

Longing and sadness in the Ronit Dovrat exhibition, Smadar Safi, Haaretz 2011



**RONIT DOVRAT רונית דוברת**  
**שטיחי קיר 2008-2010 Tapestries**

30.1.2011 < 6.1.2011

פתיחה: יום ה', 6 בינואר, 2011, בשעה 19:30

Opening: Thu., January 6<sup>th</sup> 2011 at 19:30 pm

בית האמנים ע"ש יוסף זריצקי, תל אביב. רח' אלחרייזי 9, 64244. טל' 03-5246685  
ימים ב'-ה' 10:00-13:00, 17:00-19:00; יום ו' 10:00-13:00; שבת 11:00-14:00  
The Artists' House, Tel Aviv. 9 Akharizi St., 64244. Tel. 972-3-5246685  
[www.artisthouse.co.il](http://www.artisthouse.co.il)



There is a sense of great longing and a certain underlying sadness to Ronit Dovrat's exhibition. The exhibition happens to be fortuitously timed with the publication of a reference book on Tel Aviv's "Ahad Ha'am 90" gallery ("Ahad Ha'am 90, the 80's", edited by Raz Samira), which was shut down 25 years ago, in January 1986 - practically light years away. The gallery was open for nearly four years. Dovrat, an artist, graduate of the 'Midrasha' Art School, founded the gallery together with two of her colleagues- Sarah Hinsky and Arie Berkowitz. Hinsky, a pioneering researcher of Israeli art, died in 2008. Berkowitz heads the Tel Aviv Artists House, hosting the exhibition of Dovrat, who has been residing in Italy since the 80's.

Dovrat, born in 1955, now achieves public recognition for her role in the local art scene. Her decision to exhibit in Israel, having refrained from doing so for 25 years, is to be construed as a longing for artistic recognition.

The works she has elected to display: designs over tapestries portraying everyday scenes from the life of the European aristocracy, are anything but commonplace. In many ways, they are rooted in the time at which the artist left the country, and in that sense, they are something of a time capsule. The use of generic historical imagery, as is the case here, was prevalent in the works of artists at that time. Such were the works of Itamar Noeman, a local artist. These included a large piece, presented at the exhibition marking the third anniversary of Ahad- Ha'am 90 gallery in 1985, where he integrated the image of "The Luncheon on the Grass" by Manet from 1863. Some international artists most outstanding in this context were David Salle and Julian Schnabel, as well as Cindy Sherman and others in some of their works.

Over time, the use of historical imagery or scenes from the life of aristocrats in art has become something of a cliché. Many artists have engaged in a historical discussion regarding the use of such imagery (Picasso for example). Whether readymade or cited, as in the case of Dovrat, it was used as a point of reference and as an act of perpetuation of the history of art. During the 80's the focal point shifted to combine high and lowbrow (the phrase was coined for an exhibition at the MOMA in New York in 1991 ('High and Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture'))

Dovrat presents vigorous, well-rounded, rhythmic drawings on tapestries prepared for embroidery- an art considered by the middle class and up as a mark of fallible taste.

The tapestries can also be regarded as reactionary for their mere allusion to a class-based world order model (nowadays, one stands dumbfounded at the way capitalist oligarchy has reestablished such similar order). The drawings portray scenes out of the descriptions of country outings: recreation, conversation, play, hunting or music. Dovrat has erased large portions of the drawings, leaving almost no trace of wildlife (in one drawing she retraces a large tree, most likely over a pre-existing tree in the original tapestry) and plants the images detached and hovering, in a new color scheme, an inferno of fiery reds and searing yellows in some of the works.

The accompanying text hails the pieces as the end result of "an identity-based process, whereby the artist connected with local popular Italian culture. The contrast between Italian historical and cultural wealth, their world-famous appreciation of beauty and creativity in the arts and design, and popular cultural inclinations as evidenced in the homes of many middle class Italians nowadays, moved her to examine how an existing object, classified as 'ugly', can be used and turned into a personal creation". The text farther mentions that "such similar tapestries can be found on proud display even here, in the homes of Jews of European descent".

This cross-cultural mix suggests a fond remembrance, traditionally eastward bound, by the Italian lower socio-economic class and Jews of eastern European descent, of some imagined golden era, of a past in which their ancestors had no real stake. It brings to light an internationally shared vision of past imagery. During the 80's tapestries were still present in the visual realm of certain parts of Israeli society. Today they are nearly extinct, a thing of the past, but still popular with some less well-to-do and non-Jewish groups of the population. Perhaps cultural inclinations and longings are more lasting in Italy.

Naturally, it is impossible to deduce the artist's entire body of work (the intention here wasn't retrospective in nature) based on the works on display, but the accompanying text and other available material suggest that Dovrat tends to engage in political themes (she is an active member of Italian groups for peace in the Middle East and collaborates with 'Zochrot'- a foundation aiming to raise public awareness of the Palestinian Nakba). At "Ahad Ha'am 90, the 80's" it is noted that in her first solo exhibition, 1982, following Israel's assault on Lebanon, known as the First Lebanon War, Dovrat made a clear political statement - a courageous act at a time when most

artists maintained silence, in contrast to the political art of the 70's and the cynical exploitation of politics in art in vogue today.

The only fact mentioned in the accompanying text regarding Dovrat's artistic past is that in Tuscany, where she lives, she has been invited twice to present works pertaining to the conflict and the Israeli occupation. An important work of hers was placed on display at the entrance to the municipality building of Massa Carrara in 2006. The artist erected a nine-meter long concrete wall divided by a swing. This current exhibition is perhaps an attempt to connect with the past, 'identity-based activity', which has as much to do with Italy as it does with Tel Aviv; the same dusty and bitter Tel Aviv as was described in Yaakov Shabtai's work "Zikhron Dvarim", which was published a mere five years before the founding of the "Ahad Ha'am 90" gallery, rather than the trendy city born of a change in which Dovrat took part as well.