

VERISIMILITUDE / טבע דומה

Four Artists, Four Walls. In the exhibition “Verisimilitude” we have brought together four seemingly disparate artists, yet we see a common theme: the pseudo landscape. All artists, on some level, represent landscape. Landscape is not just outdoorsy nature, but what we see around us. Representing it, or in some cases, misrepresenting it, is how artists deal with their environs. For some artists, these environs might be personal or internal. Doron Adar, Alejandra Okret, Yehuda Armoni and Ophira Shpitz were each allocated a wall; it could have turned into four separate exhibitions. The similarities, if not necessarily visual, emerge.

Doron Adar, is more readily known for his traditional landscape photography. This is evident in his recent exhibition at the Artists House. Adar is an out-and-about artist; he never stages his work. In these works, however, there appears to be an element of staging which takes his work to a new level. But the staging is as falsified as the “landscapes” themselves. He has chosen here to exhibit his museum “landscapes”. Yes, we could all take a cell phone and photograph the works displayed in the museum, but Adar purposely and purposefully takes the photographs you, as a museum visitor do *not* want to take. The frustration of seeing the black barrier ribbon in front of the beautiful mosaic of El Anatsui whose work was exhibited several years ago in Israel, or the visitors sitting in front of Lisa Reihana’s “landscape” in *Pursuit of Venus (infected)* video creates an itch for the viewer. We want to see the actual artwork, not some watered-down, cropped version of it being literally blocked by the human presence. In this series, Adar appropriates others works but allows a twist of nature to evolve. He does not add the twist; it is there whether he or we like it or not. “Nature”, in this case, being the humans visiting the museum. They are responsible for the twist, the disruption, the itch. So while his works seem ordinary and familiar, maybe even unnoteworthy, they are stating Adar’s acknowledgment that the museum can in fact be a landscape and, by photographing with an element of mediation, he has deliberately called them thus. By photographing a museum goer in front of Reihana’s large video, Adar quite emphatically turns her ersatz landscape into a “real” one.

In this way, Adar’s photographs are no different than Yehuda Armoni’s realistic landscape paintings. Ironically, Adar says of Armoni’s works, that they are painted snapshots; that Armoni has the eye of a photographer. Armoni paints *en plein air* which his small format serves. Fascinated with the natural surroundings of the Modiin area, among other locales, Armoni diligently paints what he sees, or does he? He also must frame his works and perhaps add or remove elements to his taste. So, while Adar photographs what he sees, we do not actually know *what* Armoni or any other landscape painter actually saw when he took his brush and paints to the canvas. We know what he wants us to think he sees, and, in this respect, Armoni is virtuoso. Nearly all of the works exhibited here show the same human intervention that we saw in the Museum. An outdoors landscape is legitimate, erudite, and painting it expertly requires a formalistic approach that Armoni has undoubtedly mastered. It touches on traditional painting that is rarely seen today. This pursuit of “traditional” landscape paintings becomes, in the context of this particular exhibition, a question of what is real and whether such authoritative renditions of nature are reliable.

Alejandra Okret tackles landscape significantly differently; her wall is a landscape of life, and life as an artist. The first work, Bereshit, was finished many years ago; it is quite possibly the womb which carries the budding artist. As we travel along the wall we move through her

biography: the “inner child” so to speak, escaping persecution. This is an indelible part of the artist’s roots, and in that way, her own timeline. Later we see other, personal, works – all shades of pink. As a child of artistic intellectuals, pink was shunned, pink was kitsch. Okret’s rebellious nature escorts her throughout her artistic timeline in purposeful use of this eschewed color. The artist calls this installation “The Pink Line”. The line reverts us back not just to a timeline but to the line of the horizon, the line of landscape and ironically, the international date line which was once proposed to run through Paris and, indeed, was referred to as the Pink Line. Says Okret, “Like walking a tight rope, (the pink line is) a life-line, juggling thoughts, understanding that life is complicated but there is harmony if we keep faithful to our own line of philosophy.” We have an artist coming to grips with reality and the universal perception of birth, of biography, of creation, of time, of understanding a “verisimilitude” of reality.

Hanging catty cornered to Okret’s works are those of Ophira Shpitz. Shpitz, familiar for her use of geographical maps in sculptural installations, has departed from the use of the atlas but remains fascinated with topography, landscape, and geography in these sublime works. On close examination, one sees nature references: what looks like tree roots as well as possible flowered offshoots springing in botanical figurations on the paper and canvas without identifiable reference. Grains of marble and spiraled tree rings have a prominent role in her paintings. Like Okret’s works placed nearby, Shpitz references her own version of Genesis. The randomness of chaos reflects and is made coherent via the order of nature. As an interdisciplinary artist, Shpitz uses various techniques to meld the world of landscape in a way that “undermines” the “significance and feasibility” of reality (Ophira Shpitz, Artist Statement). Like her two-dimensional works, her rock formations are a direct exploration of the role of nature in art and in our surroundings. She creates a false landscape that the viewers need to circumvent as if in a nature trail filled with visual stimuli.

The exhibition Four Walls, Four Artists, otherwise titled “Verisimilitude” has united four chosen Modiin artists who examine separately, and now here in the gallery, together the part landscape plays in the eye and mind of the artist. As interpreters for the rest of us, they introduce many questions which they ever strive, successfully or not, to answer.

Audrey Sklar Levy