

Givati

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Hadera, Khotin, Hadera: 1944-1948

Moshe Givati was born in Hadera in 1934. He was named Moshe Hacoheh Wexler after his late father, who died at 21. Givati's parents, Yehudit and Moshe, immigrated to Palestine from the Bessarabian town of Khotin in 1933, having married at a young age. The bride's parents consented to the couple's immigration to Palestine on condition that they first marry. The two joined a group of young pioneers, Hachsharat Masada, which was affiliated with the Gordonia movement. Upon their arrival in Palestine, Yehudit and Moshe settled in Hadera, and were sent to work in road paving. In those years the country experienced a boom in immigration, construction and development, which was dubbed the "prosperity" period, due to the steady rise in the standard of living and the rapid urban growth. But the prosperity period was relatively short, ending late in 1935, following the Italian-Ethiopian War which threatened Britain's status in Palestine.

Givati's mother, Yehudit, never talked with her son about his father's death, in fact avoiding any mention of her late husband who passed away shortly after their arrival in Palestine, some three months before his son's birth. She broke off all contact with the late father's family as it had objected to the marriage from the outset. At 17, as reinforcement in Kibbutz Sha'ar Ha'amakim, Givati managed to locate his father's burial place, at the Khayyat Beach Cemetery, Haifa. Only recently did he find out that his father had been stricken with dysentery, rushed to the government hospital in Bat Galim, where he died, and was

thus buried in Haifa rather than Hadera, his place of residence. The gravestone which Givati found, bore the following succinct epitaph: Moshe Wexler, son of Elazar, died at the age of 21 (the name "Hacoheh" was omitted from his full name for some reason). To date, these facts are all Givati knows about his father. Regarding his early childhood years, he has managed to gather more orderly information from hearsay, and therefrom compose the first chapter in his personal chronicles.

My mother worked with the group that built the Sargel Road to Afula. After she gave birth, she couldn't keep me with the labor force; the conditions there were unfit for child rearing. Thus, after much wandering, she brought me to my grandmother in Khotin, and went back to Palestine on her own. I was two years old. In 1939, on the eve of World War II, my mother went with a group of friends to visit their families in Khotin and brought me back here. I was thus saved from the horrors of World War II. We embarked on the last ship that set sail from the port of Constanta in Romania. I was nearly five. I remember arriving at the Haifa Port and the sky was full of giant helium balloons attached to wires as camouflage against the Italian air raids mainly directed at the port and refineries in the Haifa Bay, which were protected by means of thick smoke. We went to Hadera. My mother worked as a night guard in the Working Women's Farm. She had an apartment there. I lived with her and went to the Working Mothers' Organization kindergarten. I couldn't speak a word of Hebrew. I spoke Yiddish and Russian. I quickly relearned Hebrew, but apparently I was a dyslectic child

and had great difficulty reading. My mother was a simple laborer and there was no one to help me. In 1944, when I was about 10, my mother remarried and we moved to live with a group of laborers in an orchard in the Tel Mond area. The bachelors in the group lived in the packing house, and the families were given shacks. When my sister Zfira was born, the place became crowded, and I moved to live on my own in a tent. I went to the Tel Mond Regional School every day by donkey. I used to tie the donkey and at the end of the school day ride back to the orchard. Sometimes the donkey would run away, or simply stop midway and refuse to budge, and therefore I missed school quite often, but no one cared. Aaron Priver was our art teacher. I remember that he told us to copy a horse which he drew with great accuracy on the blackboard. He used to walk about the room with a ruler in hand and slap pupils' hands. He wasn't all that popular. When the War of Independence broke out, it became dangerous to live in the orchard, and we returned to Hadera. My mother found an apartment in the Brandes neighborhood. I resumed studying at Beit Hinuch Workers' Children School. The school bordered on the Yemenite Neighborhood which was the stronghold of local Irgun (IZL) forces. The Yemenites lived separately, outside the camp, and had no contact with the laborers, except for Zachariah's falafel cart with the intoxicating aromas that emanated from it. We used to gather by the cart which was located near the bakery whenever we had a Mill or two in our pocket. For some reason, the Yemenites did not belong to the Labor stream, even though the men used to go out every morning with hoes to work in the orchards, and the women – to clean houses. They were simply from 'there' and lived in absolute autonomy. The children studied in Tachkemoni which was, of course, an orthodox school. The observant Ashkenazim had a separate school as well. In Beit Hinuch, which was considered a liberal institution, they never checked why a child didn't study, and were

never strict about our level of education. It thus happened that until quite late I couldn't read at all. I scribbled and drew a lot in my notebooks, and then, at some point, I was kicked out of school.*

Kibbutz Sha'ar Ha'amakim: 1948-1958

At 14 Moshe Givati went out to work. Initially he worked in a small factory for towels and tablecloths, wherefrom he shifted to working on an old kerosene-operated tractor, but was exploited by his employer who paid him scanty wages. The War of Independence was at its height, and all the men were drafted, thus the need arose for working hands. Givati soon received an offer to work on a large, modern tractor, and join workers laying the new railway tracks connecting Hadera and Tel Aviv. He made 6 Lira per shift in this job, a considerable sum in those days, from which he gave money to his parents and also managed to purchase a Matchless motorcycle. Later on, when his stepfather purchased a tractor and tools, the skilled Givati was entrusted with their operation. He did not get along with his stepfather, however, and therefore gathered all the equipment in the yard and left the house. He went to the Hashomer Hatzair headquarters on Allenby Street, Tel Aviv, and asked to join a kibbutz. As in the case of many other children whose parents were immersed in hard work and busy with the trials and tribulations of life, for Givati too, the youth movement became a refuge, even a life saver. The youth movement in those days certainly left its imprint on the youth, and its influence on the course of their lives was greater than that of their family home or the education they received in school. As a youth who failed in school and found no open ear at home, the movement became the center of Givati's life. At Hashomer Hatzair he met middle class children who attended the general school in Hadera. Hashomer Hatzair, which belonged to the United Workers' Party

* All the quotations are from the author's conversations with Givati, unless indicated otherwise.

(Mapam) had at the time the reputation of a more respectable movement than Hanoar Haoved (Working Youth), and thus it was more popular among youngsters and parents, even those who were ideologically affiliated with other parties, like Givati's mother who was a devout adherent of Israel Workers' Party (Mapai).

In the Tel Aviv offices I was told that a group was being organized in those days for agricultural training in Kibbutz Sa'ar in the Western Galilee. I was given a shopping list; I packed all the necessary equipment and hit the road. After a short stay in Sa'ar the truck took us to Kibbutz Shamir. At that time I painted quite a lot, but kept none of it. There was someone in Kibbutz Shamir who painted a little, and he was also a little bit of a musician. Then Moshe Kagan, who emigrated from Russia, arrived at the kibbutz, and on special occasions such as May Day he used to decorate the dining room with portraits of Lenin and Stalin. I just painted on stencil paper and anything at hand. Every now and then I would prepare some decorations for the youth club house. We worked half a day and studied. After two years Hashomer Hatzair secretariat decided that we should move to Sha'ar Ha'amakim. We joined the youth group that was educated in the kibbutz, and were defined as a complementary group to the class of three eldest girls who were the same age as us, and two of the "Teheran children" – one of them, Alex Levy, was a gifted painter who later died in tragic circumstances, and the other – Reuven Yaron, a wonderful musician who fell in the Sinai Campaign in Dahab. We stayed there until we were drafted by the Nahal Command.

Together with his peers Givati joined the Nahal. During his military service, due to an inexplicable urge, he says, he often drew on a notepad that he always kept with him. Despite his strong tendency to paint in color, the conditions in the field and the transience that characterized the military routine prevented him from painting more than

these drawings to which he devoted every spare moment. From this early period in his artistic career, and even from the first years after he was discharged from the army, no documentation has survived. His earliest works located with friends, collectors and family members, all date back to the early 1960s, and include mainly paintings in gouache on paper and watercolors.

In Kibbutz Sha'ar Ha'amakim he met Yael Givati, who was born on the kibbutz. He was twenty and she was nineteen when they married. In those days he was still known by the name Wexler, but after several years he adopted his wife's last name. The marriage brought about a change in his life. He moved to live in a "family room," and set up a painting corner on a chair, where he painted mainly in gouache. That same year a daughter, Vered, was born, and some eighteen months later – a son, Ben-Zion, and several years later – their third son, Nir.

When the painting corner in the family room became too small to contain his work materials, Givati took over one of the old shacks in the kibbutz and made a studio for himself. The kibbutz artist's status in those days was indefinite, and members used to hold long discussions on the subject. Values such as the work ethic and one's contribution to the community were a top priority for the Kibbutz Movement, and the artists who lived on kibbutzim were forced to fill work quotas equal to those of the other members, and engage in art in their spare time. In the course of time, usually after stormy discussions in members' meetings, the kibbutzim started to make life slightly easier for artists, and allot time for their art. At first these were allotments of a few hours, but artists who established their status in the kibbutz, proved their talent and contributed to the community (by decorating the dining room on festivals and various occasions), were gradually given, in keeping with the criteria determined in the members' meetings, a few days a week to practice their art. At some stage Givati enjoyed this privilege as well, but theretofore he

worked as driver on a Mack truck, and spent most of his work time outside the kibbutz.

Tel Aviv – The Early Years: 1958-1963

I traveled throughout the country: Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Eilat. I worked as a driver, and would often arrive in Tel Aviv. I stayed in the Geula Hotel on Geula Street, where all the Party's "big shots" stayed. In Tel Aviv of those days there were plenty parking spaces for the Mack diesel. In my free time I strolled in the city and became acquainted with Chemerinsky Art Gallery and Katz Gallery. There was also Rosenfeld, but he mainly engaged in framing, and in the window of his workshop he used to exhibit paintings that came in to be framed. Only at a later stage, after selling many paintings, did he gather a collection and then transform the shop into a real gallery. I always used to pass by his window on Dizengoff Street. In 1959 I took my portfolio with me and entered Rosenfeld's place. He opened the portfolio, liked what he saw, and immediately bought five works on paper. He paid me 250 Lira cash, and said that he would exhibit a painting of mine in the window the next week. This was the heart's desire of many painters. For me it was a big thing. When I was visiting, he exhibited Mokady and Janco in his window. He sold my paintings. I kept in touch with him, and later he even made the contact between me and Haya Avni of Chemerinsky Art Gallery.

Artistic activity in the Tel Aviv of those days was lively. The Helena Rubinstein Pavilion for Contemporary Art was opened in January 1959, and in April that year the ninth exhibition of the New Horizons artists was held there. Dizengoff House was still active, and presented the General Exhibition of Painters in Eretz-Israel. The Association of Painters and Sculptors staged the exhibition "Modern Art in Israel." In 1960 Naftali Bezem, Shmuel Bonch, Michael Gross, Pinchas Shaar, Jacob Pines, and Aviva Uri were

sent to represent Israel in the Venice Biennale. In March 1961 Samuel (Sam) Dubiner opened Galerie Israel on the corner of Frishman and Ben Yehuda Streets, which was managed by Barry Kernerman. The inaugural exhibition showed most of the New Horizons artists, among them Zaritsky. In April, an exhibition of twelve painters, including Argov, Wechsler, Okashi, Krize, Abramovic, Streichman, Stematsky, Giladi, and Mati Basis, opened. Danziger, Feigin, and Tumarkin exhibited sculptural works in that show. Zaritsky and Abramovic were no longer among the participants. At the end of that year, Yehiel Shemi, Yitzhak Danziger, and Shamai Haber represented Israel in an international sculpture exhibition at Musée Rodin, Paris. Exhibitions of young artists were held in the foyer of Eked Publishing House. In 1962 an international sculpture symposium was held in Mitzpeh Ramon, organized by Kosso Eloul, who was also one of the participants alongside Dov Feigin and Moshe Sternschuss, and eight foreign sculptors who were invited. Curator Haim Gamzu selected the artists for the Venice Biennale that year.

As aforesaid, Givati spent the period driving. Once in a while he went to Oranim Seminary to sketch nude figures after a live model, where he also studied with Marcel Janco. But he was much more fascinated by Tel Aviv and its galleries, and used his spare time to become better acquainted with the big city. In late 1961 he came across an advertisement published by the Tel Aviv Museum in *Al Hamishmar* (to which he was subscribed as a kibbutz member); Haim Gamzu was inviting young artists from all over the country to submit works for an exhibition in memory of Eugen Kolb, the late director of the Tel Aviv Museum. Givati submitted three framed paintings, and all three were accepted for the exhibition which was held at Dizengoff House. These paintings depicted semi-abstract landscapes executed in mixed media on paper. Raffi Lavie, Joseph Gattegno, Shlomo Cassos, and other young artists

participated in that exhibition as well. Gamzu was impressed by Givati's works and wanted to meet him personally. This was the first exhibition in which Givati participated, and thereafter Gamzu included him in all the Autumn Exhibitions he curated at the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion for Contemporary Art. Later he would sign him on a contract for a solo exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum.

In one of Givati's visits to Rosenfeld he met Pinchas Abramovic who invited Givati to visit him at home in Ramat Aviv. A friendship developed between the two, and Givati became a frequent visitor to Pinchas and Emma Abramovic's home. They gave him a spare key and invited him to stay there whenever he wanted. In the meetings arranged by Emma in their home, Givati became acquainted with the New Horizons' artists, and Abramovic opened a new world to him and enlightened him with regard to the dominant artistic trends prevalent in the city. Givati was mainly influenced by the coloration of Zaritsky, by Abramovic himself, and by Streichman; he assimilated the influence of Lyrical Abstract into his unique painterly structures which differed from his sources of inspiration.

As aforesaid, it was Eliezer Rosenfeld who recommended Givati to Haya Avni, wife of painter Aharon Avni, who in 1954 founded the Avni Art Institute with the help of the Histadrut, the General Federation of Labor in Israel. Most of the teachers at Avni were members of New Horizons. Chemerinsky Art Gallery, which was managed by Haya Avni, was located on Gordon Street. Avni's studio was in the basement of that building.¹ Haya Avni examined Givati's portfolio and set a date for an exhibition: February 1962. Then the issue of his name came up, since he was still called Wexler at the time. In those days he didn't sign his paintings until he sold them. Of that period several works remain bearing the signature with his original name, "Wexler Hachohen". Per Haya Avni's demand, he was asked

to sign the paintings to be exhibited in the gallery before the exhibition, but she was not happy with the name Wexler, and asked him to take a Hebrew name. She said there were too many painters named Wexler/Wechsler (Jacob Wechsler, and even another Moshe Wexler), and was afraid that the audience would mistake him for the seasoned Moshe Wexler, even though each of them spelled his name differently in Hebrew. Moshe Hachohen Wexler forthwith adopted his wife's maiden name (which had been Hebraized by her late father, before he was killed stepping on a mine in the Kibbutz fields during the 1936 Riots), and legally became Moshe Givati. He continued to avoid signing his paintings later on as well, waiting until they were to be exhibited or sold. Rosenfeld framed the paintings, and Givati was entrusted with the task of mounting the exhibition. Years later he recounted how he stood helpless facing the gallery walls, clueless as to how to hang a professional exhibition. Moshe Prupes, who accidentally walked in, came to his rescue. He sent him to the movies, to see Godard's *La Chinoise* at the Paris Cinema. Prupes reduced the number of paintings for display, skillfully placed the works one next to the other, and when Givati came back from the film, the exhibition was already mounted.

