יפעת מידע תקשורתי
הירקון 3 בני ברק, מגדלי LYFE בניין B טל. 03-5635050 פקס. 03-5617166

26.73x31.11	1/3	עמוד 10	the jerusalem post - in jerusalem	01/2025	92955557-7
בית האמנים ירושלי - 12572					

Exhibitions

The art of fake news

Four new exhibitions at Jerusalem Artists House offer the public a reality check

BARRY DAVIS

Jerusalem Artists House tends to offer a broad sweep of subject matter and styles in its regular four-part rollouts. The current lot stretches eclecticism to the max with its mix of uniquely treated oil paintings, video work, installations, and cutting-edge hi-tech channels of communication.

The latter primarily relates to the "Baal HaSulam" (Owner of the Ladder) exhibition of works by Elad Larom, curated by Sally Haftel Naveh. There are multitudinous talking points among the dozens of items hanging on the walls of two display spaces on the upper floor of the venerable building.

Larom addresses a clutch of topics, such as religious iconography, state-of-the-art technology, and reality as we know it, or at least perceive it to be. The show's moniker suggests a mystical subtext to the creative proceedings.

Baal HaSulam was the pen name of Yehuda Leib HaLevi Ashlag, an early 20th-century commentator on the kabbalistic *Book of Zohar*. Then again, Larom's line of thought follows a meandering route through all sorts of philosophical, aesthetic, conceptual, and cultural climes.

"What interested me here was the poetic property of the name, and, here too, I took it out of its original context. And there is an indication here of loftier spheres," he says.

There is clearly more here than meets the eye, and there is a lot to see, too. There are scenes that appear to have been lifted straight out of some Renaissance tapestry or paintings, complete with a Jesus-like figure or two, a female character who just might be a nod in the direction of Mary, and something that may infer some biblical narrative.

At first glance much of the works, which include frescoes painted in traditional style onto hefty-looking tiles and large charcoal and pastel drawings on paper inspired by the cartoons – preparatory drawings – form an elemental phase of the mural production process.

It is a topsy-turvy affair in which Larom turns the creative practice on its head. He also challenges Christian iconography in his own singular way and considers where we stand with regard to truth and deceit.



Elad Larom references religious iconography, state-of-the-art technology, and perceived reality. (Photos: Daniel Hanoch)

As far as Larom is concerned, it is all fair game. "It is not necessarily connected to Baal HaSulam. I wanted to expropriate him too, in some way."

I noted that the notion of a ladder puts one in mind of higher things, of climbing up to celestial domains.

Larom comes right back at me. "You can also climb down a ladder. It also hints at something earthy." Fair enough.

One gets a sense of straddling the bridge between two worlds. There is clear ecclesiastical content, but there always seems to be a terrestrial, corporeal, and material side to it all. Larom says there is an action and reaction seesaw thread running through the show.

"I want to take this out of the church and bring it into the art gallery. But I think the art is still in a sanctified place. This is still very spiritual and also very personal. I bring it into the inner individual temple."

Therein lies the crux of the exhibition and also Larom's take on art in general. Art is, naturally, a means for artists to express their view of themselves and the world about them, regardless of official terminology and structured faith. Larom does that in "Baal HaSulam" with gusto.

