

Plain Abstract

Dani Karavan and Atar Geva

Curators: Anat Lidror and Noa Karavan

Dani Karavan, 89, international sculptor, creator and artist, has to date created over 70 projects in Israel and around the world, all of them places including masterpieces such as the Negev Monument, Kikar Levana (White Square) and Square of Culture (Habima Square). About three months ago, a comprehensive seminar on his work was held at the Israeli Art House - Tel Aviv-Jaffa Academic College, where one of the speakers, artist Michal Rovner, said: "When I asked Dani how he defined himself, he replied: I once called myself a painter, then a sculptor; I was called a decorator, then I was called a set designer. Today I call myself a sculptor, a creator. I open new windows, start from nothing, start from scratch. "

Rovner reads from the book - 'Word for Word', where she finds synonyms to the concept of artist: builder, creator, proponent, contributor, instigator, carver, thinker, initiator, mastermind, establisher, performer, explorer, connector, renovator, catalyst, cultivator, founder, producer, compiler, preparer, inventor, developer, planter, planner, installer, worker, doer. And she concludes: "So many spheres of creation."

Atar Geva, 45, still has a long road ahead, but if one looks for a definition for what he does one realizes that these words are not too big for him. He creates (sometimes with partners) art in the sphere between painting and sculpture; orchestrates live events which are large, breathing art works that combine many artists and their work and the public that participates and shares the experience. Such are Under the Streetlamp (a two-night arts festival in Givat Haviva) and Artaftefet (a happening combining art, science and education). In all those spheres, Geva is clearly thrilled with the uncontrollable space, the composition created by the material – which can be industrial paint, a burning process that sculpts newspapers, or artists and art, community and experience, all in one space.

Geva grew up (in Kibbutz Ein Shemer; his father Avital Geva is a conceptual artist working on the line between art, agriculture and education) in the lap of art, of conceptual thought, of agriculture, kibbutz and Hashomer Hatzair movement, as well as in the experience of exploration and experimentation. He developed them into research on the essence of matter in its broader sense, on the connection between disciplines, art and people.

Many people today may not know it, but Dani Karavan also grew up (in Tel Aviv of yesteryear) in a very similar environment. His parents, members of Hashomer Hatzair, made aliyah as young people to Bitaniya. His father was the first landscape architect of Tel Aviv from the 1940s through the 1960s. Karavan was a member of the movement in his youth. He was one of the founders of Kibbutz Harel, which later broke up following an ideological dispute. His first creations were illustrations for Hashomer Hatzair publications and the children's weekly, Davar Liyeladim.

Karavan is therefore, fundamentally, a member of Hashomer Hatzair, who was particularly moved on his recent visit to Givat Haviva before the opening of the exhibition, when he saw so many blue shirts in a busy dining room at noon. This is where he comes from and this is the source of his deep belief that art should be the property of the general public rather than of select individuals. That was why he traveled to Florence in the 1950s to learn the fresco technique. There he was exposed to the importance of place, and to art being place-dependent. He has thus evolved over the years to become a broad-minded artist who deals with the essence of a place, the simplest way of saying that which sustains a living place, where people are the ones who create it as such.

For both of them, the road may be long and unknown, but the work of art, one way or the other, will eventually have to reach its true, simple existence.

THE PLACE

Karavan and Geva meet at Givat Haviva, and in its home for art, the GH Art Gallery. They grow into and out of this place. Givat Haviva is a place that started with an idea; it is an institution that became a symbol and a living place. It is a place of kibbutz, of Hashomer Hatzair, of a Jewish and Arab shared society, a place of art, of young and old alike.

SIMPLE

Is it also a place of simplicity?

Givat Haviva and its surroundings are shaped like a kibbutz: A green lawn where one can run and feel free; Bauhaus buildings alongside old-time cabins; kibbutz-style public buildings (some of them architectural jewels designed by Shmuel Mestetskin and Chilik Arad) giving a glimpse of the brutalist, exposed, honest.

