

HEZI COHEN GALLERY

Sweeping Glances | Zigi Ben-Haim

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In the current solo exhibition *Sweeping Glances* on view at *Hezi Cohen Gallery*, 13 artworks by Ben-Haim give us a look into his concept of creation where he keeps on reinventing himself, while moving from one chapter to another, creating to his own drumbeat. His works in general and particularly in this exhibition exist somewhere between abstraction and symbolism. He celebrates the beauty of everyday life, from found materials in his neighborhood; contrasts and unites various natural and industrial materials from wood to aluminum, rock to steel; tree leaves to newspapers and concrete.

Zigi's work evolved from a more personal journey into his personal culture to a symbiosis and adaptation of nature and culture that is at the core of his work. Looking at Zigi's art is like a journey into space that looks familiar but is full of surprises and traces from his travels and explorations. Ben-Haim's multi-layered, cultural background inspires his art and will continue through the years to come.

Equally adept as sculptor and painter, his two-dimensional works float in space. Lately he has exchanged the cold aluminum as his preferred 'canvas' with warm burlap for his painterly-collaged works, like in his work *No Exit*. He uses burlap and the printed words on them, which reminds him of the burlap sugar bags distributed in Israel during his childhood. He continues his journey of creating footprints of culture and nature, as seen through his prism of multicultural experience.

"The opposing forces in our living environment feed my work," says Ben-Haim. "It's like a second nature to my art. It manifests itself through the materials, colors, shapes, dimensions, etc, that I choose to use. Burlap is a warm and soft material, resembling a natural world as opposed to my works on aluminum, cold, hard and industrial presence; a tension of opposites, like a pull on a rubber band and most of us live somewhere in the middle."

Ben-Haim has stated that his work, especially paintings on aluminum—such as *Walking on Air* on view in this exhibition—address the current state of environmental affairs, which concerns humanity's place in the universe. The large-scale, multi-layered works present nature as simultaneously fragmented and grand. Using aluminum panels, wire mesh, paint, and collage, Ben-Haim's art shows his love for nature and concern about the environment, the tension that pits nature against culture. In an extraordinary way, he manages to bring contradictory images into harmony with

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each other, to create order from apparent disorder. The leaf as a sign of growth and nature's renewal or a brick as a symbol of humanity-building culture carried by a mighty ant are poetic.

"The essence of my work lies in balancing the tension between survival and extinction. The abstract forms I utilize are drawn from both the natural and industrial/cultural world. Materialized in my work, each world adopts the other; they collide and coincide with each other to form a third 'being-existence' that reflects the idea of survival and projects the energy of life," says Ben-Haim.

Zigi Ben-Haim's vision shows a path to reconcile his work for the engaged viewer – thus this great visual artist becomes a visionary poet.

- Susanne Lingemann

About the Artist:

Zigi Ben-Haim (b. 1945 in Baghdad, Iraq) is one of the most prominent contemporary artists living in New York and Tel-Aviv. Ben-Haim has exhibited extensively in the USA, Israel and internationally, and his works are in the collections of the Guggenheim Museum, Brooklyn Museum, the Israel Museum, Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv Museum of Art among others. In 2005, NASA commissioned Ben-Haim to create a work in tribute to the space shuttle, "Columbia." In 2013, NASA commissioned an additional monumental work by him in honor of the robotic rover, "Curiosity," exploring Mars. Zigi has been selected for the National Art and Culture, Legacy Program, 2015-16 Art Cart, Saving the Legacy, a project of the research center of Arts and Culture, USA.

At the age of five Zigi's family fled Baghdad, Iraq, and immigrated to Israel via Iran. Ben-Haim graduated from The Avni Institute of Fine Arts, Tel-Aviv, Israel and the Institute of Fine Arts and the California College of Art in Oakland, California. He holds an M.A. from the J.F.K. University, Orinda, California, USA and an M.F.A from San Francisco State University, San Francisco, California, USA. He has won numerous awards throughout his career, including A Pollock Krasner Foundation grant, 2013; 1996; 1990; The Emily Harvey Foundation, Fellowship to Venice, Italy, 2007; DAAD Fellowship to Berlin, Germany, 2004; National Endowment for the Arts, 1985; America-Israel Cultural Foundation, 1966-70.

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