NETA BACHRACH (Lena Gomon)

HAIM SENYOR (Ran Erde)

Three artists, three questions

3-D imagination: Sculptures

• BASIA MONKA

Sculpting requires a three-dimensional imagination and such a perspective on the world.

Sculptors of ancient cultures shaped the direction of artists of many generations who followed them.

Certainly, the heritage of African and Asian sculpture is also significant in contemporary sculpture, yet in the European tradition, closer to me personally, the Greek *glypton* and later on Roman sculpture (the word is derived from the Latin "*sculptura*," meaning "carving," "engraving") are still the exemplifications of sculpture.

Of course, in the later history of European art, there were many significant sculptors, and we wouldn't be where we are if not for the works of Michelangelo, Donatello, Rodin, or *The Little Fourteen-Year-Old Dancer* by Edgar Degas.

And as the perception of art is subjective (also to its creators, as this column has been proving for two years), each reader of "Three Artists, Three Questions" could give other names of sculptors who built for them the canon of this genre.

I was curious about what new contemporary Israeli artists bring to the language of sculpture. Three of them, of very different ways of expression, and who just opened their exhibitions in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv this month, spoke with me and answered my three questions:

What inspires you?

What do you call art?

What, in your opinion, makes your artwork different from that of other artists?

NOA ARAD YAIRI

Noa Arad Yairi was born in Jerusalem in 1960 and has lived there for most of her life. She studied visual arts at the University of Haifa's NB School of Design (1984-1988).

A sculptor with a background in graphic design, she teaches in the department of visual and material culture of the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design.

For many years, Arad Yairi ran her own design studio and worked as an art director and graphic designer. At a certain point, as she told me in an interview, two-dimensionality was no longer enough for her. "I think three-dimensionally, so I abandoned graphic design." In 2007, she closed her studio and devoted herself entirely to sculpting.

Two years later, she began exhibiting her work in group exhibitions in Israel, Europe, and the United States. Her sculptures have also been presented in solo exhibitions and in public spaces.

Arad Yairi's figurative sculptures explore the subject of a woman's position in the contemporary world and her political inclinations. Arad Yairi's work combines intellectualism and instinct.

She sculpts in clay, a medium that, as she said, allows her to make and correct mistakes. She creates all elements of her work herself. "I trust my eyes and hands; I have to do everything myself."

> *'I think three-dimensionally, so I abandoned graphic design'*

Depending on the subject, Arad Yairi creates molds and casts in various materials, such as cement, polymer plaster, and polyester.

Her sculptures caught my attention with their unspoken side, their interiority, the "inside." When we discussed this, the artist explained that she often leaves them open purposely and works on them from the inside as well. "It's interesting for me to observe how it forms from within, that unconscious [part], leaving it open... partial, split." *Splittings* was the name of a series of her work, presented at the 8th Ceramic Biennale at the Eretz Israel Museum in 2016.

In March, Arad Yairi will open a solo show at the Benyamini Contemporary Ceramics Center in Tel Aviv. Now on view are her works in a group show titled *That Perhaps You Saved a Rose* at Mamuta Art and Research Center in Jerusalem, and in *Odd or Even,* a two-person exhibition, with her life partner, Yuval Yairi, which opened on January 16 at Jerusalem's HaMiffal.

"Life and art are an ongoing saga of separations and collaborations. We are both artists, but of very different practices. [Yuval started as a photographer and recently started drawing.] This exhibition is a shared examination of our relationship, the relationship between our way of thinking and creating," the artist said.

Inspiration

"My Inspiration comes from varied, sometimes odd and unexpected places. It can be a piece of material that, when I see it, I immediately have an idea of what I want to try with it; a book that translates itself into a specific visual idea; a conversation with a friend; the archaeological wing in a museum; art I see in exhibitions

and books; a historical image or an item on the news – anything can be a trigger for a thought or a visual idea, sometimes even a stroll in a shop."

Meaning of art

"There are no means to define what is included in the definition of 'art.' I can only give an opinion about something that is displayed as a work of art, whether I find it good art or bollocks – and, more often than not, pretentious bollocks."

Arad Yairi's art

"My art reflects my thoughts and feelings, my experiences, my views, and my biography – it is a combination of all these, delivered with my personal brushstrokes and personal taste.

"Often, I think and express myself through images, portraits – almost always of women I know and appreciate. Through them, I express my thoughts.

"I sometimes tend to use a hinted reference to art history as well.

"It is the mixture of a very strong feminist attitude, with the fascination, since childhood, of the Christian iconography, and the urge to act outside the convention that is present in my creative process."

https://www.noaaradyairi.com

HAIM SENYOR

Haim Senyor was born in 1972 in Tel Aviv, where he is based today. He is the 12th generation born in the Land of Israel of a family originally from Spain.

He is a graduate of the Avni Institute of Art and Design (1994) and recipient of several awards and grants, among them the Yehoshua Rabinovich Foundation for the Arts grant (2015) and an international artist residency at Künstlerhaus Bethanien in Berlin (2018).

He mostly exhibits in Israel. His sculptures can be found in private collections as well.

During our interview, he said that he started as a painter, but after many years of painting he wasn't successful. When he was already in his 30s, his former teacher, Israeli artist Uri Lifshitz, visited his studio.

"I told him, 'I don't know what I am doing wrong.' Lifshitz looked at my paintings and said: 'You are not a painter; you are a sculptor. Make me a sculpture.' I used many layers when I painted; there was a structure...."

The following day, Senyor made a plasteline sculpture of a man and a dog. "Lifshitz said he wanted to keep it."

Since then, Senyor made the shift to sculptures exclusively. Wood became his medium.

