

ORIT HOFSHI

BEACON

New solo exhibition at Zemack gallery for contemporary art
Curator: Ron Bartos



Orit Hofshi © alternatives

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Orit Hofshi, born in 1959, is currently working in Herzliya, Israel.

Orit, who has received her MA in Arts from Leeds University, UK, first studied in the Wizo College of Design in Israel. Upon graduating, she continued her studies at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia.

Hofshi has exhibited worldwide, including solo exhibitions at the Haifa Museum of Art; The Open Museum, Tefen and Omer Industrial Parks; Anna Ticho House –The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art; The Print Center, Philadelphia; Shulamit Nazarian Gallery, Los Angeles, California; Locks gallery, Philadelphia, PA; Braverman By Art Projects, Tel Aviv.

None of the works, exhibited in Orit Hofshi's new show Beacon, include the depiction of a visible guiding device of sorts and certainly not of a lighthouse... In fact, upon reviewing her past or present works there is no evidence of any such imagery.

Beacon is not the result of an afterthought but rather the manifestation of Hofshi's deep rooted sense of artistic expression. Art as striving to emanate conceptual light, interpretation or possible bearings to the often murky and foreboding current events as well as historic chronicles. Hofshi's mixed media work, including drawing, painting, printmaking and wood carving techniques, create vivid striking imagery. The intertwined and formalistic blending also enhanced by expressive chiaroscuro compositions, further emphasize Hofshi's call for reflection and observation.

Chief curator of Philagrafika, **Jose Roca**, had to say the following about the very talented Orit Hofshi.

Last week I traveled to Israel to install an exhibition of Colombian artist Oscar Muñoz at the Herzliya Museum, which opened last Saturday. I took the opportunity to meet with Orit Hofshi, who, like Muñoz, will take part of Philagrafika 2010: The Graphic Unconscious. Orit Hofshi

studied in Philadelphia at the Pennsylvania Academy of Art, and last year showed at the Print Center in Philadelphia. Hofshi works by hand on a very large scale, achieving monumentality while retaining an intimate quality in her prints. I had visited her last year in her studio near Tel Aviv where she was working on new woodcuts for an ongoing series, and what struck me most, knowing the scale of her prints in advance, was the tiny size of her working space (which was half-occupied by shelves of materials, prints, and books). This tension between grandeur and intimacy is, in my opinion, an important feature in her work, since her prints, which can be viewed from a great distance, have the ability to lure the viewer close to the surface, where their surface texture becomes apparent.

Hofshi works primarily in woodcut, a technique that has experienced a revival in contemporary printmaking in recent years; its atavic associations (woodcut is arguably the oldest of the printing techniques) contrast with the visual output of the technologically driven society we live in. Hofshi usually works in a fixed format, using standard-size sheets of pine from a builder's supply store. She creates varied horizontal and vertical matrices with

the panels, adding to or subtracting from the grid as she works on the image. Pine is soft but tends to have knots although the artist doesn't see this as a drawback. Rather, she takes it as a positive condition of the material, and uses it to shape her compositions.

Once the matrices are carved, Hofshi inks the panels and lays Okawara paper down on them with utmost care so that the paper does not become soiled. Then she uses a wooden spoon to rub the back of the paper to pick up the ink. This technique allows her to control the intensity of the line in a process somewhat akin to painting or drawing. Sometimes she integrates the yet-to-be-printed matrix as part of the work, displaying the wooden boards adjacent to the prints.



Orit Hofshi ©Apsis



An interview with Orit Hofshi

By Jose Roca

Jose Roca: Why did you choose xylography, one of the oldest printing techniques, as your primary medium of expression?

Orit Hofshi: As a woodcut artist I am drawn by the simplicity of the process, a seemingly contradictory preference to the textual challenges I choose to confront in my work. A board, a knife, a brayer and ink make the art form possible. The self-reliance on the actual pressure of the hand, releases me from dependency upon the mechanics of the press. In fact, the directness and immediacy of the media

lend to a clearer and more expressive creative process. I typically print very small editions (4-6), allowing the intensity and detailed process I feel necessary for each print produced.

