

Creators of the World

What emerges in a journey throughout the hermetic, distinctly different, spaces of Shahar Yahalom and Liat Elbling?

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Watching Shahar Yahalom's exhibition *Hayot* at Noga Art Gallery evokes a feeling of a nocturnal visit to a pet and women cemetery. However, it is not accompanied by a sense of morbidity, but rather conjures up a timeless, even mythological, territory. Yahalom creates a world of black-and-white drawings and objects, positions them in the space and pins them to the walls, thus creating an almost archeological landscape of a long-gone kingdom. A primordial world in which there are archetypal murals, plaster objects in the shape of Egyptian graves, and remnants of buildings adorned with owls, cats, plants, and women's heads.

Against the poetic and sensitive drawing, and the feeling of serenity and unity among the women, animals, and vegetation, stand the titles of the works, which imbue them with a cruel meaning. For instance, in a drawing entitled *Scalper*, a figure stands over a kneeling woman, holding her hair in a position that alludes to the impending violent action. Alongside the woman stands a dog, perhaps threatening, possibly comforting her. Another work, which Yahalom calls *White Scalp*, is composed of white porcelain masks that bring to mind heads of hunted animals, which were hanged as ornaments, as well as death masks meant to preserve the memory of people. Yahalom's world stretches in-between, between a severed head and a memory mask, between cruel scalping and delicate porcelain, between the feeling of death and the life that is present in this beautiful garden. It creates a lyrical and moving, closed and hermetic pause at the edge of time. It is not coincidental that Yahalom chose as the title of the exhibition the Hebrew word "Hayot" written in Latin letters – which could be read as a reference to animals, as the feminine conjugation of the verb "to live", and in the sense of "being".

It is interesting to exit Yahalom's passionate and intensely emotional world and step into the nearby Julie M Gallery and the cerebral world of Liat Elbling in the exhibition *Things as They Are*. Elbling also creates a closed and hermetic world, but in her works the seemingly sloppy drawing and ostensibly unrefined materials are replaced with regimentation and simulation. That world corresponds with the agenda of contemporary photography, which does not see any point in engaging with the thousands of images created every day, documenting the real world, but prefers to explore the medium and the unlimited potential entailed in simulation and technology. Elbling creates alienated and geometrical spaces devoid of any sensation of humanity. Nevertheless, in that sterility, between the layers, lies the entire world. In her previous series of works Elbling photographed exhibition spaces of galleries, which she then deconstructed and reassembled. In the current series she takes another step further, constructing space based only on illusion, as though seeking to examine the deception found at the root of the art world.