

Lullaby for the Eyes | Yael Hovav

Curator: Sofie Berzon MacKie

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Thin layers of oil paint on canvas, pile up to form a living room with two human figures. The canvas is covered with a sheet of dreamy colors, a palette of sunset on a distant sea, or sunrise on desert sands. A doctor-man figure places a stethoscope on the chest of a naked woman, her body sprouting out of the deep blue couch. Both lack facial features, but their feet are described in full, as if they haven't yet finished growing up to their crowns. In another painting, a man and a woman are in a living room. The scene is clearly taking place in Israel. The tile strips on the floor, window bars and Monstera plant concur only in one house, one country, and one time frame. A man's figure stretches a bow and oat-made arrow, the potential children are already thrown on the back of the woman, who is kneeling like a cocked spring. The memory of laughter from an Innocent child's play, grows in wide ripples. Maturing into the story of a relationship within the home and outside the home, Man-Woman-World. Our origin tale. The man and woman look like two bodies that have yet to decide whether to be part of the world. Then, they will be asked to determine the fate of their encounter, with its wounding beauty and delightful coarseness.

A chain of vague thoughts begins to unfold. Thoughts about protection and the price we pay for it, the hidden struggle and passion of exercising power or devotion, intertwined anxiety and liberation, the different faces of intimacy. But the word 'faces' suddenly feels too definite. Perhaps it is something else? Just as I feel the unraveling choreography between the characters, I am distracted by a patch of orange light filtering through the blinds. Casting doubt; is what Hovav observing actually taking place 'outside?' I imagine something to be somewhere, and immediately, things are elsewhere. This intense orange light, shifts between the works with changing appearance, but we'll return to it later. A system that is in equilibrium can already be established as the foundations on which Hovav layers her paintings: Man-Woman-Home, the need to find the correct ratio, and the challenge of wholly grasping something.

The encounter within the domestic scene takes place at the heart of a familiar home. It is the memory of her childhood home in the Jerusalem hills, painted from a family photograph, or her current home in Tel-Aviv. Her works are dotted with identifiable local elements: a power outlet or a multi-socket, window shutter, or sneakers with

laces, all of which point to 'home' as a private case of universal consistency. With their presence, she lays a delicate net, set to capture elusive things that escape in direct contact or gaze. Their transparent gentleness is concealed by the mundane, beneath house tiles, municipal taxes, bank fees, train schedules, and cleaning supplies advertisements. But they hold a penetrating insight about the nature of the world and our place in it.

Hovav describes a house of cards, constructed by energies that keep the world stable due to the correct placement of balance and brakes. Her paintings too, are systems that are in equilibrium. In the stroke of the tiny brush with which she works, lies a close relationship between a thing and its opposite. A held painting allows for emotional release; loose areas provoke anxiety. This relationship between control and release, reveals the presence of a Gordian knot that forces things to be found only in the presence of their opposites. "...*Through the unknown, remembered gate, When the last of earth left to discover, Is that which was the beginning...*" as T.S. Eliot wrote^{1*}. This state of mind translates also into the female and male figures, and the unresolved relationships between them. They seek contact and recoil, reveal and then cover themselves in the wrong places, finally to be led alone through the weight of their lives, with diverse solutions in the face of life's trailing absurdity.

Floaties worn by a sleeping character remind us that dreams are also nightmares despite our language distinguishing between them. In our inner world, too often, it is difficult to identify what is what, and something remains locked away from us. "*Who looks outside, dreams; who looks inside, awakes.*" Carl Jung wrote in a short letter from 1916, urging the postponement of the view on the outside world in favor of an introspective quest for identity formation. The clear gaze inward is a path we walk alone. A collapsing ideological building like the one outside our doorstep in Israel 2024 (and sometimes it is the home itself burning down upon its occupants) reluctantly pushes our gaze inward into the arms of a world, where there is no one but us to reorganize it.

This chain of thoughts that started with an oat, moves through the painting of a light, painting a star, a light turning into a star, a lamp in a house morphs into the sun. An orange-red light illuminates the outside and then the interior. The light undergoes transformations of hue, form, and meaning. I understand it as a negotiation about life, movement, and flow. An inner north star in renewal dynamics – the reduction of infinity, a clearing of space, the crystallization and dissolution of form. A world that is being built and, at the same time, collapsing, collapsing, and dying out.

^{1*} T.S. Eliot, *Little Gidding*, *Four Quartets*, V.