

Galia Bar-Or

### **The Road to Ein Harod<sup>1</sup>**

Efrat Galnoor's journey, following Amos Kenan's dystopian novel *The Road To Ein Harod*, started in Tel-Aviv; just like Rhafi's, the book's protagonist.

Aside from that parallel, Galnoor's journey begins at a particularly address: Oded Shatil's apartment on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of 8 Liberman St. Shatil opened a contemporary art gallery in his own apartment after the closure of the gallery he had managed for four years.<sup>2</sup>

His avant-garde gallery situated in an everyday private space earned a high reputation due to Shatil's personal and cultural-political commitment.

His move dovetailed with Galnoor's experience as an artist. An exhibition of her paintings<sup>3</sup> at the Mishkan Museum of Art, Ein Harod had closed six months earlier..." and I was feeling a little lost." At that fragile personal Junction, Gal-Nur recorded a conversation we had in a small cafe in the valley, in the hot winds of early summer 2017.

We spoke of crossing lines, of possible actions, and of Kenan's book *The Road to Ein Harod*.

What stands out in the notes Galnoor made of our meeting is the sense of emergency.

It seems that although the sense of threat was obviously linked to the dystopian content of Kenan's book, the distress and urgency grew also from the contemporary zeitgeist.

There is something exceedingly local in Kenan's book; embarking on a journey which follows a promise of freedom and solidarity whose very existence is no longer certain. There are times when this kind of violence described in the book is paralyzing, like fate. At other times something in the book evokes an option, a return to ways that might return a human gaze or touch as a pulse of life.

Galnoor wrote: "trying out something that has no home and no space." Or "work simply" "maybe something is resolved differently, there may be hope after all." We met again three years later for a gallery talk at the last segment of the journey held at the Afula Municipal Gallery. The curator Oz Zluf is a member of the cooperative movement "Tarbut" [culture].

COVID-19's time invested that finale with special meaning, like a thought-provoking challenge to a catastrophic rupture that offers other ways of moving forward.

### **Motto: Still life and the Compass Rose.**

Starting the journey in Oded Shatil's gallery seems like a tribute to contemplation of art that is only possible in a private space that is open to the public.

Right at the entrance, Galnoor placed a spectacular and disturbing 'still life' of pomegranates blown up on a kitchen table.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This article was first published in Arnon Ben David & Ishai Kalter, editors, Tyuta Magazine, June 2021

<sup>2</sup> Julie Maman opened the Julie M. Gallery in 1975 (7 Glikson St., Tel-Aviv). The gallery closed in 2016.

<sup>3</sup> Nymphs, Mishkan Museum of Art - Ein Harod, 2017; curator Yaniv Shapira.

<sup>4</sup> Translator's note: in Hebrew "pomegranate" is the same word as "hand grenade".

She chose a non-painting installation to hint at a painting, or rather a genre of painting: still life, known in French as *Natur Mort* [dead nature]. Still life painting requires time and reflection of the viewer because it inevitably touches on the fleeting nature of life, and the question that Galnoor insists on asking: how can a visual image also be political and conceptual?

The crushed pomegranates (one of The Seven Species<sup>5</sup>) are in essence a performative opening, leading the viewers to Shatil's living room where Galnoor placed a large circular collage representing a metaphorical path to Ein Harod. The collage, a circle of paintings of various sizes, like painterly markings or postcards related to the places she planned to include in her journey. At the heart of this compass rose, Galnoor placed Shatil's house: "It's as if I stood on the roof and looked around 360° and saw Herzliya and Sidna Ali, and Deir Yassin and I made this improbable map."

But Galnoor did not really climb to the roof of 8 Liberman St. The map was a ghost map, imaginary; its directions fictional. The image brought to mind another compass rose, or practically two that she showed several years earlier at the Ramat Gan Museum of Israeli Art (2013).<sup>6</sup> For that exhibition she did actually climb to the roof. ,

For each series she dictated a set of rules or procedure how they were to be done. The series *360°* was a set of paintings made over five consecutive days and describing, in a circular motion, the 360° panoramic view from the museum roof. The second series was based on a series of overexposed photographs Galnoor took from the museum roof. The overexposure washed out the details, creating an almost abstract image which Galnoor transferred to canvas. She likened these circular pieces to "observation tables" placed in mountain viewpoints to help orient viewers to landmarks in the open scenery.

The Ramat Gan show was titled: *Landscape with Museum and Gun Post*,<sup>7</sup> alluding to a position dominating the landscape. The term "Shoot," used in photography, implies the violence associated with the active action of the viewer. For as well known, the view of the landscape is charged in advance with positions of origin and purpose, which seep and predetermine one's view of the not-so-innocent object that is a landscape image. From her position on the roof, using conceptual photography, Galnoor dealt with that process through the materiality of the photo-image that emerges and unfolds .

