



The Fragile Boundaries of Paradise: The Paradise Inn Resort at the Former Jerusalem Leprosarium¹

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The aspiration towards a utopian borderless space, a plan for a space without lines, was the dream of architect Rodriguez [pseudonym of João Delgado], who had signed his business card “Arch. Rodriguez – Plans without Lines: an architect on a tightrope” (from the curatorial text of “Borderlines,” Drawing Biennale 5).

*As an artist, you already know: first, you should imagine the big lines, then the ensemble, then each part separately, and then you can understand the whole (Boris Schatz, *The Rebuilt Jerusalem, Jerusalem: Bezalel*, 1924).*

The utopia that Boris Schatz described in his novella *The Rebuilt Jerusalem: A Daydream*, written in 1918 during his exile in Safed, is supposed to be realized in the year 2018. Schatz envisioned a paradisiacal Jerusalem. The Jews will coexist in harmony with nature and with the Arab residents of the city, and, with the consent of the Arab minority, they will build the Third Temple, which will serve as a museum for Jewish art and Jewish science. In

¹ A longer version of this article was originally published in *Borderlines: Essays on Mapping and the Logic of Place*, eds. Ruthie Abeliovich and Edwin Seroussi, 160-173 (Warsaw: Sciendo, 2019), and is accessible at <https://doi.org/10.2478/9783110623758>. Thank you to the editors for allowing the article to be printed in this collection.

♦ “Paradise Inn - A Dream for Only One Person”, plaster construction, art works, souvenirs, website, airb&b. Artists: Nir Yahalom, Sala-Manca, Itamar Mendes- Flohr, Oz Malul, Guy Yitzhaki, Shaul Zemach, Chen Cohen, Pessi Komar, Shiri Zinger, Lior Pinsky. Curators: Sala-Manca, 2015.

this futuristic, utopian vision, the Land of Israel is a Biblical paradise where Jewish inhabitants wear Middle Eastern garb and have biblical names but lead modern lives.

In July 2015, a group of Jerusalem-based artists decided to conduct a dialogue with Schatz's novella, contextualizing and materializing his utopian and paradisiac Jerusalem.² They chose to do so not on the Temple Mount, where some traditions situate paradise³ but in the Talbiyeh neighborhood, inside the walls of the former leper's home in Jerusalem, a nineteenth century hospital established outside the Old City's limits and surrounded, like the city of Jerusalem, by its own walls.

Since 2012, the Hansen House, a center for art, design, and technology, has existed in the compound of the Leprosarium Jesus Hilfe, which during its years of operation was an autonomous paradise for lepers. In its basement, the Hansen House hosts the Mamuta Art and Research Center run by the Sala-Manca Artists Collective.⁴ The Hansen House consists of art galleries and a historical exhibition about the leprosarium on the main floor and, on the second floor, the Master's Degree programs in Urban Design, Design and Technology, and Conceptual Design of the Bezalel Art Academy, products of Schatz's partially fulfilled dream.

This essay deals with the physical, semantic, and metaphorical roles

² I want to thank Rachel Elijor and Chaym Noy for our fruitful conversations and for providing the inspiration for this article.

³ *The Book of Jubilees*, Noah (8:12) states: "The Garden of Eden is the Holy of Holies and the dwelling of the Lord." The Garden of Eden is in the place where the Third Temple is supposed to be rebuilt, where only the High Priest (הוֹדֵכָה לַיהוָה) may enter, once a year, on the Day of Atonement. See also Rachel Elijor, "The Garden of Eden is the Holy of Holies," *Studies in Spirituality* 24 (2014): 64-118; and Rachel Elijor (ed.), *A Garden Eastward in Eden* (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2010), 5-59 (Hebrew).