Joav BarEl, later to become Givati's best friend, had already replaced Dr. Gamzu as art critic of *Haaretz* at the time. In his column "Exhibitions in Tel Aviv" he published the first review about Givati's first solo exhibition:

The first solo exhibition of Moshe Givati, member of Sha'ar Ha'amakim, is purely comprised of gouache. Givati's work is not yet consolidated, and the exhibition spans three periods of the painter's quest for self-acquaintance. Givati tends to build up atmosphere by means of color, but the color strokes still surrender great hesitation which is manifested in the amassment of color upon color, resulting in their mutual blurring. Givati attempts to reinforce the structure by employing lines that do not stem from the color

1 The gallery itself was named after the late Habima actor – Baruch Chemerinsky, as per the requirement of his widow who owned the property.

application and appear 'glued.' Having studied at the Avni Institute of Painting and Sculpture, Givati's painting also evinces the influences of his teachers; in *Painting in Ocher* and other paintings, one may discern mainly Krize's influence. It seems that Givati still has to digest these influences fully and take more care with the interrelations between the line, the stain, and the geometric structure. He must beware mainly of the easy solution of using grays and neutral colors in a color clash.²

Art critic P. Friedberg also referred to the exhibition in an article published that day in *Al Hamishmar*:

Moshe Givati, native born Israeli and member of Kibbutz Sha'ar Ha'amakim, studied with Marcel Janco and at the Avni Art Institute, but acquired most of his painterly education by observing young art in exhibitions throughout the country. A blessed influence on him was that of the "beautiful stain" painting. Many of his paintings are composed of tiny rectangles of color linked together with fine pen drawing, à la Mieslewitz. The subject matters in these paintings are ships mooring at port, buildings, etc.

Other paintings consist of larger color surfaces – and in these too, the drawing is significant as a linking and defining element, whereby a yellow stain, for example, transforms into the wall of a building with an arched window, or a rock. Moshe Givati, as aforesaid, is still at the very beginning of his career, and it is therefore hard to determine the true quality of his paintings. He covets all, and in his efforts to master motif and atmosphere, harmonious colors, a rhythmical composition and the material, the picture itself is lost. His paintings also display a certain measure of slovenliness which attests to a quick execution devoid of sufficient knowledge. Nevertheless, the exhibition reveals signs of talent. *Lilith* is a perfect, beautiful painting. The entire paper is covered with small stains of dark, crude color reminiscent of a tree trunk. The bird merges with the

background, and yet is slightly accentuated. This is partly achieved by drawing in thin pen lines which do not contradict the general painterly nature. Everything is seemingly warm brown, but in the midst of this color – blue, orange and frost-white draw our attention.

Let us wish that at a later date the artist will be able to exhibit many more paintings of this quality.³

All the paintings featured in that exhibition were sold. Following the exhibition at Chemerinsky, Givati was exposed to the Tel Aviv art scene and began to comprehend its power structure and the parties involved. New Horizons was still grouped officially at the time, but was already at the end of its activity as an organized group. Its tenth and last exhibition was held in 1963 at Mishkan Le'Omanut, Museum of Art, Ein Harod. In addition to Arie Aroch, the participants included Tumarkin, Raffi Lavie, Ury Lifshitz, Moshe Kupferman, Arie Azéne, and other young artists who were not members of New Horizons.

That same year, the 8th Congress of ICA (the International Association of Art Critics) was held in Israel, with the participation of some of the leading art critics and historians of the time. The Israeli artists received extensive exposure in the myriad exhibitions held on that occasion: The Tel Aviv Museum staged an exhibition of select Israeli art organized by the Department of Painting and Sculpture of the Public Council for Culture and Art, featuring forty artists. Bezalel presented a solo exhibition of Mordecai Ardon, which later traveled to all the prominent museums in Israel. Special exhibits for the congress participants were held in the Museum of Modern Art, Haifa, in Ein Hod, Safed, and the Artists' Pavilion, Jerusalem. In the wake of these events, Israeli artists (most of them members of New Horizons) were invited to exhibit at Galerie Charpentier, Paris, which focused mainly on abstract art, and a year later – at the Guggenheim Museum, New York. Givati, still a member of Kibbutz Sha'ar

2 Haaretz, 9 March 1962 [Hebrew].
3 Al Hamishmar, 9 March 1962 [Hebrew].

Ha'amakim, participated that same year in the exhibition of Hakibbutz Ha'artzi Artists at Beit Hasofer, Tel Aviv. Joav BarEl, in his review in *Haaretz*, warmly recommended the exhibition, and commended Givati, saying that this multi-participant exhibition was equal in quality to other general exhibitions, and even stood out in comparison to other exhibitions of its kind. In the very same review, however, BarEl also chose to deride the

lip service and bombastic phrases opening the catalogue, whereby the kibbutz artist is guided by 'an inner need to create art, and thereby express his belief in life, man, and the kibbutz.' The real need guiding the kibbutz artist is likely the very same need that guides artists anywhere, without any added collective dimension, and it is all for the better. The enhanced artistic quality is not the result of a heightened awareness in communal social life, but rather due to a developing artistic consciousness and a growing sensitivity to the needs of form and color, which are the means of expression of any artist.⁴

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BarEl's critique of the cliché of the pompous social ideology was not foreign to Givati, whose affinity with the kibbutz, its members and values, gradually diminished, despite his entitlement to one day for art per week – a privilege that was not granted to every kibbutz artist. In the meantime, his driver's license had been revoked for a year, and he stopped driving the truck and worked in assorted jobs. They didn't know what to do with him on the kibbutz, he says. On his free day intended for painting, he used to go to Acre.

There were two small taverns⁵ there. The fishermen used to bring their catch early in the morning. They would fry the fish, make hummus, and drink coffee. I met a few Arab fishermen there and they invited me to go fishing with them. Before going out to sea, after they completed all the preparations, I saw them rolling what looked like a giant cigar. They asked me if I wanted to try.

It was top quality Lebanese hashish. After this first time they dragged me semiconscious to their home. I slept there until the afternoon. It gave me a jolt, I felt good. I kept in touch with them, and my friend, the fisherman, used to visit me on the kibbutz every now and then and bring hashish.

Within a short time Givati's paintings underwent a radical transformation. The dramatic metamorphosis that occurred from the time he started depicting the Acre landscapes and fishermen to his quasi-Cubist monochromatic abstracts can only be explained as enlightenment due to a sudden development, or as a result of an accelerated process of learning that magically influenced his consciousness, stemming from constant observation of changes and transformations in the art world. These were always supplemented by the human figure, without which Givati could never manage, and now found its way back into his canvases, each set of figures and the narrative leading thereto.

Europe – First Journey: 1963-1964

As aforesaid, Givati used to spend his allotted painting day outside the kibbutz. He often hung out in Tel Aviv, catching up on the goings-on in the local art scene and overseas. Finally he decided to go to Europe, mainly Paris, which was the longed for destination of Israeli artists in those days, although it had already lost its hegemony as "the capital of international art" to New York. Like the seasoned artists for whom the gates of Europe opened only in the wake of World War II, Givati yearned to visit the origins of painting, the museums and cathedrals, and see, first hand, the originals he theretofore knew only from reproductions. He asked the kibbutz for leave, was granted a month, and embarked on the S/S Moledet headed to Italy. During the voyage he painted ceaselessly on variously sized papers. One of the passengers noticed him painting on deck,

4 *Haaretz*, 21 March 1963 [Hebrew].

5 Small eastern taverns where one drinks alcohol, smokes a hookah and plays backgammon.

sent him drinks at her expense, and purchased everything Givati created on board. Thus, Givati disembarked in Naples with a substantial sum of money. In Naples he met two priests who sat next to him in a pizzeria. They invited him for wine, and when they found out he was headed for Rome, they offered to drive him there. On the freeway to Rome they drove at a dizzying speed; on the way they stopped at a gas station and asked him to pay for a full tank. In Rome they dropped him off by a hotel adjacent to the central train station (during his entire trip in Europe Givati stayed close to train stations, fearing he would get lost). On the first morning of his visit to Rome, he went straight to the American Express office and purchased a combined European train and ferry pass. He took a train to Venice, where he stayed an enjoyable fortnight. From there he continued according to plan to Padua to view Giotto's famous piece at the Arena Chapel: the fresco cycle he created circa 1305-1306, depicting scenes from the life of the Virgin and the Passion of Christ, works about which Matisse is known to have said that one does not have to be familiar with the stories of the New Testament in order to fathom their meaning, for their truth is inherent in them. Givati arrived there only to discover that the chapel's frescoes were undergoing restoration, and the place was closed to the public. He checked into a small hotel in the city, and continually visited the chapel, insisting to be let in. Eventually he was indeed allowed to enter and view the spectacular frescoes through the scaffolding.

From Italy, Givati continued to Spain, first to Barcelona and then Madrid, where he stayed for a while in a small family pension next to the Prado Museum. He visited the Prado every day during his stay to observe, close up, the paintings he had known so well from reproductions, which far from reflected the power of the original. Zvi Mairovich had told him not to miss a certain painting that had captured his eye in any event: Velázquez's *Prince Baltasar Carlos on Horseback*.

Three things overwhelmed me in that painting. I was fascinated by Velázquez's repeated attempts to place the horse's front leg accurately as he rises on his rear legs – he sought the critical point with graphite or pencil where the leg should be placed on the canvas. He left all his initial sketches on the canvas. It is rare for a painter to expose his searches for solutions and his deliberations in the work process to the viewer. Another thing was the horse's eye: you could see that he had put white, ultramarine and black paint on the tip of his brush, gave one whirl, and that's it, spontaneously. I was stunned. Also, the free azure brushstrokes of the sky were not as slicked up as I had thought, but rather liberated and tempestuous. It was an important lesson. I went to see this painting every day, and when the guards became suspicious that I was planning to steal it, they asked me why I didn't go see Goya.

From Madrid, Givati took an organized tour to Toledo, and visited El Greco's home. Standing there thrilled before the breathtaking vista and the paintings in their authentic birthplace, he missed the daily bus back to Madrid, and stayed with a local family. From Spain, he took the train to France. Initially he planned to stay in Paris for a while, but it wasn't a week before he found himself on board a ferry that crossed the English Channel.

Painter Aaron Witkin had a brother in London who was a sculptor. One of his friends, who had a small hotel in London, waited for me in the port and hosted me in his hotel for about a week. In London I met Ezra Orion who told me about the St. Martin's School of Art. I was especially impressed by Turner's large-scale canvases, which were absolutely wonderful, and found London inundated with Francis Bacon's works. Nouvelle figuration had already infiltrated the world of abstract, and later influenced my work as well, which in essence was not lyrical abstract at all, as it was often described.

Despite the turbulent ferry journey from France to England, Givati once again took the ferry to Amsterdam. It was late December. He rented a car and drove to the Kröller-Müller Museum to view Van Gogh's originals. Here too he was in for a surprise due to the great gap between the flatness of the reproduction and the power of the original.

The Van Goghs in Kröller-Müller struck me because they were nothing like what you could see in the reproductions. Except for a single class with Prupes at Avni, and another class with Janco in Oranim, I never really studied painting, nor Art History. In fact, all that I know – brushwork, color strokes – I learned from observation of Zaritsky, Streichman, Stematsky, and some other members of New Horizons. And then I suddenly saw, in Van Gogh, what brushstrokes are. But this was not the end of the story with him. Within all the madness there I found great discipline and realized that nothing was placed on the canvas by accident.

Givati returned to Amsterdam in stormy weather, exhausted from his travels. The New Year drunkards celebrated in his hotel, and he decided to go back to Paris, thus foregoing the planned encounter with Rembrandt's paintings.

This time Paris was less alienating. During his stay in the city, Givati met some Jewish artists who resided in the city and several Israeli artists who sojourned there. He rented a room in a hotel near Montparnasse, and to his surprise discovered that the shower was not included in the rent. He was also surprised by the number of exhibition salons in the city, which differed stylistically, thus enabling each artist to find a suitable platform for his work.

The Israeli artists were accustomed to struggles for hegemony. It was commonly believed that the "lyrical abstract", which was predominant for many years due to Zaritsky's unshakable authority, was the preferred style, and its status was considered higher than that of symbolical-

national painting, for example (as represented by Mordecai Ardon). Artists of all other styles traditionally stood on one side of the divide, whereas the other side was occupied by the New Horizons artists (although it gradually became clear that even among them there was no stylistic homogeneity), and a harsh battle took place between these two groups.

During my stay in Paris, Jacques Greenberg and Uri Stettner exhibited in one of the painting salons in the city. I knew Jacques back in Tel Aviv, following his exhibition at Chemerinsky Art Gallery. He was an ardent communist. After the exhibition he left Israel and settled in Paris. At that time, he was a star in Paris and attracted great attention on account of two impressive canvases he painted.

One day, at Café Select, I met the younger brother of painter Arieli from New Horizons, who took me to see the Salon des Réalistes Nouvelles. They had a place of their own as well, and I realized that each one found his niche in Paris. But the 'hottest' name in the city was Marian, a real prince. I didn't know him then, but I met him later, when I stayed in New York at the Chelsea Hotel. In Paris I already knew Hanna Ben Dov, whom I met when she came for a short visit in Israel during Pinchas Abramovic's opening at the Holon Museum. She gave me her address and phone number. There I also met David Lan-Bar, who visited Israel at the time as well. I immediately went to see Hanna, and we became good friends. I met Lan-Bar between La Coupole and Select. He used to sit in the closed balcony of La Coupole, and when I joined him he would spout his bitterness. In Paris I also met Yehuda Neiman, Meir'ke Lazar, and other Israelis who hung out in the City of Lights, and there were many of them. I once saw Menash'ke Kadishman there; he entered La Coupole wearing a sheepskin coat. I settled in Paris. Naturally I went to the Louvre, but the long queue in front of the *Mona Lisa* scared me off. I saw the Impressionists, I visited the galleries, especially the small ones that exhibited

works on paper, prints and etchings, and stayed there for quite a long time. After five months or so, when money ran out, I returned to Israel and received a cold welcome in the kibbutz. I told them I was willing to work as much as necessary during the high cotton season, and went to my shack to paint. I ordered stretched canvases and paints in the Association, and worked intensely. I was removed from the kibbutz work roster, and practically did what I wanted.

Tazpit: 1964

The members of the Tazpit group, which assembled on an ideological basis, perceived themselves as the followers of New Horizons, which ceased to exist as a group. Toward their first exhibition, held in the spring of 1964, they composed a manifesto where they attempted to define a shared painterly language. In fact, it was the strongest and most refined expression of the need to exhibit an uncompromising, homogenous exhibition of the abstract trend, including breakthroughs in the field of sculpture, and first touches of Pop Art. The group numbered some thirty artists, among them "alumni" of New Horizons, such as Streichman (who gave the group its name), Abramovic, Luisada, Wechsler, Okashi, Yehiel Shemi, Danziger, and others. These were joined by some of the artists from the "Group of Ten," among them Eliahu Gat and Ephraim Lifschitz. The seasoned artists invited young ones to the group, some of whom already had participated in the tenth and last exhibition of New Horizons at Mishkan Le'Omanut, Museum of Art, Ein Harod. Among the younger artists were Raffi Lavie, Moshe Kupferman, Ury Lifshitz, Ziva Liebllich, Aika Brown, Tuvia Beerli, Aron Doktor, Aaron Witkin, Buky Schwartz, Mati Basis, Tumarkin (whose name appeared in the catalogue, but he withdrew his participation before the opening due to disagreement, and his works were not presented), and others.

At the time Givati was, as aforesaid, still a

member of Kibbutz Sha'ar Ha'amakim, but he was already much more involved in the inner life of the Tel Aviv art scene. It was Abramovic who invited him to take part in the Tazpit exhibition, where he presented an abstract oil painting with a cubist structure, one of a series of paintings that dealt with composition of abstract forms with rhythmic color clusters, usually of the same color family, to create works at once intense and restrained, on medium-size canvases.

This was the artists' grandest hour. They provoked a storm in their demand "to exhibit their works in the museum space, to elicit agitation, to bring about a change in artistic life in Tel Aviv, and awaken public opinion to the wrongs done to painters and sculptors."⁶ Streichman, Argov, and Shemi conducted negotiations with the Mayor of Tel Aviv, Mr. Mordechai Namir, and with Dr. Gamzu, the Museum Director, in the name of the angry artists. The Tel Aviv Museum was forced to postpone a French exhibition scheduled for that date to allow the Tazpit group to stage its show. The professed goal of the group members was to fight for the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion, which was considered the most prestigious exhibition venue. Thus, after an adamant struggle on the part of the artists "against whims of foreign exhibitions and public relations" and for local art, the exhibition was held at the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion from April 14 through May 5.