Her photography never attempts to "frame a picture" or to capture a "decisive moment". Likewise, Galnoor has never exhibited photography as such. Her photography is a roving technique that captures visual-corporeal imprints of the urban space – moving, turning, continuing – as though the camera were an organ of a body moving through space. Over the years, Galnoor developed an approach to painting that incorporates a conceptual-collagist sensibility with photography. As she wrote in her notes: "to go around, take pictures, paint, layer, so it doesn't become synthetic."

Galnoor regarded her Ramat Gan exhibit as "site specific" as it centered on the museum, its structure, surroundings and even its content. The exhibition circled the museum, but also challenged its centrality by embedding the building in its urban setting and "over-exposing" its activity.

*Nymphs* at the Mishkan Museum, Ein Harod (2017) was also a site specific exhibition focused on the courtyard' water lilies. But at Oded Shatil's gallery she had taken the opposite approach: not a landscape with a gun post but launching a voyage.

## Liminal Encounters

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<sup>5</sup> Translator's note: Seven fruits and grains mentioned in the Bible as typical of the land of Israel.

<sup>6</sup> *Landscape with Museum and Gun Post*, Ramat Gan Museum of Israeli Art, 2013; Curator Meir Aharonson.

<sup>7</sup> Translator's note: Literally "a shooting post".

The outline Galnoor laid out in the gallery served as scaffolding for an idea to weave a network of relationships and trust – on her way from Tel-Aviv northward through Wadi Ara to Ein Harod.

Her work became decentralized, losing the unifying focus of a physical structure. Indeed, there is liberation in detaching from an institution or a space. Untethering, moving to places and landscapes to weave a web of relationships without anchor is a leap into the temporary and the unknown. The compass rose in Shatil's gallery was more an imaginary map than an observation table, and as long as the journey did not begin it offered only an abstract idea of a journey. For every point along the way began to take shape only when the artist reached it. Wandering has its own logic and it can sometimes lead to districts where the encounter unexpectedly shifts the directions of the journey. "When I went to Herzliya, I entered a mosque and met Bilal Jaber Nashaf, the Imam of Sidna Ali. When I told him about the project, he suggested I visit old mosques in Taybeh. And so, my path had suddenly shifted." The stop in Taybeh afforded Galnoor an acquaintance with the nation's fringes, where life exists in liminal spaces – the polar opposites of romantic landscapes. At the heart of the Zionist self-evident sense of belonging beats the encounter with the existential (not the metaphorical) 'other'; they who are not contained by any system, also not the civilian one. For example: Asmahan Gbale, who received Gal-Nur and introduced her to Taybeh has been operating for years without an Israeli identity card. She is deprived of all basic rights. It seems that every stop in this journey affords an encounter with the human experience within the vulnerable fabric of time and with the ever shifting relationships that grows life forces against the destructive ones and exerts itself against silencing and erasure. The road to Ein Harod is paved with worlds within worlds, and one must leave the highway to experience the sights and the forces of unity. "This is an attempt to raise the stakes" wrote Galnoor, "I don't just come and drop off paintings, I create a space of time." To create a space of time means opening up other ways to permeate past present and future channels to seep through. We are "captives in time," Gal-Nur noted.

How can this seepage to other spaces happen through painting? How can painting be freed from time's prison? Galnoor's awareness of these questions has led her to question painting itself. Galnoor studied at two schools diametrically opposed in their approach to painting. The HaMidrasha Faculty of Arts is based on the conceptual and collagistic which is evident, for example, in the combination of photography and painting; or with an emphasis on the 'procedure' - rules of action that are set in advance to create a series of works, for the procedure is the message.

After Gal-Nur graduated from the Midrasha, she began studying painting at Israel Hirschberg's Jerusalem Studio School.

Her studies at Hirschberg's school introduced her to the painting method of 'color spots' emphasizing spots of light and hue as opposed to the traditional emphasis on drawing a boundary line and shape. But this method also aimed at painting on canvas or paper in the face of a landscape or portrait - a 'high' painting that has its own school, method and world of positions. But Galnoor's painting has created new connections and hybrids. For Galnoor's painterly language is above-all collage-based, a patchwork quilt. It is saturated with color spots and internal deviations of context and expression. Each time, the paintings newly challenge the gestalt, sleuthing after the lacunae and the shadow of the visible. It never ceases asking how a visual image can simultaneously be sensual and poetic, and also, conceptual and political.

At every exhibition along her journey Galnoor, using various media, created and showed in situ. At her stop in Ein Harod, Galnoor did not exhibit paintings but rather covered the central wall with a kind of drawn compass rose made of shorthand text – a flow-chart of a conversation after the fact. The work included names of key people and places with lines connecting them to each other and to her – as if reaching out to form bonds. It seemed like Ein Harod would be her last stop, but the final exhibition took place in Afula where a nascent cultural movement is creating a network of inclusionary grass-roots culture activists and actions in Israel's peripheral cities.

