

ZIGI BEN-HAIM
SCATTERED ECHO

WORKS 1993



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The picture of the signs which appears in the works reflects a route of transitions between visual elements and narrative components. An overt fusion and a covert fusion of means bring concepts and materials together to create a framework of active occurrence. The oscillation constructed in the works brings material components, signifying components and narrative components together, into action in a field that has no focus and no definition of direction. The emphasis is given to the processes, to the activity zones that signify an abstract, distant presence subsisting somewhere between the points of reality and cognition.

This is a deliberate giving of attention to states which have no clear affiliation. An attempt to concentrate on the essence that absence creates, on the reality of the black hole. The absence represents an abstract state in which all the natural and artificial forces act, concentrate and intermix towards the creation of a picture of reality. The hidden and abstract aspects are stronger than the exposure that reality gives. Reality reflects the contour line, the external element of a hidden system. The quest that the individual conducts in the system of absence aims to complete the missing picture, to emerge to behind-the-scenes, to routes of time and routes of soul which expose traces and signs of depth pictures.

The treatment of the elements of absence is conducted in a calculated manner, like a research study. The quest and the investigations involve the activation of various techniques and means. The pictorial expression of the investigation expresses a process and does not aim to represent an absolute state. The words present a fragment, a partial and regional picture in the sequence of pictures. The works create a legend of signs and means that comprise a kind of language. This is not an actual writing, but a material and formal signification, a conceptual state of writing in which the various signs are not the thing itself but serve as evidence of another thing.

The need to compose a simulation, to create an artificial disparity between the sign and the thing itself, expresses a private cognizance of the void, of lack, of the black hole that gapes between the will to decipher and the inability to crack the code. In these works, this cognizance leads to a series of visual flanking maneuvers and detours which compose a kind of readability, a state of sensing. The works activate a succession of methods with the aim of creating a closeness, even an artificial one, with elements of disparity and absence. The moves that lead to the hidden field and the desire to remain in this field express a position of doubt with regard to the concept of reality. The difficulty of containing the defined state as a reality leads to the recurrent quest for elements that are not part of the data in the conventional definitions of this reality. The action of this reality is subject to a set of conventions, to social systems that place the individual in a comparative and relative framework. This framework determines the type of belonging and the angle of connection between the individual and the reality of his environment. The environment and the individual's capacity to exist as a constituent of this reality are dependent on the possibility open to him to transfer and translate personal

sensations into a picture of the reality. The level of identification between the individual and the environment and the conditions of communication construct the kind of integration with or separation from the space that is perceived as the reality. In this system the reality operates in the framework of the movement of the social elements. This system from the outset defines a picture of disparities in which the cultural place of the migrant, the foreigner and the deviant is determined.

The shifts that Zigi Ben-Haim has made, from Baghdad, to Tel Aviv, to San Francisco and to New York, were not made from choice. This is a route of constraints. "Alien forces" moved him onto the route of migration from place to place. The movement from place to place reinforces the private element in the perception of reality. This reality includes the points of migration but does not constitute a natural part of them. The picture of the reality is reflected from the private and impaired picture of social contexts. Nonetheless, this private reality subsists in the cultural environment of the places in which it is a deviation. This situation accords meaning and importance to a kind of interim sensation, to a lack of understanding of the general space, to alienation, to a belated and distant absorption of social codes apprehended as though from a second vessel.

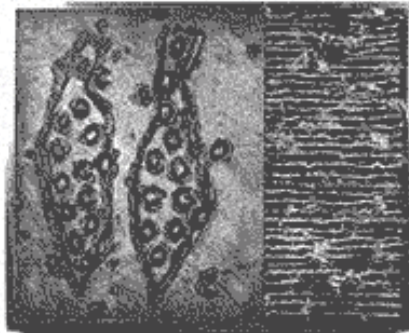
The works contain a kind of quest for roots, but these are roots that are not fixed in one place. In the work titled *Stony Roots* there appears an image that hovers in the upper part of the plate, dissociated from any source. The roots are present in the transition, in the flow, and designate severance and independence. Movement as an essence, as an expression of transition from place to place, as a fateful occurrence which is a part of a natural cosmic movement, finds expression in other titles of works which connect nature with movement: *Stormy Void*, *Chasing Wind* or *Memory Trails*. The use of these titles, and the use of signs taken from the world of nature, shift the private quest to the mythic field - a field in which traits of a deciphering existence are created, which on the face of it bring the individual closer to the hidden natural pulse of being. However, the quest subsists in conditions of simulation, of emotional distancing from interpretative, scientific or spiritual illusion. There remains only the process, the endeavor to grapple with the hidden and the lacking. There remain the investment of thought, soul and body involved in the identification of the process. There remains the artistic object as the plastic bearer of this investment. The processes and their plastic representation accumulate a vitality and a present existence of their own.

