar seemed friendly and nice, knowing it is made of drones, makes it controversial.

On the other hand, looking at a drone, and knowing this device makes it possible killing someone in a very cruel way, without even being around, just unexpectedly -like how U.S. during a drone strike killed citizens from Australia and New Zealand in Yemen, simply bombing their car, because of suspected Al-Quaeda connections, or reading former soldier talking about how it feels seeing your victims on the camera before killing them – makes drones incredibly inhuman for me.

Even so, watching them arranged in harmonic geometrical patterns, I would not be able to say, I don't like it.

So sometimes, context really means a lot. And while checking the other works of Eric Parnes, actually, I have found the same logic in many of them.

Context can make frivolous, or even very serious things so ridiculous. Also, sometimes changing the context can emphasize mistakes, sometimes this inconsistency helps to understand the message of it, or just add value to something.

When I looked at his other works, I found interesting, that the harmonious side of his works are usually the neo-orientalist characteristics, while what makes these controversial, are the somehow seemingly little undervalued American pop-culture elements.

Personally I really like the approach how he use these two things together complemented with high aesthetic taste, to make it easier to get attracted to the piece, and motivate you to think about it.

But above all, I love the criticism, and that very kind irony how the ongoing cultural exchange between east and west is presented. How difficult 'stories' are being told in a very light way. Don't want to shock, don't want to make you feel bad. How the topics are taken very seriously, but the way to express remains jaunty.

The main topic Ishtar was built around according to myself is war.

It has been told, this piece was inspired by story of the U.S. drone captured in Kasmar, Iran, close to the border with Afghanistan, in 2011.

However I know the geometrical pattern suppose to add only the orientalist element of this work, for me this shape could be easily linked with my theory of war.

In wars, especially nowadays, are not only two actors are involved, and the conflict, existing between Iran and the U.S, especially effects almost all the other countries in the world.

Basically, as far as I know, there was not a single period, when our world had been in complete peace. Conflicts are like circles, keep the world turning, and you always need a counterpart for that.

In my point of view globalism has two big results in international conflicts. First, makes them more dangerous, because all countries could be easily involved, but on the other side of the coin, globalism causes the melding of cultures, which could lead to a more peaceful world.

As I see in Eric's works this cultural exchange has a very primer role. However, like how Ishtar is, also more like a description of the situation, with the purpose of driving the attention to the progress, than trying to figure out it's future.

Going back to orientalism, and neo-orientalism, I think in this case it is very important to highlight the similarity between classical orientalism and therecent american commercialism.

Orientalism lived it's golden age at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, and was criticised for simplifying the picture of the East, representing mostly it's attractive magic, and exaggerate some of it's main characteristics, with showing belly dancers, spices, camels, and fancy palaces.

After this, let's see what is the common notion about the Orient nowadays. Most of us, we still associate to men with big beards, riding camels in the desert, drinking mint tea from little cups, listening to eastern music. But there are some "new" words implemented to our general picture, like: oil, burka, veil, terrorism and money. So many of western people still have the same picture, just not with belly dancers, but with wives kept in slavery, while men sitting on their money, praying to Allah, holding guns.

So in time, sadly somehow war and violence became also linked to the Orient and however the creation of Ishtar is linked to a certain incidence, I cannot completely isolate it from this picture.

For me through the topic of using drone in war, a certain question show up: How far you can go by referring to self-defence? Where is the point, where the too much effort, put in self defence, becomes the starting point of self-destruction? When do states reach the point, when get trapped in these circles they created around them?

Here I would like to stop. Maybe this already too far from the original purpose, and more like just theory than any valuable information.

But this is what I like in this and many other pieces of art. Can drive you so far, if you give the time for your self, to think about.

In spite of all, somehow I feel like the play Eric plays with his work, are also meant to make this topics easier. In the way how he turns something nice to something scary, and back again, I see a very positive approach remains behind the concept.

Closing my words I would like to point out something interesting, not necessary in connection with this specific piece, but contemporary art itself.

II say, this is my approach, than how my personal views and personality patterns change the way I see it? What does our interpretation tells about the work, and how much it talks about us? Is t possible that the piece we are talking about, and how we do that could tell a lot about how we are?

I think, while trying to find the meaning of some works we always add some thing from ourselves, and because of these we should never take our point of view too serious. I any case.