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הביאנלה הים תיכונית בסכני - 200710					

תערוכה

אורינט אקספרס



צילום של אלמגול מנליביבה. מזרח תיכון חדש

בירן, שפי בלייר, רגי'פ בסמסולמו, טורנסטיין ברינקמן, אביטל בר'שי, ג'אנו גאואסי, נידל ג'בארין, משה גרשוני, אלמגול מנליביבה ועוד.

שלמה נתיב

הביאנלה הים תיכונית בסחנין. ב'ה' 10:00-16:00, שבת 10:00-16:00. נעילה: 13.7.
רחבי העיר סחנין. פרטים: טל' 0544235790;
www.mediterraneanbiennale.com

הביאנלה הים תיכונית השנייה בסחנין, ביוזמת האמן בלו-סימיון פיינרו והאמנית אביטל בר'שי, בשת"פ מפעל הפיס ובחסות עיריית סחנין, נושאת בתוכה מסר של שינוי חברתי, הדגשת הממד החברתי ומתן כבוד לשונה. נושא הביאנלה: "רה-אורינטציה" - חיבור בין "אורינט" ו"כיוון חדש"; ערבוב בין "מזרח" ל"מערב" ושאיפה לחיפוש אחר שיח חדש, שמטרתו לקדם תרבות מקומית מקורית השואבת השראה מהאזור ומתייחסת לשאלות של זהות, מקום, זמן ואינדיבידואליות בעידן של תרבות גלובלית.

רשימת האמנים שיציגו מצירותיהם כוללת ישראלים ופלסטינים, אמנים ממדינות שאין עמן קשרים מדיניים, כמו אפגניסטאן ואיראן, קבוצה של אמנים מטורקיה, אמנים מאגן הים התיכון: יוון, איטליה, קפריסין, מרוקו, אלג'יר וצרפת, ואמנים מארה"ב, דנמרק, גרמניה, אתיופיה, פולין, אנגליה, רומניה, רוסיה ואוסטריה.

העבודות יוצגו בכניין העירייה, באצטריון דוחא ובמוזיאון למורשת הערבית, ובקצביות, בתי אוכל, חמארות ועוד. משתתפים: מנשה קדישמן, מיכה אולמן, פיקרט אטאי, ברברה אישהורן, בשיר כורלקוב, נטלי-מבא ביקורו, מחמוד בדרנה, דניאל

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PERIPHERAL VISION

The curators of the Mediterranean Biennale in the Galilee city of Sakhnin have overcome rejection from all sides to create an exhibition showing that art can sometimes trump politics

Shany Littman

A group of journalists and bloggers hungrily pounced on a heap of skewered, grilled pullets and a stack of hummus-filled pitas, ignoring completely the bucket at their feet crammed with remnants of bloodstained meat. One of the reasons for the intense enthusiasm was probably the smell of the dead animals that pervaded the butcher shop in which this improvised meal happened.

Belu-Simion Fainaru and Avital Bar-Shay, the organizers and curators of the Mediterranean Biennale in Sakhnin, watched the scene with equanimity. They seemed impassive at the eagerness of the guests, whose encounter with the Lower Galilee city, its inhabitants and institutions – and with the works of art scattered about in it – had left them craving food. “The Arabs are so nice, just like Jews,” one of the bloggers mumbled through a mouth stuffed with food.

The Second Mediterranean Biennale – the first was held in Haifa, in 2010 – opened on May 13, the eve of the Shavuot feast, and will run until July 13, the eve of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan. [Full disclosure: Haaretz is a partner at the exhibition.] Its general title is “Re-Orientation,” which, as the Biennale’s website (in English) explains, “connects the concept of ‘Orient’ with that of ‘new direction.’”

In Fainaru’s view, the peculiar choice of a lunch venue evokes the central idea of the event: an unmediated meeting of life with art and of art with life, and, of course, of Arabs with Jews.

Many doubts

In the organizers’ dreams, the Jews were supposed to rediscover Sakhnin. Until the events of October 2000 – when police shot dead 13 Palestinian-Israeli demonstrators – the city’s restaurants were a regular stopping point en route to the north. Since then, Jews have largely shunned Sakhnin. The residents of the city, for their part, were supposed to discover the wide range of contemporary art. And the artists were meant to be inspired by this cogent encounter with reality to assay new themes and new modes of expression.

“The idea was to create a dialogue,” Fainaru explains. “When we first met with the city’s mayor and director general two years ago, the idea was quite new

for them and they didn’t know what to expect. But they said ‘*Ahlan wa sahlan* [“Welcome”], we are ready to cooperate with you.’ And then we slowly tried to get to know the place. It was a long process that was accompanied by many doubts.”

In fact, nothing happened the way it was supposed to. At first, the curators were not taken seriously by the state institutions asked to help underwrite the event. “A member of one of the Culture and Sports Ministry’s committees told me, ‘It’s totally *deja vu*, there’s nothing new in it,’” Fainaru recalls. “Offended, I said to her, ‘You are sitting here in your office with a cup of coffee and we are in the field, trying to accomplish something. You need to encourage us, not belittle us.’”

