Yoav Ben Dov
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In his new solo exhibition, Yoav Ben Dov exhibits portrait paintings, most of them painted during the past year. These works, dealing with a theme that was absent until now from Ben Dov’s oeuvre, reveal the sculptural nature of his work and his continuous preoccupation with the linkage between language and material.

Portraiture is an artistic medium serving to explore issues concerning identity and representations of reality. In his portraits, Ben Dov takes an opposite direction – instead of exposing the figure, its presence in time and space, its characteristics and uniqueness, he removes all its identifying signs, leaving only its outlines, and turning the portrait into a stratified sculptural and conceptual exploration, in order to break its essence apart, turn it into words, and communicate these words through the visual image.

Such is the work Self Portrait with Mighty / Closed Eyes, a personal interpretation (and homage) to Aram Gershuni’s work bearing a similar title, “Self Portrait with Closed Eyes”. The closed eyes of the artist, that do not look at his figure while painting, but rather absorbed with his inner imaginary world, turn, in Ben Dov’s work, to another meaning of the word Atzumot (closed) in Hebrew, that alludes to gigantic eyes, reminiscent of the idiom ‘having eyes bigger than one’s stomach’. With this allusion, Ben Dov refers to the eyes of the viewer, who is asked by the artist to capture and complete the figure out of his own memory, but also refers to a person having gigantic, or big, eyes, who wants to gluttonize.
Another homage to a well-known cultural icon is found in **Self Portrait with a Hat**, which is a portrait of the artist with many hats, reminiscent of the many self-portraits of Magritte with the immortal bowler hat. Like in, the viewer of this work also has to complete in his imagination the human figure, which can be discerned only with effort. Ben Dov actually moves the center of gravity from representing a human figure to the objects identifying and defining it, in this case – the hat that can be seen three times, in a quick hovering movement. This is a hat in the sense of “changing hats – changing changing roles” – the artist’s role as having a social, cultural and personal responsibilities.

**Hands of Gold - Touching the Edge while Standing Tall**, is a life-size self portrait, a version of Da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man. Here, too, there is only a silhouette of a white figure, this time on a golden leaves background. The title of this work alludes playfully to these golden leaves, the material from which the work is made of, and also using the term for a person having high technical skills. The one that has ‘hands of gold’ is the artisan – the artist, but also the sculptor and the angel. The Vitruvian man is a person with perfect proportions, having harmonic relationship with nature, which brings him closer to God. Ben Dov explores playfully the Vitruvian image, and also examines the limits of the artist as a divine entity.

In contrast to this glittering work, there is a work made of most humble materials – **Wanted**, a self portrait constituted of about fifty post messages sent to Ben Dov and announcing him he has registered mail to claim from the post office, mail which was never claimed (“And I am sure these are not candy boxes waiting for me there” he says). As opposed to the golden leaves romantic and intimate works, this work is a defiance of Ben Dov as a person and an artist against the pressure of bureaucracy that turned him into a destitute ‘wanted’. The usage of the jute material as a support for the work emphasizes his cry more intensely – the jute is a cheap and simple fiber, serving for preparation of sacks and coarse cloths. And here we are carried by our imagination to a wide variety of idioms and phrases in Hebrew that testify to the artist’s protest – a punching bag (in Hebrew, literally, a punching sack), a potato sack, “put sackcloth upon his loins” (a mourning practice, Genesis, 37, 34).
Hands of Gold, charcoal and gold leaves on canvas, 2010,

Wanted, mixed media on canvas, 2012,
Another aspect that is unique to the portraits of Ben Dov is the action of the painting itself – a portrait painting demands that the artist sits a long time in his studio, while conducting a deep observation, whether into his own soul or into other persons’. This is not the case in Ben Dov’s works – his painting action is a completely sculptural one – he puts the sitter in front of the canvas and draws his or her outlines. This is a kind of action painting, but while modern action painting is an obvious sign of the purifying physical act of the artist who is isolated from his environment, Ben Dov’s painting action is never individual, but rather always involves his family and close friends in the studio. The social aspect is an important facet in Ben Dov’s life, being a social activist in the Shapira Quarter of South Tel Aviv, where he lives for the last twenty years. Ben Dov’s linkage to community and social activities is evident in each of the works displayed at the exhibition. Dov’s life, being a social activist in the Shapira Quarter of South Tel Aviv, where he lives for the last twenty years. Ben Dov’s linkage to community and social activities is evident in each of the works displayed at the exhibition.

This linkage can be found, for example, in Minian, a work in charcoal and oil on canvas, referring to the Jewish practice maintaining that an assembly of ten people turns into a sacred gathering. Ben Dov assembled ten people from his close circle and drew their outlines, one after another. Ben Dov’s minian defines the dynamics and the grain from which action can grow and develop. Each of the painted persons was exposed to the language that Ben Dov speaks, as a kind of prayer understood only by this small community.

Family Portrait also utilizes the language of the physical action. This work summarizes the double nature of the portraits exhibition, the personal and social facets that intertwine in it – on the one hand, it is a specific family, Ben Dov’s extended family, whose outlines were weaved while standing against the canvas. It is a notably personal work, created several days before the death of his mother, in last
The exhibition ends in the inner room of the gallery, that functions as an intimate space, where several works are displayed next to each other: the self portrait of the artist as a **Simple Man**, that also refers to the several meaning the word simple, pashut, has in Hebrew: He spreads and stretches out his limbs (pshut-eivarim), when his hands are in a gesture of acceptance, and he is also a humble and simple person, wearing simple cloths and having no externality, and next to him, in contrast, the portrait of the “help meet for him” –.

