

City Haven

Edmond de Rothschild Center

Opening: 15 February 2024; Closing: 9 April 2024

Curator: Reut Barnea; Assistant Curator: Yael Jacobs

Participants: Ofir Karin (Mittelpunkt), Ori Shifrin Anavi, Oren Rozensal, Hagar Lieberon, Michelle Boginski, Noam Sitruk, Nir Giorgio Levin, Rabab Abu Saada, Tom Maor

The urban space is a haven; not only in the sense of a physical shelter, but mainly as a conceptual one. More than the buildings, roads and other means of protection it offers, what ties us to the city is the human fabric, the spirit, the ecosystem.

We had decided on the title of the exhibition, *City Haven*, almost a year ago, long before anyone ever thought shelter would once more become an existential issue. The idea arose last winter, with the beginning of the protest period, which compelled many of us take a fresh look at the way of life the city affords us, and realize that it is not something to be taken for granted.

Since then, several (a multitude of) things have happened, yet the city has remained a refuge. The specific city of Tel Aviv-Jaffa has become a conceptual city, one that envelops those who live in it, protecting them in various ways from the outside world. In the Bible, a city of refuge was a place where someone who had accidentally committed manslaughter could seek asylum. In the 1980s, a song of the same name by Ehud Banai on his first album *Ehud Banai and the Refugees (1987)*, added a new meaning to the term.

We are not naïve in thinking that the city is only a shelter, only envelops, only protects. More often than not, the city also encumbers life, and does so also in diverse ways. All the

artists participating in the exhibition have a relationship with a city. They live in an urban space as opposed to a rural agricultural village or kibbutz; in a particular urban space as opposed to another; or have lived in the same urban space for their entire lives.

For us, the urban space is a haven. It creates a fabric of contemporary urban life in which we each find our place. It is the same fabric that spawned the protest for the preservation of a democratic and liberal existence; the same fabric that wraps us in a protective bubble—that, for many generations, was disparaged. However, over time we have come to realize it is our most vital asset, even if we do not possess a physical asset (in the sense of a piece of real estate—the city is in our hearts).

The Edmond de Rothschild Center is one of the few exhibition spaces located on a central axis in the urban space. Hundreds of people pass by it daily. In this sense too, it is an asset. Its beautiful façade, prominent in the urban fabric, is a focal point, attracting passers-by who, on entering, find their city of refuge inside it.

Ofir Karin (Mittelpunkt), Citopia, digital game; paper cards

Citopia is an integrated-format, ecological and urban-themed game of strategy. The game asks players to “Save the city in thirty minutes!” by restoring balance to the world through environmental decision-making. Players are presented with a ruined city and must work together to save it. The interactive game, covering ecological and urban issues, refers to balance not only in the physical sense, but also in a spiritual sense. For example, the balance between forested and urban areas is a metaphor for social equilibrium.

The design language draws inspiration from alchemical symbolism, which strengthens the connection to the natural elements which we must align for our existence. Originally, the game was

created as a final project in the Department of Visual Communication at the Holon Institute of Technology (supervised by Golan Gafni), but in the wake of recent events, more meanings have been assimilated into it. The pre-war situation is not necessarily the balance that is needed for post-war Israeli society. A sequel game is needed.

Ofir Karin (Mittelpunkt)

Born in the Jezreel Valley (1994), lives and works in Tel Aviv.

Graduated from the Department of Visual Communication Design, HIT - Holon Institute of Technology.

Instagram: @ofir.mittelpunkt

Ori Shifrin Anavi, Spheres, mixed technique

A pile of colorful plastic balls is installed in front of the Edmond de Rothschild Center. The balls are familiar to us from the ball pits commonly found in children's gymborees and playgrounds. The sensation of being immersed in a pool of balls - unstable yet secure, confident of being able to just lie there, or to play or jump without getting hurt, without any danger of drowning - is embedded in our physical memory.