Cutting and carving pine boards and printing on paper, is like experiencing a micro reality in itself. I am more conscious of the properties of my materials and their relationship. Particular the inherent texture and patterns of the wood combined with the effects of the carving and sculpturing tools, all becoming an integral part of the woodcut's message. I see woodcutting as a physical as well as an emotional challenge, enjoying the negotiating and testing of the board's resistance to the sharp gouge plowing

its path through a wooden earth... There is always the sense of wood, ink and paper, rigid and soft, not antithetical but merging together.

J.R: How does working in such a politically charged environment like present-day Israel influence your practice?

O.H: It is, in fact, very difficult to work with. The human condition has a constant presence in my work, whether actually depicted in the work and even if not. Preoccupied with the current and past social, political realities I do not rely only on my immediate experience or surroundings, but am obsessively aware of the broader human circumstances at a given time. I look constantly for images of people in daily newspapers as well as images from the archives. Similarly to my processing of natural impressions, I do not focus on the literal content or meaning images. I am fascinated by expressions and disposition portrayed in images as a source of inspiration. My frequent depiction of isolated figures refers primarily to the notion people need to face challenges, as well as the consequences of their actions and decisions as individuals. This does not minimize in any way my deep sense of society as a most significant environment and context for the individual, as is referred to in my work. But despite the fact we are so affected by social and political contexts, the reality is that ultimately the individual needs to make decisions, balancing apparent practical and specific dispositions with more complex moral parameters; and become responsible for any outcome of such decisions.

J.R: You showed me a sketch of the work you are planning to do for Philagrafika, and it involves creating a physical space for the viewer to enter. Had you worked tri-dimensionally before? Can you talk a bit about this new project?

O.H: Tri-dimensionality and physical space have been present conceptually in my thinking and creative process for quite a while. In previous works I proposed monumental spaces conveyed to the viewer by large scale and size, while relying primarily on apparent two-dimensional formats. In this project I wish to create an



Orit Hofshi ©Cirque

actual tri-dimensional space formed by several elements which render a new physical presence. These elements will be the combination of materials and formats from diverse worlds, yet mutually-enriching, also manifesting the different stages and processes of printmaking and drawing: the work on paper, the use of wood, the manual aspects required, the attentiveness to the material's innate rhythm (textures, fragility, etc.).

I have gone through a gradual transition process from strictly two-dimensionality, exhibiting prints and drawings on paper and then adding carved wood panels, as well as framed and non-framed works. In fact, over the course of the years I had carried the sense that even panels, which I had used for prints, therefore darkly tinted with ink, embed significant content and statements, beyond their being just a phase in the printing process leading to the traditional final outcome, the print on paper.

The concept of acknowledging the process and recognizing the significance of its specific phases, fuels a broader motivation in this project. Sections of the work are set to be newly carved elements, but others, forming the tri-dimensional structure, will be comprised of panels which were the reliefs used for a print also included in the complete work. The viewer will be exposed to the print as well as its suggested "echo" or elusive mirror image, in the form of dark carved panels. Evolution of time, remnants and recorded natural or human footprints, which have been a focal point of much of my recent work, take more center stage also formal on this project.

I hope that the introduction of the structured space and the dialogue and sub context suggested by the elements, rendering the work will stimulate motion and create varied observation points of view, enhancing the viewers' experience and insight.

List Gallery director, Andrea Packard, knows Hofshi for quite some time now and is able to draw on some of the artists earlier years, "I first met Hofshi in 1986, when she began studies

at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Philadelphia. Even then, she was well on her way toward developing her signature imagery and processes. Already a graduate of the Neri Bloomfield Academy of Design, in Haifa, Israel, she came to the United States seeking a broader vision of both art history and contemporary practices. She was especially drawn to European masters such as Albrecht Dürer and Titian, the expressive language of Käthe Kollwitz, members of the Die Brücke group, and contemporary artists such as Anselm Kiefer (b. 1945), whose solo exhibition at the Philadelphia Museum of Art in 1988 made a lasting impression." Now Hofshi's current exhibition, *Beacon*, shows us how her deep rooted sense of expression only continues to grow and evolve.



Orit Hofshi © Reminiscence



Orit Hofshi ©debate



Orit Hofshi ©beacon

- The article includes excerpts from an interview with **Orit Hofshi** by **Jose Roca**, chief curator, Philagrafika 2010 and an essay by **Andrea Packard**, director of the List Gallery, Swarthmore College.

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