

About Nomi Tannhauser's Work in the Exhibition Shibolet

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One of the points of departure for Nomi Tannhauser's new works is personal biography. At its foundation is a distant childhood memory – an end of the year celebration in elementary school in which her class put on a play based on "The Book of Ruth". As she tells it, "In the class, three of us were named Naomi. The two other Naomis wanted to play the role of Naomi. I knew I would not get a significant role in the play, but had I been given the choice, I would pick the part of Ruth, who seemed to me much younger and more attractive. Finally, along with some kids for whom a suitable role was not found, I played a Shibolet (a stalk of wheat)".

Today, as a mature woman and mother of children, Tannhauser adapts in her work the "Book of Ruth", out of historical consciousness. She uses the feminine alliance formed in the Biblical story as a platform for dealing with issues of national belonging and social involvement, an alternative to the deep chasm still existing between the nations. The field, along with its symbolic meanings of fertility, cyclicity and the achieving of maturity(1), is her basis of dealing with issues of gender.

The theme of Tannhauser's current painting series are Jewish and Palestinian girls, usually dressed in their school uniforms, on their way home. Tannhauser takes them out of their natural environment – the streets of the city and the alleys of the village – and places them in the open field against the background of a sea of stalks. This enables her to blur the mental –cultural identity that splits the two societies, drawing attention to their private identities as girls, to their common liveliness, their facial expressions and their bodily gestures.

Tannhauser's paintings are charged with contexts and meanings, these are expressed also in the texts accompanying this catalogue. Still, it seems that her paintings should be distinguished as paintings that stand for themselves, demanding separateness from all ethical value, and expression of senses and emotions searching for form in matter.

From the perspective of the current series of paintings, the tension between the figurative expression and the abstract one is sharpened. IN her early works the precision in the construction of the figure is visible – the clothing of the women, the body position, the facial structure, and the firmness of the gaze. These expressions are apparent in the intense coloration, in the meticulous shadowing and in the composition. Her later works are gradually moving toward abstraction. The color planes become larger, the tones dim and become pastel, and the background occupies a more generous space.

In the framework of abstraction it is interesting to point out the similarity between the "heroines" of Tannhauser's paintings – the figure of the girl and the image of the shibolet. In the paintings Shibolet 1 and 2 the stalks fill the canvas, becoming its central image. In the paintings Girl, Large Portrait no 2 the girl appears against a blinding white background whereas the color of her curling hair is the same color as the stalks until it seems for an instance that it is integrating with it. In the painting Girl, Portrait no. 1 it seems that the stalks are integrated into the folds on the cloth that wraps the girl's head. In the paintings mirage 1 and 2 the figure and the background nearly merge

into one.

The abstraction in Tannhauser's paintings becomes more apparent in the series of paintings she calls Counting of the Omer. The field they depict does not include a human figure and the painterly solutions are based more on color planes than on realistic descriptions. The examples we have before us show the difference between the uniform format paintings, particularly the mid-tones of the greens, browns and yellows – an abstract that is turning into a representation of emotion rather than place. The counting of the Omer is characterized by changes that occur in the timeline. Tannhauser mentions the decision to go out to the field as part of her desire to "live the present, the changing that occurs in the wheat, a changing that demands of me to cope with a situation of change". In this process she disrupted her routine method of painting from photographs and went out to paint in the open field. The unmediated experience of being alone in nature – along with identification with the objects of her paintings, the girls – exposed her to the same feeling of fragility and vulnerability that she relates to them. In the entire body of Tannhauser's paintings, the Counting of the Omer paintings stand out as an autonomous entity, embracing with them the story in its whole.

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