The art-loving audience responded keenly to the daring exhibition, and the press was agitated as well. Tumarkin's work trousers and cast shoe, like Buky Schwartz's totem poles and Aika Brown's dolls, were elements still foreign in the mid-1960s Israeli art scene. The art critics, however, were not particularly impressed by the phenomenon already prevalent in the international scene, which, as usual, arrived in Israel somewhat belatedly. Rachel Engel discussed this in her essay "The Angry Fail to Shock: Veterans and Youngsters in Tazpit."

The Tazpit group with its 30 members is probably

the most comprehensive group of painters and sculptors to emerge from among the practitioners of plastic art in Israel – outside the framework of the Association of Painters and Sculptors. Moreover, it also seems to be the most versatile in its make-up, as it comprises well-known seasoned artists, such as Streichman and Kahana, alongside young artists at the outset of their career, such as Moshe Givati and David Ben Shaul.⁷

After noting that it was indeed time that artists confronted artistic values, as New Horizons did at the time, Engel goes on to describe the exhibition itself:

When you stroll about the three floors of the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion today, you realize that, in fact, the time came long ago. If Aika's black 'dolls' whose heads peek at you from behind apertures in a fabric screen hardened and stretched over the 'relief,' Tumarkin's corduroy trousers and cast left work shoe, Schwartz's architectural sculptures reminiscent of either totem poles or road signs, Aaron Witkin's harmonious geometrical wooden structures, or Aron Doktor's cold, rigorous metal works – had been presented in such a consolidated and implicit spectacle in museums years ago, they would have probably elicited strong echoes. Today, however, you pass by them almost indifferently, for similar works have already been exhibited in various art centers throughout the world, at times more perfected in their design, at times more imaginative, and in any event – much earlier...

Art critic Miriam Tal closely examined the works of the painters and sculptors who presented at the exhibition. After reviewing the sculptural works of Ezra Orion, Aaron Witkin, Aron Doktor, Buky Schwartz, Lea Vogel, Ury Lifshitz, Itzhak Danziger, and Yehiel Shemi (as for Tumarkin, Tal noted him separately at the end of her review, deeming him an important, innovative artist and a key figure in the exhibition), she maintains:

In painting, there is a fundamental difference

between painters who possess knowledge, experience, even virtuosity, yet remain essentially conformist, and those who have learned not only to speak the language of abstraction, but also to articulate meaningful, valuable statements. In Abramovic's work one sees light surfaces, slight squares, elegant strips, green flowering; in Argov's one finds semi-'formless' compositions, somewhat reminiscent of Schneider; one canvas contains a snow-white surface; the colors are usually gray, green, white, and light yellowish-brown. Arieli fuses the forms with broad strips in a diagonal composition and matching colors; Mati Basis's work displays an overly 'trendy' type of abstract painting, ostensibly bold, an abstract growth of sorts influenced by Streichman; a green-blue painting with forms in slight relief elicits interest. Avigdor Luisada (who was much more significant as a still-life painter) depicts mainly vertical, parallel, light forms against a dark background, or cold colored forms. In the work of Ephraim Lifschitz, who constructs his canvases diagonally, in vernal colors, admiration for Mark Tobey is evident.

Two painters, each in his own way, have found refuge in the world of paradox. Moshe Prupes, who was a highly skilled and utterly modern figurative painter, presents canvases that are entirely red, with echoes of other colors, or slight echoes of forms and shades. There is no deception or pretense here; this is a final destination of an honest quest, like a philosophical despair, visually unbearable; and Raffi Lavie – despite all my good will, I cannot share the excitement of some foreign critics vis-à-vis these whitish canvases, decorated with primordial drawn or incised lines, with echoes of pink or grayish tone. There is a type of endpoint of 'total scorn' for form and color, executed spitefully by an artist who is well capable of painting as well as drawing. Avshalom Okashi is faithful to monumental black surfaces, with torn, dramatic, white or orange pillars of light. This painting is certainly simplistic, yet undoubtedly impressive nevertheless.

It is rather among some of the younger artists that one finds values of truth devoid of sensationalism. In Moshe Kupferman's works the abstract language has released an eloquence that attests to a true personality. His painting is like a confession, and is based on agitated, violent forms, intense colors, mainly gray-purple. The only canvas by Moshe Givati, a 30-year old kibbutz member, is interesting in its restrained, domesticated coloration manifested in free, 'natural' squares. Eliahu Gar's watercolors are indeed formless, yet poetical, light, refined, like an abstract sea. Ury Lifshitz emerges as a painter in an intense whirlpool of mainly black and red 'commas' against a light background. It is an alert, pleasurable painting, influenced by George Mathieu.⁸

Miriam Tal goes on to describe the works of Ziva Liebllich, Hayuta Bahat, Mina Sisselman (whose paintings appeared only in the catalogue), David Ben Shaul, Tuvia Beeri, Chaim Kiewe, Yehezkel Streichman, and Aharon Kahana. Her descriptions sketch the Israeli art world at the time – the withdrawal of the older generation (except for the prominent artists who continued to operate in different ways even after the disintegration of New Horizons) and mainly the root-taking of the younger generation of artist at the time. The Tazpit exhibition offered a blend of both generations, spawning, according to Tal, a non-homogenous result. Nevertheless she still found a set of interesting works, mostly by young artists, in it.

Joav BarEl referred to the exhibition held at the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion in his column "Exhibitions in Tel Aviv":

Tazpit 1964 (Exhibition of Israel Painters and Sculptors – 1964) is unlike most group exhibitions with which the country has been blessed. First, it brings together 29 painters and sculptors, many of whom are among the leaders and shapers of the Israel plastic art scene. Second, it is not an exhibition organized 'from above' through external

initiative, but rather the result of internal artist activity, in response to issues that bother them, taking artistic action toward a shared goal. The reasons that triggered the need for this exhibition are many; the most important of them are: 1) The participants' shared belief that the only language which allows expression of the period in which we live is that of abstract art; 2) struggle against what the Tazpit members call a 'speculative approach to art, trade in Jewish consciousness, use of symbols that have long lost their meaning, use of external impressions and depictions of objects and figures'; 3) the need for a common platform on which to present the fruit of their work 'in apt light and with an uncompromising spirit' (all the quotes were extracted from the group's credo which opens the catalogue). In other words: the struggle waged by the Tazpit members is twofold: for exclusive expression in the language of abstract art, and against treating an art work based on the theme which it purports to depict.

BarEl concluded his essay by saying that:

The title *Tazpit 1964* implies a *Tazpit 1965*. Such an exhibition can be a major event for all art lovers, and preparations for it should already get underway.⁹

This, however, was the first and last exhibition of the Tazpit group.

Exhibition of Young Israeli Artists: 1965

In the spring of 1965 I visited Givati in his studio in Sha'ar Ha'amakin (needless to say I didn't realize then that one day I would seek the paintings he showed me on that visit in order to catalogue and exhibit them). He was wholly immersed in artistic work and the stormy occurrences in the art centers. My impression was that he stayed on the kibbutz solely for family reasons, and was awaiting an opportunity to leave. In Tel Aviv, preparations for the "Exhibition of Young Israeli Artists," which opened at the

Helena Rubinstein Pavilion in August 1965, were at their peak. It was decided that the participants' age would range from 20 to 35. Haim Gamzu, the exhibition curator, explained the decision in the introduction to the catalogue: "By restricting the participants' age we followed similar exhibitions in Europe, and mainly the precedent of the Parisian Young Artists' Biennale." In his essay Gamzu further noted:

Except for the odd ones, who took the ultimate risk in identifying with the most recent currents in Europe and America, the great majority of our young artists are often extremely cautious, overly so: – before they undertake to join any recent avant-garde ideology. Thus has arisen in them a sort of double mingling of influences; those who have been absent for a long period from an artistic centre abroad, and have not been confronted daily with the achievements and failures of the various innovators, and those who have come upon the neoteric abroad and under the shock of the modern, and the necessity for revision, have most radically abandoned their first way and taken new paths. It is therefore most important to summarize the achievement of those artists whose young age is generally a formative period, a period, simultaneously, of continuation and abandoning.

What characterises the artists represented in this exhibition is first the fact of their being, in most cases, either born, or at least, brought up in this country. Of like importance is the number of those belonging to the eastern communities, a fact which constitutes evidence of their becoming organically all one with the artistic creativity taking place here.

The exhibition was divided into three sections presented in three halls. The first featured mainly figurative paintings, the second – abstract painting, and the third – graphic works, figurative as well as abstract.

The "Exhibition of Young Israeli Artists" included 52 artists, among them Gad Ullman,

Arie Azéne, Benni Efrat, David Ben Shaul, Mati Basis, Moshe Givati, Joseph Gattegno, Abraham Hadad, Zvi Tolkovsky, Amos Yaskil, Raffi Lavie, Yael Lurie, Ury Lifshitz, Mordecai Moreh, David Meshulam, Shaul Samira, Milka Chisik, Jacques Mouri-Katmor, Joram Rozov, Ivan Schwebel, Yitzhak Shmueli, David Sharir, and many others. Some persisted and continued to stand out in Israeli art later on in their careers, others later left the country, and yet others disappeared from the local art scene in the course of time. Joav BarEl was positively impressed by the exhibition, and wrote in his column "Exhibitions in Tel Aviv":

In comparison to other general exhibitions, the "Exhibition of Young Israeli Artists" is characterized by high quality and multifacetedness. It displays a less dogmatic clinging to schools prevalent in Israel and a stronger emphasis on individual expression. This is not to say that the show does not contain exhibits that draw on certain schools – there are such exhibits, and the drawing on the lyrical abstract school so widespread in Israel is especially conspicuous – but even those associated with, or those that can be defined as part of the lyrical abstract school, emerge in the show in exhibits that are stamped with the imprint of self search and personal diversification. As aforesaid, the technical level is rather high, but equally important (perhaps even more) is that only a few of the participating artists display aestheticist ornamentation per se; the majority of the works display an emotional strength and the need to convey something meaningful.

BarEl, however, goes on to add a reservation:

Despite the general inclination to find independent paths, the exhibition contains virtually no echo of the radical-innovative quests that form a type of 'avant-garde' in contemporary plastic art... It may be highly significant that in an exhibition of young artists – who are, as usual, the first to respond to new trends – there is hardly any trace of assemblage, pop art, or op-art... In the department of abstract painting, the abstract

geometric trend is conspicuously absent; apparently, young artists in Israel are not inclined to the unequivocal, highly rationalistic layout of geometric abstract.¹⁰

Despite BarEl's critical tone in this excerpt, however, he sums up his article with a decisive assertion: "The 'Exhibition of Young Israeli Artists' is one of the most interesting staged this year, and should be applauded."

It is interesting to read Miriam Tal's response to the same exhibition in *Gazith*, where she emphasizes a certain withdrawal she discerns in abstract painting:

... This is especially conspicuous in the graphics department, which usually surpasses painting in originality as well as quality. Even though the entire second floor was populated by abstract paintings, some of them good ones, and although there were fine abstract paintings on the other two floors as well, a transition is felt which is manifested in the mental climate. The painters faithful to vernal-lyrical, floral-lyrical, or desert-lyrical abstraction, usually teem with *joie de vivre*. The descriptive painters and graphic artists are usually immersed in total pessimism devoid of all playfulness, of any pretense. It is an authentic, 'natural' pessimism. To this atmosphere one should add, as a third, conspicuous fundamental, a profound yearning to find new ways and set themselves free of abstract conformism or descriptive conformity. Our young painters, for the most part, no longer settle for mere aesthetic solutions. Thus we come to the fourth fundamental underlying the exhibition: the quest for new paths leads to the world of the imagination, symbol, mystery, magic, enigma. This phenomenon has, as it is well known, many names, and in most cases it should not be reduced within the narrower frame called Surrealism. Hence also the surprising fact, that the works of these young artists are more akin to those of the Jewish École de Paris than to the 'forefathers' of our painting, especially the forefathers of abstract. When one

sees youngsters filled with a revolutionary spirit and hot temper, but also with technique and knowledge, among them ones hailing from Iraq, Persia or the kibbutz, painting in the very tradition of Soutine, without imitation – it reinforces our belief in the continuity of Jewish painting with a definite ethnic character. This painting attests to 'natural' expressionist elements typical, as it were, of our people, which find a reasonable outlet, different than personal-lyrical or 'cold' painting. Man with his suffering and deliberations has returned to Israeli painting in either a symbolic form or realistic-stylized form.¹¹

Givati's work, which was influenced by the school of abstract painting and its various forms, as well as the works of several additional artists who participated in the exhibition, did not match this description at all, which was, in any event, anachronistic and displayed lack of awareness of the occurrences and mindsets among the young artists in the mid-1960s. The "Exhibition of Young Israeli Artists" awakened the Tel Aviv street and created yet another link in a chain of organized exhibitions held in key places in the ensuing years, thus paving the way to transformations that later occurred in the Israeli art world's approach to artistic exhibitions.

The Autumn Exhibitions: 1965-1970

Following the young painters' exhibition, Dr. Gamzu planned to stage a similar exhibition of young sculptors, but the plan never materialized. Instead, in December of that year he initiated the first Autumn Exhibition. The group of artists he selected for that show indicated an attempt to please everyone, both mature and young, a tendency manifested in Gamzu's introduction in the exhibition catalogue:

In the course of penetrating and comprehensive conversations that took place between artists and the management of the Museum, there emerged the firm conviction that this exhibition must be

more sweeping and less sectarian in nature, for if this should prove of inherent value, it might well mark the turning-point in the relationship between Israeli art and the art-viewers who closely follow its progress. There was recognition of the need to endeavor to incorporate in the Autumn Exhibition the works of artists, some of whom had formerly been members of the 'New Horizons' and later the 'Tazpit' group, and others who have not aligned themselves with these organizational frameworks, but whose paths had been close to those of their colleagues who belonged to these groups; they include artists of the same age and those who are older, and also painters who participated in the Exhibition of Young Artists which was held recently in the Tel Aviv Museum. It was thus that the idea of the Autumn Exhibition took shape, the outcome of the initiative taken by the Museum and the cooperation between it and the artists who are participating.

The list of participating artists indeed affirms the above. It includes painters and sculptors who were former members of New Horizons, alongside some of the young artists who participated in the Tazpit exhibition and the "Exhibition of Young Israeli Artists." Givati was also among the participants, with two medium-size oil paintings. Scrutiny of Givati's works from these years shows that he did not distinctively belong to the group of Lyrical Abstract painters, despite the assertion made by art critic Miriam Tal, that one could discern the clear influence of Zaritsky in his work. Givati's works from that period articulate a constant struggle between the painterly trends prevalent in those years, and an outburst of powerful personal expression. His leaning toward figuration and his inclination for a geometrical division of the canvas, alongside occasional wild brushstrokes, preserved his unique expression which makes it difficult to affiliate him with a specific school of painting. Givati had been and remained an artist who absorbed from everyone, and in the course of time created a distinctive,

identifiable painterly language all his own.

