

Grossbard's paper cuttings, that are not part of the current exhibit, the motif of light plays a major role: the hannukia, the candle, phrases such as "these candles" appear even in designs for Shavuot displaying the motif of the shining menorah. Watching his art-work over the years, shows how his palette is getting brighter, as if searching for good and kindness. In his memoirs he summarizes: "Each painting is a new beginning, a new search. I aspire to honesty, peace of mind and optimism."

The light appears not only as something that enables us to see objects, to build and form them. The light is an important and central theme in Idit Levavi Gabbai's work and the sources of light are often the titles of works: "Inverted Sun", "Moon at the Window", "Day and Night" and "Fruit in the Sun". The images gleam like rays of light in the memory, in the consciousness: the vast space of the valley in summer, the ideology on which she was raised as a "child of the sun", the geographic and cultural sense of belonging to the Mediterranean. One sees in the paintings an overall lightening of color alongside the symbolic colors such as red and blue. As in Grossbard's work, in Levavi Gabbai's paintings the shadow appears within the object itself (for example, in the folds of the towel), but is not cast upon the wall. Emerging from the physical plane, the fabric, the material, the rag itself moves, metamorphoses and is transformed into an emblem of a purified spirituality.

The recurring plea in the exhibit is "let there be light", an abundance of light, light that influences the surroundings, rests upon and emerges from within the paintings.

"We shall clothe you in a Concrete and Cement Gown", a phrase from a poem by Alterman², is the name of the project in which this exhibit takes place. The houses of Yehoshua Grossbard and Idit Levavi Gabai are not houses of concrete, they refuse to wear a dress of cement, and instead, choose a dress of light.

1 "Togetherness: The 'Group' and the Kibbutz in Collective Israeli Consciousness", 2005, Helena Rubinstein Pavilion, Tel Aviv Museum.

2 From: "Morning Song" Nathan Alterman, written in 1934 for the movie "A New Life" a promotional film sponsored by Keren HaYesod LelIsrael.

Table

I am looking at a still life by Grossbard. The knife laying at the front of the table looks weary, as if it could not have been the instrument that cut the length of the fruit or the crust of the bread. There is something slack and dull about it, something in its angles is not convincing, it is weak. The connection between the handle and blade does not seem strong enough to perform such an act – the act of separation. The touch and the connection create the tremor in the painting. The bread touches the bottle, the split pomela leans against the container.

Idit Levavi Gabbai has carried the kitchen towel with her through all her years of creative work, folding it, spreading it out, hanging it on a hook, a loose covering like a tallit, or a flag hanging limply at half-mast. The towel (a word with a feminine ending in Hebrew) was initially a painting surface for Idit. A surface on which she recreated the weave of the canvas and so turned it into an individualized “stationary” for the transmission of urgent messages. Later on in her work, the towel became an image, a subject for artistic observation, a symbol, and an icon.

The towel which dries, absorbs, is close to the naked body; remains as presence without function. It symbolizes the lowly, despised rag in the ranks of floating, waving fabrics. It is saturated with the sweat of the silent women of the kibbutz who enacted, wordlessly, the great ideologies. The kitchen was the arena from whence arose the existential questions: questions of identity, place, and morals. The limp, passive kitchen towel, sacrificed routinely upon the hook that became an entity in itself – a mask, a skull, a face with eyes and a nose but without a mouth. The hook and towel are silent witnesses. They are present and observing and both depend on that which supports their back – the wall. The wall with its painted horizon – the lower half shiny, smooth and easy to clean, the upper half dry and barren. The trinity of towel-hook-wall appears in different contexts in Idit's work, sometimes as separate elements and sometimes adjacent and touching.