Shifrin Anavi stacks the balls in a pile that represents a frozen moment, preceding or after an action - a moment that can represent construction or destruction. The pile echoes the piles of building materials, a familiar sight in the urban fabric, but in a surprising, colorful, free, embracing and comforting material. The balls, whose presence in this moment in time and place indicates an action of emptying, are charged objects. As elements that we can also encounter on the concrete and the psychological battlefield, the balls remind us that every happy moment can be sad at the same time, and vice versa.

Ori Shifrin Anavi

Born in Maccabim (1991), lives and works in Tel Aviv.

Graduated from the Department of Industrial Design, Shenkar College of Engineering, Design and Art.

Instagram: @ori_shif

Oren Rozensal, Routine Emergency Routine, acrylic on wood; mixed technique

How does one live in an apartment building during normal times? And how does one live in it in urgent times? Life in the city unfolds in very close quarters. People on top of people, squeezed into a space, each person living in their own defined territory, and usually not dependent on interaction with the neighboring territories.

In routine times, the stairwell is the main contact point in a residential building; and residents are under no obligation to interact. The situation is somewhat different in wartime. One feels compelled to be more communicative, to notice who is wearing what and who is talking to whom. And then, when it is over, it is as if nothing had happened. Everything returns to normal. Cats rummage through the garbage bins, and we return to the seclusion of our private spaces.

The work deals with the interaction between neighbors in an urban residential building, but also invites viewers to interact; to touch, turn, ring the bell, and leave the personal territory for a moment for the neighboring personal territories.

Oren Rozensal

Born in Kibbutz Maoz Haim (1996), lives and works in Ramat Gan.

Graduated from the Department of Visual Communication, Shenkar College of Engineering, Design and Art.

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Hagar Lieberman, Kaplan: Theater of Democracy, drawing, in combination with digital tools on paper/fabric; mixed technique

The map is part of an ongoing project Lieberman created towards the end of the weekly protests in the past year. It documents the newly created protest space in Israel - the axis of Kaplan Street and the Ayalon Highway that intersects it. At the present moment in time, the map serves as a testimony, a memory of an event, which became part of a significant, and still developing, timeline.

The purpose of the map is to understand the space of the axis, which in essence is not a space intended for protest but an inter-urban intersection, and to examine how the protest reinvented it until it transformed officially into "Kikar ha-demokratia" - "Democracy Square." The protest period was an extreme moment in the history of the country and of the city, and was accompanied by an even more extreme moment that came immediately after it. Added to the mapping of the street as a social, communal, architectural and urban space is a layer of trauma and rupture, which are also expressed in the existing urban space.

Hagar Lieberman

Born in New York (1995), lives and works in Tel Aviv.

Graduated from the Department of Architecture, Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem.

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Michelle Boginski, Confessional, Mixed technique; Textiles and sound work (7 minutes)

A temporary structure built from oriental-like carpets; their identity as blurred as that of Boginski herself. Out of them, she created a shelter, a protective space that she could take with her from place to place to try to understand herself. Where

does she belong? Has what she has taken become hers? Does the structure really provide security or only the illusion of it? Does the city really provide security or is it too just an illusion?

Inside the temporary structure, a sound work operates in a meditation-like process. It regulates thinking, seeks to breathe and formulate a worldview, while at the same time also rebels against what we hold most precious. In a flow of prayer, the work creates a weave of contrasting emotions, like the weave of a tapestry - the warp and woof threads examining reality, raising questions about existence in this land and the power of words to effect change.

Michelle Boginski

Born in Acre (1997), lives and works in Haifa.

Graduated from the Department of Photography, NB Haifa School of Design.

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Noam Sitruk, Aleph - Beit, video work, soil-covered wall

Images of a city - houses and buildings, drawn by Sitruk's students, boys and girls in the second, third and fourth grades at the Shapira neighborhood school in Tel Aviv, are projected onto a wall that is covered completely with soil. The houses and buildings tell a story that takes place in between reality and imagination. Some were drawn from the children's real world, some from their imaginary worlds.