Promised funding failed to materialize, with various constraints cited as excuses. Finally, Fainaru had to take out a personal loan to pay for what was most urgently needed. He hopes the funding will come through at some point.

In dealing with Sakhnin’s municipal officials, meanwhile, Fainaru and Bar-

FAINARU: THIS IS WHAT I SEE AS THE GREAT MOMENT OF ART. IN MANY SENSES, ART HAS CEASED TO MOVE PEOPLE. AND THIS IS WHAT WE ARE AFTER HERE – TO CREATE A POWERFUL EXPERIENCE.’

Shay found themselves navigating a minefield. Fainaru: “The town is divided into *hamulot* [clans] and is rife with tension. If you work with one clan, another is unhappy. Some people tried to intimidate me, and one threatened to damage the exhibition. He told me that if I wanted quiet, I should pay him. I passed this on to our partners in the municipality; they spoke with the person who threatened us, and he stopped. They dealt with it behind the scenes.”

Even the artists were reluctant. According to Fainaru, Jewish-Israeli art-

ists refuse to leave Tel Aviv, other than for the airport. “The bulk of the activity in contemporary art takes place in the center of the country,” he observes. “That’s where the artists are, along with the gallery owners, the art collectors and big-time financial organizations. Hardly anything happens in the periphery. The Israeli artist is out to conquer the world.

“When you say ‘Sakhnin,’ you don’t imagine that important people from abroad will come. But international professionals find the project interesting and many of them want to come, including a curator from the Museum of Modern Art in New York.”

The attempt by the two curators to recruit Palestinian artists encountered flak from both sides. The Sakhnin municipality didn’t want them, claiming they clashed with the local spirit, and the artists themselves declined. “We put the word out through galleries that work with Palestinian artists abroad,” Fainaru says, “but they turned us down. They said that as long as the Zionist state exists, they will not exhibit in the country. They are boycotting Israel.

“We invited a young artist from Syria to come, or at least to send works,” he adds. “I told him he would have total freedom to express himself, and that this is the only way to bypass the politicians. But he said no. The Palestinian Authority’s minister of culture, Saham al-Barghouti, said this was not the time to bring works by artists from Ramallah and the rest of the West Bank to Sakhnin.

“I was in touch with Jack Persekian, an Armenian-Palestinian curator and producer, who has ties with artists from East Jerusalem and from the Arab states. I asked for help with addresses and phone numbers. At first I got an affirmative response, but afterward I was told that [his office] couldn’t help me. I suggested to a well-known Bedouin artist, a woman who has received many prizes from the state, that she exhibit her work in Sakhnin. She told me that the people in Sakhnin are collaborators, that this is a racist country and that she wants nothing to do with us. I do not accept that. The artist’s role is to offer what he has, not to boycott.”

