

Maayan Elyakim's practice, which includes experiments with materials alongside theoretical research, begins with attempts to decode, touch, and nudge the intrinsic essence of an image, matter or phenomena. All along, cultural and historical elements drift away from their original context, integrate with each other, and deconstruct the traditional hierarchies to reveal new affiliations. It seems that the works were created out of their own inherent logic that is kept intact and expands as the work is created, and each layer is equally treated with care. As the hierarchies between content and matter, symbol and form, are annulled – the the display method take on an integral role in the artistic process itself.

In the current exhibition, Elyakim treats the gallery as a mindful space that is a sear for a multitude of events and tensions: formalistic, medial and symbolic. The works implement a twisting and branching bond between them, which resonates through different frequencies and axes, contrasting rays of light and all-absorbing darkness; springing water and suffocating drought; the moon and the sun.

During the last two years, Elyakim delved into the work of the group of artists who established and worked in Bezalel in the early 20th century. Similar to the current zeitgeist, the Bezalel group's grasp of time was not linear but spiral. Biblical stories, European orientalist fantasies, archeological relics, early modernist art, Palestinian embroidery, Bedouin weaving and Yemenite jewelry making, were all mixed together in the creation of decorative objects and fine-art that expressed the essence of the local spirit and culture of that time.

By immersing into the local experience: the founding fathers of Israeli Art (Schatz, Raban, Lilien) and local nature (the scorching sun, the wilting flower that turned to a thorn), Elyakim uncovers insights regarding the universal existential being as a mortal human who is unwillingly subjected to the cycles and laws of nature, celestial bodies, sexuality, abstract experiences, and the pendulum of birth, death, and rebirth.

Asmodai

At the beginning of the 20th century, Zeev Raban designed a standard deck of cards, using biblical characters as the theme for the face cards. The common suit symbols (spades, hearts, diamonds, and clubs) were replaced by local and Jewish symbols: Pomegranates, fig leaves, Star of David, and Menorahs; the Joker was dressed as Asmodai. According to folk Jewish and Christian traditions, Asmodai is the king of demons, ultimate evil, Satan. In the collective subconscious that the Joker represents, there always lies the primeval fear of the other, the evil opponent we struggle to repress. However, the deck is incomplete in its absence. It makes the image of existential experience a whole, as the eternal struggle sets it in motion. Elyakim tried to find one of the Raban's Joker first-edition lithographs, however as he came across difficulties he decided to recreate it himself. During the process, he took the liberty of correcting mild misprints and adapted few of the details: he re-drew the third eye that was lost in print, added the word 'Asmodai' in Arabic, following the logic of life in israel, and instilled the pentagram symbol. In this exhibition the card is presented through five mat boards that gradually expand and get darker. The icon of evil rests in its adobe as the doors of perception open towards it.

Transformations

On both sides of Asmodai hang two brass plate engravings of a figure constructed from one intertwining spiraling line and blackened with printing paint. This triptych display – one main figure with two subordinates to each side, accents the trapeze-shaped walls of the project room and brings to mind iconic Christian triptychs or the two cherubim shielding the Ark of covenant according to the Jewish tradition. The painted engravings simulate the 'behind the scene' of the etching process and recall relationships of positive and negative, male and female.



Resurgence

A round hatch in the white mat board reveals a reproduction of an archeological finding- a clay spiral which was used as a children's game. On the mat board, small snake brass castings are placed towards the center, as though hypnotized by the spiral. Their bodies and tails emulate sunbeams emerging from the middle. The burned earth (the clay) and the snakes that crawl on it create a celestial body; by looking at the earth we discover the sky.

Nails

Thorns of various kinds are arranged on a flat surface in different compositions. Elyakim utilizes a practice borrowed from natural history museums, and by it enables to view and rediscover an exotic item from our local environment. The work's title brings to mind the cycle of growth and harvest. Detached from their natural environment and function of protecting the plant – they enable the discovery of their aesthetic value, now as they became an object of observation.

Untitled (Kiss in the Dark)

Through the white mat board, we gaze into the darkness. A black rectangle portrays a hand laying on a thigh. This photograph that was taken by Elyakim in 'poor lighting conditions' is a detail of a white marble statue, *The Kiss* by Auguste Rodin. This renowned sculpture was featured at first in Rodin's monumental relief 'The Gates of Hell'.

Ha'levana

'Ha'levana' (the moon in Hebrew) is a print abstraction of one of Elyakim's sculptural works based on an Egyptian hand mirror. The photograph that appears in the work was taken in Arcosanti, a utopian city developed by architect Paolo Soleri during the 1970's in Arizona USA.

Shira and Maayan (An Allegorical Wedding)

The turtle shell patterned bathing suit was designed and sewn by Elyakim for his spouse Shira. He took her picture during a trip to the Jerusalem hills as she was bathing in the spring (Maayan in Hebrew). The bathing suit follows the natural logic of using an outer protective shell to cover the vulnerable center of the body, exposing the limbs and head. The bathing suit protects the body from a viewing gaze, whilst it is glorified with gradually growing hexagons, with lighter middle to darker edges. The title of the work refers to Ephraim Moshe Lilien's 'Allegorical Wedding' (1906), a sketch for a carpet triptych. In his work, Lilien combined a variety of styles from different periods and cultures in the history of art into a seminal conjunction that was meant to beget the local culture. At the center of the piece, a man and a woman are portrayed in their wedding ceremony under the wedding canopy. The man resembles the figure of the Assyrian emperor Tiglath-Pileser III as portrayed in Assyrian bas-reliefs. The men who hold the canopy resemble Ancient Egyptian sunken reliefs figures; at the right hand side of the painting, the figure of Jeremiah is structured according to its portrayal by the renaissance master Michelangelo on the Sistine Chapel ceiling, while the frame of the painting is in European *jugendstil* style. Contrasting the thorns on the right hand, in the center there is a depiction of lilies (Lilien in German) as a reference to the artist's own name. By doing so the artist inserts himself into the setting – a 'wedding' in which all these cultures and different parts of the artist's life experiences merge into one new culture.

Hila Cohen-Schneiderman

Maayan Elyakim (b. 1985) lives and works in Tel Aviv. He has exhibited several solo exhibitions in Israel, and his works have been presented in museums and galleries in Israel and abroad, at venues such as: Pulchri, Hague; Helena Rubinstein Pavilion, Tel Aviv; the Biennale for Drawing, Jerusalem; Petach Tikva Museum and Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv. Since 2016 he is a lecturer at the Bezalel Academy for Art and Design, Jerusalem. He is the 2010 Keshet Award recipient, and has a BFA in Fine Art from the Bezalel Academy for Art and Design, Jerusalem.