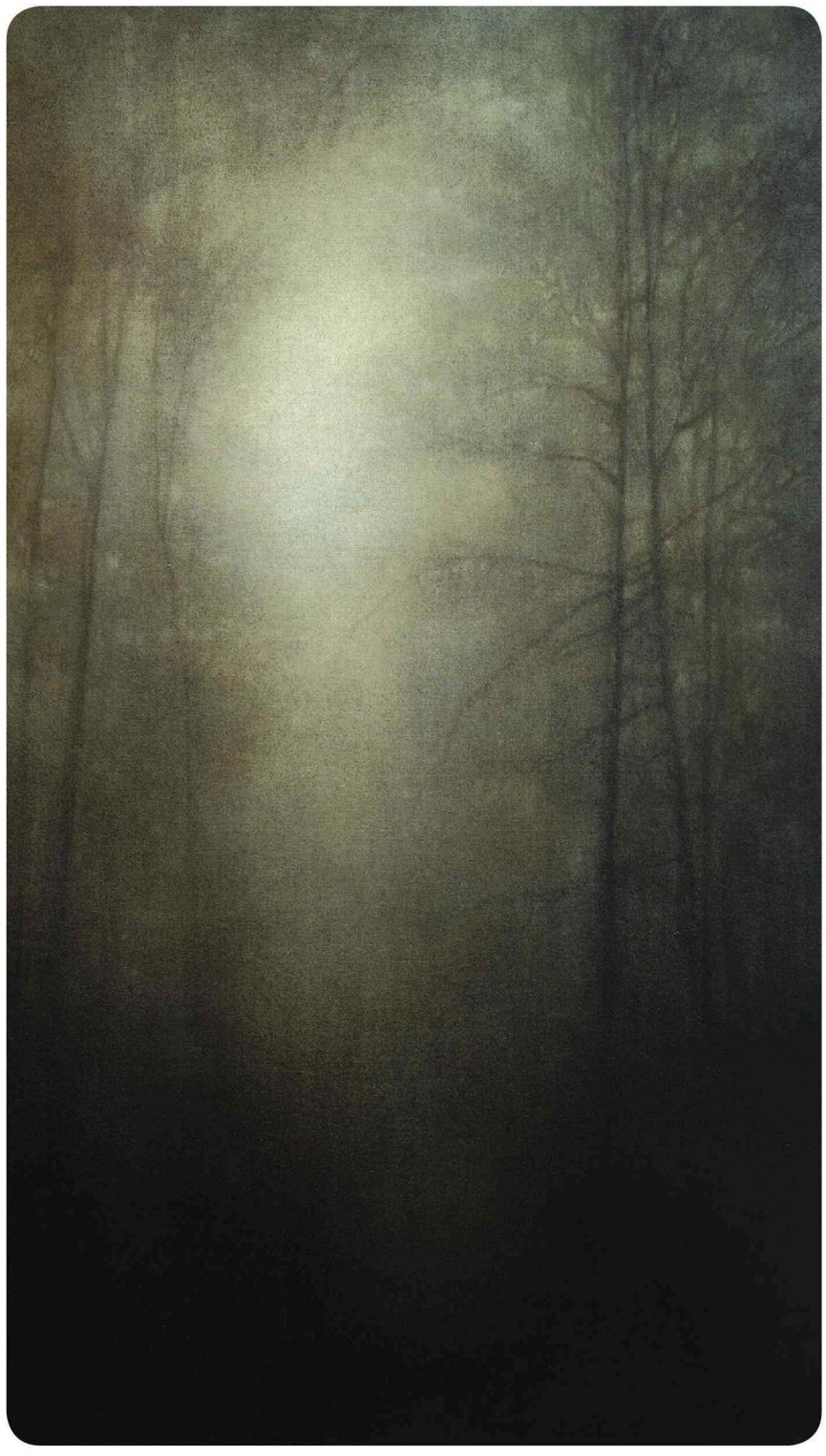
AI in the art

Larom also employs AI as a major component of the artistic continuum.

He utilizes AI software to fuse images from the annals of the artistic timeline with his own work, and

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25.49x29.34	2/3	עמוד 11	the jerusalem post - in jerusalem	01/2025	92955558-8
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Orit Livne's 'A Sliver of Light' deconstructs the darkness.



Biblical narratives meet futuristic images in Larom's exhibition.

content from the fields of science and science fiction.

He inputs textual instructions to manipulate the algorithm to produce images with the aesthetic characteristics of frescoes. The images he ends up with challenge religious-Christian iconographic tradition, thereby deconstructing them and the Christian decorative order.

The idea was to take ownership of the timeworn hallowed aesthetics and transform them into archetypal images with which we can comfortably connect.

Larom has some good news for those of us who find the idea of artificial intelligence distasteful if not downright petrifying. "AI is a tool, just like Photoshop or a camera. People are concerned about it, but I don't think that is justified. It is only a tool. You have to put it in its right place."

User-friendly religion

In terms of religious beliefs and the visual representation thereof, Larom is keen to introduce what he considers a more human, user-friendly element to the religious proceedings.

"Dogma is instrumental. I didn't want to have that [in the exhibition]. I think artists of the past also struggled with that, but they had to manage within those constraints. The religious officials were their patrons."

Whatever the underlying ethos to the spread, "Baal HaSulam" makes for arresting viewing with its seemingly incongruous brew of figures lifted straight out of strict religious iconography, comics-like pictorial slots, and scenes that exude a sense of frantic vortex dynamics.

The square-shaped frescoes, and the way they line up around the walls, are somewhat reminiscent of a comic book or storyboard format.

"There is a story there," Larom agrees. "But it is a very open story. There is nothing really defined. It is a story with lots of interpretative layers and riddles."

That is par for the course for any display venture. The artists create their work. They then – in the best-case scenario – work together with a curator to decide on how they should be arranged.

Finally, we, the viewing public, come along with our own baggage, understanding of art, and personal taste, and add our own take to the exhibits, regardless of the artists' intent.

Looking for the light – and the knight

If it's light you're looking for, you'll certainly find some among Orit Livne's show, curated by Judith Anis, which occupies the rest of the upper level of the building.

The title, "A Sliver of Light," gives some of the game away; however, it is more a matter of sorting out the tactile from the ethereal.

Livne's paintings appear, at first glance, to be largely opaque. There does not seem to be much going on in the two-dimensional abstract morass. Then, as you get a little closer, you begin to discern shapes of foliage, tree trunks, and branches, puffy cloud outlines, and often, some subtle source of light.

