

# ROTHSCHILD 69

White Mule<sup>1</sup> // Lihi Turjeman's solo exhibition // by Noam Segal

2.1 We make to ourselves pictures of facts.

2.11 The picture presents the facts in logical space, the existence and non-existence of atomic facts.

2.12 The picture is a model of reality.<sup>2</sup>

The exhibition includes two triptychs and a painting: "A Sheikh's Tomb", "Demons" and "Board", are the respective names of the works.

Lihi Turjeman, is a painter who works in the Rationalism tradition, which addresses the chasm between the scientific and the fortuitous, and tries tirelessly to subject her paintings to mathematical rules and calculations. She creates for her various concepts and diverse limitations on the act of painting, and imposes them on the intuitive variables of her work.

Turjeman has been working for the last three years in an aged, flaking space, with ramified corridors, rooms, cells and indistinguishable passages, taken over by the vestiges of time. The space used to be a school, now closed, and is scheduled to be demolished in order to make room for a new residential tower.

The artist has spread the huge canvasses on which she works throughout each and every one of the spaces in the building. Her canvasses lean on the walls which are badly afflicted by green lesions, grayish depressions and brown deposits. In her paintings, Lihi reproduces these blemishes; she records the encroaching, conquering and non-eradicable element.

These random stains are subordinated in her work to a world governed by geometric and objective laws. Her thinking seeks to conceptualize the contingent, to invest it with meaning and domesticate it within an engineered system. The sporadic blemishes on the canvas find themselves inside architectural structures, pseudo models of engineering.

It seems that the prolonged creative experience in a space which instigates confrontation between the pedagogic and the disturbed has penetrated her work.

The conflict between a linear, progressive, enlightened and modernist perception, and the mystic component, an unpredictable chaos of expanding nature and the irregular diffusion of organisms, exists in her work in a non-hierarchical relationship, where no perception attains superiority over the other.

The structures, "A Sheikh's Tomb" and the space where "Demons" reside, appear as schematic archetypes of Holy Sites. Chronologically, it was the demons themselves which appeared first on the canvas, a replica of the time-blemishes on the wall; they provide the artistic subbase where the rational act takes place. Turjeman conceived only subsequently of the suitable architecture to be populated by this strange display. The final product generates profane thoughts such as "idol in the temple" and the prohibition "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image"<sup>3</sup>. In this sense, the paintings contain an additional conflict of values, between Epicureanism and faith, as well as between

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<sup>1</sup> A mule is the hybrid of a donkey mating with a mare or a jennet with a horse.

However, the mule is sterile, in spite of possessing all the external sex organs. A female mule is called a molly.

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractus Logico-Philosophicus*. P.11 KM Press, Tel-Aviv '94

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 20 4

religiosity and the divine versus science and the physical organs of nature.

In her paintings, she insists in creating a rational process for the random stains, whose evolution she tracks in a pedantic manner. The stains are not recorded in the scientific sense, as phenomena researched in a laboratory; they are perpetuated in their natural form, without the interference of the artist. She records in this manner the ravages of time, the degradation of material, and incidentally creates a new meaning-coinage through the perpetuation of the old and the contingent.

Turjeman thinks of these blemishes as demons, and searches for the meaning of the demons and ghosts for her work. The demonic, is that which cannot be turned obedient and disciplined. In the modernist sense, its functioning in this manner represents our deepest fears; the incidental, ritualistic and primitive, that, which cannot be domesticated. In the religious sense, the demonic is the opposite of advanced monotheistic faiths; it represents multiplicity, a mystic world and an association with Satan. Within the religious discourse it reinforces the existence of such faith and simultaneously opens the floor for theological discussions concerning good and evil.

The paintings depict a position of existential doubt in relation to questions of faith with an internal or external foundation; faith in religions, or in science and secularization. Meanwhile, they struggle with the crisis of modernism and seek to construct it as a new array of action. These are not necessarily new meanings, arising from her works, but an examination of modes of existence, an emphasis on practices and the transformation of the meaning-coinage. Her works seek to describe the transformation of "how things in the world operate ", not what their meaning is.

In his book "On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods"<sup>4</sup> Bruno Latour discusses practices of operation and representation of religion and the Gods in the world, as opposed to the practices of operation and representation of the scientific sect. He suggests examining the course of action of these two social constructs, as such that function using the same strategies, and yearning for the same halo. Both practices seek to create a world in which there is "one universal truth", however, according to his analysis, none is disconnected from the fabrication methods which establish their stand in the world. He discusses the tendency of modern man to attribute doubt and skepticism to objects which contain some myth (figurines, rituals and sacred artifacts), but suggests an interpretation whereby "scientific facts" accompanied by the same myth of "one truth", are not judged by modern man in the same manner as objects. Because of a specific order of discourse and the modus operandi of a logical utterance vis-a-vis a fetishistic object, modern man does not think about the fabrication means of "scientific and objective" facts governing his life.

In a sense, Turjeman presents these operation modalities in her work, whilst creating an egalitarian space populated by the two "truths". She creates a "halo" of equal value for each "truth", through compositional placing whereby the two systems permeate each other. Mythology surfaces in her paintings as meaning-coinage which envelops both the geometric- scientific and the mystic-religious. She facilitates an egalitarian visual myth for both worlds, but in its midst, the viewer is in limbo.

In the work "Board" a slightly different process occurs. The work functions as a kind of index, a scientific and modern process in its own right, where the artist seeks to create a genealogy of the signs in her works. Turjeman lays out in this painting a geometric network which links the various signs in her works; yet, through examination, it will emerge that these signifiers have no signified, and have self-created themselves onto the canvas, due to the wall that stood behind them. In the centre of the board is the figure of a person, marked as a target in a rifle-range, echoing its own existence that finds itself in a faith crisis.

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<sup>4</sup> Bruno Latour, *On the Modern Cult of the Factish Gods*, Duke University Press 2010.