



Yael's Dreams (AND NIGHTMARES)

—Avner Ben-Gal, Eti Jacobi, Tomer Rosenthal, Lior Shachar, Gil Marco Shani, Alexandra Zuckerman—

Opening: 24 November 2017, 7pm

On view: 24 November 2017—8 December 2017

Curated by Nicola Trezzi

Israeli artists work with a variety of media, from video to photography through installation and sculpture. However, there is a strong tradition connected to the medium of painting, especially in regards to seminal figures such as Nahum Gutman and Reuven Rubin but also related to the New Horizon group and Moshe Kupferman, who took the language of painting and the clash between their cultural heritage and the visual alphabet of the Middle East in order to create works that would challenge important issues related to visual art, such as the eternal conflict between innovation and tradition. Their radical art went through a different path, creating something that was completely in tune with the complexity of the place where they decided to live and work.

In a similar manner, contemporary artists Avner Ben-Gal, Eti Jacobi, Tomer Rosenthal, Lior Shachar, Gil Marco Shani and Alexandra Zuckerman, who all live and work in Israel, take the language of painting, and its oscillation between abstraction and figuration to new and unexpected horizons. They also create works that are deeply critical, but deprived from any strict or didactic agenda, taking a path that we can define as *oneiric*: dream-like or nightmare-like.

The title of the exhibition, “Yael’s Dreams (and Nightmares),” comes from this specific state of mind. “Yael” is both one of the most common names in Israel, the name of an animal [ibex], and the name of a dear friend, who is connected, in one way or another, to all these artists; she is having dreams and nightmares that are embodied through the works of the aforementioned artists. Through the understanding of painting as an open field – an *expanded field* – Ben-Gal, Jacobi, Rosenthal, Shani and Zuckerman’s embodiments of Yael’s dreams and nightmares consists of paintings but also drawings, carpets, plates, sounds, lenticular prints, installations and videos; indeed a large body of work, which is here presented, like a mosaic, through a very carefully orchestrated selection, according to keywords belonging to the language of painting, such as “palette” and “motif”.

Ben-Gal’s works, part of a set of unique prints entitled *BIOGENETICS* (2011) and his acrylic on canvas entitled *Sensitive Trunk* (2008) takes the history of humankind to the territory of the grotesque. Through Jacobi’s colorist untitled paintings – from the series “Black Rainbow” (2010) – the unthinkable comes together: from Bambi to abstraction, from Poussin to the Israeli light. As underlined by some of its titles – *Apparition I* and *Apparition II* (both 2014) – Rosenthal’s works can be seen as gates to a parallel reality as if the paper has been used to capture ghosts, now trapped in between worlds. Shani’s drawings – all included in his artist book *Dome* (2006) – elevate history – of art, of Israel, of humankind – to its most sophisticated and crude state. Folklore and fairytales are instead the main source of inspiration behind works by Zuckerman, such as *Smoke* (2013) and *Girl with Unicorn* (2014). The last set of works presented in this exhibition – an aquatint on paper, a trio of works on synthetic clay, and an installation made of fabric – are by Lior Shachar, an emerging Israeli artist currently studying at Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design Jerusalem MFA program with myself and Shani. She was selected by Ben-Gal, Jacobi, Rosenthal, Shani and Zuckerman to be part of this project.

In fact, the works presented in this exhibition – all essentially paintings – are encapsulating the practice of each artist and at the same time highlight the visible and inner connections between them, reinvigorating the notion of a “counter Israeli style,” an *anemic* one, that refuses any direct connection with the current state of affairs in favor of a deeper understanding of reality.

“Yael’s Dreams (and Nightmares)” is the third exhibition of a trilogy involving Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design Jerusalem MFA and BFA students, the Fila Maimeri Group in Milan, Sommer Contemporary Art, the Estate of Moshe Kupferman, and Art+Text Budapest. Bringing together an art school, a company and three exhibition venues, this project – which includes a prestigious award given by Maimeri, a series of master classes on the topic of “expanded painting” given by Shani and myself at Bezalel, and the inclusion of different generations of artists never shown in Hungary before – is a unique opportunity to expand the discussion about painting and, by consequence, about art.

—Nicola Trezzi, Jaffa, November 11, 2017

Image: Gil Marco Shani, Drawing from the artist book *Dome*, detail, 2006. Color pencil on paper, 32.4 x 24 cm.

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