

Gallia Bar-Or

The act of painting accumulates meaning in an endeavor to reconstruct a dim memory that has been suppressed beneath the threshold of consciousness, or in a groping for an event that preceded consciousness; an event that cannot be located by means of memory and that continues to pulsate like the end of a thread for an explanation. The body is a stronghold of memory that bears the imprint of events anchored in a distant past (birth and separation from the mother's body, for example) and also a site of a fluid identity and of frequently changing physical and sensory experiences.

This model dictated to the artist a quest within the medium of painting, and only in this medium, and it was right for her as long as she dealt with body organs such as the navel – which is also a landscape, sealed and stained with the separation from the mother's body, suffused with a sensuality in which the sense of loss already nestles. The shift to dealing with skin and with stitches (closing of wounds) in the late '90s led her to deliberations that dictated more radical means to her and pushed her to break through the circular frame of the painting, This breakthrough enabled her to go beyond the slow duration dictated by painting, beyond its long tradition and its ritual (the preparation of the canvas), and, primarily, beyond the sense of muteness that stems from the detailed treatment of the hidden, non-explicit, and so cultural elements of this medium.

Merav Shinn Ben Alon's engagement with skin was later directed to the cloth of the inside-out shirt (that experiences with the cloth as skin) stretched on a wooden frame as if it were a canvas – a last gesture to the ritual of preparing the canvas and stretching it on the frame. The old shirt cloth carries a memory of accumulating moments of life – the body that was covered by the cloth and the cloth that covered the body – and makes possible an experience that is tactile, sensual, erotic, in addition to the optical experience embodied in the painting. The next stage in her work – her engagement with stitches, holes, closing of wounds – traversed diverse artistic means of expression and opened up to contemporary technological possibilities such as photography and scanning.

The latest work by Merav Shin Ben Alon in the exhibition, done a short while before the opening, is a wall installation that incorporates work with red thread and a narrative text composed by the artist and handwritten by her on the wall. Already in 1991, at an exhibition in her studio in New York, Merav Shin Ben Alon incorporated both works in painting and texts (a sort of lexicon of concepts), in an endeavor to develop an additional experiential layer of writing, language, language and speech. During the ten years since then Merav Shinn Ben Alon painting while processing events from life that seeped into the depths of her work. Now she has again found the words she needs, and today she is engaged in a dynamic of examining the connection between text and image.