The Autumn Exhibition provided a counterpoint for the General Exhibition held annually by the Painters and Sculptors Association, which was a multi-participant exhibition shrouded in an air of anachronism and provinciality. Thirty-two artists participated in the first Autumn Exhibition (twenty of them were Tazpit artists). The eldest was the 74-year old Israel Paldi, and the youngest was around 28. Most of the works presented in the exhibition were defined by the critics as abstract art, although this was not necessarily the abstraction introduced by Zaritsky and his trailblazing colleagues. Among the participating artists, some turned to the type of abstract painting which had already been formulated in Israel and abroad, and already defined as "abstract academism," to which they added elements with local motifs; others sought new ways to convey their personal perspective. Pinchas Abramovic, Mati Basis, and Moshe Givati presented abstract paintings with vivid, eye-capturing coloration. Similarly, the abstract paintings by Jacob Wechsler and Avshalom Okashi displayed an exceptionally colorful quality. Yehiel Krize remained faithful to the accentuated white element and the echoed cityscapes, Moshe Prupes's paintings revealed flickers of red through ashen and silvery layers, with echoes of abstract star signs and the zodiac, and Moshe Kupferman presented impressive, tempestuous, grid-based canvases with warm coloration. Ziva Lieblach's canvases were dominated by the desert motif, both as a theme and as a raw material, and Tuvia Beeri created a cosmic-symbolical-imaginary world in his colorful etchings. Elements of Pop Art were discernible in Aaron Witkin's works; Ury Lifshitz presented dense, intricate canvases, and Raffi Lavie assembled segments of reality in paintings constructed as collages from newspaper and photograph shreds. Joseph Halevi combined an ethnic experience with more conservative values of abstract painting. Yehiel Kimchi presented

striking, powerful visions in red-black combinations. Michael Argov founded his work on white surfaces. Aharon Kahana presented large, impressive canvases that drew on sculptural motifs employed in his ceramic work, and David Ben Shaul aroused interest with his post-abstract landscape paintings. The 70-year old Marcel Janco presented dynamic, angular aluminum reliefs that seemed to burst forth from his rigid drawing line. Joav BarEl featured two abstract reliefs of surrealist nature, both entitled *Organic Landscape*, created through a sharp interplay of gestures and strong twists, which acquired added depth by means of dark shadows on the one hand, and meticulous, calculated restraint, on the other. Yehiel Shemi stood out in the exhibition mainly by virtue of his welded iron sculptures: one was *Homage to a Spaceman*, and the other – *Large Nest* – a giant sphere cut in half which enabled a peek into its rusty complex mechanism. Buky Schwartz was surprising with elegant aluminum sculptures that displayed interesting, promising kinetic and optic experiments. Danziger created a cold-looking geometric sculpture reminiscent of a quintessential architectural structure which he dubbed *The Ritual*, and the young Pinchas Eshet presented closed, rounded, lumpy, crude and abstract powerful forms made of sheet iron. The late Aika Brown was represented by a relief populated by ropes, sack cloth tears, and other elements that came together to generate a gloomy atmosphere. Israel Paldi presented reliefs consisting of primordial-eastern formations decorated with vivid colors. Dov Feigin introduced a new sculptural direction with sharp, symmetrical forms, like a game of variations with acute-angled triangles, and Lea Vogel presented *The Wall* – a daring work made of cardboard, comprising squares and rectangles, opaque areas and openings, with a few accents of dark paint and a touch of Pop. Aron Doktor innovated with an experimental work partly comprising ready-made elements; Hadar Frumkin presented sculptures made of crude basic logs, and Ori

Reisman's works were characterized by spontaneously primal compositions which he conveyed on canvas, attesting to mindsets like a seismograph. Moshe Mokady turned to a richer than usual coloration in his paintings, opting for a refined, light color gamut.

The first Autumn Exhibition stirred extensive reactions in the press and among art lovers. It was argued, for example, that all the participating artists stylistically belonged to the abstract wing in Israeli art, and thus the Museum intends to hold a separate exhibition of Israeli figurative art. The critics concurred that the exhibition did not display any new breakthroughs, and in this respect they regarded it as a sequel to the Tazpit exhibition. It was generally agreed that the "Exhibition of Young Israeli Artists" was better and had greater momentum than the "Autumn Exhibition." The fresh, lively, angry spirit of the New Horizons group once again came up, gaining many superlatives in comparison to this mild organization. The large number of prominent artists who did not participate in the exhibition was also mentioned, and thus it was declared that it must not be regarded as a cross-section of contemporary Israeli plastic art, not even in the field of abstract. Mina Sisselman published an even more blatant review in *Davar*:

If we compare this show to the exhibition of Polish artists recently presented in the very same pavilion, we shall find that the Poles' professional level exceeds that of the participants in the current exhibition. In the Poles' exhibition one felt that they approached their work with solemnity, despite the fact that it did not display a single current, but rather included numerous artists from diverse trends. Even the exhibition of the seven artists from Brazil held at Dizengoff House on Rothschild Boulevard surpassed this exhibition in both artistic level and technical know-how.¹²

In contrast, there were more positive views as well. Critic Reuven Berman, for one, was mainly impressed by the level of sculpture

in this exhibition:

The surprise in this exhibition lies in the fact that sculpture 'stole the show.' Both the mature and the young artists display fresh thought, knowledge, and daring.¹³

Rachel Engel found the exhibition auspicious too:

While one still cannot say that this is a display of the best of Israeli painting and sculpture, for many of our prominent artists are not among the participants, and some of the participants are not among our prime artists, nevertheless the pulse of life is clearly felt here. It is a living creature, and if it gradually grows and improves, it has a good chance to endure.¹⁴

Tslila Orgad directed most of her critical arrows at the provocative, defiant entrance hall, maintaining that it contained works that are "so anarchic and private, that they do not represent any specific current," but praised the display on the third floor:

The display is more homogenous, the style – better defined, and it is not impeded by different levels of skill, but rather displays a homogenous artistic will throbbing in each and every artist: Givati, Basis, Kimhi, Abramovic.¹⁵

Some wondered why artists like Zaritsky, Streichman, and Tumarkin were absent, if the Museum endeavored to display a cross-section of the "progressive" currents in Israeli art. Some of the critics, on the other hand, noted the reverberating impact of the kinetic-optical exhibition presented in Israel and the influences of Pop Art discernible in the exhibition favorably. They emphasized mainly the fact that it relied to a lesser extent on the brushstroke tradition and tended to be more communicative due to the artists' use of diverse materials, symbols, and contents. Thus, although the exhibition drew much criticism, ultimately everyone praised "The Autumn Exhibition," cautioned art lovers not to miss it, and even expressed a hope for fruitful

continuation of this series of exhibitions. Indeed, "The Autumn Exhibition" at the Tel Aviv Museum lasted consecutively until 1970 (except for 1967 when it was canceled due to the war), and each year it brought in new artists who enriched its contents and provoked reactions in the local art discourse.

The 1966 exhibition was supplemented by names such as Aviva Uri, Alima, Michael Gross, Yehuda Neiman, Lea Nickel, Menashe Kadishman, Moshe Castel, Mark Scheps, Tumarkin, and others. All in all, it featured 39 artists, 18 of them new ones. This time too, Gamzu introduced a declaration of intent similar to that presented at the first Autumn Exhibition, explaining that the Museum's goal in these shows was to diversify as much as possible between the different generations, to introduce innovations and surprise:

"To assemble in one joint art display the works of artists whose common feature is not necessarily the homogenous social and personal element, but rather an artistic trend aimed at new aesthetic experiments and at variegated contemporary reactions, of which the innovation, far from being merely external, is an organic element of the spirit of the present age, its hopes, disappointments and rebelliousness.' ... In our time the borders between the figurative and the abstract have become blurred. The artist is no longer judged according to his leanings towards one trend or another, but on the intrinsic quality of his work, the nature of his personal or universal message, the communicative force of his art...

At the opening of the 1969 Autumn Exhibition catalogue, when the tradition was renewed after a one year pause, Gamzu referred to the important transformations that occurred in the path of certain artists, as well as to the implications of external influences on the local art. Forty-one artists participated in the show, some of them not having participated in previous Autumn Exhibitions. Among the seasoned artists who

13 *Al Hamishmar*, 17 December 1965 [Hebrew].

14 *Ma'ariv*, 10 December 1965 [Hebrew].

15 *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 10 December 1965 [Hebrew].

joined the tradition, one ought to note Zaritsky and Streichman (alongside Abramovic, Feigin and Baser, who had taken part in previous exhibitions), David Lan-Bar and Hanna Ben Dov, who were living in Paris at the time, as well as several new names, such as Avraham Eilat, John Byle, Yehuda Ben Yehuda, Reuven Berman, Yair Garbuz, Moshe Gershuni, Michael Druks, Hava Mehutan, Oded Feingersh, and Henry Shelesnyak.

The response to this exhibition was ambivalent. On the one hand, it sparked the critics' imagination and elicited favorable, encouraging reviews; on the other, it also sparked harsh criticism, mainly aimed at the works of Moshe Gershuni and Yehuda Ben Yehuda. Miriam Tal wrote that:

Moshe Gershuni's exhibits are of the entertainment type; these non-functional, red-yellow pieces of furniture do not belong in an exhibition; instead of plastic art we have here 'the art of plastic'... Yehuda Ben Yehuda's work invoked the question, whether the end justifies the means in the field of art as well. Via bodies cast in latex from live people, the artist 'created' a public of naked people, men and women, lying, standing or walking, at times trembling by means of an electric appliance. The end of days? Perhaps the resurrection of the dead. All interpretations are possible; the impression was rather appalling.¹⁶

In this exhibition, Moshe Givati presented three large oil paintings of the same dimensions to which he reverted time and again over the years. Their compositions combined geometrical design with expressive motifs that conveyed a sense of horror and aggression.

The 1969 Autumn Exhibition opened in the absence of Gamzu, who was in New York at the time, working to expand the Museum's activities and prepare for the opening of the new building. Thirty-six artists participated in that exhibition. Only a handful of them were new artists who had not participated in the previous Autumn

Exhibitions, among them Rami Zohar, Daniel Peralta, Amichai Shavit, Michael Eisemann, Arie Aroch, Sioma Baram, Moshe Gringras, and Yeshayahu Granot. As in previous years, the artists were selected by the Museum in collaboration with a three-member committee of "an important group of artists," as Gamzu defined them (Joav BarEl and Alima were among the artists who sat in that committee over the years). Miriam Tal who reviewed the exhibition in her critical column in *Yedioth Ahronoth*, wrote:

Moshe Givati has turned pink, and he paints almost like Raffi Lavie several years ago, with hinted figures in light geometrical frames.¹⁷

The jury of the last Autumn Exhibition held in 1970 endeavored to lend the exhibition an avant-garde, current air. The 33 participants exhibited a wide range of artistic approaches. Some obeyed the criteria set out by the committee members and the challenges formulated by Gamzu at the beginning of the catalogue:

An art institution nowadays should, and some say must, provide information to the public concerning the various experiments which are being made in the field of artistic expression. This applies even if such experiments appear to be mere passing phases and even if some are doomed to failure. Certainly, it is only he who does nothing that risks nothing, but at the same time experiments which do not open up new aesthetic vistas, might lead art to a dead end. This Exhibition is experimental in character.

Indeed, the list of works in the catalogue indicated the experimental tendency among the artists, as well as the myriad techniques with which they chose to express themselves: Hena Evyatar created a work she dubbed *Corals* from a plastic material; Michael Eisemann processed a work entitled *Oh, quell cul t'as* from sewn cloth; and Michael Argov presented *Modulation* made of wood, nylon, and plastic. Joav BarEl created "*Ho, those sweet sweet memories*" in mixed media, Avital Geva set up an

16 *Gazith*, 26: 9-12, 1969-1970 [Hebrew].
17 *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 5 December 1969 [Hebrew].

"industrial line," 18 meters in length, and Yeshayahu Granoth created an object from fiberglass and metal. Moshe Gershuni presented *Columns* in mixed media, Ivan Moscovich – a group of dynamic objects in multimedia, and Raffi Lavie created *Something* in mixed materials. Shimshon Merchav presented 37 slides, Joshua Neustein – *Road Piece* made of straw and tar paper combined with sound, and Dida Oz presented *Spring Love*, a combination of oil and springs on plywood. Amihai Shavit presented *Trauma*, a work consisting of mirrors and wood; Buky Schwartz – *Sculpture from Wall to Wall* in colored plastic; and Eshet – *Yellow Element* made of shaped canvas. Alima used sponge-cloth for her work, and Henry Shelesnyak and Aviva Uri presented painting in mixed media.

Givati planned an installation for this exhibition that was supposed to consist of giant, transparent Plexiglas cube combined with a pile of paper sleeves. The latter were meant to fill the cube to its maximal height. The objective of the installation was to observe the pile's sinking within the cube from the exhibition's opening through its closing. The installation was planned in collaboration with a group of students at Haifa's Technion who were supposed to take part in its mounting. While Givati's name and a description of the installation indeed appear in the checklist, Givati himself recalls that he never participated in the 1970 Autumn Exhibition and the work plan never materialized, as he was drafted for 60 days of reserve service in Abu Rudeis.

The Autumn Exhibition tradition was stopped upon the opening of the Tel Aviv Museum's new building on King Saul Blvd.

10+ Group: 1965-1966

The 1960s were characterized by organizations of artistic groups aimed at gaining power in order to pressure the artistic establishment, and mainly the Tel Aviv Museum and its director, Haim

Gamzu. Raffi Lavie was the life and soul, the mover and go-getter behind the organizations of those years, and his influence in the field of Israeli art since the early 1960s swept the young generation of artists along – first those born in the 1930s, and subsequently the younger as well. Concurrent to the "Tazpit" exhibition, the "Exhibition of Young Israeli Artists," and the "Autumn Exhibitions" (where the impact of the "new winds" that blew in the establishment's face in full force was conspicuous), the 10+ Group was also established, perceiving its organization mainly as an impresario-like step; the group members decided to present their works together and invite guest artists to take part in their exhibitions. The idea of establishing the group originated as a response to the intrigues and plots in the selection of artists for the "Tazpit" exhibition. The idea was conceived by Aika Brown and Raffi Lavie in 1964, but Aika died in a car accident in France that same year, and the group's founding was postponed a year. The group included Raffi Lavie, Tuvia Beerli, Mati Basis, Buky Schwartz, Pinchas Eshet, Ury Lifshitz, Siona Shimshi, Joseph Gattegno, Benni Efrat, and Malka Rozen. Givati himself belonged to the "+" rather than the "10." Various artists were invited to take part in the exhibitions initiated by 10+ in the spirit of the policy introduced in the group's codex formulated in Raffi Lavie's apartment in August 8, 1965. The group's aim was not to attack the artistic establishment, but rather to operate by its side and even assimilate into its various activities. Among their achievements, the group members managed to force the Tel Aviv Museum to add Ury Lifshitz and Mati Basis to the "Exhibition of Young Israeli Artists" despite the management's objection. The group members strove to be original at all costs. They wanted to surprise, shock and shake the local art milieu, provoke and elicit a debate. The ten exhibitions they staged were given thematic titles and did not serve any ideological trend. They evinced the influences of Pop Art, and were typified by extensive use of

diverse materials. The critics blamed the group for its inclination for gimmicks. Ultimately, during its five years of operation, 10+ furnished some 70 artists with a platform, whereby to reach the consciousness of the local art milieu, thus helping to fight the stagnation that permeated the art world, setting it free and promoting it.

The first exhibition of 10+, "Painting on Textile," opened in December 1965, featuring fashion textiles painted by artists. It was held in the Maskit shop on Ben Yehuda Street, Tel Aviv. The critics mocked the exhibition which tried to tie painting and textile design – specifically, they laughed at the fabric dimensions which were matched for cutting dresses and shirts, and did not refer to the breakthrough introduced by the artists when they brought art down from the Olympus to the street. The members of the "10" who participated in the exhibition were Raffi Lavie, Siona Shimshi, Buky Schwartz, Joseph Gattegno, and Malka Rozen. The "+" was represented by Moshe Givati, Aaron Witkin, Nora Frenkel, and Dani Schwartz. Givati was given ten sheets of cloth by the Kibbutz sewing workshop, and painted on all of them in a special ironing technique (the dyes were supplied by a company for textile dyes, through the initiative of Siona Shimshi, who was Maskit's tie-dye artist). Once the fabrics were removed from the shop's ceiling where they had been suspended, Givati gave one painted fabric as a gift to Emma, Pinchas Abramovic's wife, from which she made herself an original evening gown that she wore for a gala concert of the Philharmonic Orchestra. Givati returned the remaining fabrics to the sewing workshop at Sha'ar Ha'amakim, where they made fashionable summer dresses for the female members. Fashion designer Jerry Melitz also used the painted fabrics to make unique dresses which were presented on the opening night of the second 10+ exhibition, and this time they were lauded by the critics.

