

Tal Matzliah, A New Middle East, 9.4.99 - 6.5.99

Exhibition site: <http://www.hagar-gallery.com/talm00.html>

Tal Matzliah. A New Middle East

Text by Tal Ben-Zvi

"Pickles in white sauce"

"Theory-bypassing road"

"Future artists meet future collectors"

"Money-bypassing road"

"The works of art can be purchased after the show. The price of each work is one \$"

Notes, memo notes, "a new Middle-East" as a memo note for a colorful, fragrant space made of plastic. A space without a focus, blurry, non-uniform, a space with an inner contradiction and many faces. It is an attempt to locate and to map the artist's intimate living space, the place in which she lives in south Tel-Aviv, to locate the artistic cultural space in which she works in direct relation to the concept of "locality": This is where I live, this is where I work, this is where I create. That same "here" versus the symbolic space that is a result of the political concept: "A New Middle-East".

The concept: "A New Middle-East" as a phrase, as a political term that has at its base the deletion of the existing Middle-East, and its creation as a new cultural-geographical space. What's new in this space? Of-course there is the Zionist-western presence, and therefore the whole space is new in order to contain that presence as natural, rather than as questionable. The new space is presented as a synthesis of east and west, a synthesis that seemingly holds relations of equality, as an utopian possibility of our existence in a foreign and threatening geographical space. This space is offered as a new product, as a technological, democratic, progressive and enlightened solution, without borders, without nationality, without ethnic origins, without smell, color or identity. The artist sees it as a false product, an object for resistance. She says: "There is no relation between that Middle-East and the one I have in my head. It is a space that I understand as lacking any understanding of accepting the Other, or the possibility that perhaps another culture will take place here. Its not that someone here is expanding the space, learning Arabic, Syrian, Jordan or Egyptian culture.

She says that her works represent a locality, such as the place where she lives. A collage of solutions without method, an obedience to some rational of beauty that does not adhere to a clear set of rules. She calls it: "human solutions, practical solutions, the hand of man is running life here. There are no experts here! Seemingly it is a primitive, miserable place since the mechanism of the ordered system was not implemented here, for me it is a heaven of humanity."

Tal Matzliah uses the concept "New Middle-East" as a cliché, as a product that exists in culture and expresses a synthesis between the eastern and the western, she uses it but she casts new contents into it. She creates an alternative space, "A New Middle-East" as a memo of that eastern world that has been dropped, deleted from this cliché. It is the attempt of a woman artist, who defines herself as a product of a western educational system, to detach herself from the western concepts of beauty, to detach herself from an artistic language that wants to be universal, that wants to exist in some imaginary global village, and in its stead to propose a possibility of another language, such that is being formed in the "New Middle-East": local – ethnic – eastern.

There are three subjects in the show, which repeat recur in the works of art: the subject of money and the economic power relations, the subject of the politics of east-west, a subject that ultimately also comes back to money, and the subject of beauty. In spite of the desire to detach herself from the concepts of western visual art, it is important to her to remain in the

sphere of the artistic object, in the sphere of beauty, to create beautiful, happy works of art. To the same extent that is important to her that the works be beautiful, it is also important to her that it will not be possible to exchange their beauty for money. She wants to enable everyone – but everyone, to imagine her work in his/her home. At the end of the show, the works will be given out to whoever wants them, for one \$ only.

The works are beautiful, very beautiful, colorful, varied, rich, detailed: plastic, a lot of plastic, stickers, fish, butterflies, balloons, satin ribbons, donkeys, a donkey carrying a woman, view postcards, desert, camels, a cow, plastic soldiers, plastic toys, a bookshelf, Sheik Yasin, mosques, the King of Morocco, paper cutouts, a mask of a black Negro, Dan Daor, Dvir Interatour, azure-colored bombs made of sponge, a child closing his eyes so as not to see, hands asking for mercy, many hands asking for mercy, people praying, Smiley, water-colors, the picturesque fingerprint of Tal Matzliah: paintbrush sweeps in yellow, green, red.

The works are a collage: a collection of existing objects, readymade that was collected, glued, woven into a new object. It is an attempt to learn the eastern-local-ethnic, not through an authoritative body of knowledge - presenting, translating and interpreting, but rather through a direct use of images. It is an attempt to see things, to identify them, to learn and to know them through their representations in reality. The images appearing in her works exist in reality, there is no need to create them, to invent them. Her drawings, with her "fingerprint", for her they too are already a product.

The direct use itself of symbols (for instance, the use of the Arabic language) graphically, without explaining their inner-cultural meaning, and their incorporation within an ocean of images, both western and eastern, local and ethnic, expresses an unsolved situation, an inner contradiction between the strong desire to give an expression to the concept of locality, and the impossibility of a woman of western education to perceive and understand it essentially.

This duality expresses a skeptic but optimistic stance. Alongside the big question-mark regarding the ability of local Israeli visual art to represent, to contain, to express the place in which the art is created, there is the artist's personal choice to identify herself as local-eastern-Other.

From: Ben Zvi, Tal (ed.), 2000. *New Middle East: Eleven Exhibitions, 1998-1999, at Heinrich Böll Foundation, Tel Aviv*, Jaffa: Hagar Association, pp 104-105