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

26.78x30.75	1/3	עמוד 10	the jerusalem post - in jerusalem	07/2025	94805260-4
בית האמנים ירושלי - 12572					

Spotlight

Art by divine

Veteran Jerusalem-based artist Joshua Borkovsky takes the Christian route to wonderment

BARRY DAVIS

There is a rhythm to art. That may not be immediately apparent, but if you think of plastic artworks in terms of tempo and possibly sonic textures, you might suddenly begin to appreciate the visual fruits of an artist's labors in a different way, with an added dimension.

Joshua "Shuky" Borkovsky would be gladdened if visitors to *The Annunciation*, his large-scale exhibition that currently spans the entire top floor of the Jerusalem Artists' House got that.

"This is a musical score more than anything else," Ruth Zadka enlightens me about the exhibition when I meet up with Borkovsky. "It is very important to bear that in mind before you take a look at the individual works," stresses the director of the Artists' House.

As I wander through the four display halls of the exhibition, curated by Ravit Harari, I quickly get Zadka's point. Borkovsky fine-tuned the concept.

"This is a symphony. I composed the exhibition," the artist observes before getting into the behind-the-scenes technicalities. "I had a model of the exhibition in my studio, one and a half meters by one and a half meters, for six months. I wanted to make sure the proportions were appropriate. And then, for six months, I was busy with what I call composing." That is an intriguing take on a show which largely comprises works with geometric patterns.

Borkovsky calls the cycle of works *Mirror* (Floor Reflection), which traces the mirrored reflections of geometrically patterned floor tiles.

In one of the paintings, there are seemingly common square tiles with a diminutive right-angled triangle in one corner. That allows Borkovsky plenty of room for aesthetic maneuver as he creates arrowhead shapes by twinning identical corner squares with the triangles juxtaposed, or diamond shapes at the interface of four such "tiles." While easily and almost simplistically created, this produces an eye-catching effect that subtly introduces a sense of movement and cadence to the display equation.

Other works have more complex patterns that imply physical depth and 3D, somewhat reminiscent of the mesmerizing creations of visual conundrums that trick the eye and bamboozle the brain produced by famed 20th-century Dutch graphic artist M.C. Escher.

BUT WHAT is this "Annunciation"? It sounds like a rather grandiose moniker for an art exhibition which infers that some game-changing light bulb moment is in the offing.

Naturally, such a name conjures up thoughts of a major event in the history of Christianity. There is, in fact, an eponymous item in the exhibition, a pentaptych. The division into five units was dictated by 15th-century Franciscan friar Roberto Caracciolo da Lecce's reading of a confab between the Virgin Mary and the angel Gabriel. The celestial being informed the unsuspecting maiden that she would give birth to a baby "who shall be called the son of God." Da Lecce perceived the watershed episode as a continuum with five stages – *conturbatio*, *cogitatio*, *interrogatio*, *humiliatio*, and finally *meritatio*.

For anyone out there who is not fully up to speed with Latin, that translates as "disquiet," "reflection," "inquiry," "submission," and "merit," corresponding to Mary's evolving spiritual and cerebral states as she took on board the significance of the angelic tidings.

Borkovsky's rendition of the sequential epiphanous manifestation follows a suitably gradual aesthetic line of development. There are clear cross shapes in all five works, but they are presented in highly differing shades. Some contrast sharply with the background, making them stand out with clear demarcation contours, while the observer has to make more of an effort to discern the others betwixt the gray-white color gradations.

"At this point of submission, da Lecce says the incarnation takes place. He says a divine beam of light penetrates and impregnates Mary," Borkovsky explains.

That was not only a landmark incident in the world of Christianity. The artist posits that it runs parallel to the very core of the act of producing a work of art.

"You have here the essence of the artistic process," he explains. He walks me through the stages of his thought progression and channeling his ruminations through his brushes and other painting utensils. "When you start out [to create a work of art] ,you feel uneasy." Would he call that alarm? "Not alarm; more a sense of disquiet. You wonder where it is all going to lead."

