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EXHIBITIONS

Art for the open-eyed



• BARRY DAVIS

There is an alluring naiveté to quite a few of the works that will be on display at the Jerusalem Artists' House as of tomorrow.

Let's begin with Eyal Sasson's "Armpit Garden." For starters, that is a pretty intriguing name. The choice of the titular corporeal recess may suggest a certain aromatic association, but there are all sorts of anatomical references in the lineup, betwixt the frontline items of flora.

The array is at once mesmerizing, smile-inducing and a little repugnant. Sounds a mite oxymoronic, if not downright incongruous, but the pervading sense is of an attractive and endearing nature.

The dozen or so outsized creations remind one of giant botanical cardboard cutouts, of the kind one might find in some titan's children's pop-up book. The featured organs nestle cozily among the verdant foliage and polychromic floral elements, and seem to suggest there is some tale going on behind the scenes. It might be a fairytale of the Brothers Grimm ilk, which, in the original Germanic version, incorporated plenty of gruesome detail. But you could just as easily go with the pleasant insouciant flow.

In fact, as Sasson explains, there is more Garden to the collection than Armpit.

"This is really a continuation, a sort of zoom-in, to my last exhibition, last June," he says. "The overall reference was landscape, with foliage and vegetation. And the small human figure from the previous works has been blown up, and you can see organs and plant elements."

It is fascinating to try to discern the various limbs, some of which resemble petals and other floral components. But the inflated specimens feed off the grander narrative.

"It is important to note that Eyal's point of departure is landscape paintings," explains curator Ravit Harari. "To begin with, he made paintings that were more pleasant and subtly colored. He even had an exhibition of monochrome works. Over the years he has broken out and has reached a stage of overflow, satiation and of almost spewing out the colors at us."

Sasson has, indeed, traveled expansive ground over the years. Gone are the seductive and compelling broad visual sweeps, with mountains, forests and even icebergs. The current show takes us into the innards of Mother Nature's offerings, almost forcing us to get up close and practically rubbing our nose in the glorious multicolored richness that surrounds us on a daily basis, and which we could enjoy if we only took a time out from our busy schedules.

"Armpit Garden" is actually more installation than exhibition. The large-scale acrylic-on-cardboard paintings give the impression of almost leaping out at you, and some will have three-dimensional elements. While the various colored sections are pretty clearly delineated, there are places where the paint has dripped beyond its planned confines, leaving an endearing antithetical trail to follow its gravitational path across a very different shade.

There is a fleshy succulence to Sasson's spread that hones in on the microcosmic plane of the vegetation, somehow combining the attraction of sumptuous color with the cold hard deconstructed reality of just

ABRAHAM KRITZMAN'S Smoking exhibition includes freely cast figures that look like ancient pillar capitals crafted by a substance-abusing artist in a fit of unrestrained release. (Ruth Malul-Zadka)



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LEFT: KRITZMAN Attempts to convey a sense of information overload. (Elad Sarig)

EYAL SASSON'S giant acrylic works convey a sense of sumptuous, almost excessive, natural coloring. (Avi Amsalem)

what goes into the natural majesty around us, particularly at this time of this rainy year.

CURIOSLY, THE scale manipulation aspect in Sasson's work is also central to its neighbor at Artists' House, "Smoking," by Abraham Kritzman. The mixed-media collection incorporates oil paintings, sculpted stoneware plates, higgledy piggedly cast blocks that look like ancient pillar capitals that were crafted by a substance-abusing artist in a fit of unrestrained release.

As with the Sasson project, "Smoking" involves sectioning, fragmentation and layering. The core idea was sparked by hiking trips Kritzman took to the region of Piatra Neam, a city in the Moldavia region of Romania where his great-grandfather lived. The old architecture of the region comes through in the aforementioned multidimensional cast objects as well as in the various strata incorporated in the layout.

Naturally, art is very much about conveying ideas and creativity through visual means. Then again, Kritzman says he wants to make life a little difficult for his spectators.

"I am very interested in masking, which is how I arrived at the title for the exhibition. There is something in the way we take information on board today – on a daily basis, across history and in other ways – whereby the layering is very misleading."

That, he says, is mainly down to the constant flood of data.

"We don't pick up on everything. Bits of information arrive simultaneously, and we naturally assign them to a kind of hierarchy. We are bombarded with information."

Kritzman uses the exhibition, in part, to try to make some kind of logical pattern of the constant influx of new knowledge, and to compartmentalize and assign facts to their natural slot, if we are still capable of that. The showing is also informed by other trips the artist

made, across Europe and to Japan, and there is a sense of the universal, or multiculturalism, in the layout, which occupies two spaces on the upper floor of the building.