The second exhibition of the 10+ group was entitled "Large Works" and held at the Artists'

House on Alharizi Street, Tel Aviv, in February 1966. The participating artists were asked to prepare works more than 2 meters in height. Seventeen artists took part in the show; some of them had no previous experience with such large-scale works. On the opening night the artists surprised the audience with a monumental collective piece installed before the audience as a live performance. It was the first time such an act was held in Israel, and it stirred up the artistic community. Concurrent with the exhibition there were also poetry readings, concerts of electronic music, film screenings, and theatrical performances. After the closing, the works were sold at an auction conducted by Dan Ben Amotz.

The exhibition stirred interest in the local art milieu, but the critics were in disagreement. Joav BarEl criticized some of the works, but wrote favorably about the exhibition as a whole:

While one may disagree about the quality of certain exhibits, there is no argument about one thing at least: the exhibition is not boring. For the first time one may clearly encounter echoes of the artistic shades now occupying such an important place in America and Europe – Pop Art, the object, art where the spectator takes an active part, etc. It is a fresh manifestation that must be congratulated – even if it is somewhat later than similar activities abroad, at times much more radical. Individualism stands out in the exhibition. At the same time, groups come together of their own, which may be classified according to the means of expression and its orientation.¹⁸

In this context BarEl classifies Givati, Basis, and Gattegno in one stylistic "group" of which he writes the following in the same article:

Mati Basis, Moshe Givati, and Joseph Gattegno, each in his own path, construct their works in more conventional techniques that contain clear echoes of the expressionist-lyrical abstract. Despite the large format, the three have managed to create exhibits that are among the most beautiful of their works; Gattegno is colorful and rich, Basis

is freer and braver than ever in his brushstrokes, and Givati is more accurate here than in any of his paintings in the past.

In his article BarEl reviews the works of all the exhibition participants where most of the 10+ group members were featured (save Tuvia Beerli and Ury Lifshitz), alongside the added artists whose number was larger than in the past. In contrast to BarEl, critic Tslila Orgad maintained that the exhibition displays "vulgarity in the guise of art":

It is usually possible to make amends for the fact that an artist employs the style of a foreign colleague, presenting it to his provincial peers as his own creation and vision – if that style serves as a mere vehicle and means, rising to the level of a work with a new, subjective meaning, one adapted to his own ideology. Unfortunately, this is not the case with some of these artists, who display all the 'Pop' and 'Op' and every other 'ism' now prevalent as painting's latest trend in Europe's capitals and in the USA. Lack of independent thought, detachment, pure avant-garde, excessive (inauthentic) tendentiousness, a type of propagandist-superficial showiness – this time these characterize the works by Segré, Lavie, Weinstein, Witkin, Doktor, Malka Rozen, and Buky; I am particularly appalled by the naked truth as revealed in the large mural painted by all the participants on opening night: for some reason it reeks of screeching – albeit without artistic perspective – of hit parades, and other mass psychoses, brush splashings, paint dripping on the ground, children's wall scribbles.¹⁹

Rachel Engel, in *Ma'ariv*, summed it up laconically:

They call their exhibition 'Large Works' – and it is unclear whether this refers to the works' physical dimensions or rather to their artistic value. Coming to observe the exhibits we have indeed found one monumental surface called a 'group painting' created by the 10+ members

on opening night, as well as other unusual exhibits of rather large dimensions, but the largeness did not manifest itself in the spiritual qualities as well.²⁰

Reuven Berman, who later joined the group's exhibitions as an artist, wrote in *Al Hamishmar*:

We witness an exhibition of Israeli art, where the reflected perceptions chronologically correspond with those dominating avant-garde art in the rest of the world. Here we have a group of young artists who at the very outset of their artistic maturation practically identify with the main artery of contemporary art. Since the predominant perceptions in the exhibition were formed via 'guidance' originating outside Israel, and were in part brought here directly by some of the 17 participants, who only recently finished their studies, training, or work periods in Europe, the artists participating in the exhibition have reached a crucial crossroads. The participants, as well as several other artists who did not participate in the exhibition, but whose work mode is closer to the perceptions and currents represented in it, will have to decide – whether to continue obtaining guidance overseas and keep their works 'abreast of the time' (thus creating a modern version of that provinciality against which they fight with all their strength), or to speak the art language of their period articulately, yet introduce into their works a personal shade and original thought that would reflect their personalities as well as their physical and spiritual setting. Only the second option may enable these young artists to transform the affinity with international art into a mutually productive link.²¹

From here Berman goes on to describe the works, relating, *inter alia*, to Givati's work:

In the excellent paintings by Givati and Gattegno, these two artists arrived at new achievements. Givati frees himself of Zaritsky's strong influence and his deep, mysterious painting.

19 Yedioth Ahronoth, 25 February 1966 [Hebrew].

20 Ma'ariv, 25 February 1966 [Hebrew].

21 Al Hamishmar, 25 February 1966 [Hebrew].

Unlike other critics, who mockingly describe the young artists' "imitated caprices," BarEl and Berman wholeheartedly encourage the external influences. Their stance stems from the recognition that Zaritsky's dominant impact has been so crucial, that it went beyond his own generation and continued to reverberate vigorously in the artistic perception of the young generation of artists, causing the young local art to run in place and shut itself off from new trends. Thus the influence of the currents that stirred up the US and Europe at the time and shaped Western art was restrained, and they remained outside the local arena far too long. Givati assimilated, in his own way, the values of "Lyrical Abstract" à la Zaritsky (which was a local version of sorts of the French informale and American Action Painting, yet more subtle and introverted, amorphous in its color and texture, more "breathing"). Now, however, he began setting new challenges for himself, opened himself up to new, additional influences, and strove to develop and consolidate his own painterly language.

When Givati was invited to participate in the exhibition "Large Works," he painted three very large-scale canvases. Hanna Ben Dov, who stayed in Israel at the time, visited him in his kibbutz studio and chose one of them for the exhibition. Givati brought the work to the Artists' House, and from there, went off to "Puerto Rico."²² When the exhibition was wholly mounted, he discovered that due to lack of wall space, his work and that of Gila Zur were installed as partitions within the exhibition. He disapproved of the hanging mode and decided to remove his painting, and Zur soon followed suit. When Raffi Lavie heard about the incident, he sought Givati at the Abramovics, and Emma called Givati in Puerto Rico. Eventually, Lavie installed his own work in the buffer zone originally allotted to Givati, thus solving the problem. Zur's work, which was later praised by the critics, was given a more suitable place as well, and the incident was resolved.

The 10+ members were most active in 1966, when they organized two additional exhibitions: "Miniatures" held in October at Gordon Gallery and "The Flower" held in December at Massada Gallery. Among the artists who participated in these exhibitions were Alima, Bianka Eshel-Gershuni, Batya Apollo, Mitchell Becker, Nora Frenkel, Menashe Kadishman, Shmuel Buck, Dani Karavan, Henry Shelesnyak, as well as artists and art critics Nissim Mevorach, Reuven Berman, and Joav BarEl. In the following year, in "Exhibition in Red" held at Katz Gallery in March 1967, and the exhibition "The Nude" at the Gordon Gallery in November that year, they were joined by artist-critics Mina Sisselman and Ran Shechori, as well as young artists Yair Garbuz, Aviva Uri, Jacques Mouri-Katmor, Jocheved Veinfeld, Miriam Tovia, and others. "The Nude" scored favorable reviews and gave art collectors an opportunity to purchase works for relatively low prices.

Paris: 1966-1968

Givati's involvement in the 10+ group was cut short in 1966, due to a trip to Paris, and was resumed only several years later, toward the end of the group's activity, when he returned from his world travels. Givati's declaration that he intended to leave the country again caused a conflict with the kibbutz members who did not regard his frequent travels for unlimited periods favorably, but he refused to succumb to the pressure and flew off:

For some time I lived in Hanna Ben Dov's studio at La Riche. I slept in the upstairs balcony, and in the morning I would evacuate the place to let her paint. Close to La Riche there was a big slaughterhouse, with a family restaurant, where I ate for next to nothing, like all the other artists.

Givati looked for paying work to cover his stay in Paris. At La Coupole he met singer Bracha Zefira, who introduced him to Yaacov Agam.

Agam's studio was like a small factory for kinetic art, and he offered Givati a job on the spot. After a week Agam asked Givati what he thought about the works he helped create in his studio:

I told him that the work was very aesthetic, but beyond that I knew nothing about kinetic art. I explained that I was a brush artist. He forthwith sent me home to paint, and told me to come back every Friday to collect my pay. In effect, he paid me to sit at home and paint, and never asked for a return. Later he purchased a fancy apartment in some building occupied exclusively by the French elite, and held a housewarming, to which he invited all the French art community and various men of means. There were Meshulam Riklis, Yona Fischer, Pierre Restany, and, of course, many of the Israeli artists – some long residents of Paris, and others who had newly arrived. That day he sent a driver to my place and asked me to load the car with my paintings. I arrived at the party with Hanna Ben Dov. Agam asked all the artists to bring catalogues and photographs of their work with them. The goal was to try to sell paintings to Meshulam Riklis. At some point Agam led Riklis to the room where my paintings were hanging. The next day, on Saturday, I sat at Café Select on my way to the opening of the 'May Salon' dedicated to kinetic art, where Agam exhibited some large-scale works. The first to come rushing toward me was Yehuda Neiman, who congratulated me that Riklis had purchased all of my paintings. Kahana, who arrived after him, congratulated me as well. This is how I found out that all my paintings were sold. When I arrived at the 'May Salon', Agam approached me and told me that Meshulam bought only four paintings, but that he spread the word that all the paintings were sold. Forthwith he asked me not to reveal the truth, and unfolded his theory about the right conduct to make an artist successful. He gave me a quick lecture about the value of artist jealousy and the way to create a prestigious image. Riklis paid me generously, a sum of money that covered the rest of my stay

in Paris. Years later I met Riklis's ex-wife at a Chanukah party held in the house of Meir Levin, a New York print publisher, and she told me that two of my paintings were at that very time making their way to Israel in a container, and the remaining two remained with Meshulam. In their divorce agreement they divided the paintings I had created and sold in Paris equally between them.

Several months later Givati returned to Israel, but immediately asked to leave for Paris again. The kibbutz secretary, Ezra Ben Dor, who was a teacher and an educator, asked Givati to persuade him that it was a crucial move before he agreed to urge the secretariat to approve his trip in their next meeting. "He succeeded, and my trip was approved," says Givati, "he just recommended that I leave the kibbutz as soon as possible, because one of the members, who was absent from the meeting, had already filed an appeal." Before leaving, Givati was asked to prepare the set for a play staged by the kibbutz members after a story by Nathan Shaham. He created décor on wheels which elicited great admiration among members.

On the eve of his next trip to Paris Givati met Chana Orloff, who came to Israel frequently during the 1960s for family visits and for the openings of her exhibitions and installation of her sculptures. Mr. Rabani, an art collector and Orloff's close friend, who was also a friend of Pinchas Abramovic, introduced them. When Orloff came for a visit in Haifa, Rabani took her to Givati's studio in Sha'ar Ha'amakim, where they also discussed Givati's upcoming trip to Paris. Orloff, who was known for her special relations with the Israeli artists (who constantly streamed into the City of Lights, for short as well as long sojourns), set up another meeting with Givati at Café Dome, warning him not to be late. When Givati came to the meeting on time, Orloff was already waiting for him.

After arriving in Paris and renting a small

studio apartment, Orloff came to visit him. She climbed three floors up the narrow staircase and purchased two of his small paintings.²³ She told him that at the outset of her career in Paris she made a living in textile design, and advised him to paint several patterns on paper, although professional pattern-making is done on cardboard, since the latter required certain technical know-how. Givati took her advice and prepared a sample portfolio of textile paintings:

I walked down the Champs-Élysées with the green sample portfolio. It started raining. I found myself standing in the entrance of a famous fashion house, and walked in for shelter. The receptionist asked me in French something I didn't understand, but ended with the words 'textile design.' I nodded, and she sent me upstairs. I climbed up and sat down. When the door opened, I was called in. The man who welcomed me spoke English. He liked the samples, noted the nonprofessional presentation, but nevertheless gave me a letter bearing their logo. He referred me to a company named Trikozan, where I met the owner, who was Italian. She picked ten patterns and paid me 4000 New Francs, which was a fortune to me. Before I left she mentioned that the samples should be made in a special technique.

I still lived in the same small flat, where I was even hosting Ury Lifshitz who had come for a visit from Israel. I was enrolled for art studies at the Beaux-Arts and turned up for lessons every now and then. There I met Kirsten, a Danish girl who was connected with the dance troupe of Francois and Dominique – rich kids who had a fancy large studio in Pigale. They were dancers and choreographers, and they invited me to prepare costumes and sets for their next performance. They staged the performance in Provence, and I joined them on the tour, for which they paid me generously. In the meantime, I was invited for dinner, together with Shlomo Cassos, by a well-to-do Jewish family that owned an empty spacious apartment. We befriended. Their daughter visited my family on the kibbutz, and

they let me stay in their apartment, where I had my own shower – a real luxury in Paris at the time. At long last I had lots of room in which to live and paint.

Orloff invited me for dinners in her home at Villa Seurat. She was a great cook. She used to say she created and sold sculptures only so she could eat better. We would usually eat in her wonderful kitchen. On one occasion she prepared a meal in honor of Ardon, and invited me as well. In the middle of the meal she pointed at the wall and yelled at him (because she was hard of hearing): 'You see the Modigliani there? Next to it there are two paintings by Givati.' This was her special way of expressing her fondness; perhaps she just wanted to tease Ardon. Lan-Bar and Kahana were her best friends and they often visited her at home. Lan-Bar used to move from one café to the next. I often joined him. He was a good painter and an expert in bargain hunting. As for Kahana, I visited him in his studio often. He died in Paris shortly thereafter.

I left Paris hastily due to the Six Day War. When I was still waiting to return to Israel, I performed security duties with two other men: a young rabbi who lived outside Paris, and another fellow who was a vet and was later killed in the war. We were charged with guarding the El-Al planes at Orly Airport. The planes flew back and forth, and led trucks of sorts.

At some point I decided to go back to Israel. I bought a ticket and boarded an Alitalia plane. My family waited for me at the airport. We drove for hours in a jeep whose headlights were turned off due to the blackout. When we arrived in the kibbutz early in the morning, the outbreak of the war had already been announced on the news. I packed a bag and hitchhiked north, to my IDF unit, which was already in the orchards of Kibbutz Gadot. I wasn't in the first wave that went up to the Golan Heights. When we got there, we encountered many bodies of Syrian soldiers. When I returned to the kibbutz, I found out that my shack had virtually collapsed. People went in,

23 The paintings were presented in the exhibition "Private Collection: The School of Paris & Eretz-Israel Artists chez Chana Orloff," Mané-Katz Museum, Haifa, 2002.

and each one took a painting. For the time being, they let me paint in a henhouse which was slightly fixed up for that purpose, but then it was needed, and they offered me a residential apartment – a highly unusual offer in the kibbutz at the time. That apartment was a wonderful studio. They even talked about the possibility of building a special studio for me, and I was treated exceptionally well. In the meantime, a friend from Paris removed my belongings and returned the apartment where I had stayed to its owners. I loved Paris and enjoyed every minute there; I thought I was going to return there, but when I came to Israel my plans changed. Hanna Ben Dov removed the canvases from the frames, rolled them up and stored all my paintings in her studio. They lay there for years, until Charles Tapiero, an art collector, brought them from Paris. It happened when I already worked in my studio on Neve Sha'an'an Street. I handed the roll, which I carefully preserved, to Haim the frame-maker, and he stretched all the paintings anew. I wanted to keep them in one group and not to scatter them, but since I made my living exclusively from painting, I eventually sold them to anyone who was interested, and they were scattered among collectors and art lovers.

