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Art

Art: Exhibition addresses complex culture, identity and history of Israel

Joseph and Barrie Ann George For The Sentinel 17 hrs ago

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Michael Halak's painting "Syrian-African Cracked Olives" is displayed as part of "Visions of Place" at the Susquehanna Museum until May 19.

submitted

The current exhibition on display in the main gallery at the Susquehanna Art Museum, “Visions of Place-Complex Geographies in Contemporary Israeli Art” explores the poignant impact of place in Israeli life, as seen through the eyes of some of the country’s most prominent contemporary artists.

Featuring about 50 photographic, video, painted and mixed-media works by 34 Israeli artists, the exhibition illuminates intertwining views of history, place and identity in Israeli culture. While the majority of the artists are Jewish, others are Muslim, Christian and Druze, reflecting the diverse mosaic of peoples that populate the country; and notably, half of the artists are women.

These contemporary artists present contending views of history, culture and identity, casting a spotlight on modern Israel, while questioning age-old relationships to — and conflicts over — place.

Dor Guez’s photograph on a light box, “Two Palestinian Riders, Ben Shemen Forest,” shows an Israeli landscape that may surprise many. A dense forest in a large national park, with pine trees, picnic tables and campfire, disturbed by a blurred movement; referring to the Palestinian people who are represented as ghosts who had formerly inhabited the land.

Similarly, in an example of the agriculture of Israel, Tal Shochat’s photograph “Afsrsemon (Persimmon)” highlights a lush persimmon tree at the height of maturity. The vibrant colors, give the tree an almost “too real” quality. Part of a series of fruit tree

portraits shot against a black background, Shochat beautifully represents this important crop and major export of Israel.

In “Former Ammunition Storage Area,” a photograph by Shai Kremer, the landscape is marred by the remnants of the Israeli military presence. The image of the deserted military camp illustrates the effects of conflict upon not only the people, but also the environment of the country.

Sigalit Landau’s bronze sculpture “model for Shelter” was a model for a larger piece produced for a 2013 exhibition. Based on a real bomb shelter, the stairs have been altered to lead to nowhere, thereby rendering it useless.

“Toffee” by Hila Karabelnikov is a pair of hands holding candies bearing the greeting, mazel tov (good luck). Created with packing tape on board, this colorful image has a painterly quality, despite being made with such unique materials.



Michael Halak’s “Syrian-African Cracked Olives” is a stunning example of photorealism, depicting a smashed jar of olives, a product synonymous with the Middle East region. The title makes reference to “Syrian-African olives,” symbolizing the

complexities of identities in the region, which can even be attributed to products.

“Betrothed to the Land” is a found wedding dress that artist Andi Arnovitz has sewn rocks into the hem to represent the conflicted relationship Israeli people, particularly Jewish and Palestinian women, have to the land. The dress’s stones represent the connection to the land, but at the same time the burden it has imposed on the people.

Tamir Zadok’s “Wonder Jew” addresses the Christian stereotype of the “Wandering Jew” being condemned to wander for not accepting Christ. Ironically it displays a carousel of picture postcards showing the artist posing in front of major monuments around the world. From the Eiffel Tower to the Coliseum, Zadok is shown wearing his Israeli army uniform posing in recognizable locales, proudly demonstrating that his wandering is a choice and not a punishment.

“The Dead Sea for the Time Being” is an assemblage of pastel-colored ceramic disks by Maya Muchawsky Parnas. The shape and configuration of the display evokes the topography and landscape of Israel. The mountains, deserts and bodies of water are represented by the smooth shaped green, pink and beige colored pieces, a fragile conglomeration, reminding us of the delicate state of the land due to both man-made as well as natural threats to its environment.

A powerful and engaging exhibition, “Visions of Place: Complex Geographies in Contemporary Israeli Art” offers a unique lens through which to view and better understand the myriad of complexities of Israel. Geography, in all its physical, personal, religious, political and historical contexts, remains an inescapable part of Israeli life.

“Visions of Place” demonstrates the richness and diversity of the contemporary Israeli art landscape, and by extension, Israeli society and its place in the world. Though focusing specifically on Israel, the themes addressed in the exhibition also have a clear applicability to the broader modern world.

“Visions of Place” is on view at the Susquehanna Art Museum at The Marty and Tom Philips Family Art Center through May 19. The museum is located at 1401 N. Third St., Harrisburg, and is open to the public from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesday to Saturday, with extended hours on Wednesdays until 7 p.m. The museum is also open on Sundays from noon to 5 p.m.

Free parking is available in the lot immediately adjacent to the rear of the museum at Calder and James streets. General admission is \$8; \$5 for teachers, seniors and veterans; and free for children younger than 12. For additional information on the museum and exhibitions, visit its website at www.SusquehannaArtMuseum.org.

Joseph George holds a degree in history and art history from Dickinson College. He and his wife, Barrie Ann have spent over 30 years together traveling and visiting art galleries locally and throughout the world. They have been writing about the local art scene for six years. Their tastes range from fine art to street art.