Karavan and Geva each create their own simplicity and discover the simplicity they have in common. That simplicity originates in their childhood and in the place, in playing on the sand at the seashore, at the junkyard, or on the heap of soil on the other side of the fence.

DEPTH

Simplicity can be mistaken for the explicit, but its true essence is deep. It ranges from the basics of an idea to the sublime, from the material to the spiritual. The simple is multi-layered, starting with the concrete, useful aspect, through myriad abstract meanings, all the way to the metaphysical. There are at least two conditions that are necessary in order to achieve simplicity as a mature artist: the ability to explore through experimentation and time (Geva) while fully attentive to the place (Karavan), and a connection to childhood. "The simple way is the deepest", wrote Dani to Atar recently. It is no coincidence that the depth of simplicity reaches the abstract, as it is inherently related to the essence of abstract art.

ABSTRACT

Karavan and Geva create an abstract that is real, alive, mundane, even sublime in its banality. A harmonious yet attainable abstract, which takes place using plants and light, sand and soil, geometric forms and industrial matter. The abstract art that has moved away from nature as a realistic representation returns to nature with Karavan and Geva. Atar Geva explores many options, Karavan's many options converge into one, and both of them aspire to the living, ideal harmony.

Abstract art appeared at a time when there was a feeling of creating a new, better world. It was a new, improved era, with the values of freedom and socialism ("spirit freed and hunger fed", wrote Saul Tschernichowsky). The artists of the time wished to repair the world through art, and abstract was born. Here is another quote from Michal Rovner at the seminar, as cited by Moti Omer in one of Dani Karavan's catalogs:

"Karavan is attentive and meets the requirements and data of the specific time and place. Dani advocated the need to put content in the features of the artistic act, believing that the main value of the artistic work is the act of repairing – whether repairing the flora or fauna, society, one's nearest surroundings or the world at large."

This is an encounter, a statement and the creation of a space between abstract art and humanistic ideals and moral values. It is a conscious choice of the innocent gaze that refuses to be cynical. A gaze that insists on remembering the original source of the work, even after a complete round of searching and listening that has finally come full circle to that which is simple and deep, its essence and nature.

MATTER

Creative materials such as sand, the olive tree and citrus trees as Karavan's (and Geva's) art materials become a continuous and endless work of art. Geva's spilled paint, spreading at will and becoming liquid or solidifying, "in an attempt to lose shape and find it again" (Atar Geva), as well as the sculptural combustion processes, and their accompanying scent, ask about the part of the processes as co-creators of the work itself. Karavan's partners are the wind and the air, the light and the shade, the movement of sand poured over sand.

For both artists, the abstract is the relationship between the geometric and natural shape, between industrial matter (concrete, wood, steel, mirror, paint) and natural art materials. **Time** is essential, almost another material. So are the light, the black and white scale, day/night, light/shadow. **The last material that is always there is the human being, the link that connects it all.**

Whole movements are created in the world today as a reaction to excess in quantities, stimuli, supply, competition, possibilities. They feel that **simplicity**, as a concept, is a good response to most of the problems that exist in the world right now. The younger generation will surely agree.

Karavan and Geva share this idea, as they create the best living art.

A heartfelt thank you is due to Kobi Sarya for volunteering the thinking, production, construction and placement of Dani Karavan's works.

Anat Lidror and Noa Karavan Cohen, curators

P.S. KIBBUTZ

The show also questions the idea of the kibbutz, of which Karavan was a member and Geva was born into and is still a member. Are the values of simplicity, such a natural part of the kibbutz and its heritage, essential to its existence? Is the kibbutz, or the idea of the kibbutz and what it can be in terms of influencing society today, giving up the essence of that deep and open **simplicity** as a way of life? Or is it determined to look for its definition for the 21st century?

Many Israelis want to move to the kibbutz today. Why is that? Because of that simplicity, which is so lacking from their life. At the same time, from within, entire kibbutz communities are increasingly engaged in the connection to a life of comfort and luxury, to that which is "private, personal, mine". Will the renewing kibbutz stop to consider whether this precious essence must be lost?

Anat Lidror