[pp. 70-91]

New Beginnings: 1968-1970

During 1968 Givati had a solo exhibition at Goldman Gallery, Haifa, where he presented large-scale canvases again. Miriam Tal concluded the review of his exhibition thus:

A talented painter who combines a refined use of a light gamut, formal spurts, violent, even raw coloration, and transparent geometrical elements in his large-scale canvases; his recent paintings also contain found elements, such as enlarged photographs of skulls, relevant figures. The mental climate is violent. At times even erotic... The paintings where the visual and physical presence of death is felt are convincing in their frankness.²⁴

Yona Fischer arrived for a visit in Givati's studio on the kibbutz with Ephraim Ben Yakir. Ben Yakir had just opened the Mabat Gallery at the time, and was looking for artists to exhibit there. Tumarkin had just left Gordon Gallery and moved to Mabat. Givati signed a contract with Ben Yakir, which included a large industrial space at 34 Yitzhak Sadeh Street, and started painting intensively. Despite the good conditions he was offered by the kibbutz, he preferred the Tel Aviv option and the possibilities it opened up for him. His family stayed on the kibbutz until the end of the school year, and he used to visit them on weekends, and dedicated the rest of his time to work. The only person who came to visit him in his studio in those days was Joav BarEl (whom Givati met once when he came with his Susita Sport to lecture at Sha'ar Ha'amakim). They once went together to Ha'teatron Club. Joav didn't drink, and therefore they didn't hang out together in places where the bohemian drinkers used to sit. Tumarkin came for a single visit in the Studio on Yitzhak Sadeh Street. "It was a very exciting time for me," Givati recalls. "Whenever I finished a painting (and I worked a lot), I would carry it to Mabat and hang it on the wall right away. Tumarkin used to tease me for this." The dissociation from his family and the distance between Tel Aviv and Sha'ar Ha'amakim, however, made Givati's life difficult, and he and Yael decided to leave the kibbutz:

On one of my visits to the artist village of Ein Hod with Ephraim Ben Yakir and a hangover, we met Itche Mambush, who told me that Henry Shelesnyak's house was for rent. I returned to Tel Aviv, and signed a contract with Henry for six months. We enrolled the kids in the regional school, but there were very few children in Ein Hod, and we felt that the choice of place was a mistake. We didn't like Ein Hod for many reasons. I went to Haifa, and with the help of a real-estate agent, I found a large, spacious apartment on Shoshanat Hacarmel Street. We moved the children to a nearby school and settled in Haifa.

1969 was an especially fruitful year for Givati, in which he staged three solo exhibitions, in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and Haifa. In April, he opened a solo exhibition at Mabat Gallery. Tumarkin came to visit, wrote encouraging words on a note, and wished him luck. The critics were kind as well. Ran Shechori wrote about the exhibition in *Haaretz*:

Four different painterly approaches merge in Givati's recent works: 1) low-tension lyrical coloration based on free application of closely-hued blots of color; 2) contrasted expressive coloration achieved via swift, nervous brush strokes and exhaustion of sharp color tensions such as black-red; 3) geometric elements and smooth, sparse color surfaces borrowed from the Geometric Abstract; 4) print and figurative elements, such as photographs or paintings, in a technique akin to Pop.

In the past Givati deliberated between these various approaches and tried to combine geometrical elements in his essentially lyrical painting, which usually dissolved under his hand and lost their power, even causing a blurring of the lyrical values. In his recent works he seems to have found the way to obtain such combination: the center of the painting usually tends toward erupting expressivity, generated due to the sharp color tension, the crude fractures, and the fast, nervous brush rhythms. This pungent lump is balanced and restrained via broad geometrical surfaces, some colored coldly and rigidly with thick paint that cuts the amorphous forms at the center, others with a quiet, diluted coloration in myriad fine middle tones. This conflict spawns a canvas richer in color and visual occurrences. Givati manages to preserve the spontaneous freshness of the canvas, and at the same time, sustain a calculated, careful balance between the different elements. The three last works (nos. 4, 5, and 9) attest to yet another direction; these canvases tend toward a more rigid geometrical style and stricter color restraint. They are constructed as clean surfaces of color cut by figurative elements, such as skulls or nudes. There

is an interesting tension here between sharp color contrasts and painterly nuances, such as pencil scribbles revealed under the translucent layers of paint, or light drawing.²⁵

Shechori's review unfolds the many transformations and innovations that Givati's work revealed at the time, although in retrospect, one may say that these changes were a part of the jolting ritual that has accompanied Givati's practice throughout the years. For many years his work underwent changes reflecting his deliberating, influenced, kicking, constantly searching personality. His paintings from that period are indeed typified by an uncontrolled outburst of creativity, but closer examination of his works, from this and other periods, also reveals other facets in his artistic persona. Perusal of his artistic path shows an artist almost constantly immersed in deliberation that manifests itself in his great difficulty to express what sizzled within him throughout all the phases of his confrontation with the canvas.

Reuven Berman was likewise impressed by Givati's exhibition at Mabat, and compared his new works to those he had exhibited at the 1968 Autumn Exhibition. In his review Berman indicates the fundamental change in Givati's approach, noting the spontaneous painterly qualities and the disappearance of the rigid line from his works:

But not only slashing turbulent brushwork, savagely distorted figures and carcasses and an undercurrent of violence mark these large canvases – there is also that special blending of images, descriptive and abstract, fleshy and free-handedly geometric, special to Israeli surrealist-expressionism and its unknowing godfathers Rauschenberg and Bacon. These new paintings also reveal a conscious effort to destroy the impression of 'refinement' characteristic of all Givati's works until now, and to snarl with compulsive aesthetics-be-damned emotion.²⁶

25 *Haaretz*, 2 May 1969 [Hebrew].
26 *The Jerusalem Post*, 2 May 1969.

Berman identified the influences of Tumarkin, Lifshitz, Lavie, and Shelesnyak in Givati's new works, and noted the keen sense for composition with which he was endowed, the gift for extemporaneous invention, and his feel for the versatility of paint. These qualities, Berman concluded his review, come together to produce paintings of great vigor and perfection.

When the exhibition closed, Givati canceled his contract with Mabat Gallery, but two years later returned to exhibit there.

In October 1969 Givati was invited to exhibit at the Jerusalem Artists' House together with his colleague, Henry Shelesnyak. The two shared a single exhibition space, where Givati settled for presentation of two paintings and two drawings. His canvases stood out in their division of space into sharp, clear-cut circles and squares, and the use of elements of painting, drawing, print, adhesion, handwriting, scribbling, and graphic effects. The coloration was light, and was dominated mainly by pink and gray which emerged from the canvases' paleness. Especially impressive were the unusual space divisions on the canvas, and the sophisticated, accentuated delineation of the figures and their location on the painterly surface. Shelesnyak's works were characterized by distinctive minimalism of color and form. They were dominated by white, which became a key element in his work and one of the challenges he had already faced earlier in the 1960s, even before he became acquainted with Rauschenberg's work, as well as after he viewed his group of "white paintings" the year before in New York.

Lea Mejaro-Mintz wrote about the exhibition in *Hayom*:

The most conspicuous among the soon closing exhibitions at the Artists' House is that of Moshe Givati. Stylistically, Givati belongs to the group of artists who have adopted a mode of expression combining geometrical forms with classical drawing – a blend that has moved forward in the world in recent years. This style combines

a lucid, rational approach, and clear drawing on the one hand, with well-defined geometric forms on the other – a reaction of sorts to the emotional-spontaneous approach of Lyrical Abstract. At the same time, this style introduces the viewer to a labyrinth of situations, juxtaposing excerpts of ideas. Within this style Givati manages to display superb technical quality in clear, accurate drawing, as well as a refined sensitivity to color. In addition, he succeeds in incorporating multiple strata and forms that come together to create a syntax invoking an emotional experience where the vague and lucid are intertwined.²⁷

With regard to the drawing, however, some critics disagreed with Magero-Mintz. Naomi Benzur wrote that the works display "an all-too-hesitant drawing," and that "the combination of elements characteristic of Givati often generates an overflowing work."²⁸ Ran Shechori maintained that "despite the multiplicity of elements, the painting retains its color transparency and formal clarity due to the rational area division and fine execution."²⁹ In any event, the diversity of opinions voiced by the critics with regard to Givati's work indicates lively attention to his work in the local art milieu of the late 1960s.

Still in December of that year Givati opened a solo exhibition at Goldman Gallery, Haifa, where he presented relatively small oil paintings in which he repeatedly attempted to redefine the human figure. In reference to that exhibition, Eve Goldman wrote:

Givati's man is an other... On the whole, his work is dominated by a reduced process in all categories of painting: he usually settles for various pinks and whites, thin processing of broad color surfaces, and implied sculpturality of his figures.³⁰

Zvi Raphaeli articulated a different impression:

The exhibition's theme is drawn from a world of quasi 'cultural' substitutes, from the rosy, sweet world of the man-on-the-street. Men's heads grow decorative flowers of sorts, reminiscent of

27 *Davar*, 17 October 1969 [Hebrew].
 28 *Ma'ariv*, 24 October 1969 [Hebrew].
 29 *Haaretz*, 10 October 1969 [Hebrew].
 30 *Ma'ariv*, 19 December 1969 [Hebrew].

caricatural horns, speckled robots rendered in confetti-like dots, carried atop a geometrical construction. Showcases 'for all to see' and small boxes of sterile rooms become cosmetic commercial alcoves or erotic cubes of contemporary 'progress' (paradoxically, a type of vulgar, loathsome, disgusting rococo is created here). Despite some external influences, from American Pop (Allen Jones), there is more of an unconscious adaptation and subconscious assimilation here, rather than pure imitation; the artistic motivation and the meticulous architectural design of the painting differ from the works of most of the artists in the gloomy Israeli Autumn Exhibitions.³¹

Indeed, Givati's paintings from that period were governed by minimalism of form and color, on the one hand, alongside outbursts of warm, sharp color and aggressive drawing, on the other. Black emerged on the canvases in different variations, becoming gradually more dominant and lending the painting a calculated composition and a dark, mysterious air.

10+, Last Shows: 1968-1970

Givati did not take part in the next exhibition of 10+ held in December 1968 at 220 Gallery under the title "For and Against," since he was busy reorganizing his life. The artists in that exhibition were asked to respond to their social and cultural environment. The participants included poet David Avidan (who was *For Against and Against For*), playwright Hanoch Levine, who co-exhibited with Michael Druks (*Man and Wolf*), Avraham Eilat (who presented transparent plastic boxes filled with "chunks of meat" that threatened to spill out), Raffi Lavie (who presented the work *Post Mortem*), as well as Yaacov Dorchin, Yair Garbuz, Henry Shelesnyak, Alima, Aviva Uri, and others. Of the "ten" who founded the original group, only Lavie participated in the exhibition.

Three months after the 1969 solo exhibition, Givati once again joined the members of 10+ in

the group exhibition "Circle" that opened in August of that year at Gordon Gallery. For his work in the exhibition, he used screenprint on Japanese canvas mounted on circle-shaped plywood on which he painted a "leaf" in acrylic. From this essentially airy work the shades of pink and azure emanate, bursting out between the dark area and the white part, creating a fusion between a duplicated human figure and an unidentifiable, yet intriguing landscape.

Yigal Zalmona summed up the exhibition retrospectively in the culture and art review *Musag*:

Generally it seemed that the artists had already become accustomed to the type of challenges introduced by 10+, and learnt to fully exhaust the theme, to employ unusual techniques and materials, and to strive for the unconventional.³²

Twenty-six artists participated in that exhibition. Mina Sisselman who reviewed the summer exhibitions, wrote that in the group's previous show the participants arrived at more interesting results, such as in the exhibition dominated by the red stain³³:

For many of them this is a first exhibition, and one is impressed that the challenge is beyond their capacity. Most of the participants referred to the circle as a square, and those paintings executed within a circle could be squeezed into squares without feeling any real difference. Most of these artists presented compositions of ordinary painting based on transparent layers of paint, or line scribbling, and pressed it into a pure geometrical circle – two antithetical elements.³⁴

In her essay in *Hayom*, Miriam Tal lingered on each of the participating artists from a generally favorable position toward the exhibition, blended with little criticism:

As in the other exhibitions of this group, it contains interesting experiments and a fresh, pungent, impertinent spirit; there is a quest for 'clean' forms without sentimental baggage; but there is also

31 Haaretz, 12 December 1969 [Hebrew].

32 Musag, 6 November 1975 [Hebrew].

33 Sisselman herself participated in the "Exhibition in Red."

34 Davar, 15 August 1969 [Hebrew].

a profusion of absurd, or simply entertaining, phenomena. One senses a tendency among several artists to evolve toward relief sculpture or kinetic art.³⁵

Tal goes on to commend her favorite works, especially Batya Apollo's, criticizing what she perceives as "the result of chasing 'avant-garde' that has long been dressed in shrouds, in both Paris and New York," words which she deemed most appropriate to describe the work of her colleague from the competing paper, *Haaretz* – Ran Shechori. To Givati she allotted a simple description that avoided taking a stand: "Moshe Givati turned to a synthesis of photographs (transferred to the canvas) in different variations, and painting that connects them."

In that same year Raffi Lavie gave an interview to the *Tel Aviv* newspaper, and tried to explain to the interviewer, Liora Keren, what 10+ was, one minute before the group dissolved. To Keren's question, why the group was going to dissolve only shortly after it was founded, Lavie replied:

The problems have been resolved, and the arguments and the democracy. Our intentions were good, but it simply didn't work. Each artist wanted, for instance, to hang his work in the best space on the wall. [...] The group was a total democracy. The codex says that everything must be unanimous. But ten horses pull the wheels in ten directions. There were, for example, those who perceived the group only as a means to exhibit, and were not at all interested in the themes. As for inviting guests, there were endless arguments about that. Time ran its course, and I think eleven of the ten went abroad.³⁶

Lavie goes on to note that of the ten founding members of the group, only he and Pinchas Eshet remained in Israel. To the question what happened to 10+ after everyone went overseas, Lavie replied:

I stayed in Israel (I have never been abroad),

and I felt sorry for the whole business. I decided to continue as sole initiator and setter. A dictator. My only crime was that I kept the name 10+. It was a good name. It was worth using to get to the audience. I was later joined by Joav BarEl and Ran Shechori, and the three of us now determine 10+ unanimously. With them I arrived at compromises and concessions. And we call ourselves impresarios. Now no one decides except the three of us. All the others are invited once a month. There is no option.

The exhibition "10+ on Venus" was held in May 1970 at Gordon Gallery. In the same interview with the *Tel Aviv* newspaper Lavie unfolded his thoughts about Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, and its selection as the leading image for the ninth exhibition of 10+:

It triggers all kinds of associations. There is a star by that name, but this is beside the point. You just take Venus and create variations on it. The theme is difficult and intricate. We want to work on the theme together. Once again, only seven artists. We will meet, talk, exhaust the problems. The goal is to introduce a very clear theme through various perceptions, because it will not be allowed to change Venus. You will introduce Venus into your style, but it must be Venus, it must be recognized.

Ultimately, despite Lavie's declaration that the exhibition will include only seven artists, 17 artists took part in it: Avital Geva, Yair Garbuz, Oded Feingersh, Panasi, Michael Druks, Batya Apollo, Aviva Uri, Raffi Lavie, Jocheved Veinfeld, Henry Shelesnyak, Avraham Eilat, Ziva Ron, Micha Lubliner, Ran Shechori, Michael Eisemann, Moshe Givati, and Igael Tumarkin. Givati was not invited to participate in the exhibition originally, but he prepared a work, which he brought to the gallery toward the exhibition's mounting, and the painting was included despite Lavie's protest.

In his critical review, Azriel Kaufman divided

35 *Hayom*, 1 August 1969 [Hebrew].

36 *Tel Aviv*, 29 August 1969 [Hebrew].

the participants into four groups:

The first – including Ran Shechori, Henry Shelesnyak, Moshe Givati, and Yair Garbuz – confronts a profound, in-depth search. Their works attest to realization of aesthetic values while creating a balance between material elements and conceptual-intellectual elements. The intellectual alertness leaves its impression on most of the paintings, saving them from falling into superficiality and amateurish experimentation.³⁷

The exhibition, as a whole, invoked antithetical views, but almost all the critics noted the small number of artists who hit the mark of their personal taste and provided some justification for the underlying theme. Reuven Berman, for example, was only impressed by the work of two of the participants:

The works of Michael Eisemann and Michael Druks carry most of the burden of bolstering up the anti-conventional ideal and/or reputation of 10+.³⁸

Among the critics who wrote favorably about the works of Batya Apollo and Tumarkin, were also those who commended the pieces by Raffi Lavie and Oded Feingersh.