That, of course, is bread and butter to the creative continuum. If you are not going to take risks, leaps of faith, then nothing of value will ensue. It will all be predictable and shallow. "Then you begin to think," Borkovsky



Joshua (Shuky) Borkovsky displays work accumulated over the past 12 years. (Joshua Borkovsky)



Holy hour, a monthly ceremony inside the Tomb of Mary, in Gethsemane, Jerusalem. (Flash90)



Borkovsky's geometric shapes suggest musical dynamics.
(Photos: Daniel Hanoch)

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

26.21x30.55	2/3	עמוד 11	the jerusalem post - in jerusalem	07/2025	94805259-2
בית האמנים ירושלי - 12572					



The placement and intervals between the exhibits correspond to a musical score.

continues. "When you get into that, you submit [to the process], and then a miracle has to take place so that it all comes to fruition."

THAT RESONATES right across *The Annunciation*, and informs Borkovsky's credo and the way he would like us to consider his offerings. He also references it in a short documentary film about him called *Retzafim* ("sequences") that is screened in the entrance area to the top floor of the Jerusalem Artists' House.

Borkovsky' introduces us to various categories of his artwork, as well as the relevant sources of inspiration, such as a set of dreamstones. It is said they have the power to turn dreams into reality, much like the focused timeout the artist wants us to utilize to immerse ourselves in his works and discover the surprising substrata.

We get a pointer in that direction in *Retzafim*. "This stone looks simple, and then the magic emerges," he says as he flips over a stone and we see a naturally produced layered arrangement that looks like an enchanted landscape of wooded mountains, with possibly a waterfall slicing through the escarpment. Therein lies the sublimational juncture.

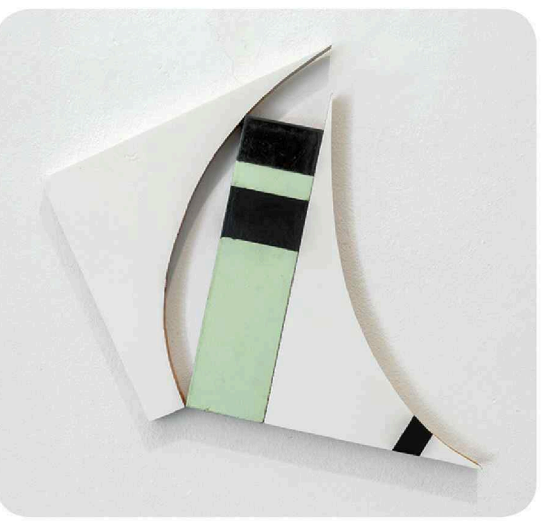
He invokes some neat Hebrew word play, making the short sonic and syllabic bridge from the term *le'hishtahot* – "to linger" – and *le'hishtaot,* which means "to wonder." Borkovsky believes that should we give the works we behold, and ourselves, due time, the previously undetected message will eventually manifest itself. That also applies to the artist's elbow grease efforts.

"In the end, it looks like that, as if it was made without any effort being put it," he remarks as we approach the tile arrangement with triangles at the corners. And he has no intention of making life easy for us. "From my point of view, it has to look this way, as if there was no effort involved," he suggests somewhat enigmatically. "But there are around seven semitransparent layers [of paint] here to make it look this way."

Borkovsky would be delighted if the observer were to discern the labor-intensive backdrop to the finished product. But surely he realizes he is living in an increasingly digital, virtual, information-bombarded world where attention spans are constantly shrinking.

"The necessity to linger is cardinal," he states. That, I reply, is a challenging state of affairs for most of us. "I know it is challenging, but I expect people to rise to that," he shoots back with tenderly rendered defiance.

We return to the le'hishtahot-le'hishtaot interplay with a nod back to the *Annunciation* pentaptych. "I call that 'the grace of the sudden'," he says, of the discovery of previously unsuspected undercurrents that underpin his works. Like the incarnation moment in Mary's pentamerous discovery.