**Simple Man**, charcoal & oil on linen 2010, פחם ושמן על פשתן אדם פשוט

**Sgula (Purple/Virtue)**, oil and gold leaves on canvas, 2011, שמן ועלי זהב על בד סגולה

The **Sgula** (Purple / Virtue), (in Hebrew Sgula, which means purple, but also a characteristic, a virtue and a talisman) a work in which the material becomes the signifier of the traits of the word. This is a laud to feminine traits, and it refers to the precious material from which the female figure is made of – the real golden leaves that occur again, and the cobalt powder. The entire work is constituted of the signs of the Hebrew letter ꔟ (Yod, equivalent to I or to Y), a motif that reiterates in Ben Dov’s works of the recent years. The letter ꔟ, he claims, is the root of the Hebrew letters, from which all the other letters derive, and in this work he links the power of the female virtue to the root of the language.
Self Portrait (Sabra), oil on canvas, 2006,

Pan / One Side of, charcoal on canvas, 2012,
These works are surrounded by portraits by Marc Chagall, Reuven Rubin, Mordechai Levanon, Anna Ticho, and Isaac Frenkel, chosen by Ben Dov from the gallery’s collection, in order to turn them into the final accord of the exhibition.

Among these paintings, one can find A Painter by the Easel (Peintre au Chevale, image no. 1), a self portrait of Marc Chagall from 1980, in which the painter is depicted in the studio while painting his famous work, The Lovers. The portrait of Reuven Rubin is depicted in his important work from 1955, A Peace Offering (oil on canvas, image no. 2). This is a large painting, depicting a father and son, looking like natives carrying an offering, the father with a white lamb on his shoulders and the son with two white doves in his hands. This work is a kind of reconciliation of the artist, born in Rumania, with the ambivalence evident in his earlier paintings about his place as an artist and as a citizen and family man in Israel. There are also two self portraits of Mordechai Levanon – Self Portrait in Romema (Jerusalem) from 1954 (image no. 3)– a Soutine-like painting, in which the artist is depicted with a frowning expression, maybe after a drink or two, and next to it – a portrait from Levanon’s last years, more relaxed, fluid and lyric, that connects at a glance his blue hat’s brim, the figure’s features, and the light blue background behind. This is a typical ‘Levanonian’ painting, in the style we are familiar with from his ‘intoxicated’ landscape paintings (image no. 4). In addition, there are two portraits by Anna Ticho – A Woman’s Portrait (1940, pencil on paper, image no. 5), and A Yemenite Man Seated (1930, charcoal on paper, image no. 6). Interestingly, Ticho never painted self-portraits. Maybe her affection to humankind that characterized her is what attracted her to paint many portraits, and she was enchanted especially from the oriental types that set in the waiting room of her husband, the ophthalmologist Dr. Ticho. Isaac Frekel, named more than once ‘a painters’ painter’, is represented with The Artist’s Wife in an Armchair (image no. 7), a colorful work, characterized by yellow brushstrokes, that endows a domestic relaxation, in sharp contrast to Ben Dov’s portraits, in which there is more than meets the eye.
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Yoav Ben Dov

3.2-28.3
Selected one-man exhibitions

1994 Place, Tova Osman Gallery, Tel-Aviv
1995 Children's Drawings, Sharet Gallery, Tel-Aviv
1997 Nine Months, Farkash Gallery, Jaffa
1998 Road Signs, Beit Ha'Bad Gallery, Ein Hod
1999 Wheat, Engel Gallery, Tel-Aviv
1999 Pomegranate, Engel Gallery, Tel-Aviv
2000 Tebar, Engel Gallery, Tel-Aviv
2001 Animals, Stones, Earth, Bar-David Museum, Kibbutz Bar'am
2002 Press House, Janco-Dada Museum, Ein Hod
2002 Olive, Engel Gallery, Tel Aviv
2005 Home, Engel Gallery, Tel Aviv
2006 Together, Engel Gallery, Tel Aviv
2007 Shepherd, Engel Gallery, Tel Aviv
2008 Sad Moon, Dear Noga Window, Jaffa
2009 Artist(?)?, Ein-Hod Gallery
2010 Language to Matter, Engel Gallery, Tel Aviv
2012 Icons, Engel Gallery, Tel Aviv

Selected Group Exhibitions

1993 Sculpture in the Little Forest, Raanana
1994 3rd Sculpture Biennale, Ein Hod
1995 Galilee Stone 4, Maalot Tarsicha
1996 Artists-Messengers of Peace, Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv
1997 Miniatura, Center of Visual Arts Ghobio, Italy
1998 Where Have We Came From and Where Do We Go To, Petach Tikva
1999 Museum Drap-Art, Chuzot Hayotzer and Jerusalem Theater, Jerusalem
1999 Hiriya in the Museum, Tel-Aviv Museum, Tel Aviv
2000 Site, Petach Tikva Museum of Art
2006 Flowers, Engel Gallery, Tel Aviv
2007 You Won’t See, Umm El- Fahem Art Gallery
2007 Beamed Thoughts, Dana gallery, Yad Mordechai
2008 Signatories, Engel Gallery, Tel Aviv
2008 Unresembling Luna Park, Love Art in Rothschild bl., Tel Aviv
2008 “We shall clothe you in a dress of concrete and cement”, Dana gallery, Yad Mordechai
2009 Path of the Just, Street exhibition, Shapiro Neighborhood, Tel Aviv
2009 The Good Place, Utopia, Engel Gallery, Tel Aviv
2010 And You Don’t Have Nothing Without its Place, Artists’ House, Tel Aviv