Givati's *Venus* concluded the series of paintings where he made minimal use of color and drawing, as well as a smooth, calculated measure of area division on the canvas. Venus herself was depicted in this work via fine drawing that emerged from a geometrical composition. An amorphous stain in dominant pink stood out on the canvas, within the azure and black applied in exemplary order behind, and the demarcation of the square in pale (peach-pinkish) skin color in which Venus's head was placed deepened the perspectival layer of the painting, lending it an additional dimension. As the square continued, Venus's body led into the black strip that closed the canvas downward.

The "Mattress Exhibition," which later turned out to be the finishing stroke of 10+, was held at Dugit Gallery in September 1970. The organizers

planned to cover the gallery's floor and walls with mattresses wrapped in uniform fabric in order to create a general sense of softness in the space. The result, however, was disappointing, and the critics regarded the exhibition, at best, as a tasteless joke. Some regretted the missed opportunity to present worthy environmental art for the first time, but the general atmosphere regarded the mattresses scattered on the gallery's floor and walls, prodding the visitors to lie down, with amusement.

Raffi Lavie decided that 10+ had reached its end and exhausted itself. New galleries emerged which displayed openness toward innovative artistic phenomena, and the group's members started to establish their place in the art milieu and did not require organizations such as those of 10+. The hostile reviews of the group's two final exhibitions also helped put an end to its continued activity. As aforesaid, from the perspective of time, Yigal Zalmona maintained that 10+ "indeed buried Lyrical Abstract... because its members aligned themselves with global trends, yet it succeeded in introducing a value system radically alternative to the prevalent one."³⁹ At the same time, one should bear in mind that the group members never declared such ambitions. Ultimately, their contribution to the politics and sociology of art was considerable, and to a large extent they shaped the evolution of the local art field since the 1970s. The group members turned their own ways, carrying considerable experience in staging thematic group exhibitions and with great openness to issues pertaining to artist-society-establishment relations.

The Summer '70 Exhibition

Givati ended the 1960s with a solo exhibition at Goldman Gallery. He began the 1970s with intense activity in Haifa. He did not cut himself off from Tel Aviv, which continued to function as the central axis in his life, but endeavored to shift some of the current, updated feeling of the central city to the peripheral Haifa, which in those

37 Haaretz, 22 May 1970 [Hebrew].

38 Yedioth Ahronoth, 22 May 1970 [Hebrew].

39 Musag, 6, November 1975 [Hebrew].

days was dominated by the Haifa Association of Painters and Sculptors, the sole authority that determined the exhibitions and contents to be presented locally. Thus, in the same month when 10+ staged its last show in Tel Aviv, the "Summer '70" exhibition opened at Gan Ha'em Park, Haifa. Givati initiated and produced the exhibition, and Shmuel Bialik, Head of the Culture Department at Haifa Municipality, gave him full backing and support throughout the production of this artistic endeavor which went beyond anything the northern city had been accustomed to theretofore. The press discussed Givati's event as "a breath of fresh air." The participating artists included Joshua Neustein, Yocheved Weinfeld, Buky Schwartz, Eli Ilan, Michael Argov, Aviva Uri, Michael Eisemann, Michael Druks, Pinchas Eshet, Ran Shechori, Henry Shelesnyak, Zvi Mairovich, Raffi Lavie, Ruth Cohen, Moshe Gershuni, Joav BarEl, Dan Levin, Shlomo Selinger, Shlomo Cassos, Itzhak Danziger, Michael Gross, Yehiel Shemi, and even Zaritsky. Raffi Lavie assisted Givati with the artist selection, and Danziger helped with the works' installation and hanging. The Mayor of Haifa, Moshe Flimann, opened the exhibition, and Joav BarEl spoke on behalf of the artists. Art critic Zvi Raphaeli (Haifa-based himself), expressed his excitement:

The 'familial' General Exhibition of Artists of Haifa and the North has passed away at a ripe old age. Through the private initiative and sole authority of one of the non-establishment artists, and with the Municipality's full support, a nationwide exhibition was organized for the first time.⁴⁰

The papers further noted that the selection finally deviated from the provincial atmosphere prevalent in the ordinary exhibitions held in the city, and from considerations of peace-keeping in the Association, protecting the 'rights of veteran members,' giving in to various pressure groups, etc. Sculpture exhibitions had previously been held at Gan Ha'em, but this time the pavilion that remained from the flower show was used for

mounting an exhibition of paintings and for presentation of works intended for interiors. The reviews about the quality of the works were mixed. Some perceived the exhibition as an opportunity to exhibit seasoned artists from among the members of New Horizons (two of whom participated in the exhibition), and voiced their hope to see more of their works alongside those of young artists that generally populated such exhibitions; everyone, however, wished for a fruitful continuation in the same spirit, and regarded the unusual initiative as a breakthrough as far as presentation of art works in Haifa was concerned.

For the mounting phase, Givati collaborated with Danziger who taught three-dimensional design at the Faculty of Architecture in the Technion, and resided in Haifa. At Gan Ha'em, Danziger himself featured the sculpture *Light*, comprised of four formal syllables whose combination generated a structure that refracted and reflected the light. The sculpture was made of steel cylinders painted white, blue and red, and linked in their top parts by means of rectangular surfaces of industrial metal painted white, calling to mind wings pulling upwards to the heavens. These were, in turn, connected to thin pipes painted white, and the entire construction created a type of drawing in space exposed to the sunlight and its motion. The structure cast shadows of varying degrees of brightness on the sculpture and the surrounding ground. The large-scale sculpture made its debut at the Tel Aviv Exhibition Grounds; subsequently, in the "Summer '70" exhibition in Haifa, a new and more sophisticated version of the sculpture was presented, including metal scraps contributed by the Shemen factory through the mediation of Benjamin Givli. The sculpture was disassembled at the end of the exhibition.

Givati himself presented paintings in acrylic on canvas, where he displayed measured use of black-gray-white hues that accentuated the geometric precision created on the surface, and

merged with free brush strokes devoid of meticulous planning.

Rehabilitation of the Nesher Quarry Project: 1970-1971

Givati first met Danziger in the 1960s, in the "Tazpit" exhibition, and subsequently in the Autumn Exhibitions. Their initial acquaintance was made in encounters at the Herlin café on the corner of Dizengoff and King George Streets in Tel Aviv, where the artists used to pass on their way from the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion. "We used to sit there and talk. This was how Danziger found out that I lived in Haifa. He had just come back from Düsseldorf thrilled from the encounter with Joseph Beuys." Danziger had already engaged with "landscape structures," "transient, ephemeral sculpture," and ideas originating in the affinities between natural qualities and human qualities, back in the 1960s. In Europe he found extensive echoes of the ideas that preoccupied him, came across far-reaching developments in the field of environmental art, and attended discussions of ecological issues which had been evolving throughout the world at the time. In November 1970 he was invited to present his work *Suspended Artificial Landscape* in the exhibition "Concept + Information" that opened at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, on February 2, 1971. This work was the first harbinger in the gradual realization of his future plans: on a floating square surface he scattered a blend of paints, plastic emulsion, cellulose fibers, and chemical fertilizer. With artificial lighting and irrigation the first signs of germination appeared on the surface. Transparencies projected next to the suspended work presented the environmental ecological damage caused by landscape-destroying industrial plants and air-polluting transportation hazards. Concurrently, Danziger sought a suitable platform to realize his ideas, aspiring to create a monumental environmental piece.

Photographer Shosh Reich arrived in Israel

from the USA at the time, and Joav BarEl brought her to Haifa. Influenced by Danziger's talk about earth art, Givati sought ways to realize ideas in that field. As a point of departure he asked Reich to photograph the retreating waves at the Bat Galim beach and the traces and forms they left on the sand. From these photographs Givati later created a series of unique works in screenprint technique. Subsequently, Reich also photographed expressionist moments on the football pitch at Kiryat Eliezer for him to paint. The two situated themselves by the goal in order to capture human situations and thrilling moments during the game. The series of works which Givati had planned according to Reich's soccer photographs, however, never materialized, as he recalls:

Danziger came to visit me at home, at Shoshanat Hacarmel. We discussed ideas and plans at length. One evening, on November 27, 1970, we both got an urgent phone call from Joav BarEl, who told us to turn on the television. In the news program 'Events of the Week' they showed Avraham Yoffe, Director of the National Parks Authority, and Yehoshua Raz, CEO of Nesher Ltd., in a TV debate about the fate of the deserted quarries on the western slopes of Mt. Carmel. The massive quarrying enterprise entirely thinned them out of the stone reserves required to produce cement. The press at the time harshly criticized the Nesher plant for the pollutants it discharged into the air, despite the special filter attached to the factory's smokestack. In effect, however, the filter slowed down the cement manufacturing process, and thus was not often activated at all. The plant also wanted to gnaw away at additional parts of the Carmel for quarrying a chalklike substance. Joav BarEl, a "man of ideas," instantly linked Danziger's aspirations with Nesher's image-building needs, and conceived of the project of rehabilitating the deserted quarry. Danziger had already been in touch with specialists and professionals from the Technion at the time, and they helped to explore different methods for

reclaiming the place. I knew the Nesher CEO, Yehoshua Raz, and immediately organized a meeting between them. Four days after the TV debate, in a meeting held in Raz's office, the 'Rehabilitation of the Nesher Quarry' project was launched. Danziger talked about hanging gardens, and I proposed to issue an international tender for architects and link the rehabilitation with the construction of a residential neighborhood. We started touring the quarry areas, and in one of them, which was adjacent to the factory and looked just like the surface of the moon, we discovered a green patch in the middle of the wilderness. It was difficult to climb up there, but as we approached, we discovered that the wind had carried some barbed wire fencing which became fixed in place up to that spot, and around it gathered scraps of paper and various types of drift in the course of time. Seeds blown in the wind were stopped by this obstruction, sprouting between it and the thin chalky layer that remained there, and pioneer plant species began to colonize that bare spot of ground. Hence we learned that there was no need for relief workers to recreate the landscape, but it could be achieved instead by much simpler means, because nature can take care of itself.

Nevertheless, rehabilitation of the site demanded preparation of an infrastructure, a process which involved planning rock explosions, creating depressions and craters in which the earth would be concentrated, moderating various gradients, scattering nets, preparing habitats for plant cultivation, seeding and strengthening the vegetation, and perennial maintenance which would involve observations and experiments intended for improvement and optimization. The Nesher Company was willing to take all the expenses involved in the rehabilitation upon itself. Raz knew that if the damaged slopes were rehabilitated, the company would be able to continue quarrying stone from the mountain.

Givati participated in all the stages of the

experimental rehabilitation of the Nesher Quarry, from the moment in which the idea was conceived to the phases of practical execution. In the planning phase he suggested to Danziger to photograph every phase in the work and document it by means of screenprints. Danziger liked the idea, and Givati approached a master-printer who worked in Itche Mambush's screenprint workshop in Ein Hod at the time:

I told him that we wanted to document a project.

We made a deal and agreed that he would come to work as subcontractor. We set up a workshop in my apartment in Shoshanat Hacarmel, and the place became a screenprint workshop and an office. Danziger used to come every morning to make phone calls and deal with the quarry issues. It came to the point that I moved my family out and rented another apartment for them. Itzhak and I often drove off to the quarry in his Morris station-wagon. It was winter, and we used to come back in the rain and mud.

Givati who had finished working on the series of works after Shosh Reich's nature photographs, now devoted himself to a series of works in other media (acrylic on canvas, mixed media on paper, screenprints, drawings), all of which pertained to the quarry. The theme was burning in him and provided him with extensive material for a new outburst of creativity. The rehabilitation project got underway, the ecology specialists from the Technion remained on site, and the activity was intense. The press began to moderate the harsh criticism previously aimed at Nesher due to the latter's willingness to collaborate and find solutions for the acute ecological problem. In January 1971 Givati had already decided to exhibit his new works at Mabat Gallery, Tel Aviv. Danziger, who had presented a large series of drawings there a year earlier, was the exhibition curator and was entrusted with hanging the works in the Gallery. In that exhibition Givati featured two large-scale canvases and a series of works on paper. His drawings evinced a light, lyrical

atmosphere. Soft gray pencil stains blended with a refined color drawing and dissolving textures in pastel hues. One can trace an affinity between these works and Larry Rivers's painterly approach, essentially based on virtuoso-free expression of the accomplishments of free abstract. Inspired by this approach, Givati incorporated figurative and graphic elements in the colorful texture using various technical means, such as pencil, oil pastels, brush and Indian ink, all on a single sheet of paper.

On January 15, 1971, all the papers published reviews of Givati's exhibition at Mabat Gallery, and all of them discussed the fact that Givati was a full partner in the quarry's rehabilitation process. Tslila Orgad, for example, wrote:

Nesher's deserted quarries, which have left a big, barren scar in the landscape of the Carmel, are now, as it is well known, the worry of National Parks Authority Director, Avraham Yoffe, and all those 'Beautiful Israel' enthusiasts. Several artists such as Danziger, BarEl, and others, and apparently Givati as well, have recently come together to find a landscaping-architectural solution to revive them. In the meantime, the desolation has not bored Givati, and has inspired him to create an extensive series of abstract color drawings in pens as well as thick black brushes. The tendency is coordinatory – relationship between hatched areas, stains dissolving like dust, horizontal lines, hinted objects in the horizon, and chiaroscuro.⁴¹

Ran Shechori further added in *Haaretz* that:

Givati's drawings are a free, imaginary depiction of a realistic fact – the quarries of the Nesher plant on Mt. Carmel. Under his treatment the theme has undergone many processes of reworking and painterly styling, and only little of the realistic image remains in the final product. One must perceive his drawings as free sketches for the challenge in which Givati takes part – the rehabilitation and reconstruction of the Carmel landscape, destroyed by the quarrying. His

impressions form a type of pre-documentation for a large-scale enterprise, enabling an artist to deviate from the boundaries of the paper or Museum space, and create on the scale of landscape and nature itself. This thought, evolving in the consciousness of contemporary art for several years now, strives for the creation of 'cosmic' art whose means are drawn from nature and from advanced technology, its dimensions are superhuman, and its place is in nature itself. Christo's enterprise in Australia and similar attempts made in the USA, Germany, and England, seem to open up a new artistic era. One must view the fact very positively that in Israel too, there is someone willing to allow such artistic-architectural-technologic experiment.⁴²

This was Givati's seventh solo exhibition, and Miriam Tal, in her review, emphasized that it was a landmark in Givati's evolution as an artist. She referred mainly to the smaller drawings which she deemed the most succinct and sensitive:

The current series certainly marks advancement toward formal concentration, a personal idiom and painterly culture. These are brush and stylus drawings; and there are also some papers where color is added by means of pastels or colored ink. The artist seems to succeed in articulating himself more convincingly in smaller paintings. According to him, several of the paintings were inspired by thoughts and proposals for the rectification of the landscape following its inevitable destruction, such as for the construction of quarries. Violent yet aesthetic, overly defined, the forms are concentrated at the center of the paper or canvas. The structure is diagonal, or alternatively based on a horizontal-vertical dichotomy. The white background is prevalent, but not exaggerated. Several sketchy paintings virtually convey the impression of abstract photographs, but there is no trace of photography here (nor of collage), and everything is achieved exclusively by means of drawing.⁴³

41 *Al Hamishmar*, 15 January 1971 [Hebrew].

42 *Haaretz*, 15 January 1971 [Hebrew].

43 *Lamerhav*, 15 January 1971 [Hebrew].