Questions of myth and reality also surface as the eye roams across the dozens of naïve-looking paintings that provide the multi-hued backdrop for one section of the exhibition, which covers a vast stretch of wall. The seemingly unplanned base pictures appear to be pretty similar, and might almost have been created by schoolkids as art class exercises. There is an innocent feel to the substratum, which, when you get up close, is in fact pretty intricate. But the initial impression is one of uniformity, perhaps alluding to the "same-same" sensation that we can tend to experience when we are inundated with news, thereby becoming desensitized to human tragedy and other truly momentous developments.

The opposite wall offers an explosion of color with

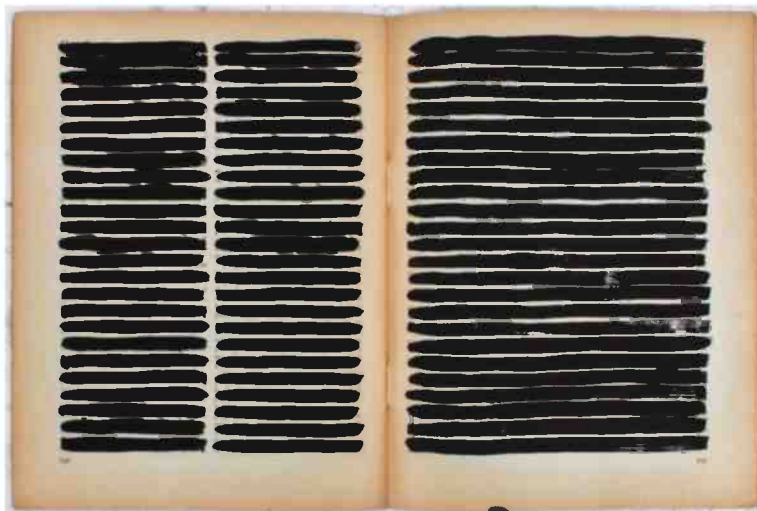
richly hued paintings offsetting the monochromic top layer works on the other side of the hall.

So, what to make of "Smoking?" With its layering and chromic interplay, there is much to ponder. Whether or not that leads the observer to a state of greater clarity, only time will tell.

THE HOLOCAUST also makes an appearance in the new Artists' House rollout. Gideon Rubin's aptly titled "Black Book" gets that across in no uncertain terms, but also, once again, somewhat naively. Rubin is the grandson of seminal Romanian-born Israeli painter Reuven Rubin, which, curator Marie Shek points out, brings Rubin Jr. back full circle.

"His grandfather studied here, when Bezalel [Academy of Art and Design] operated from this building. I see this exhibition as a form of closure for Rubin, and in terms of Israeliness."

The younger Rubin, who has lived in the States and



GIDEON RUBIN'S Black Book looks to eradicate the evil of Nazism. (Richard Ivey)



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FRENCH FILMMAKER David Teboul's film 'Sigmund Freud, a Jew Without God' sheds light on the man behind the famed psychoanalyst. (Courtesy Jerusalem Artists' House)

in London – where Sigmund Freud spent the last year of his life, after fleeing Nazi-controlled Vienna at the last moment – visited Vienna to get some background information and impressions of the great psychoanalyst's life and work following a commission for an exhibition at the Freud Museum in London.

That experience was complemented by a serendipitous Internet purchase Rubin's wife made one night. Unbeknownst to her, the job lot of publications included an English edition of *Mein Kampf*, which was serialized in a British paper in the 1930s, presumably for educational purposes. "Gidi [Rubin] was shocked when he saw it," Shek notes. "He wanted to do something about it."

What he did is now on display at Artists' House. Double spreads of the various chapters of the book have been placed in display cabinets with the entire text blacked out by Rubin.

"He didn't want anyone to see this," Shek says. "He wanted to completely obliterate any trace of Hitler's writings."

That is, of course, a strong statement, but it also comes across as a little naïve. Rubin spent hours upon hours drawing a black marker across the thousands of words in the book, in the earnest hope that might keep a lid on the Nazi leader's poisonous vitriolic, and keep antisemitism in check.

"It is clear to me that the blackening of the words and lines has no meaning in the art field beyond the act itself," Rubin states in a conversation with Shek. The artist happily confesses to adopting a somewhat innocent approach to the exercise.

"As an artist, however, one entertains the very romantic, human belief that in the darkest place, taking a stand matters."

Shek also offers a greater understanding of Freud, the man and the psychoanalyst, by including a screening of French filmmaker, artist, and writer David Teboul's 90-minute film *Sigmund Freud, a Jew without God*. The French-language film, which has English and Hebrew subtitles, delves into Freud's personal correspondence, and uses archival footage and period photographs

that often resemble paintings.

The film takes us through Freud's evolving awareness that things were not going well for the world, as early as the outbreak of World War I, and his preference for remaining a European, come what may, rather than joining the Zionist movement.

The exhibitions close on April 25. For more information: www.art.org.il



OFRI LIFSHITZ explores the interface between mechanization and human beings. (Ran Kushnir)