

Roni Landa: Over My Dead Body

30.04.22 — 11.06.22

Curator: Maya Frenkel Tene

In Roni Landa's artistic practice two world of content are melded into one another – the first is preoccupied with Science and Medicine, and the other with the History of art. On the surface it seems that these are two different disciplines, yet an in-depth look reveals an array of connections between them that are visually expressed in the sculptural objects in the exhibition.

A central reference in Landa's work is Dutch Flower paintings of the 17th century, known to be part of Still Life genre. These images, characterized by an intense color palette and richness of shapes and textures, at first glance seem realistic but they do not represent reality, as within these packed floral compositions one can find flowers whose origin is in distant geographic areas, where flowers bloom in deferent seasons. Another element in these paintings is the visible disproportion between the height and weight of some of the enormous arrangements in comparison with their relatively small-sized vases. From a Botanical point of view, these bouquets are impossible, yet, as a painting reference, they carry both symbolic and cultural meanings. The multitude and variety of flower species speak to wealth, social positioning, and financial abundance. According to that period, which was characterized by faith in the presence of God, the very act of realistic painting was considered an act of adoration of God, and in it, certain flowers like the rose, the Lily and the Violet symbolized specific Christian themes.¹ In many of the paintings, the fleeting moment and the transience of nature are represented through the life cycle of the flower - germination, budding, blossoming, dying back, and rotting.

Another element of inspiration in her work can be traced to anatomical images that were created in the Renaissance period through the 19th century. The origin of these images can be found in medical textbook illustrations, declaring human beings as God's creation, and offering an investigation of the cycle of life and death. One of the unusual means for studying anatomy at the time was a life-size wax figure of a woman, complete with glass eyes, human hair, clothes and adorned with jewelry. **The Anatomical Venus** by Clemente Susini, was created in 1780 and could be dissected into seven anatomically correct layers, including all internal organs.² Her "Sleeping Beauty" appearance was in stark contrast to her slashed inner organs displayed before us. To the modern eye, she may appear visceral, a clear example of the "Uncanny" and the abject, lurking under the skin that covers the body.

Similarly to peering into the human body, examining the works in the exhibition creates an experience that is both pleasurable and repugnant at the same time. Our gaze at the complete object becomes a dissecting one, penetrating, both clinical and voyeuristic, it is a gaze that connects us to the worlds of medicine and science, or alternatively, to human intimacy. The body is presented here as a sum of moments that are violent, sensual, erotic, and vulnerable all at once. Yet, unlike Anatomical Venus, whose immaculate body remained unharmed, Roni Landa's flowers carry evidence of human conditions on their surface, and therefore appear at times injured and scarred. The entire installation creates a fusion between outside and inside, leaving no room for hierarchy between attraction, repulsion, beauty, pain, and pleasure.

¹ Arthur K. Wheelock Jr., *From Botany to Bouquets: Flowers in Northern Art*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, 1999.

² Joanna Ebenstein, *The Anatomical Venus*, London: Thames & Hudson, 2016.

Roni Landa (b. 1986) lives and works in Tel Aviv. She holds an MFA from Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design (2020), and a B.A in Textile Design from Shenkar - Engineering, Design, Art (2011). Her work was included in many group exhibitions worldwide and in Israel, among them at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, The Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Beit Ha'ir, Tel Aviv, Janco-Dada Museum, Ein Hod, Design Week at Hansen House, Jerusalem, Bedford Gallery, Walnut Creek, California, The Jewish Museum, Moscow and more. Her works are included in private collections worldwide, among them the collection of Galila Barzilai-Hollander, Brussels.