⁴ The members of the Sala-Manca Group are Lea Mauas and I.

of the temporary borders and structures constructed for the paradise,⁵ which is surrounded by plasterboard walls, then by the walls of the former leprosarium, located less than a kilometer away from Suleiman the Magnificent's rebuilt walls of Jerusalem's Old City of Jerusalem⁶ and less than three kilometers away from the separation wall.⁷

The Paradise Inn Resort

Paradise Inn, Talbiyeh, Jerusalem. A dream for only one person. Infinite stars and a real gate to paradise. Reserve your room at the former Lepers' home in Jerusalem, where any piece of land can become your temporary dwelling (from the Paradise Inn website)

Paradise Inn is... a metaphor of differentiation and exclusivity... a luxurious paradise that originates from a public institution that was historically used to protect society from lepers and lepers from society. Paradise Inn dwells in the spirit of gentrification, inviting an artist to reside for free in the paradise for a month and a half. In return, the artist is expected to produce artwork for the comfort of future residents (from I Love Jerusalem Magazine [fake quotation of the curators]).

⁵ I was involved in the project as co-curator together with Lea Mauas (Sala-Manca Group) and also as an artist.

⁶ The inscription commemorating the reconstruction of the walls says that Suleiman the Magnificent "decreed the construction of the wall, he who has protected the home of Islam with his might and main and wiped out the tyranny of idols with his power and strength, he whom alone God has enabled to enslave the necks of kings in countries (far and wide) and deservedly acquire the throne of the Caliphate, the Sultan son of the Sultan son of the Sultan son of the Sultan Suleyman". (<http://www.imj.org.il/imagine/galleries/viewItemE.asp?case=7&itemNum=374383>, accessed August 2015).

⁷ Construction of the separation wall started in 2002 in order to "erect a physical barrier separating Israel and the West Bank with the declared objective of regulating the entry of Palestinians from the West Bank into Israel." See *The Separation Barrier* (1 January 2011), *btselem*: http://www.btselem.org/separation_barrier. Accessed 3 August 2015.



In the summer of 2015, a major part of the gardens of the historic, walled-off Jerusalem leprosarium became the setting for the construction of a temporal paradise, a summer camp for one single person, a metaphor of exclusiveness – the rebuilt (paradisiacal) Jerusalem of Boris Schatz.

A connection between the lepers' home and paradise exists widely. According to some traditions, based on the writings by the Byzantine historian Nicephorus Callistus Xanthopoulos in his *Ecclesiasticae Historiae* (Church history), the Empress Eudocia, wife of the fourth-century Roman emperor Theodosius, founded an almshouse for 400 lepers in Phordisia. Phordisia is a variation of *foridish*, a word that comes from Persian and means "garden" (hence the origin of the Hebrew word *pardes*, "orchard"). This word, which refers to the tradition of the Garden of Eden, morphed into the Latin word *paradiso*, hence "paradise." The biblical scholar Józef Tadeusz Milik located the Phordisia leprosarium in the Sheikh-Bader area (today's Givat Ram), although the independent researcher Joe Edward Zias, in a less supported theory, located it in Herodium.⁸ Zias based his argument on the fact that the Arabic name of Herodium is Jabal Foridish (Mt. Paradise), a name given to it by the Ta'amirhe Bedouin tribe.⁹ According

⁸ See: Joe E. Zias, "The Garden of Eden or the Free Hospice," *Teva vехаaretz* (1987): http://www.snunit.k12.il/heb_journals/aretz/296017.html (accessed September 2015), 296 (Hebrew).

⁹ Yehuda Ziv, "May his Place of Rest be in Gan Eden' – On Hordos' Orchards" *Mehkarei Yehuda veShomron* 18 (2008): 328. About other settlements whose name uses the word Foridish in its variations, see *ibid.*, 327–342. About the connection between paradise and the lepers' colony, see, for example, Linda W. Greene, *Exile in Paradise: The Isolation of Hawaii's Leprosy Victims and Development of Kalaupapa Settlement, 1865 to the Present* (Denver: National Park Service, Pacific Northwest Planning Branch, 1985).