The state of hovering in which the works are positioned, hanging a little bit in front of the wall, symbolizes the experimental space for their shift from their conventional positioning. These are shifts that aim to move the works into the interim zones of the kinds of definitions which operate in an identified cultural space. The works simultaneously sustain an illusion of a painterly essence and the presence of an object, a product. The form of the work, the choice of



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materials and the contact with the material combine into the conceptual mapping which constitutes the language of the work. The applications of paint on the aluminum plates create an illusion of layers, forms and brush-strokes. In fact it is the other way around. Protuberances are not protuberances and layers are not layers. There exists only a flatness in which the silvery aluminum surface appears under a thin layer of paint and is at times active in the creation of the illusion of a depth and of brush-strokes. This is an abstract and illusory depth which works in a material state of flatness. There is no stratified and quantitative depth in the transition from the bare metal to the painted metal. On the metallic plate there occurs only a story of layers, of a depth of brush-strokes. The formal language connects with the signs of writing, with images of significations of letters which stem mainly from forms of branches of trees or leaves which already appeared in



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earlier works. The detached leaf, which at first sight seems to lack any real function, bears a charge of meaning, background memories and a kind of belonging. The leaf becomes the literary representative of a hidden presence which it signifies. Its distanced literary presence integrates with the plastic forms that simulate components from the language of painting and sculpture. The work hovering in front of the wall signifies painting. The construction of the work from aluminum plates joined by screws symbolizes the building of a three-dimensional object, sculpture. The layers of paint and the illusion-producing brush-strokes designate the possibilities of painting. All the components combine into an expression of distance, of disparity from the thing itself.

subtracting from the material. The work-process, which creates the actuality of the picture, is conducted in stages of removal and subtraction. The work, instead of being built and developing, is peeled to its actual form. The picture represented in the work constitutes a system of signs of forms in different degrees of peeling and subtraction. The basic paint that is applied onto the aluminum plates in layers and quantity undergoes a contradictory process in the course of the work. The real layers of material are emptied, subtracted from, scraped away and flattened to create their simulations. Other initiated acts combine with the act of removal and add a component of contingency to the states of subtraction. Ropes and other materials that are laid on the aluminum plates before the application of the layers of paint are torn off in the course of the work, and become formal elements in the system of subtraction.

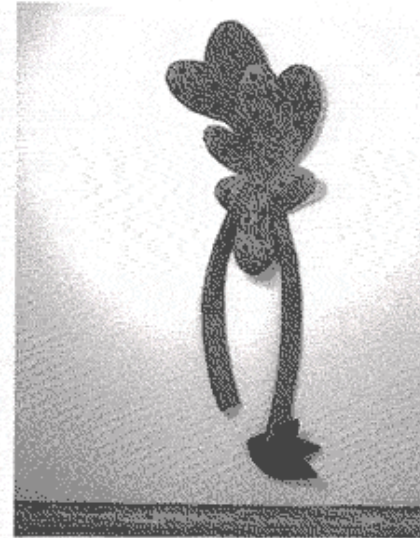
In the work-process too, a performative distance from the visible thing is constructed. The illusion of layers and hues is not produced by a painterly application of surfaces of paint, but by a sculptural method of

The entire work-process occurs in paint on the surface of the aluminum plates, without any intervention with the plates themselves. The plates are combined as a skeleton, a mechanical industrial product which is not intended for artistic expression. Screws hold the plates to the structure. The attempt to bring the works, the process, to a meeting with the plates does not, in the end, touch them; in all the processes of peeling there is no scratch on the material, and no

touch on the surface. The entire attempt to create is conducted in an artificial framework. The event upon the surface occurs between it and itself. It is not capable of becoming an actuality that joins surface and material together.

The process designates a sense of fiction, of contact with things that have an existence but that do not belong and can disappear. The entire work is in a state of dissociation and a state of being subtracted from, which leads to a final disappearance. After an absolute removal of the layers of material and of the signs from the surface, the aluminum plates will return to the clean and neutral state of an industrial product.

The principal colors active in the works are black-and-white and a group of cold colors. This limitation in the use of utterances and hues serves the distance that is preserved in the works from too much proximity to realistic depiction. The picture presented in the work is no more than a photograph, a non-colored black-and-white print of a process. The process itself is no more than an artificial allusion to a different essence. All the disparities, the shifts, and the distances that the work-process creates simulate the oscillation of forms and insights in the encounter between the self and the real. This is a simulation that tries to reconstruct the event that occurs in the transition between the landscape and the negative in the camera, or the original and the print in the printing process. To reconstruct a situation in which the reality turns into a picture of a memory. The simulational activity in the works connects the physical action of its creation with the narrative content expounded in them. The emptied layers of paint and the narrative elements that are constituted by the leaf create a conceptual system in which illusion and reality are mixed together. A lack of clarity is created, which draws the viewer to come closer and follow what is happening on the surface of the work. This closeness brings the viewer from the conventional way of looking at a picture to a route on which the material and narrative signs are read. The distanced and bounded conditions produced in the work-process point a way to a reading which can create a certain connection with the factors of reality present in the plastic story. The content and the means are the scattered echo which returns from the reading that is projected onto the environment, onto the reality.



Organic Persuasion, 1993, פיתוי אורגני