

## Can art possibly object to the object?

**"Measure," currently on show at the Givon Art Forum in Neve Tzedek, does not content itself with the fine assortment of thought-provoking artworks it presents, but chooses to turn against what it sees as 'a disease of the object' the artworld has supposedly fallen under**

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Currently on show at the Givon Art Forum, the Neve Tzedek extension of the Tel Aviv gallery, is an exhibition organized around a thesis. Attempting something rarely seen in museums, art centers, and least of all galleries – out of a fear, perhaps, of drawing something too general, or yet out of short-sightedness, or inertia – Noemi Givon sets out to make a bold statement with regard to contemporary art. The show she has put together isn't just a fine assortment of thought-provoking artworks, nor is there a specific theme it revolves around. Departing from a current state of things it claims to diagnose, "Measure" proceeds with concern and anger, finally to lay out, in plastic terms, its polemic presentation of the issue at hand.

Givon makes the argument that, as of late, the art world has been stricken with a malady of objects. Much of what is produced and displayed within it comes under the vague and generalized category of "the object" – whether sculpture, ready-made, assemblage or maquette. And the category remains vague and generalized, offering as it does an easy outlet for mixed-media combinations and obscured definitions. Anything can qualify as 'an object', regardless of material: From iron, wood, plastic and polyurethane to everyday objects found on the street, just as intricate, labor-intensive structures – not to mention the abundance of textiles (curtains and tapestries, fabrics and threads) that have descended upon art exhibitions like manna from heaven, or ceramic objects that have likewise worked their way in, sneaking in a slow, individual trickle.

Givon opens the exhibition text with a battle cry, calling on "to object the object" – to stand against that which stands against us. This is not an easy claim to make, as every work of art is, after all, also an object – an *objet d'art* – and for more than a hundred years now, just about any object can qualify as art object. So what does one object to, in effect? Givon's call, perhaps, is to forgo this elusive, futile category of 'the object' – a category that blends and fuses different types of media, consolidating everything and lacking validity, as a result. This is a semantic and rhetorical claim, one of definitions and classifications that are of relevance to the art discourse. But it encloses, perhaps, another claim: to forgo anything that can be understood only in terms of 'an object'. This would then be a confrontational claim, one that takes on a whole category of works that have no part in any of the existing classifications of medium, works that have only of late begun to enter art exhibits – those that don't easily qualify as "art". This would make it a

claim of a different order, then, one pertaining to artistic taste – and so also to the symbolic power to determine who's in and who's out.

The show unfolds in-between these two claims. Presented across two floors of exhibition space, the works grouped here are meant to generate a counter-paradigm to the object. "Measure" features a good amount of sculpture, but painting and collage are represented as well, together with light-boxes and ready-made objects that are, to an extent, treated. It reveals the depths of Givon's collection of Israeli art, and the hanging, as per usual, is elegant. The show's vanishing point resides in the only work included in it of international origin: A series of photographs by Pierre Huyghe and Philippe Parreno that show a barrage of fireworks being shot into the night, creating "a grin without a cat" – an image devoid of an object.

At the heart of the show are works in sculpture that look as objects but are not just that – fumbling as it were the inner limit of sculpture. "Black Table," a work by Micha Ullman, is an iron table that has been laid on it back, its legs extended upwards and the base turned into a water basin. It is a utilitarian object that has been turned on its axis, its basic position shifted – taken out of context and turned into a lab experiment in communicating vessels, just as it is a personal experience for the viewers, who get to glimpse their own reflection in its watery mirror.

Across from it, digital prints by Nurit David are mounted on corrugated plastic hangers, appearing at first like items in a storefront garment display. But these prints are only the end product of an excruciating process involving both manual and digital reworking, with elements retrieved from previous works by the artist multiplied, altered and reworked, then printed individually, to end up somewhere between pattern and figure – between the geometric and the human.

A sculpture by Itzhak Golombek, a wooden box with a thin slit on its face, the shape of a shaving blade, and a painting by Gabriel Klasmer, where two small circular holes were cut into the canvas – are each imbedded in the tradition of a familiar medium, a territory within which the status of a slit or a hole – respectively – is explored as object. However, the 14 beehive doors that make up a work by Moshe Gershuni – dating from 1970, and presented here in its entirety for the first time – begin as a ready-made, to become boxes containing formal compositions and well-orchestrated material processes. These are the ancestors – none of which, according to Givon, is tainted by "the object".

In the next generation, things get complicated: A curtain by Maya Attoun – a long, undulating purple sheet impressed with a repeated pattern – was indeed created after an etching the artist had made at the etching workshop in Kibbutz Cabri, itself part of an ongoing research by the artist on the Frankenstein story, as are several other works of hers in the show; but it is, still, a curtain. The same goes for a metal structure by Hila Toony Navok, entirely made of grill racks that are hung vertically, on a wooden surface that lends it a human form: To what extent has

the artist raised the object to the level of sculpture? A sack of fabric by Avi Sabah – its upper opening agape and the downward draping meticulously arranged, to evoke the human figure – is the zero-level of matter reworked into shape, entirely subject to the gesture of correct hanging. These works constantly threaten to cross the line – a forbidden line, according to Givon – between art and object.

But to mark the object as art's outer limit is nothing new. The ready-made object was supposed to be the non-artistic entity that, once displaced and re-contextualized, would become work, in the confines of an exhibition space. Even the minimalist sculptures of Robert Morris, who just recently passed away – these "specific objects" or "unitary forms" that have set out to free sculpture from the slightest shred of representation – were suspected as non-art. Michael Fried, in his attack on minimalism, wrote that they put on a theater where the object assumes a stage presence; that they have no presence of their own, but rather through the viewers they tempt to walk around them, who are then reflected by, or absorbed into, the works. It is a theater of objects that threatens to replace sculpture, painting too – in fact all of visual art, turning it into stage art. No doubt, everything that is an object of mass production on the one hand, and an artisanal design object on the other, is essentially suspect. The world is indeed replete with objects. But even more so than objects, at present it is replete with images – not necessarily incarnated in the flesh, but mostly digital, coded and circulating via screens. We have become producers and consumers of video far more than piles of matter.

But this Givon doesn't tackle. She wages a somewhat lost war against the tactile object – from a modernist standpoint. She insists on the distinctions between the different media, on the working of matter, on highlighting the new, on the intrinsic qualities of a work of art, on the good measure. She is highbrow, uncompromising, trenchant. There is a quixotic flair to it: A medieval chivalric romance played out in modern times. But what is to become of art without the quixotic impulse?

"Measure," curator: Noemi Givon. Givon Art Forum (3 Alroy St., Tel Aviv). Visit by registration, no end date