

Iva Kafri | Lava
איזה כפרי | לבה

18.5-1.7.2023

Gallery talk with the participant of the artist: Saturday, June 3, 12:00

In her new exhibition, Iva Kafri is showing six large paintings on canvas and paper, along with an intervention in the gallery space in the form of two pillars painted in charcoal and red paint.

The eye reads the images in the paintings as collages, even though there are no pastings and cutouts in them. One can recognize a figure, an architectural perspective, doodles and stains made in various paints and techniques. The paintings were made in charcoal, acrylic paint, graphite, pencil and chalk. In one painting the eye recognizes vegetation, a fire, water, a hut, a winged figure from Francisco Goya's Los caprichos print series, a frontal nude figure taken from a Paul Gauguin painting directing its gaze to the viewer, the bust of ancient Egyptian queen Nefertiti, Odilon Redon's spider, Francis Bacon's version of a Van Gogh painting, and an African fertility figurine. These figures originate from postcards and printouts Kafri kept since here early school days. These images are both art historical in reference and biographical in resonance – they stem from Kafri's beginnings as an artist, like the lava adorning the exhibition title – a congealed energy. Fertile soil.

After developing for over a decade and a half her own style of pictorial installations, made up of shapes, materials and colors put together in the gallery space, in her previous solo show at Raw-Art gallery, "Adama" (Earth) (2020), Kafri showed two dimensional figurative paintings. Kafri's installations created dynamic images, always changing with the movement of the viewer in space, oscillating through the opacity and transparency of these surfaces, and the ways these were framed and re-framed depending on the viewer's position in space. While the painterly gestures of the new works on canvas and paper in "Lava" expend onto the gallery space with the two painted columns, the paintings themselves hold the immense energy of multi-faceted layering, combining colors, movements and gestures. The intensity and plurality of perspectives that the canvases and paper works offer, bring the viewer into a state of exploration, by which the viewer's eye constantly connects and detaches elements in the painting – the eye moves on these paintings as if they themselves were multi-layered spaces.

Her old-new studio, where Kafri worked on "Lava" is her childhood bedroom, where she returned to after her mother's passing. This room is where Kafri initially began drawing as a child. The intimacy of this biographically charged space allowed Kafri to re-introduce herself with her own painterly gestures. In this space, the movement of her own hand already activates the space. In her new works, matt and glossy shines, lines and drips, frame and re-frame each other. Kafri's powerful gestures present an enhanced materiality in the paintings. The female figures in the paintings look directly at us, responding to the viewer. Like a "re-photo" exercise recreating an existing photograph, Kafri's return to her childhood room brought the artist back to her first completed paintings. For example, that of an American volunteer in Kibbutz Ein HaHoresh, which Kafri painted from a photo by her uncle Itamar Kafri, when she was thirteen. The photo appears in a book of black-and-white photographs taken by her uncle between 1977-1986, a book she had

at home since childhood. The stains and strong colors of the painting enhance the presence of the figure – a young woman in shorts, seated in a room, facing the camera. As a teenager, Kafri found her way into the force of this figure through the disassembly of strong colors – her Fauvist painterly gesture leads us to the symbolism of the figure. In this sense, this young volunteer, along with other female artists and figures, influenced Kafri in her quest for powerful female presences. This approach can be found in Kafri's installations, which dominated the gallery space, as well as in her current evocative paintings.

The childhood room is where Kafri was introduced to herself as an artist. While it looks over the Mediterranean and the open horizon, it is also packed with memories of adolescence and goodbyes, self-discovery and longing. In her painting, Kafri uses forms she has developed in her installations – there is a minimal gap between her and the paintings. With the move to her old-new studio this last November, the stable energy of daily routine studio work was replaced by the urgency of painting. The planned deployment of objects and color fields in space was taken over by the joy of painterly discoveries – first acted on and then reflected on. With Kafri’s way of working, the studio is not only a space, but a duration as well. The time of the studio brings flow and focus. The choice of colors is not arbitrary but combinatory – there is no fate but the beauty of intuition. Random becomes inevitable, the contingent is eternal. Each element connects to the other while containing itself. Kafri’s way of working allows for coincidences to reveal themselves. Her previous studio, where she worked for a decade, suddenly looks like a version of her childhood room, which was her first studio, and is her studio now. There is a perpetual return to this site – on family visits when Kafri lived in Paris, in albums, old notebooks and diaries, postcards and the meshing together of all the spaces she has worked in as an artist. The eye discovers itself as a muscle in front of Kafri’s paintings. And as happens with paintings – the incidental is absolute.

Joshua Simon, May 2023

Iva Kafri (b. 1981) lives and works in Tel Aviv. She is a graduate of the MFA program at the École nationale supérieure des beaux-arts de Paris, where she has earned an ENSBA, as a student of Jean-Marc Bustamante and Dominique Gauthier. Kafri has had solo exhibitions at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art and RawArt Gallery in Tel Aviv. Her works have been exhibited in numerous group exhibitions in venues both in Israel and abroad, including the Petach Tikva Museum of Art, Haifa Museum of Art, the 1st Herzliya Biennial of Contemporary Art, La Générale en Manufacture in Sèvres, France, Vault and Tape Modern in Berlin, and Tilton Gallery in New York. Kafri was awarded the prestigious Rappaport Prize for Young Artist by the Tel Aviv Museum in 2013.