♣ "Front of the Hotel", Sala-Manca, interactive installation, plastic shutters with electronic opening, arduino, candies box, plaster and a door from the JesusHilfe hospital, 2015.

to Hanna Cotton, the toponym *pardesya* may have migrated or been extended to the west, so that Phordisia may be located in the area of Beit Hakerem (today's Ein Karem, a village southwest of Jerusalem).¹⁰ Although the ancient location of the Phordisia leprosarium is unclear, evidently, a lepers' home was situated there, creating a clear semantic and suggestive connection between leprosarium and paradise.¹¹

The paradise project, commissioned by the Hansen House,¹² was curated by the Sala-Manca group of artists, directors of the Mamuta Art and Research Center at the Hansen House. The project began with a series of actions:

- Selecting the site of paradise in the former leprosarium gardens with the consequent definition of its borders;
- Constructing temporary walls made of rough plasterboards painted in white, which constituted the factual appropriation and enclosing of the public area;
- Redefining the paradise site as The Paradise Inn Resort, a boutique hotel for only one person;
- Adding eight historical doors taken from the former hospital, seven of which could not be opened, leaving only one to be opened by the hotel guest;

¹⁰ See Hannah Cotton, *Corpus Inscriptionum Iudaeae/Palaestinae A Multi-lingual Corpus of the Inscriptions from Alexander to Muhammad* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2010); and Rod Edmond, *Leprosy and Empire: A Medical and Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹¹ The artists were somewhat familiar with Zias' connecting the leprosarium, paradise and Herodium, but they did not engage in further research.

¹² The commission entailed carrying out a summer project using electronic waste. The curators proposed changing the main topic by adding a series of works using electronic waste to their paradise project.

- Adding a large frontal, closed “window” made of interactive plastic shutters, making it possible to show the inside of paradise for eight seconds in exchange “for only three shekels.”

The walls of the paradise site, constructed as a façade or as scenography, were actually delineating the boundaries of this contemporary paradise through a fragile temporary construction. Prohibiting visitors from entering the area created an uncomfortable feeling of exclusion, on the one hand; yet, it stimulated the visitors’ curiosity and imagination, adding a symbolic and higher economic value to the closed garden, on the other hand.

In exact (and unplanned) contradistinction to Jerusalem’s eight gates, of which seven gates are open and only one, the Gate of Mercy (שער הרחמים – the Golden Gate according to Christian tradition) – the gate through which the Messiah will enter according to Jewish tradition – remains closed, seven of the doors of the Paradise Inn were closed; only one door through which the guest could enter remained open. In order to accentuate the yearning toward the closed garden, the artists left some voyeuristic access points that enabled visitors to understand what they were missing.

Lea Mauas and I, in another blurring of borderlines between producers and users, defined the project in the curatorial text as follows: “Paradise is built – a haven in the middle of the city, a white façade bounding a garden that has been expropriated from the public. In Paradise, only one human being at a time can experience the ideal and modern natural living, leaving the public with a sense of longing, allowing a sneak peek into a free and peaceful world, at an affordable price.”¹³

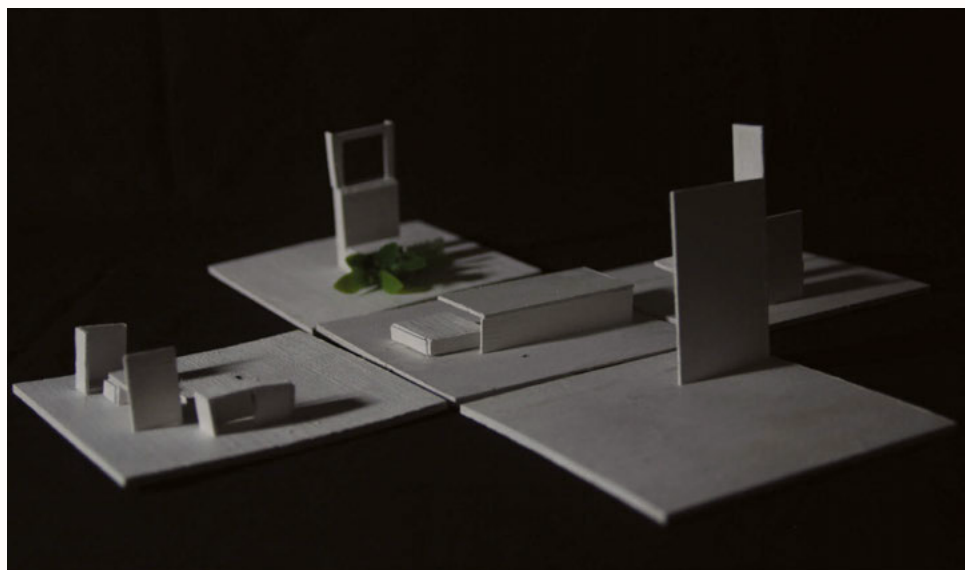
The curatorial text also defined the undertaking as a critical architectural project in the context of the urban politics of Jerusalem:

In light of the policy of the city of Jerusalem to develop tourism and to use

¹³ <http://mamuta.org/?portfolio=paradise> (accessed February 2022).