Just as the houses tell a story, so does the soil: soil is a stable, heavy, safe foundation. It is what lies beneath the concrete of the city's houses, it is what makes it possible to have a place to live on and it is also the source of long-standing conflicts, which sometimes claim lives. The houses are

projected "in the air," touching-not-touching the ground, as if looking for a safe place, which they will not necessarily find.

Lately, the concept of home has taken on a new meaning. The temporary home and the uncertainty in the images of the schoolchildren's houses, some of whom are children of asylum seekers, have become a collective story of people who have lost their homes or left them and still cannot return.

Noam Sitruk

Born in Lapid (1995), lives and works in Tel Aviv.

Graduated from the Department of Art, Kibbutzim College of Education, Technology and the Arts.

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**Nir Giorgio Levin, Night Port, industrial machine knitting;
video work**

Night Port - Reflection of the Queer Shelter invites an experience where art and reality merge, where history and the pace of modern life meet. At the heart of the installation are two matching knitted textile images, stretched on triangular frames, reflecting the past and present. The knitted image depicts a statue of a naked Greek male who stands on the seashore and holds a lamp in his hand as a symbol of a lighthouse in the dark night. The lamp placed between the canvas and the viewer illuminates and breaks down the barriers between artwork and viewer. The light also functions as a metaphorical guide, a beacon that leads the way through the dark shadows of the notorious night. It is at night, when we are unburdened of our daily routine, that people find their place.

In the installation, Levin seeks to bring the night and all the possibilities it represents to the forefront. Night is not only a symbol of freedom, but also a place where one can be oneself without fear. A place where one can experience the queerness

that resides in each of us, regardless of how we define ourselves.

Nir Giorgio Levin

Born in Brazil (1994), lives and works in Tel Aviv.

Graduated from the Department of Textile Design, Shenkar College of Engineering, Design and Art.

Instagram: @Nirgiolev

Rabab Abu Saada, Air Cutoff, ready-made; mixture of gelatin, glycerin and water; video projection (7 minutes)

Inside a Syrian shelter in the northern Golan Heights, Abu Saada found a connecting pipe whose original purpose was to filter the air for those inside the shelter. This pipe is the starting point of the work. Abu Saada processes it using a substance she makes herself out of glycerin, gelatin and water. The resulting texture is simultaneously transparent and opaque, and serves as the ground for the projection of a documentary video which she filmed in the same shelter.

The work deals with the relationship between searching and acceptance; between darkness and light; between underground and ground surface; the relationship between heaven and earth; between earth and air; between feeling suffocated and being able to breathe. The blending of the material in layers, one atop the other, illustrates the struggle of multiple identities and the lack of identities in the work.

The pipe, made to provide airflow, disconnected from its initial purpose and physical location, is reassembled here to enable a different type of breathing - in a distant, urban space, disconnected yet connected, taking us on a journey to discover the country of origin of the work.

Rabab Abu Saada

Born in Mas'ade Local Council, Golan Heights (2000). Lives and works between the Golan Heights and Haifa.

Graduated from the Faculty of Arts, Hadmidrasha, Beit Berl College.

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Tom Maor | Broken // Vessel , sculpture in clay

Handmade ceramic figures. Figurative yet abstract; sweet yet stress-inducing; creating islands of happenings, like centers of human congregation in the city. They find themselves in an ambivalent space of activity where it is unclear whether the space is happy or sad, or both.

The figures are broken and glued back together again. They start low down, in the lowest place, where everything induces the sense of banality and insignificance. Then they sprout upwards - hands moving, breaking, gluing and uniting the fragments, glued, fragments united. Only then can one look ahead. There is no hope without movement; we must keep on moving.

Tom Maor

Born in Haifa (1992), lives and works in Tel Aviv.

Graduated from the Department of New Media Art, The Naggar Multidisciplinary School of Art and Society.

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