## **Free Afula**

The Afula municipal gallery devoted its three largest spaces to the final exhibition, curated by Oz Zluf, in the *Road to Ein Harod* series. The opening took place under the looming shadow of the COVID-19 pandemic which in fact forced the show to close prematurely before reopening. The crisis revealed the institutional and social foundations of each country and society: the level of solidarity and the sources of resilience and laid bare buried fault lines. Long repressed tensions that lay just beneath the surface have broken free.

In the high-ceilinged foyer, Galnoor made a new installation devoted to public space in Afula. While her exhibition in Givaat Haim dealt with traumatic memories and historical rifts through paintings of water towers and a war memorial; the exhibition in Afula dealt with the living public space, and through it touched the tip of a glacier of a rift in relations between different populations – not only in the city of Afula but at the core of Israeli society.

In another space, Zluf hung works by the many of the people who aided Galnoor over her two-year journey. Colleagues from the Midrasha, past and current students, groups aligned with the *Tarbut* movement, and local artists. Some of the works were made in direct relation to Galnoor's journey and consisted of documentation of the project as it progressed. Others were either inspired by or had some affinity to Galnoor as an artist or as a teacher. Through this group exhibition, Zluf expanded the project beyond the usual bounds of an artist's oeuvre to encompass the way Galnoor's work continues to ripple in expanding circles, inseminating ideas and imaginations, and even kindling new biographical forms.

For the main part of the exhibition, Galnoor laid a long collage-like series of paintings and video works that represented different stops along her journey. The pieces, starting with Shatil's gallery and continuing from there, were not hung discretely but rather in a continuous flowing stream along a serpentine wall that split the hall lengthwise. In the very middle of the wall, separate from all the rest and marked by a graffiti-like yellow arrow and a red heart, hung a glowing little yellow painting – like a beating heart or a lit candle: *The Beach Evening Primrose*. Galnoor's painting of the flower is indeed tiny, like the sketch for the postage stamp bearing its image that was printed for 1960's Memorial Day.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the stamp, where the flower appears in daylight and couched in sand (this flower blooms only at night) Galnoor's primrose blooms in pitch darkness, surrounded by faint white circles that evoke something target-like, or a ghostly bouquet. It appears as if lit by a floodlight and the heart-shaped petals drip some yellow fluid as if from a wound.

This image illustrates how Galnoor's painting seeps into different time-streams, to feelings and thoughts; and how her works interconnect. A video in which Galnoor tells her daughter a fable about the Evening Primrose was featured in the first exhibition, back in Shatil's gallery. In that piece, she told of a "small dry fruit" that joined Yaakov when he emigrated from Europe to Eretz Israel. Yaakov's family found the conditions in the Middle East difficult and decided to return to Europe. But on his trip to buy the return tickets, Yaakov saw a field of yellow flowers covering the rocky beach. The flower told him "don't you remember me? We immigrated together." Lesson learned. The story ends happily. Except that beyond that yellow patch we see ashen grey charcoal drawings of Taybeh, and Galnoor's video with Asmahan in the olive grove. The red stain in the Taybeh sequence spreads and burns, culminating in two large landscapes paintings of the charcoal making facility in Um El Fahem. A post-apocalyptic landscape.

Within the sequence of works, Galnoor inserted four small paintings of the horsemen of the apocalypse: white, red, black and pale. These, according to the Book of Revelation, carry with them plague, war, famine, and death. In Revelation, each opens a seal and says "Come and see." "It was important to me that this call, 'Come and See,' be included in the exhibition," said Galnoor.

The sequence ends (or begins) in Megiddo – on the way to Afula. Megiddo (Armageddon) is, according to Christian eschatology, the site of the final battle between God and Satan at the end of times. Galnoor focused on the painting "The Megiddo Mosaic." At the heart of the painting is an archeological mosaic excavation of an ancient

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<sup>8</sup> Tzvi Narkiss, *Beach Evening Primrose Sketch*. The stamp was printed in 1960 to mark Memorial Day.

church, Some say it is the oldest church ever found.<sup>9</sup> Galnoor. deals with the relationships represented by a Christian prison guard from Megiddo Prison, who is excited to be digging such an ancient Christian site, the Muslim prisoners recruited for the excavations, and the Jewish archeologist supervising the excavation on behalf of the Israel Antiquities Authority.

This was the sweeping sequence of the collage. But the exhibition included a sound piece that Galnoor created in Afula: Radio Free Afula. This work echoed the radio call from Radio Free Ein Harod in Kenan's book. The call that started Rhafi on his way. In Radio Free Afula Galnoor interviews residents as to what is freedom? Is Afula a free city?

In the midst of the chaos and uncertainty, the life force that Galnoor points to, . is weaving the journey network that focuses on the human encounters event that which is ongoing and that which is ignited during the journey. It starts the journey in Shatil's gallery with a video of Shatil and Galnoor sitting around a campfire, and it is projected at the end point in Afula, during the meeting of all the journey's participants around the campfire at the same site and the same time as it began.

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<sup>9</sup> The church, discovered in 2005, was dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E. The dig was overseen by Yotam Tepper of the Israel Antiquities Authority.