

## Cut in the Landscape Liat Livni / Curator Ora Kraus

In her exhibition, Liat Livni presents a series of monochromatic pieces, which come into being through illustration, pasting and cutting using a utility knife. Their immaculate precision, the meticulous choice of materials and their formative completeness give her pieces an incredibly esthetic and exceptionally beautiful appearance. So much so, that it seems as if a mechanical arm was involved in their creation. The artist refers to the conquest of nature by man, and in order to illustrate this theme she creates an artificial landscape image, within which, in a surrounding of pastoral nature, she "plants" elements taken from an urban environment: A tractor, an antenna, electric poles, a bridge etc. Once in a while a human image appears - which enhances the sensation of nature's grandeur as opposed to man's insignificance. In other pieces, the natural landscapes also feature animals, sometimes depicted only using their outline.

In her works, Livni uses paper plates and cups, as substrates prominent in their white color. In some of her pieces appear pale patches of color of veneer and brown colored paper. At times, it is difficult to tell apart the variety of materials, integrated and piled one on top of another to create a texture of mysterious landscape. The meticulous cutting of the cups and plates glued together creates, as if by magic, a three-dimensional texture, a type of collage that is created from emptying and filling of material.

Some of the pieces presented in this exhibition were created while Livni was an artist in residence in Mino, Japan. It is possible to recognize the Japanese influences in her work, especially those of the Japanese Zen gardens, which were themselves meticulously created in nature's image: pastoral landscapes, mountains, streams and waterfalls. With the development of Zen philosophy, the presence of absence and void grew in these gardens, which were perceived as a suitable place for meditation. Indeed, with the influence of Zen gardens, it is clear to see that in the artist's creations, landscapes are depicted with simplicity and minimalism, and empty spaces are quite conspicuous.

Other works focus on urban landscapes. Thus, for instance, in the piece *White City* the artist created an embossment of a completely white urban landscape, built from a stack of cut up paper cups in different heights, layered one on top of the other. The cups are lit from below, and thus the contour lines of the embossment are emphasized. The piece *Stencil Lesson* depicts the landscape of the city of Mino, spread out on the shape of a Japanese fan, with contour lines that are created by precise and ascetic carving. The platform is built out of four layers of paper, while the white paper is cut out in the shape of a stencil. This paper replaces the original brown paper (whose color was achieved by smearing persimmon oil), which was used in the past in order to prepare stencils for the Kimono, the traditional Japanese garment.

Other pieces combine natural and urban landscapes. The series *Global Landscape* is made out of cut white paper plates – a kind of drawing through cutting – that leaves gentle silhouettes of changing landscapes; electric poles are planted within them, their shape reminiscent of thin human images. The whiteness of the images is emphasized by

the shade they create in the background. The piece *Landscape With Waterfall* is a collage created on top of a small plate, in which natural and architectural landscapes appear lit from behind: Tel Aviv sky-scrapers, a Swiss mountain and Japanese architecture combining a bridge and a waterfall. In this manner, the piece creates a sense of fantasy, formed by the surprising combination of imagery. Other pieces are focused on calm and poetic natural spaces: the piece *Origami Lesson* was created by the folding of a single sheet of paper, using traditional Japanese technique, and creating an image of a boat sailing on a river of light. Much to the viewers' surprise, when the light underneath it is switched on, a landscape that was formerly hidden - suddenly appears before them. *Mountain Of Plates*, one of the most original pieces on display in this exhibition, is formed of a pile of plates, which Livni carved through with a utility knife. Every layer that is cut reveals the one beneath it, and in this laboring manner the artistic object is formed.

In general, Livni's works, relating to the vacant spaces between the aforementioned items, in many ways remind the viewers of the Japanese Haiku. These short poems illustrate spiritual insights and express transcendent moments, mostly through concise and implied images that represent a stream of thoughts and feelings. In the depiction of these minimalist images, much room is given to the imagination and the spirit of the readers, adding what is missing themselves, as in the following poem:

*Ancient pond*

*Frog jumps in*

*Water's sound*

This Haiku, composed by Basho, one of the traditional Japanese poets, is created in response to the question of his Zen meditation mentor in regard to the state of awareness he is in. The pool symbolizes the poet's serene consciousness, while the frog leaping into the water symbolizes the teacher's question, interrupting this serenity. The description itself is given to the reader in a very concise manner – a characteristic also featured of the artist's works. Similarly, it is possible to tie her pieces to the characteristics of traditional Zen-Buddhist art, attempting to express as much as possible in the most minimalist manner possible, by using less. Indeed, it seems that Liat Livni's pieces inspire a state of meditation, silent and reflective observation that fills the gaps between the minimalist descriptions, which are delicately and beautifully designed.