▲ "Silent Room n1", Chen Cohen, 2015, photo collage.



▲ "Room Kit", Pessi Komar, sculpture, 10X10X10 cm, 2015.

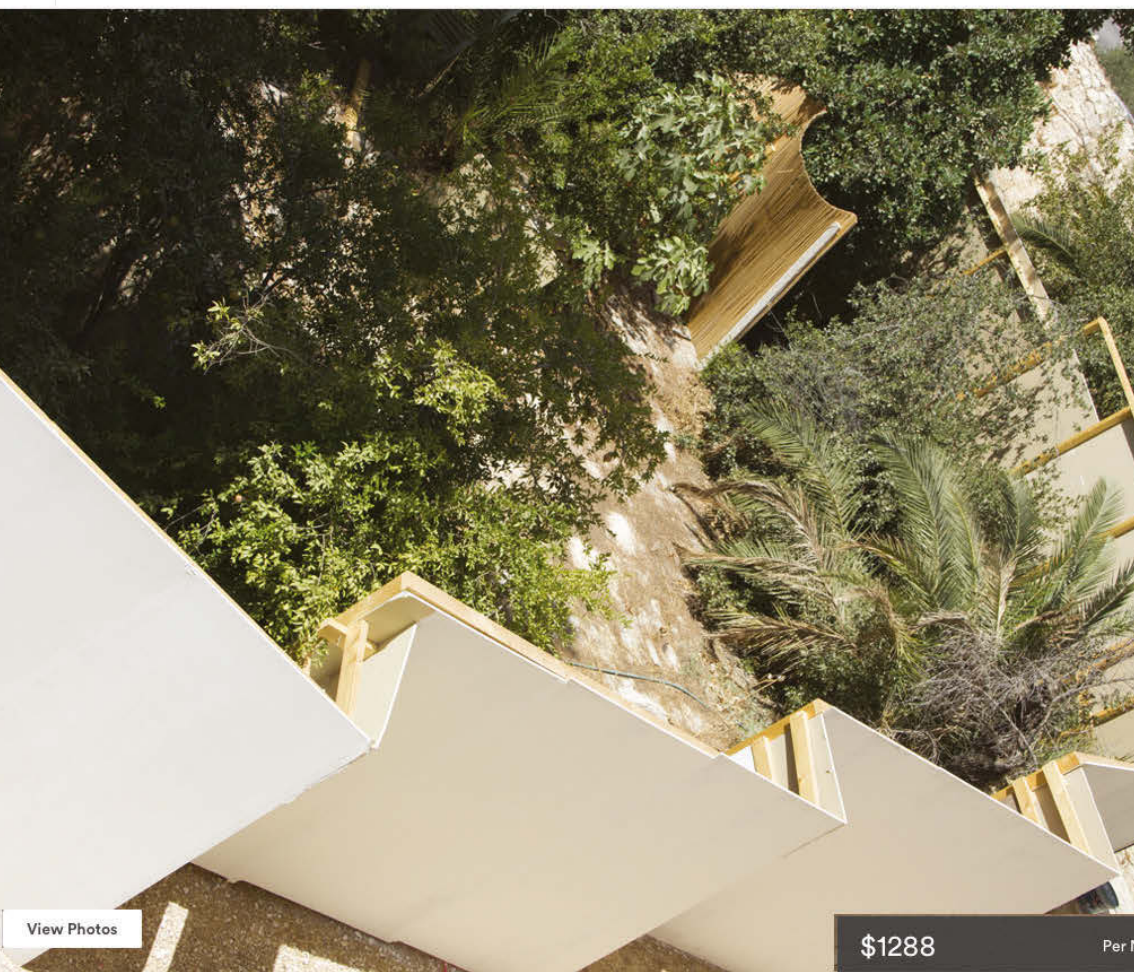
art and culture as a touristic tool, a group of local artists decided to be part of this new trend... In order to generate a new resource for tourism ... they established the luxurious *Paradise Inn* on part of the lands of the former Jerusalem Lepers' Home at Hansen House ... The project synthesizes new visionary ideas for a modern Jerusalem: a hotel for only one person, a personal paradise built in the exquisite Hansen House gardens.¹⁴

