

Ar'aa shorsha v'anfa. Soil, Root and Branch

Inter-generational Art in Israel

This exhibition looks at Israeli artists who are bringing attention to the creative process that begins from the ground and continues as an enigma. Raw materials, sand and clay from the soil, climate, water and sun, in combination with the human nature sustains and nourishes the place. At this complex moment in time, we have chosen to turn the gaze inward at ten pairs of artists and their connection to each other and to Israeli art.

The title of the exhibition, *Ar'aa shorsha v'anfa*, means soil, root and branch in Aramaic, a language spoken almost continuously from the first millennium before the Common Era until today, which connects us to the history of the Jewish people. It embodies the connection to the place and sources that have nourished the various generations, from which some were uprooted and have since put down new roots and grown new branches.

The exhibition explores a segment of the evolution of Israeli art by observing the connection among artists of different generations from the same family, focusing on their artistic encounter, connections, mutual influences, similarities and differences. The works in the exhibition relate to a variety of themes: identity, reflection, local symbols, social diversity, artistic movements and expression over time in the geographical space of the Land of Israel. The senior artists' works are displayed alongside those of their younger peers who interpret and characterize the local art differently. The works range from painting, printmaking, photography and sculpture to ceramic and textile design.

Highlighting the tension and dialogue around the personal, national and universal, the exhibition features an eclectic representation of Israeli art from well-known families in the local art canon alongside those who are lesser known, until now. The older artists, some of them immigrants from the East and the West, brought with them time honored handicrafts such as weaving, embroidery and knitting, as in the works by Trayya Abdar and Etta Mehler. Others brought the art of realistic photography, as in works by Dr. Franz Littauer. Some were influenced by abstract painting and graphic arts, as can be seen in the work of Shmuel Leitner.

The lithographs of Nachum Gutman reflect the naivety of the search for an expression of the local tribe in the early 20th century. The paintings of Zvi Tadmor, one of the founders of the "Group of Ten"¹ (1950s and 1960s) represent local Israeli qualities that challenged the universal modernist art of the earlier New Horizons movement.² The figurines of artist Israel Schneizer, shown here for the first time, are characteristic of artists from the kibbutz, moshav and city who choose to make their art using cheap raw materials in the "want of matter" style practiced from the 1960s to the 1980s.³

¹ From Group of Ten Manifesto, 8th exhibition catalogue, December 1956–January 1957, Tel Aviv Museum.

² New Horizons, active in Israel from 1948 to 1963, encouraged the influence of international art on Israeli visual art. It introduced an abstract lyrical style of painting and sculpture. Artists Joseph Zaritsky, Yehezkel Streichman and Avigdor Stematsky were among the group's members.

³ Characteristics of the "want of matter" (Heb. *dalut ha-homer*) style are use of simple creative materials and a critical attitude towards the social reality and myths of Israeli society. Among the artists identified with the style are Rafi Lavi, Yair Garbuz and Michal Ne'eman.

Displayed alongside works from the past are works by the younger generation, most of whom are native-born and graduates of Israeli academies of art and design. These works show a new and contemporary facet of Israeliness. They deal with issues of gender and ethnicity, the connection between ancient and modern language, cultural differences, local craft, and the need to return to nature and the physical place they live in.

The exhibition attempts to portray an intergenerational mosaic, and perhaps even a mix of arts and artists: immigrant and native-born, traditional and secular, early Zionist and contemporary. It is less political and more personal—family oriented; it reflects the complexity of Israeli creative activity and invites the viewers to examine for themselves where we were and where we are now in the trajectory of Israeli art.

Participants

Shmuel Leitner and his son Gabi Leitner

Trayya Abdar and her daughter Shoshanna Givon

Eli Eliezri and his daughter Ifat Parness

Etta Mehler and her granddaughter Noa Taub

Israel Schneizer and his niece Dalia Buri

Zvi Tadmor and his son Gilead Tadmor

Dr. Franz Littauer and his granddaughter Michelle Gavrielov Littauer

Rona Ouannou Giladi and her nephew Shachar Ouannou

Miriam Bouskela Gutman, sister-in-law of Nachum Gutman and her great-granddaughter

Ayelet Amit Yehudai

Miriam Mayer and her grandson Omri Shareth