The exhibition incorporates four cycles of works, including 'Remnants,' which features refashioned leftovers from previous ventures.

THE ANNUNCIATION – the exhibition, rather than the aforementioned group slot – is essentially something of a retrospective culled from an accumulation of works created since 2013. That was also the year when Borkovsky had an extensive showing at the Israel Museum.

At first glance, many of the exhibits appear to be of a WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get, to quote a computer interface term from the early days of the Apple Mac) ilk. What could possibly be compelling about viewing a bunch of square, rectangular, or elliptical-shaped pieces of plywood with patterns that run the ostensibly narrow gamut from square tiling arrangements to paintings that look like enlargements of tartan fabric swatches?

But somehow, as you give the work in question some temporal justice and allow the aesthetics and dynamics to seep into your consciousness, you gain a sense that there is, indeed, more to it than immediately meets the eye.

Borkovsky, who considered a career in cinema before eventually deciding on painting, says his oeuvre connects with an additional area of the arts, as demonstrated by award-winning internationally celebrated poet Israel Eliraz.

"He published a book called *Habet, Shira Mabita Betziyur* ['Look, poetry looking at painting']. Israel has a line that goes: 'Suddenly you will see what you saw.' It is a repetitive thing. The day after you see something, you can, again, suddenly see what you saw. You will see something anew each time, but you have to be constantly alert to catch that." The

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

25.11x29.57	3/3	עמוד 12	the jerusalem post - in jerusalem	07/2025	94805261-5
בית האמנים ירושלי - 12572					

book's epexegetical subtitle is "Following J. Borkovsky's Paintings."

How many of us have the patience,\ these days – even those who frequent museums and galleries – to stop in front of a mostly abstract work and allow its shapes and implied sensibilities to wash over us until something inside clicks?

We hardly spend more than a microsecond with individual images on our smartphone screens, let alone "an eternity" absorbing the subliminal possibilities that may lie in store for us beneath the topsoil of a painting. "I call that taking a frontal view rather than a visual one," says Borkovsky, once again setting two similar words in Hebrew – *haziti* ("frontal") and *hazuti* ("visual") - off against each other.

Chromic realms are also a recurring theme in the exhibition. Things take a slightly more colorful turn in a couple of works that feed off photographic formats. One references Botticelli's *The Annunciation*, a natural bedfellow for the current Borkovsky collection. "It is a processed photograph which behaves like a painting," he notes. "They are not exactly figurative." Indeed, getting up close to the work, you discern thousands of dots, of various shades, much like a heavily pixelated print.

Borkovsky's border-hopping tending discipline culls rich pickings from across centuries of artistic endeavor of various ilks.

He cites a giant of 20th-century poetry and one of the titans of French Impressionism and post-Impressionism. "The only thing I can compare with Israel Eliraz's book is a slim volume by [late-19th-/early-20th-century Austrian poet Rainer Maria] Rilke called *Letters on Cézanne*. Rilke identifies lots of elements in Cézanne's art that engage him in poetry. Israel had the same relationship with my art."