The collection is the result of three years of traipsing through the forests near Livne's home in Mevaseret Zion. "I go walking with my dog every morning before dawn," she tells me. "While I am out, I see the sunrise."

Not a bad way to start the day. She says her early constitutionals have given her some fresh insight into the natural movement of our primary source of light and how

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25.78x29.13	3/3	עמוד 12	the jerusalem post - in jerusalem	01/2025	92955559-9
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Liam Chambon's 'Four Suns' installation digs into consumerism as a refuge from the challenging reality.



Artist-actress Nouli Omer champions feminism in her 'Orla' show.

those dynamics produce a contrary effect back here on terra firma (solid ground).

"I noticed that the tops of the trees light up first as the sun rises," she says. "And then, as it climbs higher in the sky, the sunlight travels down the trunk and branches of the tree until it eventually illuminates the ground."

That is an intriguing take on the natural diurnal order of things, and she deftly incorporates that reverse movement in a couple of pictures.

"I use a method of reduction," she explains. "I apply the oil paint to the canvas, and then I begin to extract bits of it, and the forms begin to take shape."

She uses turpentine and rags, Q-tips, and even common or garden nails; then she thins, deletes, and scrapes away the paint as the composition starts to emerge.



Chambon fuses the religious with the secular with diminutive symbols of power.

"I start out with a canvas of black paint or some other color, and start to erase. Then I differentiate between the ground and the sky. Then, gradually, the forest comes into view on the canvas. The forest takes shape on its own."

It is a reverse-order method of pictorial creation; less, as far as Livne is concerned, is very much more. It also requires some input from the viewers, even if they have much younger eyes than mine.

That offers a much healthier, wholesome, hands-on experience compared with simply passively viewing some work of art on one's cellphone or on a computer or TV screen.

The antipodal process has a beginning and a finishing line as Livne works her way through the layers of paint. "The white part is light but is also some kind of base. That is the place I search for."

Once again, as with Larom's work, there is an equal and opposite balancing act in progress here. She has to dig down in order to arrive at the source of light, which is obscured by the darkness – quite the reverse of the natural dynamics.

These are not realistic portrayals of what Livne and her dog perceive in the fresh pre-dawn air. The artist accumulates the images in her bucolic surroundings, stores them in her mind, and eventually allows them to filter through her memory banks and consciousness onto the canvas.

It is not just about the visual bottom line. The process – the physical, emotional, and cerebral – informs the various stages and strata of the paintings.

"It is a very meditative effort," she says. "And that is after I get up to meditate at 4:30 a.m. and go out for my walk."

The actual creative phase also requires some calisthenic effort. "I step back each time from the canvas to get an idea of how things are developing," Livne notes. "And there are all sorts of minutiae that come into the reckoning."

That includes unplanned extra-disciplinary factors.

"You see this white spot? That's because there was a little protrusion in the wall behind the canvas," she laughs. "Everything comes into it."

LIGHTER SHADES also emerge from the dark in Liam Chambon's *Four Suns* installation, curated by Hillel Roman. Chambon dips into the street-level world of plain old consumerism as he arranges 16 black jackets on two clothes racks.

"It is like when you go into a store and sift through the garments on sale," he explains. "You take a close look at each one and really examine them before you start thinking of buying something."

The jackets also bear textual messages and are arranged so as to spell out some kind of dialogue that evokes the issue of inner individual happiness. The military-looking apparel, Chambon says, also resonates with the ongoing war and the IDF soldiers who don't come home from the battlefield.

The installation was inspired by Swedish film director Ingmar Bergman's iconic 1957 fantasy-horror film *The Seventh Seal*. One of the most enduring images in the movie is a galloping white horse taking a knight home after years of soldiering. In Chambon's piece, this is referenced in images of a horse's eye, in various shapes, on the jacket linings.

The knight is weary and fed up with war and has lost sight of what he really wants. He is bored. Chambon takes a satirical sideswipe at contemporary society and proffers the store setting as an allusion to shopping sprees as a buffer to the emptiness of life and the continuing obsession with our inevitable death.

It is a multi-layered effort presented in a quotidian store layout, with subliminal existential messages percolating to the surface. Food for thought.

In another sphere, artist-actress Nouli Omer gets in a shout or two for feminism with her diminutive "Orla" exhibition. Omer looks at the way women and the female body were represented in the 1970s and the way disparaging stereotypes were set in place.

Her video work examines the traditional female role across all strata of society, primarily in a darkly humorous way.

The exhibition, curated by Hadas Kedar, asks us to consider what shape Israeli society would be in if women experienced censorship of their bodies and of what they have to say. ■

The exhibitions close on March 15. Admission is free.

For more information: (02) 625-3653 and www.art.org.il