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Where the Wild Things Are

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Shahar Yahalom's solo exhibition, Noga Gallery, through 24.7

In her new solo exhibition, Shahar Yahalom makes an intelligent and measured use of a savage, primordial, and dark language

"Personally, I believe very much in values of savagery; I mean: instinct, passion, mood, violence, madness," said Jean Dubuffet, the spiritual father of the Art Brut genre. This famous quote seems to prevail throughout Shahar Yahalom's new solo exhibition, comprised of drawings, sculptural objects, prints, and animation work, all of which speak the language of unrestrained savageness and primordiality.

Like in "ED", Yahalom's previous exhibition held three years ago at Noga Gallery, the current exhibition also concerns drawing in space. In "ED", the artist executed it with technologically elaborate means – a tattoo machine with which she drew in intense inscribing, and a large incubator inside which grew a sycamore tree that twisted and branched in accordance with the environmental conditions she created for it. In the current exhibition, Yahalom employs much simpler material means, laced with primitivistic aesthetics: illustrated sculptural objects that look like memorial monuments that were unearthed in the wake of archeological excavations, porcelain works placed high up on the wall like sacred ritualistic masks, a graffiti drawing on the wall, and expressive black prints in the style of cave paintings.

At the entrance to the exhibition, the visitors are greeted by the exhibition sign, inscribed on the wall in childlike and wild handwriting, across from the sculptural objects and drawings. The semi-raw objects, different reincarnations of which have already been displayed in several exhibitions, work extremely well with the drawings and prints, which are as dark and gloomy as always. While these are not as good as her previous drawings, they still exude a powerful presence.

Yahalom's works have always had an air of stylized apocalyptic gloominess about them – a worn-thin genre, for which she has always compensated by an interesting use of light. For instance, in the spectacular "The Raspberry Land", exhibited at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art in 2010, she gave up the dramatic lighting effect characteristic of the genre, and flooded the exhibition space with blinding light. The current exhibition is also flooded with strong lighting, only this time it is natural light for a change. Yahalom exposed the usually concealed windows of the gallery, and so the feeling of darkness is replaced by the delicate and sterile fragility she is so fond of.

The gallery's second floor holds the exhibition's pièce de résistance: an animation work that looks like a childish doodle that had come to life. Projected on the large window of the gallery, the work brings to mind a stained glass window, yet is almost invisible in the dazzling light of day. Soon enough it becomes clear that the video work is not meant to be viewed from the inside, but rather by a viewer who stands outside the gallery. The projection inside the gallery is in fact a mirror-image of the work as it is seen to the viewer in the street. This mirror effect is manifested in several other works in the exhibition.

The exhibition text, written by Professor Efrat Biberman whose essays have been accompanying Yahalom for several years, is a sequence of philosophical associations that try to decipher the exhibition's charm and components. While the text is not always fluent, it is undoubtedly more effective than the ubiquitous banal curatorial texts found in every gallery and museum nowadays. Biberman makes an interesting move: by her use of language, she is in fact disrupting and undermining Yahalom's primordial aesthetics, thus creating an intriguing exhibition that walks the line between nature and culture.

Bottom line: we recommend arriving in the evening in order to view the video projection through the window.