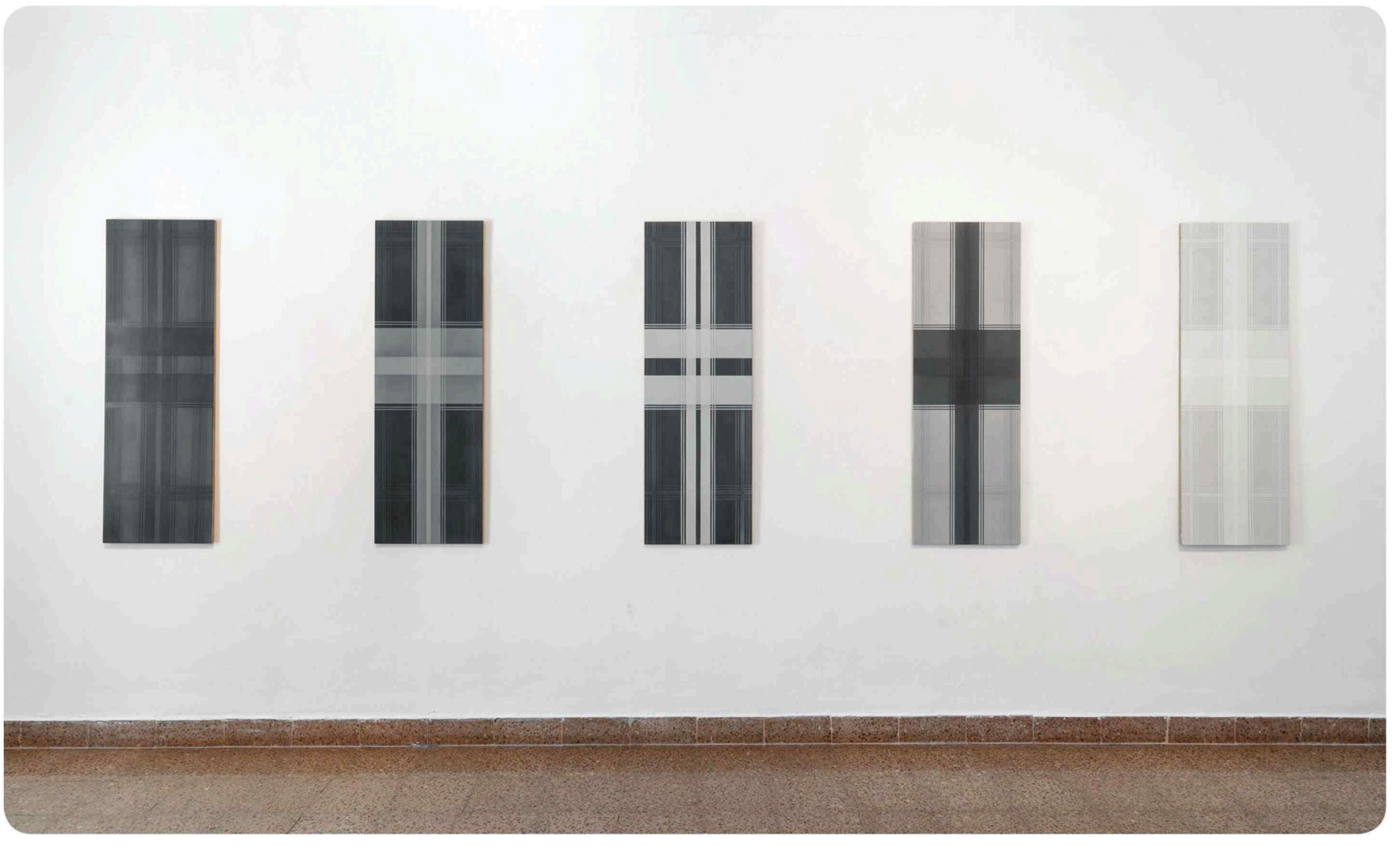
▸ **Crosses are** a leitmotif of 'The Annunciation' exhibition.

It just so happens that Borkovsky is also an avid fan of Cézanne's Impressionist oeuvre, which bleeds seamlessly into the artist's chromic choices at the Jerusalem Artists' House.

"Gray on gray. You're not a painter if you haven't painted gray," Borkovsky proffers a pertinent Cézanne quote.

The Jerusalemite and his illustrious French muse share the same birthday. "We were both born on January 19," the impish 73-year-old chuckles. "That has to mean something." ■

The Annunciation *closes on August 9. For more information: www.art.org.il and (02) 625-3653.*



'The Annunciation' pentaptych was inspired by a 15th-century Franciscan friar's reading of a confab between the Virgin Mary and the angel Gabriel.