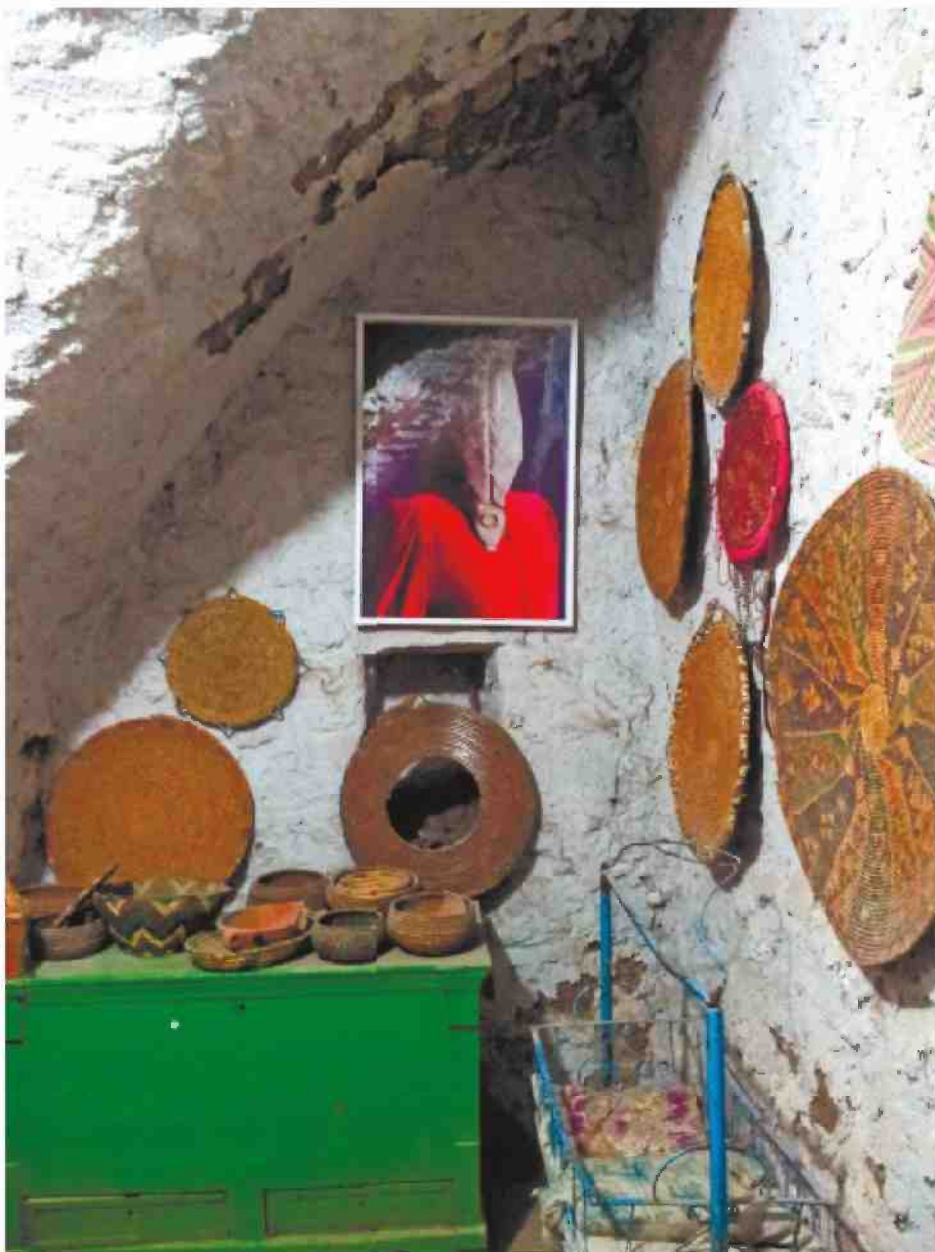
Preserving the Palestinian heritage

Sakhnin’s one museum is trying to preserve the Palestinian heritage. Its di-

lapidated condition is heartrending and attests to the near impossibility of trying to preserve a historical record in a country that wants to eradicate its every vestige. In the shabby spaces, Fainaru and Bar-Shay have installed interesting photographic works by Fainaru himself, plus works by the German artist Thorsten Brinkmann and Turkish artist Cengiz Tekin, and an installation by the Greek artist Jannis Kounellis, which engage in a fascinating and aesthetic dialogue with the remnants of village tradition. The other works on display – by some 50 artists from around the world – are bound up with the present state of Sakhnin’s inhabitants, and getting them exhibited also entailed bridging cultural and conceptual disparities.

Fainaru relates that he wanted to hang some of Menashe Kadishman’s well-known paintings of sheep in the

25.86x25.43	32	24 עמוד	haaretz - haaretz magazine	17/05/2013	36995446-6
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office of the municipality's director general. He thought the colorful works would cheer up the DG and reflect his senior status. However, the official took it almost as an affront that sheep were hung on the walls of his bureau. The greengrocer, too, declined to accept Kadishman's herd, and asked that the sheep paintings be hung outside the shop.

Along the same lines, a secular organization that assists at-risk youth didn't want to hang photographs of a sheikh or a woman praying, and the church didn't want art of any kind. In general, Fainaru says, the town flinched from art that might lend itself to an overtly political interpretation or that attacked the state.

In contrast, a work by Moshe Gershuni found a warm home in a butcher shop, next to a saw that cuts meat, and which occasionally leaves a small splatter of

blood on the work – with the artist's assent.

Another butcher was thrilled to display a photograph by the Kazakh artist Almagul Menlibayeva, of children helping their father slaughter a sheep. "No one wanted that photograph, but the butcher shed a tear and brought his grandchildren to tell them about his family's history," says Fainaru. "This is what I see as the great moment of art. In many senses, art has ceased to move people. And this is what we are after here – to create a powerful experience. If people thought they could live with the pictures we brought them, we left them there; if not, we replaced them. It's not like in galleries."

In the end, most of the participating artists are not locals, though some overseas artists actually moved in temporarily with families in Sakhnin. "There

wasn't one Israeli artist who wanted to lodge here," Fainaru says, "but all the artists from abroad wanted to. Two female artists from Berlin spent a week here and taught local women how to make video works. An artist from Romania conducted a workshop on how to make paint out of eggs and cheese, which is the material that was used to make murals in Romania in ancient times.

"The next thing we intend to do is to open an international school of art here," Fainaru concludes. "In my imagination, I call it the 'New Bezalel'" – referring to the famous art school of that name in Jerusalem. "My vision is to teach and study art for the sake of life, with partnerships between Jews and Arabs. Not just to create beautiful works, but also to look for ways in which to make life more beautiful and better in a place riddled with conflicts." ■

"Enentegre 2"
(2007), above, by
Cengiz Tekin, at the
Palestinian Heritage
Museum in Sakhnin.

"Leonelle D'Ohro"
(2009), left, by Thorsten
Brinkmann, hangs in a
Sakhnin interior.