

Lemonade

Liat Lavi on the Lev Talpiot exhibition

"When life hands you lemons, make lemonade", goes the famous saying. It appears that this approach plays a central role in Gustavo Sagorsky's artistic activity. This is undoubtedly the case with this exhibition, showing in the Artists' Studios, at the heart of Talpiot industrial zone. In one of the works Sagorsky is seen standing on the roof top of the Artists' Studios, the industrial zone appears in the background, showing the commercial signs of 'Rami Levy Shivuk Hashikma' and 'Lev Talpiot Commercial Center'. Sagorsky is holding big feathers that seem to carry him up in the air, turning him into some sort of angel or shaman, capable of bringing magic into this ugly and frantic set. His trousers are dirty, placing him among the many workers who crowd the place, but he's in his socks, as though he were at home, in the most intimate and protected place. He is an insider and an outsider at the same time.

Many works show objects that Sagorsky has collected. Residues, objects that were left behind unclaimed – a leaf made of plastic from an artificial plant, a peeled potato covered in dirt, a broken umbrella, a car mirror; Neglected objects that only grace or a miracle could save from an unavoidable faith, and instill new life in them. In other works the photograph serves to expose a concealed beauty – the dirty shirt of a worker takes the form of an expressive painting; a miniature cypress tree and a blue fence turn, with a single photographic stroke, into a classic view of a cypress tree against the blue sky; a pebble, a few small sticks and pieces of broken glass, laid on the asphalt turn into geometric abstract art. Combinations and deflections extract a new and surprising power from the found objects, but at the same time, the photographs do not conceal their origins, their miserableness, but instead show once and again the potential the lies in the dirt, and the photographers' alchemist powers.

The American philosopher William James offers a wonderful insight to the nature of experience, saying that the taste of lemonade does not contain the taste of lemons and the taste of sugar. The combination of things enacts a new experience that cannot be identified with the separate experiences that may accompany each ingredient of the combination that is given to us as a whole. The whole is substantially different than the sum of its parts. In this lies the power of the assemblage.

In and Out

The studio is the artist's fortress. In it, he is the judge and juror; there he re-shapes time and space. Leaving the studio and entering the public space, collecting world scrapes, faces the artist with a given

reality, but the richness of experience it provides allows for new freedom. The works in the exhibition present this dialectics of in and out. Sagorsky collects objects from the outside and brings them into the studio where he instills them with new life. In a previous series of works, he created toy cars from scrapes and scatters, rescuing them from extinction by reinstating them in the realm of usability and play, granting them additional time, a reincarnation, moments before they were to become obsolete. In the works of the present exhibition, the transformation is more subtle, the rescue comes to these objects on the form of beauty, and one can only assume that moments after being photographed, they were thrown away. The time given to them was brief, a charitable instant preceding their unavoidable fate.

In the course of this transformation, the objects turn into a surface. The unmediated encounter in which experience is composed of smell, taste, sound and touch, is replaced by a photograph, an object that is almost entirely given to sight. But although we meet these objects through the sense of sight, Sagorsky succeeds in maintaining some of the sensual and sensorial baggage they carry. The works seem to draw the fingers, triggering a desire for touch.

Close, Closer

Talpiot neighborhood is not among Jerusalem's fairest. As any neighborhood in Jerusalem it has beautiful spots, but it is primarily identified with the ugly and busy industrial zone, where the Artists' Studios are located and where the exhibition takes place. This at least is the impression one gets on first sight, looking at it straight and from afar. Something else happens, so it turns out, when one looks at it downwards and up-close. Even more so when one looks at it charitably, and when one uses his sense of possibility.

One work depicts soccer training at a soccer field that is located just beside a mosque. In the forefront, kids are playing with their bicycles, one of which is caught just when he lifts his front wheel. This is reminiscent of the decisive moment approach in photography, and only highlights its absence from the rest of the works. The scene is hazy, which makes it romantic and melancholic, and the photograph seems to capture an urban pastoral moment. But this pastoral scene is incredibly loaded. It is the only gaze from afar that appears in the exhibition and it is thoroughly charged with contexts, one cannot help but see in it the echoes of colonialist painting, self-indulging on the fascination of the strange and exotic.

Creating such enchantment in our day and age borders on parody. More than anything it exemplifies why it is no longer possible to look at Jerusalem from afar. Jerusalem is a charged site in many respects, and its representation is similarly charged to its bones. The holy landscape appears in the mundane as well, and the representation technic hinting to the imperialist gaze only highlights this fact¹.

¹ See: W.J.T Mitchell, *Landscape and Power* (London: University of Chicago Press, 2002), Ch. 9.

Jerusalem is a haunted city. One cannot look at it from afar without waking its demons. One can only look up close, as close as possible, so as to extract the mundane by forcing it into intimacy, by expropriating it from the public domain. In the intimate sphere a space becomes available and this act of setting boundaries seemingly leaves outside the historical and political baggage in favor of establishing a new relationship with the city, and engaging with it in dialog.

Intelligent Design

The wonder in facing nature's beauty goes back to ancient times. In theology this wonder served to prove the existence of God – according to the claim, only an intelligent power could have created such beauty and harmony as we meet in nature. Darwinism and the life sciences have undercut his wonder by supplying with a material explanation to the design found in nature, and still, the wonder remains, and the beauty of nature keeps echoing to our ears the distancing echoes of the transcendental.

Natural shapes and patterns appear in many of the works in the exhibition – a spotted umbrella, capillaries of a plastic leaf, a piece of cloth that appears as a plant or underwater creature, a scare that had healed in the shape of a cactus or a carnivorous plant, with arm pit hair serving as its roots. Between the natural and the artificial, appear here a third alternative – an artificial natural, fabricated organic.

This acts as pointing a supposed barrier, while at the same time blurring and disrupting it. This move culminates in the work showing the scarred shoulder – the skin that symbolizes the boundary between inside and out, carries the memory of the breach and the traces of its healing. In this process, out of the trauma emerges a new, manmade beauty. The scar also serves as a reminder of time's passage. Time heals all wounds, we are told, but their traces never vanish. Healing is not effacement but transformation.

Transformation, the emergence of beauty from the broken, the torn, the scrapped and beaten is a repeating strategy in these works by Sagorsky, in which the photographer takes upon himself the role of the shaman – granting time and creating beauty, putting together the fragments of reality.