The Sala-Manca group planned the *Paradise Inn* borderlines or framing together with Nir Yahalom, who translated the abstract concept into a physical fragile border made of plasterboard. The interior infrastructure for the guest was a work by Itamar Mendes-Flohr, who was also the artist-in-residence invited to live in paradise for three months. Inviting him to create not only his ideal facilities but also new artworks on the walls of the paradise, adding new interpretations, interventions, and new points of voyeurism, the curators gave Mendes-Flohr the freedom to “just to be there,” without requiring any completed products from him.

An observation post from above was an important part of the project. From the second floor of the Hansen House, one could watch all of paradise, describe its contours, and understand the framing of it and the relevance of the walls to the construction of the temporary, earthly version of the mythos, as in “Frame it – therefore it is.”

A souvenir shop with works by Pessi Komar, Chen Cohen, and Shiri Singer was created as well, including music for the paradise elevator composed by Lior Pinsky. The *Paradise Inn* Resort website, which included all the necessary information about the hotel (attractions, size, and facilities), images, a reservations interface, and the collection of artworks of the *Paradise Inn* Resort, was Guy Yitzhaki's art project. Works by two guest artists supplemented Mendes-Flohr's interventions and Sala-Manca's

¹⁴ Ibid.



View Photos

\$1288

Per night

Overview

Reviews

The Host

Location



Mamuta

Paradise Inn

Jerusalem, Jerusalem District, Israel



Entire home/apt



1 Guest



1 Bedroom



1 Bed

Check In

mm/dd/yyyy

Check Out

mm/dd/yyyy

Guests

1 guest

Request to Book

You won't be charged yet

About this listing

Paradise Inn, Talbiyeh, Jerusalem.
A dream for only one person.
Infinite stars and a real gate to paradise.
Reserve your room at the former Lepers home.

 Save to Wish List

shutters, the planned closed lobby, and seven closed doors. Oz Malul created a kinetic sculpture and pirate radio program broadcasting on the IDF's radio station Galgalatz and Shaul Zemach devised an interactive "forbidden flower" made of electronic waste.

Chaym Noy adopts a scholarly approach to the connection between the idea of paradise and modern tourism. He argues that in late modernity, the mass tourism industry has reproduced, monopolized, and mediated both symbolic paradisiacal images and specific paradisiacal spaces. Tourism has reinforced the longing for paradise while creating those longed-for spaces for consumption. The tourism industry, Noy asserts, has effected the institutionalization and commercialization of contemporary paradises via the uncanny and immensely profitable combination of two characteristic late-modern phenomena – mass communication (mainly commercials) and mass transportation. Noy notes that those paradisiacal touristic spots are defined and real geophysical spaces that combine dichotomies to the benefit of the tourism industry, which differentiates between "home" and "away," the natural and the artificial, here and there. Those places are always temporal dwellings and supervised areas.¹⁵

The Paradise Inn Resort is in direct dialogue with the paradisiac touristic destinations that Noy describes, with the difference that, unlike the mass tourism destinations, the Paradise Inn Resort serves one single person. It is an exclusive paradise, an island in the middle of the city where the artificiality is the border. The privatization of nature through the plasterboard creates an ironic reference to those paradisiac vacationsapes.

¹⁵ Chaym Noy, "Touristic Paradises: A Critical Reading of Modern Vacationscapes," in *A Garden Eastward in Eden*, ed. R. Elijor, 395-409 (Jerusalem: The Hebrew University Magnes Press, 2010), 403-404 (Hebrew).

◀ Paradise Inn page at the Airbnb website.

