

Jagged

Tali Ben-Nun

Michal Bachi's exhibition presents a comprehensive collection of paper works, revealing the artist's painting languages.

Looking at the works of Michal Bachi is akin to moving a camera back and forth in relation to its subject. The field of view is articulated by observation, in an incessant movement from the outside in, from the margins to the center, from the body to its surroundings, from the seemingly abstract surface to the deeper layers below. There, deep down, stir the subjects of the painting. Discomfort, awkwardness, breakdowns; a pulled back muscle, a loud argument, an ill-fitting pot lid, liquid overflowing a jar, underpants with loose elastic, a lodged stick, a wobbly shed. Bachi stows away secrets within the layers of matter and time, perpetuating the small details of the larger show.

Bachi is a painting laborer. She buys her raw materials – paints and tools – in building supply stores. The industrial paint gives her paintings a flat, opaque, low-calorie look. To bring the hues to life, she adds various pigments and oil paints, and works in chalks, graphite, ink, and charcoal into the paint. The actions – raking, scraping, wiping, erasing, scratching, subtracting, and exposing – and body movements are embedded in the paper. She works on many sheets in parallel, keeping works-in-progress in drawers, in some instances for months, before they return to the work desk.

In her early career, Bachi's paintings were characterized by narrative figuration. Gaunt figures, situations and relationships: partners, motherhood, friendships. Over time, a gradual process of abstraction began. The figures seemed to fall apart, becoming absorbed into the background. The painting's center of gravity wandered from the body as a whole to details: a movement of the torso, a flash of the groin, buttocks, palm, foot. An almost schematic anatomy. Dense compositions of elements that have been cut off, isolated, and yet in motion toward, in movement that seeks contact – with another body, with an object, with a splash of color. The disassembly and abstraction of the body images coincided with physiological changes in the artist's own body. The slowing down, the creaking, introduced a fragmentary

contemplation, from within the body rather than about it.

Bachi's work in small formats adds to the sense of density. At times, the paintings seem to be a scene of conflict between several forces operating at once. The works trip over their own feet. Juxtaposed with a strong, clear image are enigmatic patches of color, vivid and warm colors versus faded and pale ones. The good and the bad, the tragic and the comic, in constantly struggling movement. A hand that caresses-pickpockets-waves goodbye and also calls for help. A foot that tramples-kicks-pedals-dips into a puddle of paint. The subtlety in the movement of the painting hand gives way to an expressiveness of that very hand. A tiny eye is drawn on the paper with a coarse brush, a large area of color is comprised of countless lines drawn on with thin markers.

Naming the works takes place in a rushed, quick, intuitive and matter-of-fact fashion. Bachi needs to find her way through the abundance, and the names are identifying marks designed to make it easier for her to navigate between the works in computer folders.

In her works, Bachi cuts into the paint and sculpts elusive images in it. One moment, the eye manages to grasp them, and the next they vanish and are absorbed by the patches of color. Bachi's languages of painting – figurative and abstract – are constantly rubbing shoulders. The abstraction is drawn to the pre-verbal, non-encoded form. The verbal language – the titles of the works – is external to the act of painting, and perhaps an echo of figuration. It is the artist's most secret language. It is as though it has the ability to organize the meaning, to call the abstraction to order, to bring back the figure, to uncover the encryption and at the same time to constitute another layer, a space for countless associative readings.

"Every day when I lock the studio, I think about the possibility that it might all go up in flames," says Bachi. The studio may be a solitary enterprise, but it is also a home, a climate, a language. Productivity, multiplicity, superfluity are like defiance in the indistinct face of oblivion. Jagged, gaping, or pursed lipped with gritted, strange teeth. What is she grinding, with whom is she playing with the What-If fire?