

Interview- David Reeb

DR- I am very glad to be exhibiting in Umm El Fahem, I have taken a part in group shows here and it's always been a pleasure, and I'm particularly glad because of Assem Abu Shakra, a wonderful painter I met in the 1980's at the Kalisher school of Art. He used to say that he would love for there to be an art museum here, and I'm very glad it's starting to happen and happy to be showing here.

IL- Maybe we should start with the paintings of protests, if you think you could tell a little about how it starts- from participating in protests, through photographing, choosing a frame, how does a painting like that come about?

DR- After I began going more often to demonstrations, against the separation barrier, I started photographing there and found that I enjoyed recording video. It had a documentary function, and could also be utilized as a legal document if necessary, and after I worked on that awhile, after going to demonstrations for a while, I started to think about making paintings after those video clips, after certain frames. I liked the possibility of choosing one suitable frame out of thousands...

IL –What is the consideration when you pick a frame from a clip you've photographed? How would you describe the way you choose a frame that you're going to paint?

DR- Usually images that describe a situation in some slightly indirect or slightly general manner. Generally I didn't make paintings representing graphic violence, although that has rather blurred lately...

IL- Let's talk a little about the painting of anemones.

DR- In fact it's called "anemones". For a long time I photographed demonstrations at Nabi Saleh, where they stole a spring belonging to the village; where you see the cars in the painting, on the other side of the road, there's a spring stolen from the village, and during the demonstrations the villagers often try to get to the spring and the soldiers stop them on the way, and here there are soldiers down there, they've been sent to stop the people from the village from arriving down there and invading the spring and the settlement Halamish next to it, they're firing up towards the young people throwing stones from up on the hill, close to where I'm photographing here, and one of the village youths, a

young boy, saw the flowers blooming because it was spring, like now, and stopped doing what he was supposed to be doing and started frantically collecting flowers, anemones, presumably to bring his mother, his girlfriend, to bring home, and there was something beautiful and touching about it and I made the painting after it. Some kind of disruption or shift from one context to another has always interested me as a subject for a painting. For me it always makes the painting interesting.

IL- Often it's on the borderline between landscape painting and political painting...

DR- Look, both landscape painting and political painting are well defined disciplines. Perhaps not political painting but political art. And I think it's easier to look at things when they're not at the center of a subject but in between things.

IL- Let's talk a little about the titles you choose for the paintings, if you have an example.

DR- Regarding the painting with the tires that I painted a few days ago, it shows tires burning, which is a very typical sight at every protest and we've seen it many times, it's part of the culture of life in this country, and I named the painting "culture". I think in Israel we have a special culture. Our minister of culture comes from a military background, she was the I.D.F. spokesperson. When I went to demonstrations I remember being always amazed at how far the I.D.F. spokesperson's description of what had happened was from what I'd seen. As I remember she also used to be the chief censor. And now they've made her our minister of culture, and I think it's a special culture in Israel, and I think these burning tires represent nicely our culture in Israel, so that's an example of a title which is also a kind of joke.

EL- Let's also speak a bit about the abstract painting, for instance this not-so-easy painting, the purple-yellow one.

DR- This painting is like a doodle, it is marks upon the surface of the painting, sometimes using a broader brush, sometimes a narrower one...

EL- It looks almost like furniture upholstery or curtains dating from the '70's and '80's, abstract painting which has become a textile pattern and you bring it back to being painting.

DR- Yes, that's right, it's on the borderline between those two things, but a lot of the things I do deal with this kind of late expressive painting,

which has become emptied of meaning, and I still treat it as though it has meaning.

IL- When you switch between realist and abstract painting, how does that work for you in your subjective experience, is this I that paints the same I? Is it different?

DR- I really follow my desires in those matters. When I want to or feel like doing paintings after photographs I go that way, and when I decide to interrupt that and make some abstract paintings I do that.

EL- My impression is that there is a change in the handwriting, that for the realistic paintings you are more responsible, disciplined, "going to work", and for the abstract paintings you're David Reeb playing in the studio, with more of a sense of humor and more freedom.

DR- The figurative painting is usually connected to real events, and many times refers to real people, and demands a certain seriousness regarding what is represented in the paintings, and that's not the case with the abstract painting. Doing the abstract paintings I can have fun and make a fool of myself as much as I please. With the abstract painting I feel more freedom to be playful. Figurative painting takes me in a more precise and stylized direction.

EL- Let's discuss another abstract painting, the one that looks a little like an orientalist fantasy, how would you describe it?

DR- In this painting, which I did about three years ago, I created square and more circular shapes, and it started assuming this architectural look and reminded me a little of The Old City, the alleyways of the old city in Jerusalem, and it looked a bit erotic too, there were curved shapes, there's something a little erotic about it.

IL- I'm thinking of the possibility that the abstract paintings are more urban, that there is something about that architecture that comes across, in the layers, in the forms, in the circles...

DR- Look, it undercuts the possibility of meaning to some extent, because in a painting like that there's a very low level of meaning, in fact it says very little, but it's still alive, it somehow gets a life through these few actions.

IL- Let's talk about the mirror painting...

DR- Of course it's not really a painting but it's disguised as a painting, because what is it? It's a stuck-on assemblage, or a kind of very flat sculpture, a relief made up of pieces of mirror.

EL- And one can't escape the thought that it's a fragmentary self-portrait.

DR- But not just mine, but anyone's who looks at it.

EL- Yes, the idea of a fragmentary self-portrait is universal.

DR- And it also means that we are all similar, the maker is like the viewer, which is an implicit basic assumption in painting, that we are sharing something with the audience.