An Iron Curtain Made of Plasterboard

”גן עדן הוא בין החלוף והיא - החלוף” (”חנוך”, פרק ב’, פסוק ה’)

The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom He had formed. And from the ground the Lord God caused to grow every tree that was pleasing to the sight and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden... The Lord God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden
(Genesis 2:8–15).

The Paradise Inn proposes defining an apparently arbitrary piece of the public realm as a private paradise. The project did so through delimiting a boundary, constructing a border between the everyday and the mythical, between reality and art, between the normal and abnormal. One may interpret this separation fence as a metaphorical system constructed to frame power relations based on politics of differentiation. The Paradise Inn itself constitutes a border, a definition, an obstruction, a line of division, or, to quote Irit Rogoff’s reflections on borders, “either a mode of containment or a final barrier leading up to ultimate liberation and freedom ... the border is the line that needs to be crossed to a safe haven away from the tyranny of evil.”¹⁶

Only one person could cross the boundaries of the Paradise Inn. The first (and last) guest of paradise was a commissioned artist-in-residence, who may be followed by potential guests eager to pay the considerable amount of \$1,500 a night to enjoy the unique experience of sleeping in the gardens of the former leprosarium, rebaptized or rebirthed as paradise. This border, created by plasterboard, represents a physical attempt to demarcate ownership, to delineate a parallel juridical sphere, to create what Hakim Bay

¹⁶ Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography’s Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 112.

called a “temporary autonomous zone” for selected guests, a metonymia of the leprosarium itself.

In his influential book *The Urban Revolution*, Henri Lefebvre noted, “Space and the politics of space ‘express’ social relationships but react against them.”¹⁷ In this sense, the demarcation of the land is an attempt to express, construct, and influence those social relations. In those selected spaces, buildings are footnotes, comments on social relations, or, according to Kim Dovey, part of an environment that frames power relations.¹⁸ Drawing on Dovey, Sara Fregonese, and Adam Ramadan argue that hotels become “evident mediators of state power.”¹⁹

The Paradise Inn was a fragile and temporary structure that attempted to create a critical discourse, a living parody of the state power, a revisit to Schatz’s utopia, marking a border within a border within a border. The Paradise Inn is a proposal for a non-collective life, a critical monument to the idea of exclusion and exclusiveness. It is not a real building but a site of demarcation, a process of differentiation, an iron curtain made of plasterboard, an island of fantasy.

The public had no real, direct access to paradise; the hotel walls were the mediators. The main attraction for anyone who did not want to invest time and money was a horrible, cheap white façade, the border of everyday life, designed to create the idea of a forbidden paradise on the other side of the wall.

The Paradise Inn could be perceived as a parody of a tourist attraction. The Paradise Inn was not a “beautiful” or “aesthetic” art work. It was rude,

¹⁷ Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, translated by R. Bononno (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 15.

¹⁸ Kim Dovey, *Framing Places: Mediating Power in Built Form* (London: Routledge, 1999), 1–6.

¹⁹ Adam Ramadan & Sara Fregonese, “Hotel Geopolitics: A Research Agenda,” *Geopolitics* 20/4 (2015): 793–813.



▲ “Snake from Paradise”, Itamar Mendes-Flohr, kinetic Sculpture, wood, wire and engine, 2015.

rough, shoddy, and inelegant, an aggressive intervention in the idyllic garden of Jerusalem’s intimidating former leprosarium. The white building was disturbing: it was an architectural intrusion of Jerusalem’s “other” – the “white city” of Tel Aviv – into the stone-based architecture of German Jerusalem. The art critic Galia Yahav, who criticized the artists’ interventions on the walls, referred to the white walls as the main artistic statement of the project. Focusing on the project as a comment on the relations between the artists and the institution supporting the project, she wrote in the *Haaretz* daily: “If you asked for an artist-in-residency program? you got a settlement. If you asked for a recycling project of electronic waste? you got faltering junk. If you asked for the Third Temple? you got hipsters. If you asked for paradise? you got hell.”²⁰

²⁰ Galia Yahav, “The ‘Paradise Inn’ Hotel in Jerusalem is a Parody on the Trend of Art-Hotels,” *Haaretz* (24 September 2015).