Senyor portrays people he saw on the street. He said he never takes a photo and doesn't make a sketch. He holds the images in his mind. "I forget them for a day or two, and then I open my eyes again, and I remember them," he said.

He looks at two-meter-long wooden blocks and knows exactly what he wants to carve in them.

Senyor uses industrial tools while sculpting; his cuts are sharp and visible, rough

NOA ARAD YAIRI (Yuval Yairi)

cuts, unpolished fractures. He deliberately leaves the marks of action intact. It seems as though the wood is in dialogue with the artist.

When the sculptures are shaped, he covers them with opaque industrial paint: "I like the colors of nature: blue as the sea, white as snow, and yellow as the sun." And pink, as he explained, "just because I love it."

> *'I am fascinated by mythology and folklore from diverse cultures'*

Through carving into wood, Senyor articulates a contemporary figurative language, one that acknowledges the weight of reality, yet still seeks to stand: upright, fragile, human.

His sculptures are mostly frozen in standing or walking position. Some of them kind of invite you to stop next to them and have a conversation. Senyor said he wants the viewers of his work to go home with a sense of calmness.

In his latest solo show, *The Body of Wood*, which opened on January 23 at the Basel Gallery in Tel Aviv, there is a collection of his works from the past year.

Inspiration

"My inspiration comes from people, from human presence in its simplest form, from fragility, and from everyday life. I'm drawn to quiet moments, to inner states that are not always visible. Sometimes it's the small gestures, the posture of the body, or the silence between people.

"The wood itself is also a source of inspiration. It holds life, roughness, vulnerability, and a natural beauty that I try to preserve rather than conceal."

Meaning of art

"For me, art is a way to communicate something that cannot be expressed in words: a thought, a feeling, or a sense of existence. It's a language built from materials, movement, and form, through which one can touch others in a direct and profound way.

"I see art as a process of self-discovery and human connection – a bridge between the inner and the outer worlds."

Senyor's art

"I believe the uniqueness of my work lies in the balance between rawness and simplicity. I choose to leave the carving marks visible, so that the material and the hand that shaped it remain present. The figures are not perfect, but they are honest, carrying fragility, distance, and quietness.

"Color adds a subtle emotional layer, yet always allows the wood to 'breathe.' I'm not trying to depict specific individuals but rather universal emotions – solitude, connection, waiting, or introspection."

https://www.instagram.com/senyor_66

NETA BACHRACH

Neta Bachrach, a painter, sculptor, and installation artist, was born in Haifa in 1980. All her adult life she has been based in Tel Aviv – the city, as she said, that keeps her young.

She has a master's degree in fine art (MFA) from the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design (2024). She also has a master's degree in public law from Tel Aviv University and Northwestern University in Chicago (2010), as well as a bachelor's degree in law and government from Reichman University (2005).

As a child, she participated in swimming competitions and was always drawing. However, as an adult, instead of pursuing swimming or art, she began a career as a lawyer.

After many years in this, she realized that it did not give her satisfaction. "I couldn't look at the pile of papers on the desk; I had to do something with my hands," she said. "Art was my calling."

Bachrach completely changed her professional life eight years ago. She started out as a self-taught artist, and even though she has an art degree now, she still sees herself as such. Over the years, she has created many works presented at individual and collective exhibitions, such as the Freshpaint 2019 Fair.

Her works are closely related to nature, mythologies, and folklore.

"At the core of my creative process is an exploration of materiality and medium, focusing on the creation of sensual, tactile surfaces, and the interplay of contrasts and textures," she noted.

She works in a variety of materials and techniques: acrylics, oil paints and pastels in painting, and soft elements such as threads, fabrics, and fragments of her own previous works, as well as construction materials, such as papier-mâché, plaster, wood, and metal, in installations and sculptures. She enjoys the process and diverse dynamics of working with a variety of media.

"My practice explores issues of two-way movement between two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms, the distinctions and overlaps of painting, relief and sculpture, and the interplay of diverse materials, contrasting colors, stains and shapes," she explained.

The combinations of multiple materials and the use of a specific monochromatic palette enhance the narrative and thematic coherence of her work, evoking sensual and experiential dimensions.

In her latest exhibition, a duo show with Michal Tamir titled *Foreign Body* at the Binyamin Gallery in Tel Aviv, which opened on January 15, Bachrach presents two sculptures and two paintings on canvas, all in mixed media.

The artist explores through them the fluid boundaries between plants and human bodies, the encounter of vegetation and corporeality.

Inspiration

"I am fascinated by mythology and folklore from diverse cultures, especially stories that intertwine humanity and nature. Exploring them, I discover recurring ideas that serve as metaphors, revealing universal truths about the human experience and the cyclical nature of life.

"In my paintings and sculptures, figures merge with nature, lose their boundaries, and become hybrid, pulsating entities that express the inseparable connection between humans, material, and the world around us."

Meaning of art

"Art is a deeply emotional and psychological act – for me, a way to express emotions, memories, and subconscious states, and to maintain sanity within the complex reality we live in.

"A work of art should awaken feeling, stir the body, and resonate through the senses, carrying a mysterious and enigmatic presence that cannot always be fully expressed in words."

Bachrach's art

"Exploration of materiality and medium guides my creative process.

"Painting or sculpture is like a construction site: I combine diverse materials – [ranging] from paints and pastels to threads, fabrics, and structural elements like plaster, wood, and metal – to create layered, tactile surfaces with a dense, physical presence full of contrasts and tensions.

"Curiosity about materials drives the process, with the hands leading the way, turning discovery itself into a spiritual act that unfolds through touch and forming."

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