

Yael Wertheim Soen: Merge Surge

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Curator: Maya Frenkel Tene

Yael Wertheim Soen's paintings emerge from intuitive gestures—an arbitrary line, a shape, a stain. Each subsequent action builds upon the last, drawing meaning from both its formal context and its inherent qualities. Her intricate compositions resist representation; instead, they reflect an inner realm, poised between dreams and the subconscious processing of existence. The artworks, resembling a patchwork of painted layers, scatter outward from a central point, often invoking the structure of a puzzle created from adhered papers. The process culminates when a rationale for the artwork manifests, revealing an internal logic that resonates with the familiar.

The works featured in the current exhibition foregrounds the autonomous realm of painting, emphasizing surface, form, and material. The images, emerging from a dedication to form and color, are at once sensual and strange, embracing the unconventional and the 'ugly' in a quest for a renewed sense of 'beauty'. The works grapple with intermedium and philosophical questions regarding art making, visual perception, and the dichotomy of perspective versus surface. They echo a medieval tradition in which shadows were utilized to create (deprived) spatial illusions, invoking allegorical and symbolic interpretations due to their inherent two-dimensionality.

Within these fantastical and erotic realm, familiar Christian iconography appears—depicting figures such as Jesus, various saints, and symbols like the crucifixion and the dove. Several paintings implicitly or explicitly reference renowned masterpieces: Hieronymus Bosch's Heaven and Hell in **A Pile**; Caravaggio's Crucifixion of St. Peter in **Hurling Curling**; Piero della Francesca's The Duke and Duchess of Urbino in the diptych **A Couple** and Mantegna's Lamentation over the Dead Christ in **A Woman Being Measured by a Snake**. While these images evoke medieval and Renaissance narratives, the artistic style draws inspiration from 20th-century artists such as Chaim Soutine, Paula Rego, Philip Guston, George Grosz, and Max Ernst. Efforts to derive symbolic, narrative, or political interpretations from the chaotic assemblies of hands, noses, and bodies of humans and animals in bacchanalia are likely to prove elusive.

Yael Wertheim Soen (b. 1984) resides and works in Tel Aviv. She holds a bachelor's degree from the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design (2009) and completed the prestigious Norfolk program for outstanding students at Yale University (2008), along with an internship at the Hamidrasha - Faculty of Arts (2012). She has received the Creative Excellence Grant from AICF and the CCA scholarship. Wertheim Soen has exhibited in group shows in Israel and Germany, and most recently participated in a duo exhibition at Shankar's 'Semal' gallery. Her works are included in private collections.