

# Graduates in Focus

**Afsian (Sian) Aguilar, Dafna Ben ari, Oryan Yakobi,  
Paula Farhi, Shelly Berger**

28.11.24 - 11.01.25 | Curator: Maya Frenkel Tene

The exhibition features selected works by five recent graduates, who completed their studies in the art departments at Bezalel Academy and the Midrasha in 2024.

## **Shelly Berger** / Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design

In my work, I use a wide variety of materials, but the color remains constant—always only shades of white. White is the stable ground I have defined for myself, upon which I can disperse and lose control, yet still remain in balance. Monochromatism is the rule, or the only fixed logic in my work—it allows me to go further and lose myself in every other sense.

I work intuitively, allowing images to surface without imposing an explanation on them too early. This is because I am interested in different states of consciousness, particularly those liberated from logic. I use my dreams as an inexhaustible source of content and imagery, and draw inspiration from children's drawings, outsider art, and tribal art.

Difficult mental states such as fear and uncertainty drive me. I use my art as a means to meet and process these emotions in their raw, pre-verbal form. I create from a place of compassion and honesty—always hoping to touch something true in a specific emotional reality.

## **Paula Farhi** / Hamidrasha - Faculty of Arts

My painting, which always begins from a place of uncertainty or a lack of definition regarding its final "subject," is often based on images from my immediate world—psychological events or those occurring in the external world, family members, my children, friends, or scenes I encounter that capture my attention.

The paintings displayed in this exhibition were created after the October 7th massacre. Most of them are based on photographs taken with my phone before the war broke out. These images underwent a pictorial transformation into representations of a disintegrating reality—alternative spaces to the original, changes in the proportions of the figures, and an exaggeration of the gaps between them, in terms of clothing and gender.

The world created in the painting is fragile and suspended, confused, threatening, and grotesque. Beneath the surface, repressed violence and anxiety about the threat of collapse are bubbling up.

## **Oryan Yakobi** / Hamidrasha - Faculty of Arts

The exhibition addresses states of emergency. The emergency scenarios in my work are mostly imaginary and can exist in unknown time and place. The paintings examine the constant state of alertness for emergencies, particularly present in our contemporary time, through the threats of the COVID-19 pandemic, the dangers of war, fears of ecological disasters, and the unpredictable consequences of artificial intelligence.

The base color of the painting is a glow-in-the-dark paint, designed for bomb shelters. This color illuminates the sense of urgency and chaos during moments of rushing to safety. The human figures are based on illustrations from airplane emergency safety cards. These images echo a graphic and naive visual language, standing in stark contrast to the catastrophic situations they represent.

Instructions from safety cards, such as "Brace for Impact", have become more relevant than ever in our reality. War, the climate crisis, and accelerating technological developments fuel anxieties, deepen feelings of chaos and insecurity, and lead to an obsessive focus on preparing for extreme situations.



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## **Afsian (Sian) Aguilar / Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design**

Being the child of a Filipino mother and an African-American father, born in a land of milk and honey, I constantly explore the internal struggles of my identity and the need for disguise and camouflage in order to develop awareness of the space in which I live. At the same time, I aim to create context for the viewer and encourage my own need to ask questions about how I tell my story and how I can reinterpret my environment.

The works displayed in this exhibition are an attempt to represent my identity through material and light—through sculptural objects connected to local history, and through images from the Bible and Christian mythology, which appear in my paintings. The various media I work with—painting, 3D digital art, sculpture, and installation—interact with each other and represent my current existential condition and the space I inhabit. My artistic practice seeks to deeply investigate the meaning behind my identities, which are culturally influenced by the ongoing mindset under which I live, in what is referred to as the "Holy Land"—the land I bear on my shoulders.

## **Dafna Ben ari / Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design**

My work often begins with a story, personal experiences, and an observation of the reality around me. The themes of my paintings are drawn from my thoughts and memories, as well as from people who inspire me. Often, when I am alone, I create new worlds emerging from the darkness. The stories that arise within me are paired with used textiles that I find in garbage bins, donation institutions, and at my parents' house. My studio contains a collection of fabrics and ready-made objects that I use in my work.

I draw inspiration from figures on the margins of society – the destitute, the homeless, lost souls, the marginalized, the dispossessed. People who know the world deeply, yet remain strangers to it. Those whose life paths and futures seem predetermined by the circumstances of their arrival in the world. I identify with them because I too feel this way at times. My works are based on events that took place during encounters with them or from personal acquaintance. My gaze is compassionate, yet simultaneously coarse and jarring; through it, I seek to shatter their transparency.

Jerusalem, my birthplace, is the subject of a personal and deep contemplation in an attempt to decipher its nature. The historical and religious baggage, countless prayers and pilgrimages, serve as a fertile muse for my work. Its diverse population is an inexhaustible source of imagery; the almost cynical heaviness of the city and its people – all holy and simultaneously repulsive.