Light

The works in the current exhibit have a light colorful palette and the paintings are full of light. The pigments are absorbed into the fabric, condensed into it and muted with white. Pink, green, ochre, yellow, vanilla, pale blue – how does one maintain the distinction between softness, pleasure, pain and mercy, and a pretentious sweetness? The paintings stretch out in the sun and abandon themselves to its heat. In his memoirs, Yehoshua Grossbard recounts, in a manner similar to many painters who arrived in Israel from Europe, his struggle with the blinding sunlight and his nostalgia for twilight: “Much time passed before I could sense the delicate coloring that the sun reveals in its warmth.” Grossbard's paintings almost relinquish shadows. He darkens areas in order to indicate three dimensional situations—entrances and exits – but many prominent objects do not cast a shadow, as if they were intangible presences. The protruding shutters, the roofs – open out onto space and their surroundings are not at all shadowed. His special relationship to the wall can be seen in the way he applies paint to the canvas. Grossbard worked as a house painter for many years. At times it appears as if the act of applying the paint itself, in a defined area, is a form of meditation for him.

The area of paint, before it becomes a wall, door, curtain, tablecloth or loaf of bread, is a patch of color with a shape and a particular manner in which it reveals or conceals that which is beneath and adjacent to it, creates a frequency or certain vibration that is distinct and precise. The light in his works is the sunlight and his work belongs to the bright hours of the day. This is the light related to vision, observation, and perception. In

disruption of balance, thus Grossbard believes in the strength of structure, the power of the frame and the way these shapes influence one another. When one looks at his work over time, it is evident that simplifying and cleansing the composition is one of his main preoccupations and many works created since the seventies are no longer painted from unmediated observation of the landscape but from observation of works created a decade or more earlier. In his memoirs, Grossbard recounts that as a boy his job was to help his father paint synagogues and places of Jewish learning. His father would decorate the ceiling with scenes of nature that included plants, flowers and flying birds. As a boy, Yehoshua was expected to hold the string that marks the lines and to fill in areas of color according to the sketches his father prepared on paper, transferring them section by section to the walls and ceiling. Perhaps these recurring divisions, the segmentation and purity of these compositions have their source in this memory of childhood, the sacred quality of the work and the fear of being responsible for its execution.

Symmetric division is prevalent in Idit Levavi Gabbai's work. This structure gives her work an iconic quality that reminds one of altar paintings, the ornamentation of the ark or paper cuttings. In many of Idit's paintings one can see a central image, flanked by another, double image, as if reflected in a mirror. As if it were a body that had been cut and its parts severed to reveal its inner parts, its heart, its center, open to our gaze, uncovered and beating. The scale of the works is small, the expression is restrained, a single spontaneous stroke of the brush, the dripping paint – attempting to reorganize and reform, refusing to do so, in the silence one hears a cry, a melody.

Wall

The installation that Idit Levavi Gabbai created for the exhibit "Togetherness" ¹, called "Topsy Turvy Room", in which the outdoors – the blue skies, sun and bales of hay, entered the space of the room, while the signs of intimate, personal space – the hangers and row of towels – were outside, surrounding the room like a corset or tight band, enclosing and encircling the wall. The inversion and blurring of special distinctions between inside and outside appears in different variations in the work of Idit. A gate that remains as a sign or symbol without any indication of direction for entering or departing, a scar that looks like red embroidery, a grid that recreates the weave of the towel, of squared paper, of the canvas. Red veins appearing below or above the surface, the skin of the paper, the color of the wall – vanilla 24. Even the sun, the great light, is transformed in one of Levavi Gabbai's paintings and the radiation is turned inward. This is an inverted sun, suggesting the burning within the body and perhaps hinting at the existence of an alternate form of light.

Yehoshua Grossbard paints urban settings, adjacent houses with a yard in between. He depicts the exteriors of houses or still life, the interior of the house. The openings of the houses in Grossbard's paintings hint at the events and lives that exist within them, on the other side. These houses convince the viewer that they contain life and all its daily routines within, yet the openings do not tempt one to peer within, whether the shutters are open or shut, the curtain lifted or drawn, they respect the privacy of the house and the individual space of the dwellers within. We know that there is someone inside, and that knowledge suffices. This whispering reverberation is felt through the wall as much as the window, the curtain, door or balcony. The wall and its angles sometimes appear fragile, as if the building is made of a permeable material that allows penetration and a secret reciprocity between inside and outside.