

## **Impressions from Yoav Weinfeld's new exhibition "Wuthering Heights"**

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Curator: Dr. Smadar Sheffi

The Tower Gallery, Eretz Israel Museum, Tel Aviv

"Wuthering Heights" is the personal and collective story of our time and place, painfully specific. It tells the story of the young child Almog, the son of Tal Levi (Weinfeld's life partner). Tal's brother, Or, was kidnapped to Gaza on October 7 from the party in Re'im, and his partner, Almog's mother Einav Levi, was murdered. During the period when Tal and Weinfeld were central to Almog's daily care and protection until Or's release from captivity, the exhibition took shape.

Weinfeld, one of the most thoughtful, talented, and sensitive voices in local art, employs strategies of distance that paradoxically sharpen and distill emotion. Through the chilling and precise beauty of his art, he allows the pure soul of Almog to rise and unsettle us, the viewers, to the core.

Before us unfolds a practice layered in strata, one atop another or unto themselves, made through processes without direct hand contact (no brush or pencil) but with stencils and airbrush. Weinfeld is a master of this technique, conjuring poetic phantoms of images and forms, both melting and precise, set against chaotic, anarchic chemical reactions on the surface. His occasional hand-drawn marks humanize the other layers, at times belonging and at times alien and vulnerable, cutting into the surface with mechanical incisions.

The curatorial work of Sheffi and Weinfeld is a feat of thought, positioning the works within the topography of the space, extending beyond the entrance floor up into the brutalist tower above.

The masterpiece of the exhibition is "Boy Looking Down 2", a profile portrait of Almog, lost in thought, dreamy and melancholic. Created with white airbrush and stencils on a gleaming aluminum panel, Almog glows as if his features were etched into a block of ice shimmering before melting, both tangible and ephemeral. Two aluminum arms hold the child's panel away from a larger aluminum sheet that serves as the base, itself set slightly apart from the wall. On this base Weinfeld painted a diagonal cascade of fire flowing over the cold aluminum, scattering sparks that disintegrate into a grainy grid.

This complex work of drawing, painting, and sculpture preserves—like resin crystalizing—the moment of innocence, sadness, and fate, in which Weinfeld seeks to protect the child's soul from the devouring fire of evil. It echoes Nathan Alterman's poem "Song of Watchfulness" to his daughter: "Guard your soul from the burning, from the cutting / from what is near like dust, like skies / (...) / and from the one who kills like the water of a well, like kitchen fire." Displayed alone in darkness, lit so it seems to float, the piece imprints itself in memory with lyrical theatricality.

On another aluminum panel affixed to a steel column, Weinfeld created, perhaps with the same stencil, another portrait of Almog. This time a black spray silhouette, the child's features dissolving like ash. A fragile, delicate image, later wounded by the artist's knife blade, scratching the aluminum with a dense mesh of sharp diamonds, a failed attempt to bind image, emotion, and cold surface into one entity.

In "Inhaler", rendered in bright blue through stencils with the concentrated force of graffiti, the cubist body of an asthma inhaler slumps against hard aluminum. From its dark opening emerges a cloud of oxygen, a halo of milky light. A minor work at first glance, its crystalline beauty holds

within it life or death for those deprived of breath and freedom.

"Handkerchief" stands out as a particularly beautiful, almost exceptional piece in the exhibition. On a large aluminum panel suspended in space like a frozen curtain, Weinfeld painted, via stencils, a screen of horizontal stripes resembling light seeping through closed shutters. Upon this screen floats the image of a nearly transparent white handkerchief, like a benevolent ghost. Perhaps this is what Almog saw waking from a nap, as Tal and Yoav watched over him. (Hints of the handkerchief seep through the back of the panel as well.) In her curatorial text, Sheffi connects it to Veronica's veil, upon which the face of the crucified was imprinted. Weinfeld's handkerchief, devoid of image, is itself a tiny miracle of fragile existence.

Ascending the tower, the curation grows strikingly inventive. Small-scale works under the title "The Solitude of the Lost" are charged amalgams of abstraction in viscous states, recalling early evolutionary stages of life emerging from the inanimate, set against geometric grids attempting to chart them. They merge with the aluminum window frames of the staircase, becoming extensions of them, conceptual colonies mirroring the fate of the landscape outside.

At the tower's top, Weinfeld and Sheffi transformed the space into a "resonance chamber" of sight and sound. The panoramic windows were sealed with aluminum panels cut by laser into a lexicon of negative images, ranging from figurative to abstract: winds and rivers, objects and body parts, sea and land creatures, some still, some in motion. In certain sunlight angles they cast inverted shadow-images across the floor. Through these cutouts, glimpses of Tel Aviv appear strange, unfamiliar, as if viewed through prison bars absorbed into the art itself.

Sound fills the space through a suspended sculpture opposite the sealed windows, crafted from an aluminum panel carved into the head of a metallic harp. Positioned diagonally, it connects to a motor that occasionally moves aluminum arms across its strings, producing metallic, cold, echoing tones. More than functional, it seems stuck, rasping, flailing, storing energy.

The exhibition was initially planned for the municipal gallery in Ramla, curated by Sheffi (then its director). But after the gallery was abruptly closed by the municipality, Ramla lost the show. Through the upheavals of time, it evolved into the museum-scale exhibition it deserves (on view until the end of August).

