

## **Baskets Diary / Iris Mendel**

On the walls of Tal Yerushalmi's gallery hangs an array of paintings that portray different objects, like an exhibit of archeological findings or an ancient ethnic tradition. The objects spread across the walls: woven rugs, baskets, fragments of ropes, stones and beads, and rings of tree trunks. Like an anthropologist, the artist examines all these for new material evidence, wishing to shed a new light on them through the translation to the language of painting. The title of the painting installation, *Baskets Diary*, was derived from the world of archeology, and refers to the system of documenting and classifying findings in archeological excavations, where each day and layer have a different basket which is logged in a diary. Yerushalmi's exhibition is perceived as a state of confusion between the baskets in which findings from different places and eras were scattered and have formed new juxtapositions, weaving a visual dialogue between different cultures and between the past and the present.

Yerushalmi's paintings reflect an attempt to extract a different material quality from paint, one prescribed by the object that she wishes to depict. The painting technique starts "speaking" in the language of crafts like knitting, weaving, plaiting, and carving. Thus for instance, the paintings of rugs look like a textile made of small brushstrokes tightly placed one next to the other to form a geometrical pattern, whereas the paintings of baskets simulate the weaving of straws and cloths. Yerushalmi challenges the medium of painting, ostensibly "weaving" or "knitting" with paint in a manner that engenders confusion between painting and object, and evokes a strong sense of materiality and texture. The illusion and deception are contrasted with the simple painting technique. Nevertheless, this is not illusionary realism based on refinement, a meticulous finish, and the rules of perspective, but rather a practice that chooses to be articulated in a primitive and simple language. Blurring the lines between craft and art, high and low, it seems as though Yerushalmi endeavors to match the language of painting to its "low" subject matter, so it would look "handmade", as befitting objects that originate in folk traditions.

The painted objects, which take up most of the canvas, are presented against a single or two color background (an abstraction of a wall and a table). The contrast between two-dimensions and three-dimensions and between flatness and texture are stressed

further by the juxtaposition of painting techniques, and of the dominant warm tones with the cold color palette that characterizes the back plain of the paintings. One particularly deceptive instance is the gap left between the rug's uneven edge and the frame of the canvas: the image looks like a poster or a reproduction and at the same time as a physical tangible object. The appearance, size, and dense material quality of the image may bring to mind the work of the American painter Jasper Johns, particularly his famous painting *Flag* (1954-1955), in which he explored modes of representation and the duality between object and painting. Yerushalmi wishes to expose the paint and the painting technique. The painting is knitted and weaved, inviting the viewer to touch it, and wavers between its flatness and the option of becoming an object. At the same time, the geometric patterns in the painting and the short, tightly arranged brushstrokes also bring to mind the appearance of flickering pixels. The ancient and the digital meet on the canvas, bridging the distance between years and cultures with one brushstroke.