Yahav ended her article by referring to the paradise's walls: "The plasterboard walls are really stuck in the area, blocking visibility. They are a real aesthetic disruption. Frustration results from the impossibility of entering, seeing, touring it appropriately. Through their crude illustration, those walls clearly communicate that walls are the original sin."²¹ The Paradise Inn's walls created the feeling of a Potemkin Village, a façade hiding nothing, but, actually, those walls transformed this "nothing," this "nice garden," into the Garden of Eden. They were the medium for creating a feeling of longing, of being on the other side of the "real thing."

At the Venice Biennale, Santiago Sierra (or, more precisely, a group of Italian workers), in "Wall Enclosing a Space," built a brick wall from the floor to the ceiling parallel to the entrance of the Spanish Pavilion. The only

²¹ Ibid.

visitors allowed to enter and visit the work were Spaniards with identity cards, passports, or other legal means of identification. Sierra's work conveyed the idea of covering and revealing to selected people the process of hiding their national representative space in the international arena, converting the Spanish people into the privileged visitor able to testify to a national vacuum hidden from the rest of the world. Unlike Sierra's work, everyone could potentially enter and visit the Paradise Inn; for a certain amount of money, everyone, regardless of race, color, or gender, could be a temporary citizen of paradise. No one, however, decided to pay the bill and cross the border into this parody of a capitalist construction of temporary tourism, which anyone with money could enter and spend a night alone in paradise.

The plasterboard walls were the point of contact between the mythological Eden and the Israeli reality, between the commissioned space of the artist-in-residence and the visitor's curiosity, the platform for a hypothetical dialogue, for an anti-voyeuristic discourse. The hole in the wall created by Mendes-Flohr represented the most literal expression of this anti-voyeurism: neither an entrance nor a means of viewing a slice of paradise, it was a mirror reflecting the voyeur's own eye. An interactive installation of the Sala-Manca group merchandised the view of paradise: three shekels entitled you to eight seconds for viewing the naked paradise, the imprisoned landscape.

Only the elected artist, with his faux magnetic keycard (it was made of wood), was allowed to enter and exit paradise, to sleep in the "infinite stars" hotel, where the only part missing was the symbolic roof. There was no border between hotel and heaven; the Paradise Inn had a direct connection to it. The only contemporary Enoch was the invited artist. During his stay, Mendes-Flohr added some interventions to the walls: a moving snake made from a branch of one of the paradise's trees; a pipe taking out the dirty water from the Paradise resident's kitchen and bringing it back purified (or contaminated); the above-mentioned hole reflecting the visitor's eye; and a camera obscura-like

device providing a blurred, upside-down view of Eden. The wall of paradise, like the skin of a leper, was slowly being affected, weakened, disturbed, and threatened. The artist was its destructive disease or its nurse, the visitors the spectators of an already anticipated death. The paradise, as well as the souls of the lepers, remained invisible, inaccessible to the curious morbid gazes.

The democratization of paradise through capitalism did not bear fruits. No guest wanted to pay the whole price. One of the main questions the project raised was: what were the people missing (if they missed anything at all)? Did the artists want guests at all? Why did they stay outside? The colloquium organized for the closing of the Paradise Inn, with the participation of Rachel Elior and Chaym Noy, provided answers. Itamar Mendes-Flohr, the single and last witness, responded to questions about his experience of living there for the past three months. A day before his expulsion from the paradisiac territory, a day before his entire world was about to be dismantled, he answered with a sincere tone and a smile: “I was in paradise.”

The dismantling of the Paradise Inn started the next day. The doors and the plastic shutters no longer barred access. The fragile borders of paradise fell down. In the Facebook page, the curators posted a photo of the front wall of the Paradise Inn without windows and doors, and they added the following note: “The Gates of Paradise have been breached and are open to all, but there is no sense now. Now the [great] flood.”

Since the fall of the plasterboard walls, there is no Paradise (Inn). Nevertheless, perhaps ironically, in this very setting of the Leprosarium Jesus Hilfe/Hansen House, a new choir conducted by Noam Enbar has been established: The Great Gehenna Choir, blurring rhetorically or sonorically the fragile boundaries between (collective) Hell and (individual) Paradise.