

Song of Herself

*To see a world in a grain of sand,
And a heaven in a wild flower,
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand,
And eternity in an hour.*

- William Blake, Auguries of Innocence

The insignificant is as big to me as any

- Walt Whitman, Song of Myself

For more than three years, Hadar Gad has been travelling to Kibbutz Ein Harod Meuhad Cemetery, taking in the view and sketching the trees, stones and light. Back in the studio the sketches are turned into large-scale paintings that carry many layers of meaning. It is a continuous labor of love, its significance and symbolism - both personal and collective - slowly unfolding in the process.

Though her parents left the kibbutz shortly after she was born, Hadar Gad always felt connected to the landscape, to the cradle of the mythology she grew upon. Her grandparents were among the founders of the kibbutz and are buried there. Miraculously, the cemetery - an exquisite garden in its own right - hasn't changed since her childhood, and she was naturally drawn to that peaceful back yard.

Visiting the place stirred in her questions of belonging, roots, identity; alongside the artistic journey, she also found the key to confront these questions and resolve them. A remarkably large body of work emerged from these day trips, and in 2009 she exhibited a selection of works at the Ein Harod Museum. The show was titled "Block, Section, Row" - a system used in Israel to locate an individual grave.

The works are generally associated with the myth of the Kibbutz, the ethos of the pioneers, and the place of graveyards, mourning and remembrance in Israeli society (typified by the ever-present, meticulously depicted towering cypresses, characteristic to the landscape). The choice of a cemetery is not random, as this place is central and sacred in Israeli culture. All that is mixed with her own relationship with Death and Memory, and with a quest for Beauty and Redemption that can be found in Art.

Before stepping out into the open landscape, Hadar Gad's imagery comprised mainly paintings of interiors: bookshelves, wardrobes, the contents of the refrigerator or a trash bin - painted with great honesty, a love for detail, a decent dose of humor and a masterful hand. In taking these notes of the mundane, her vision of trivial moments, she attempted to arrest time in its tracks, like so many people do when touched by great emotion. Now the moment has come to venture into time's last stronghold; the cemetery.

Many of the cemetery paintings are drawings with some color thrown on them. Yet somehow the sparsity in color enhances the impression of rich color subdued. The paintings are built using many

transparent layers, applying and scraping off paint. The result is a surface that, while maintaining its seemingly realistic appearance, doesn't disclose all of its secrets at once. The attention is constantly shifting between the objects and the spaces between them; inward and outward movement; looking at the landscape but also through it.

The experience of visiting a graveyard might generate strange sensibilities. It is essentially a non-visit; you cannot converse with the dead. But a burial ground is after all a meeting place of sorts - everybody passes through the gate at one time or another. Funerals and memorials aside, there are other voices there, and other gates to pass; the graveyard is also the threshold, a port for the initiated who seek guidance into the ultimate realm.

After breaking through realism - and thereby letting go of the story, symbolism and all - Hadar Gad's sketches become maps, labyrinths, of that other realm. They form flat patterns resembling some animal's skin. They take a life and meaning of their own, which is not merely decorative: Even in their flatness they remain multidimensional. Their transparency suggests shreds of memory, vague, elusive, but often overflowing with feelings of longing, introspection, silence. It's referring to, hinting at, the possibility of a painting, as if the painting exists in another domain and we can only see its traces. The soft golden light in many of the images emanates from a place that can only exist in memory.

The balance between outside - form, surface, brush strokes - and inside - the invisible in the visible - is perfected more and more with every session. She seems to have found that port and gone through it, moving from presence to essence. Painting that addresses these issues takes knowledge, humility and acceptance of the process we all have to go through - bloom, fruit, decay; we all return to the soil and all that is left is our untold story. We too become slowly transparent, become layers of memory.

Eternity lies in the smallest insignificant detail. But we are all insignificant details in the larger scheme, so there is no such thing as insignificant. The measure of importance is in the artist's hypnotized gaze, reminding us that beauty, despite what the postmodernists want us to believe, is rare and far from cliché. In fact it is sophisticated and subtle and cannot be easily discerned. The beauty in Hadar Gad's paintings is something the artist alone detects and points at, not inherent in the things themselves - they can be totally nondescript at times - but an act of charity, of grace. She brings it forth from her own inner being.

Creation is putting order in chaos. As in Block, Section, Row - or finding patterns in the fallen leaves on the ground - order also symbolizes the struggle to overcome the fear of the unknown, the unexplained, the inevitable. Nature's rhythm is the greatest comfort because she offers us Forever; everything is cyclic, there's disintegration and rebirth. Order helps us see some meaning in what seems to be the cruel whimsical turns of fate. Art too is such comfort.

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