

Matan Ben Tolila in conversation with Reut Asimini

Matan: In the past couple of years I have been painting mostly landscapes. Mountain slopes constructed of colors and abstract encounters of material, which are in a constant state of formation. The landscapes are rich in color, but usually have a thin transparent skin and are close to drawing. At the core of my artistic exploration lies the act of painting itself and its limitations - lightness and weight, movement and inertness. Out of the constant disintegration and integration of the paintings emerges the story, the landscape. It constantly changes its weight, expanding or contracting through the establishing action of painting. In fact, the landscape is the action mode of the painting, the painting's mode of action is the landscape.

The landscape in the paintings seeks to display an abundance and movement, and at the same time, to maintain a subtle accuracy. A landscape that wishes to dominate, and at the same time allows itself to be subdued. I design the road passing through the landscape so that it always contains an element of dissolving, which the mind associates with a sensual, threshold, pleasurable situation.

Reut: There is a place in the north of Israel, where you arrive at a view point overlooking a waterfall. Next to the waterfall there is a rocky mass, when you look at the waterfall without averting your eyes for a few minutes and straight away turn your eyes to the rocks they move. I've had a similar experience with your paintings... a feeling of an earthquake of sorts, and a feeling that the only stable place in the painting is the house.

M: The earth is shaking under what we call "painting". The painting is an exciting arena of activity. On the one hand - to feel my powers activated, sensuality, tactility, confusing signals; and on the other hand - to feel how limited I am. No matter how much as I will push my limits, it will still be a small and minor percentage of what a painting could be and what I could be.

Movement and stability or instability are important in the works. The house, a self-portrait in a way, has a defined and clear shape, color and function. The structures serve as an anchor or point of reference in the turmoil of the changing nature. They allow you to read or experience the painting in terms of proportions, for

instance. That state of simultaneous abundance and emptiness is a state I am drawn to, like a believer.

Another thought about painting and a house: the painting is both Beit Midrash [literally a house of learning in Hebrew - t.n.] and a slaughter house; a place where you debate boundaries, beliefs and perceptions of culture, as well as a place where dramatic, groundbreaking irreversible actions are taken.

R: As a viewer I find myself helpless in a sense. On the one hand, I want to be immersed in the arena of the activity; on the other hand, the house is a static, closed structure; human figures appearing in the paintings are also looking at the house from the outside. Where is the inside?

M: When I paint, I plan the painting like an arena of activity, in it I count: one wall, two mountains, one cave, two islands and so on. I imagine that although the paintings have boundaries and various physical barriers, there is still a great movement, flexible and strong movement that can overcome weaknesses, hindering factors and sometimes even too solemn thoughts.

The question of the place is important, but so far I am unable to control it or clarify it. I do not want the place to be identified and specific. Nevertheless, on second glance the houses turn out to be temporary houses which use travelers on long hikes. In the first painting I've painted for the exhibition, Mountain Slopes (2009), you see Asian people and that is too distinct. In the following paintings, such as Searchers (2009) and Fence (2010), I allowed them to be painted all by themselves: an erased outlined form, a person in the act of weighting and evaluating, when he himself has practically no weight.

Like in jiu-jitsu, in which you use the opponent's momentum against him, in the painting I use bright vibrant colors, short and long strokes, small celebrations for the soul. When I lay the paint on the canvas I hear it, not only see it, it has a frequency and it helps me attune myself, become more accurate.

[Reut Asimini is an artist].