

No limit for the artist

Diverse and eloquent painter Jonathan Gold talks about his current exhibit in Tel Aviv

By Ellie Armon Azoulay

The biography of the late architect Arie Sharon and "Star Trek" are part of Jonathan Gold's inspiration for the paintings in his new exhibition – "Hover" – at the Alon Segev Gallery in Tel Aviv. The stand-out painter, 37, has produced diverse works.

One of the two series in the exhibition offers faceless figures (could be scientists, astronauts or aliens) surrounded by bees. Gold refers to them as the beekeepers. On the connection between these works and the renowned modernist architect, he says: "Arie Sharon used to talk about how he was a beekeeper and how he used beekeeping as a model for organizing his architectural work. He did this by looking at the bees." Gold notes he really did organize his construction that way "but there is an almost childish and poetic element in all the public housing projects he designed."

Those same figures were also influenced by "Star Trek" and its spinoffs. "I like the way in which the future is perceived and presented in them. It always seems a bit prehistoric," says Gold.

He looks at the beekeepers as a kind of futuristic thing, "but they are associated with a moment in the 1970s which seems to have been interrupt-

ed and fallen apart. And it's the same with architecture: it functions as a monument to something that hardly exists anymore."

Gold grew up on Kibbutz Afek and at age 17 left to study art at Tel Hai College, where his teachers were mostly Russian in origin – "serious artists, esoteric people and outsiders in the world of art. The most contemporary art they taught us was Russian constructivism," he says smiling. Gold then studied art history at the University of Haifa while also teaching. Following an encounter with Yair Garbuz, he switched to the Midrasha LeOmanut-Beit Berl School of Arts. There, he says, "I grew up in the conceptual sense."

Teachers such as Michal Neeman, Roi Rosen and others provided him "with an excellent platform for contemporary art" but insufficient practical tools. Two years later, he won a scholarship to the Rijksakademie in Amsterdam. In 2007, he returned to Israel with his partner and their daughter. He has exhibited at the Sommer and Rosenfeld galleries and participated in biennales in Tel Aviv and Herzliya. In 2008, he won the Education and Culture Ministry's prize to promote creativity.

Gold's new exhibition relies on interim situations. It creates figures that are between a concrete place and no place,



between the figurative and the abstract. His painting is nourished by European styles, primarily from the first half of the 20th century, such as futurist architecture, Russian constructivism and surrealism in Russia and Israel, in addition to late 1960s science fiction. And he searches for these stylistic remnants in the local architectural scene.

Some of the exhibition has an apocalyptic feel – buildings perch on top of a mountain, which hover without planting legs on the ground. Most of these paintings are based on buildings here, including the Mivtahim building in Zichron Yaakov, buildings in Yagur, the military induction center known as Bahad 1, the Dagon complex, Hadassah University Hospital and Jerusalem's Ramot Polin neighborhood. The social-oriented and functional international construction that thrived here in the 1920s and 1930s and continued with the establishment of the state and became one of the architectural milestones of the Zionist enterprise interests Gold and is dear to him.

For him, "these buildings have a story." He says they started with a discussion of form and "turned into erstwhile Zionist temples. At a certain stage, they lost some of their grandeur and now something new has been created from this. "They symbolize something different for everyone. There are people who



"Sun's Rays," to be shown at the "Hover"

many things, I'm sure that it will yet influence fashion and music," he says with a smile.

He is ambivalent about the monuments scattered across the country; when Ariel Sharon went to the Temple Mount, he painted monuments in "a mishmash of styles that interested me, some futuristic structures alongside scorched motorcycle parts. This is a language that is very typical of Israel. And everyone together is





Photos: Daniel Tcherchel

Gold in front of his work "Clusters." Left, Gold's painting "Campus."



the "Hover" exhibition.

ney wrote that photography as we experience it today disappointed us. Photography made a promise that was not kept. I don't think that he meant that photography is dead, but that photography has become so mass-circulation within the different types of media, that

transition period when the things that I grew up on as something tangible, values such as the Labor movement, communal living and others, are becoming liquid and symbolic cultural references. Even the question of who is a working man has become liq-

lege. "I feel that the preparation is a process that cleans many things," he says. "And it's fun to gamble: I work for hours on preparing the canvas with glue and then I paint on it for two hours and I know it got ruined and that it should be thrown in the bin."

What do you know about a completed painting? "I have a moment where the painting reaches a situation where it is possible to leave it, and then the more you load on, you turn it into kitsch. I try to have my paintings go through as few stages as possible. I prefer that as little work as possible be entailed; not out of laziness, but because it's important to me there be a feeling of freshness, that the time invested in the painting will not be discounted. I try to do the backdrop and the figures together. I do a lot of preparatory work. I can work for a few days on papers, in colors. Until I feel it's right. Preparation work is the test case for the final work. How much can you preserve things?" As for the status of painting alongside the new media, he says that the shattering of the figures, a hyper-visual, may make it hard for drawing as a medium, but perhaps also liberates it: in such a visual world, says Gold, there is basically no limit on what he as a painter can engage in.

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we have to relate differently to the image."

How do you do that? "The image has to liberate the painting and not the reverse. That means, an image or story or dreams are a good starting point for art; art that creates a situation where there is questioning, where it is unclear where it is coming from or where it is going to, art that does not restrict itself to just one kind of discussion."

Of his engagement in local esthetics and content, he says: "Recently I tried to think about the biographical elements in the works, and I think this is my way of looking at things. I am now in a

uid. What is a teacher? Once being teacher meant 'being a teacher in Israel' and today I'm employed by the hour and do not receive full benefits. It's a change in the spiritual approach as well. My daughter goes to school; her teacher is the most important thing to her, and on the other hand, the teacher is a disaster. I think that I have to hold on to these things because they are falling apart."

Gold also invests in the work around painting: he builds frames, stretches canvases and mixes the colors. This way of working he blames to large extent on his early studies at Tel Hai Col-

photos as a point of reference, but is not bound to documenting reality and therefore he was not faithful to the buildings in their original form: "I saw them as a starting point. I want a painting that will burst out of the painting and the simplicity that contemporary painting deals with."

He says the close connection between painting and photography no longer interests him. "The way in which the image is handled in cinema is more of interest to me than the way in which it is handled in photography. David Hock-

