

Swimming in a Red Ocean

*She is an island
Of promised peace
Of eternal peace
It seems
So close the light of the rose
So close its fragrance
So close the quiet leaves
So close that island
Take a boat
And cross the sea of fire.”*

Zelda

[Free translation by Miryam Stein-Grossmann]

Ever since Michal S. Perry decided that painting was her vocation, it has become some kind of *Red Ocean* she “swims” in. Her canvass is the infinite dynamic space where life is happening. This space is essential to her as a creator. She struggles to *Produce a Painting*, *To Live* in it and *Speak* through it, not only in her personal battlefield, struggling with the canvass, but expressing also the struggle of the world of art in general, where painting as an independent medium no longer plays an important role as in the past. In the era of mass media and technological genius (video art, LCD screens and computerized art), Michal’s painting rises like a prow of a pirate boat on the artistic horizon. It challenges and aspires to individuality, the conservation of a personal touch, primary, almost savage. Her paintings do not endeavor to take a stand on art, culture or social situation, but are rather an inseparable part of all of them.

The exhibition presents huge, abstract, expressive and colorful paintings aside small, intimate, inverted ones, where the text is a major component. The dialectic which emanates from the various means of expression, painting and writing, raises questions as to the role of the text in her painting and whether it contrasts the painting or complements it, or would not painting alone have been enough?

The obvious curative approach in all three exhibition halls accentuates the dialectic aspect of Michal’s work. The artist plays and jokes with the media. She turns the text into a painting and the painting into a text, a language. However, those questions remain in the air with no attempt to impose answers.

The main showroom contains four large and powerful works, oil on canvas, a series called *Rose Field* (2000) and *Blue Field* (1999). Although the pictures hang on the

wall, they rather seem more like installations, devouring the walls and the space, overwhelming the viewer with a total experience of color. In those paintings there is no room for words. They are multi-layered, rich in material and full of spots and drops of red paint. To the artist, red represents life. These paintings are abstract, but not entirely, since the main image in it are roses, a field of roses. Different from Van Gogh's *Field of Poppies* or Monet's *Water Lilies*, Michal's series emphasizes various cognitive spaces. The roses shed tears, as if from open wounds. They are dialectic roses which point out existential situations where pleasure and pain, beauty and ugliness, scare/fear/panic and serenity, life and death dwell permanently.

The action in *Swimming (the story of the painting)* on the red ocean canvas seems clearly based on dialectics. It is both possible and impossible. The huge white canvas invites *Freestyle Swimming* in an open space blocked by a colorful, multi-layered formation. The bottom layer of the painting is a grid drawing in black charcoal, demarking the bedding of the painting. Above it burst forth spots and drops of red, repeated rhythmically downwards. The upper layer is white, covering part of the layers beneath as if playing hide and seek. The painting is a genuine setup of signs which can be dissembled and assembled.

In the showroom at the entrance hall there are six paintings of the series *Variation in White* (2004). The format is square and small. The short brush strokes convey a feeling of uneasiness.

The paintings are multi-layered and more loaded, with additional colors of blue, yellow and orange. In this series, too, the white cover suggests hide and seek. The motif of the rose as an open, bleeding wound repeats itself but becomes bigger and fleshier. The rose surrounded by a white background is central as opposed to the multitude of roses in the series *Rose Field*.

In the rear showroom are about ten small, intimate works, oil on paper, and three works in oil on canvas in a scroll-like format. These works can be described as textual, since their central motif is in writing. Michal calls them *Sketches of Immediate Thoughts*. The thoughts flow consciously, handwritten by her in her mother tongue, Hebrew, on paper or canvas. The text is very personal, immediate and primary, non-critical, describing every day actions, situations, feelings, fears, memories and associations. The text is an esthetically designed component in her work, playing an important formative role. Like the large paintings, the vivid, technical texture of the textual ones, too, convey a feeling of injured, bleeding skin..

Next to the texts and within them, the spots and drops of color are also confined by a black charcoal grid, which forms a framework to the words and the letters as well.

The text consists of layers full of significance and self-consciousness, where the artist switches swiftly from one state of mind to another, as if turning from an inner reality to an external one.

"I am sitting on the floor on a rainy, stormy day, with the brush in my hand. It is Friday, the day that closes yet another week. In my inner world, there is only ONE time".

The text serves as a semiotic system of signs and symbols: the material sign of the letters, their size, form, density and formation of words and sentences on the one hand, and on the other hand, the symbol – the significance which is original and, pertaining solely to the writer: *"I must take Steveo, the dog, for a walk. He is lying here on the carpet, quiet, waiting for me. The boredom, when created, is cold, intedring to penetrate beyond the clouds...The clouds being the screen of consciousness. I closed my eyes, I, I, I... I...I... I...cannot manage to break down this wall. I relaxed, closed my eyes, wanting, wanting...wanting...wanting..."*

Michal's work calls for thorough observation.

Orly Meshulam,
Curator of the Exhibition

From Hebrew: Miryam Stein-Grossmann