A similar impression was also reported by Mina Sisselman in *Davar*:

The theme of the exhibition: new impressions from the quarry in Nesher, near Haifa. The subject seems to have occupied the artist for a long time, and the results of his impressions are seen in the multiple drawings he now presents. Most of the paintings are executed in black-and-white, sharp stains and continuous lines. In some instances the stains are scattered, leaving white gaps between them, in others – blots are grouped together, generating rocky lumps. Occasionally there is a scribbling in red or blue that assimilates into the black drawing; the color adds softness and a picturesque atmosphere. The drawings are variously sized, some – quite monumental, but it is in the smaller drawings that the artist seems to arrive at greater encapsulation than in the larger ones.⁴⁴

Reuven Berman presented a different view in the art section of *Yedioth Ahronoth*:

The smaller works related to the quarry motivation tend to be studied rather than full-blown position. Other works on paper, mostly drawings, are purely abstract 'scrawl and scribble' images.⁴⁵

Like other critics, Berman also relates at length to the background story underlying the exhibition:

The show is an outcome of an unusual joint project Givati has been working on with sculptor Itzhak Danziger. They have been considering ways of solving one of the Haifa area's most prominent eyesores, the Nesher Cement Co.'s quarry that continues to eat into the flank of the Carmel. The idea is to base the work at the quarry on an overall carving plan that would result in a sort of landscape sculpture, to be topped off by plantings, and eventually turned into a park – a fine and original solution to a problem about which 'Israel Beautiful' enthusiasts have rightly raised a furor.

The paintings are impressions on topography and

geological structures, many of which also include visual thinking out loud on organization solutions. As paintings they rely entirely on the contrast of geometric qualities with organic painterly ones, and Givati truncates areas and inserts straight lines and angles into the relatively amorphous masses with considerable sensitivity. The large paintings are made of several smaller canvases joined together and can be reassembled in other combinations. ... Givati also showed me a photograph of a painting comprising elements from two different paintings, and the result appears perfectly harmonious.⁴⁶

Ostensibly, Givati underwent a transformation since his previous exhibition at Mabat Gallery (May 1969), where he featured works distinguished by their multiple elements: contrasting coloration, influences of geometrical abstract or Pop, pure figuration, incorporation of photographs, eruptive expressivity, etc. In the current exhibition only strong, sensitive pencil lines, geometric structuralism, free brush strokes, and reasoned stains remained – elements that came together to form an abstraction of landscape.

When the exhibition at Mabat closed, art patron Menahem Yam-Shahor, who had previously purchased works from Givati, came to the Gallery, loaded all the unsold works into his car, and mounted an exhibition in his home in Ramat Hasharon. Yam-Shahor and his wife printed invitations and hosted the guests at the opening. All the works were sold that very day, and thus the quarry series was distributed among multiple collectors. In the meantime, plans and works in the quarry site on the slopes of Mt. Carmel continued. Danziger consulted additional specialists for quarrying, gradients, and explosions on site. Nesher CEO, Yehoshua Raz, came to lecture students at the Technion. Together with ecologist Ze'ev Naveh, and land researcher, Joseph Morin, he also lectured before public officials. Danziger also harnessed his students at

44 *Davar*, 15 January 1971 [Hebrew].

45 *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 22 January 1971 [Hebrew].

46 *Ibid.*

the Technion for practical work on site, as part of the large team of rehabilitators which also included a PR adviser. Givati wanted to bring additional artists into the project, and set up a company to promote the idea of a residential center at the heart of the quarry, but Danziger did not operate in this direction. Only toward the end of the experimental phase – following the explosion intended to level the area, and the site's preparation for planting and seeding, was the final rehabilitation model formulated, which included all the functions – construction, industrial area, roads, etc. Joav BarEl, who had in fact conceived of the entire project and was its ideologist and theoretician, started teaching at the Technion that year. He was supposed to photograph and document every phase in the rehabilitation enterprise, but decided to resign from the project at the outset of practical work on site.

As the work in situ progressed, Givati also realized that the project was going to yield nothing practical, as was originally planned, and that all that remained of it was "the experimental rehabilitation of a select site in the area of a deserted quarry, as planned and executed by Itzhak Danziger, Joseph Morin and Ze'ev Naveh."⁴⁷ He was summoned to a law office in Tel Aviv to sign a document stating that he had no conceptual rights over the Nesher project, and after a long conversation with Danziger, accompanied by a fair share of alcohol, he was forced out of the project as well. The "model rehabilitation" was completed on November 21, 1971, as some thirty different plant species struck root and germinated, making the area green. Danziger thought that dissemination of data about the experiment was as important as the experiment itself. His final conclusion was that the most appropriate solution for the site would be designating the quarry area for construction due to its proximity to residential and industrial areas, and that every construction process would inevitably involve destruction of the natural landscape.

Haifa: 1970-1974

Givati, who was left with a screenprint workshop and debts from the quarry project, fell into severe dejection. At that stage he devoted himself to production of prints of his own works, as well as for Mairovich, Shmuel Katz, Michael Gross, and even Reuven Rubin. Prof. Avram Kampf, Head of the Art Department at the University of Haifa visited his studio and stayed there for an entire night. Following the visit he offered Givati a post as guest lecturer in the Department. In addition Givati taught art courses for gifted children in the Technion.

Givati's syllabus at the University was intended to supplement the artistic education of junior high-school teachers and of ordinary students. According to him, during the only year in which he managed to hold a position in the institutionalized world, he used to play with his students and conduct extensive experiments with them, but made no effort to teach them academic drawing or painting. On one occasion he ordered a ton of flour and 40kg yeast. The flour was poured in the center of the classroom, creating a flexible pile whose contours changed with every motion. The students were asked to observe the abstract forms generated by the flour and try to draw them. As part of another exercise, Givati asked the students to fold a sheet of paper into a ball:

Everyone laughed and there was already good atmosphere. Then I told them to open the paper ball, extend it and observe it. I explained that they had created a topographic entity. On the surface of the creased paper I told them to draw in soft pencil or in pastels, at their will. We later developed this exercise without creasing the paper. They arrived at very good results in drawing. We never did anything with the yeast. At the end of the academic year I planned to pour all the flour on the floor, mix it with the yeast, and let it rise to the ceiling and block the entire room. We simply never got to it because I was dismissed

47 This was how the documentation of the process was described in a catalogue produced through the support of Nesher Portland Cement Works Ltd. and under the auspices of the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. The introduction for the catalogue was written by General Avraham Yoffe, Director of the National Parks Authority, who also opened the exhibition of the Quarry Rehabilitation Project at the Israel Museum, on May 28, 1972.

before that. Among other things, I asked them to find an old chair at home and paint it with oils. I explained that artistic painting was primarily a painting job, and then I taught them what painting was. Then, one winter day, I took them to the forest. We gathered mud and returned to the classroom. We painted with the mud and in pencil. At first they were quite amused, but then they started working passionately, created earth paintings and obtained very interesting results. In another instance I asked them to bring pebbles from the beach to class. The exercise was to fold half a printer's sheet in four: on one side they were asked to write, in their own words, what colors they found on the pebbles. They could give original names to these colors, any color name that came to mind. Then they outlined a square the size of a floor tile at the center of the opposite quarter, delineated it with masking tape, and were asked to paint all the colors they had seen in the pebbles within the square. I think they created real jewels of abstract painting.

Givati had an American nude model named Sandy, who Hebraized her name to Holit. She was his wife's best friend. Both were active in the Women's Liberation League in Haifa. Holit used to model for Givati in his studio, and he also brought her to model for his students in University:

When we started working with a model, I made all kinds of experiments on her. I wrapped her body in nylon and tied it with ropes. The students had to draw her body as it appeared through the creased nylon. In fact, they had to treat the entire mass, and not only the body itself. Eventually they didn't try to depict Holit, but rather some concept of her. There we also did the first experiments in printing a human body on canvas. Holit would smear her body in baby oil, and then with a thick layer of paint, and I would then press her entire body onto the canvas. Removing the paint from her body was a different story. I had to become sophisticated, and instead

of cotton wool to remove the paint, I used leftover cotton fabric that I bought in sacks from some factory. Once we used turpentine, which scratched her skin in sensitive places. There were terrible screams. At the time I was working on a monumental canvas that Goldman from the Gallery wanted to present in an exhibition organized by Shimon Avni and Alima, where Raffi Lavie and several other Tel Aviv artists also participated. Holit quit in the middle of the work. Alima, who just arrived, stripped instantly, we smeared her body with oil and paint, and the print of her body was born on the giant canvas suspended that very day on the central wall in Goldman's gallery.

Givati's teaching mode was incongruent with the conventional mode, and the University authorities were dissatisfied. He once asked for clay to be brought from the Ceramics Department, then ordered his students to create balls from the clay, throw them forcefully against the wall, and refer to the textures they left on it. At the heat of the exercise several windows were broken. It so happened that during that very lesson Kampf came into the classroom with a group of donors from Germany, and the drama into which they chanced obviously appeared like an illusive theatrical play. Givati never showed up for faculty meetings, which he found wholly loathsome, and at the end of the year, when the Department planned a general exhibition of all the students, he decided that his students had nothing to show. He believed that the exhibition only served the competition between teachers, and did not want to have any part in it. He gave all the students high grades, claiming that they all worked well throughout the year. His conflicts with the management gradually increased, until his work in the University was terminated.

Goldman Gallery became a type of Tel Aviv extension in Haifa. Following the 10+ exhibition "Venus," Goldman held solo exhibitions for many of the leading artists of the time. Givati himself

staged a solo exhibition in the Gallery which opened in May 1972. Comprised of oil paintings, screenprints and works in mixed media, it introduced yet another development of his ideas from his involvement in the quarry project, and touched upon ecological and technological contents. Critic Zvi Raphaeli summed the exhibition up as follows:

In large-scale canvases the artist reflects the conflict between wilderness and destruction on the one hand, and the reconstruction and rectification of that landscape, on the other. The graphic motifs that appeared in his previous works were diminished, and they now serve as a mere infrastructure from which neutral color elements bifurcate, intended to break the ostensibly functional 'geometry.' The geometrical hatching, symmetrical surfaces demarcated with an outline – a horizontal and vertical line – make room for sharp, poetical coloration. Furthermore, the artist has managed to lend the chemical material what it lacks; thus, for example, several oil paintings resemble fine watercolors, and even the 'non-color' is reflected as a colorist work par excellence. This time it seems as though the artist has freed himself from the Americanization that had often dominated his elements. Motifs of the immediate landscape are slowly created here. The color texture, rigid in the not-so-distant past, has become more subtle and sensitive. The architectural structure of the work is no longer as closed as it had been, but freer and more spatial. In particular, Givati has managed to introduce via mixed media, a dialectical dialogue between quasi-Fauvist spontaneity and concrete design.⁴⁸

In September 1973 the exhibition "Graphic Art in Israel Today" opened at the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion. This prize awarding exhibition was initiated for the State of Israel's 25th Anniversary celebrations. The 120 works by the 73 artists selected for the show, presented a wide range of print techniques: woodcut, various types of etching and engraving, screenprint, and mixed

techniques. Givati presented two screenprints which awarded him the second prize of 1,500 Lira. The prints were extracted from a series of landscapes in which he incorporated graphic elements that reinforced spatial and fragmentary effects of an arid lunar landscape alongside a blossoming of earthly nature in blue, green, white and black, at times combined with touches of another color, or alternatively, reducing the coloration to two hues only. Haim Gamzu sent Givati his congratulations for the award.

Body Imprints: 1974

Art lover and collector Freddy Kwiatt purchased two paintings by Givati following his exhibition at Mabat Gallery. He continued to follow Givati's activity, and asked Ephraim Ben Yakir for the artist's Tel Aviv address. Later on he also came to Haifa, purchased all the paintings from Givati that were available in his studio at the time, loaded them on a small truck he rented on the spot, and drove off. When Dvora Schocken opened her gallery at 59 Hovevei Zion Street in Tel Aviv, Itche Mambush brought her and her husband Gideon, to Givati's studio where only several rolls intended to be destroyed remained. The Schockens already owned a small painting by Givati for several years, which they purchased in an auction immediately after the Six Day War. Yael Givati gave the painting to Ruth Dayan to be sold in a benefit conducted by Dan Ben Amotz in Moshe Dayan's house, while her husband was staying abroad. When the two heard that all the paintings from the studio were in Kwiatt's possession, they went to his storehouse and purchased a large number of works from him.

Givati now had contacts with Goldman Gallery in Haifa and Dvora Schocken Gallery in Tel Aviv. The International Art Fair opened in Düsseldorf at that time, and Givati decided to go to Germany. In Düsseldorf he ran into Joseph Beuys who came to one of the exhibition venues in the city with a group of students dressed in

strange costumes, and the entire incident deeply impressed Givati. From there he went to stay with an Israeli friend, a well-to-do contractor who lived in the middle of a forest near Frankfurt:

He had an entire zoo there, a private stream, and a habitat for trout. We went to Frankfurt. We drank vodka all night long in some bar. When I woke up in the morning with a terrible hangover, the German housekeeper told me that war had broken out in Israel. We turned on the television, and suddenly I recognized the son of a friend, standing with his hands raised above his head in Syrian captivity. This is how I found out that the Yom Kippur War broke out.

Givati stayed in Germany for only a week, and rushed back to Israel on the third day of war. For six months he served as a tank crew member in the northern Suez Canal, and only at the end of the war returned home, to intensive work in the studio. On April 1, 1974, his solo exhibition at Dvora Schocken Gallery opened. Givati presented mainly paintings of body stamps on large-scale canvases, alongside screenprints and paper works in various techniques. Imprinting of the models' bodies was executed both as a performance in and of itself, documented in photographs, and as a basis for paintings, which he reworked with a brush. The authentic presence of the female body unfurled across large canvases on which he painted interpenetrating, multi-leveled structures and refractions which spawned a perspectival interplay. The exhibition, which was installation-like by nature, raised controversial views: Rachel Engel of *Ma'ariv* regarded the body of works favorably, perceiving it as an integral part of Givati's engagement in the art and print techniques in which he had trained in Paris and in his Haifa workshop:

Moshe Givati, one of the most conspicuous among the younger Israeli painters, has recently opened a new solo exhibition (at Dvora Schocken Gallery), where he presents mainly large-scale canvases created in the past three years, distinguished by

a unique character... His beautiful screenprints, occasionally shown in group exhibitions, have already attracted public attention. In his current exhibition, Givati presents 'prints' of a different kind. In fact, these are oil paintings executed with brush in a distinctive painterly technique, layer upon layer upon layer, but the point of departure for the painting is a stain not rendered with a brush, but rather 'printed' on the canvas with the body of a woman who served as a model. Givati colors the woman's nude body in oils, and then rolls her on the canvas extended on the floor, until the impression of her body is printed on it. Around it the artist constructs his composition – dulled-soft, quasi-abstract figures alongside sharp-contoured, rectangular and rigid forms. The final result – the painting – is a large picture whose theme is definitely man and landscape. For instance, one such large canvas – a 'living-fleshy' nude section within a natural setting and cityscapes. The colors – it is time to talk about them – are the light, ostensibly-faded hues of azure, light green, pink and purple, all of them, in fact, sky-colors, if one may use such a term, as opposed to the worldly, heavy-brown 'earth colors.' The 'body print' infuses the canvas with a dynamic of sorts, vivid-warm movement, a type of occurrence, unrest. In Painting no. 6 the body print is repeated several times, and its setting is all dulled by the layers of white paint which Givati applies to the depicted subject time and again, painting and covering, and so on and so forth. Bodies upon bodies shed their forms, transforming into white shadows of themselves, incarnating in various forms.⁴⁹

The Jerusalem Post published another favorable review, by critic Gil Goldfine, who shed light on yet another angle in these works when he identified allusions to romantic landscapes in the abstract paintings:

Moshe Givati's recent paintings are epic and grandiosely handsome abstractions which vaguely suggest landscape. Large canvases, measured in

meters, virtually hide the gallery walls. Upon entering the room the viewer is enchanted by billowing spaces that open before him, and with a bit of imagination, is engulfed as a participant rather than as an observer.

The pictures are smartly composed of components organized around a division of the surface into quasi-interior rectangular compartments. Within these frames the horizonless craters of infinite space are formed by transient patterns of active rhythmic movements created by Givati's lyrical style and impelling brushwork.

Concentrating on blues, Givati builds a rich spectrum ranging from lustful ultramarines and cobalts to delicate turquoise and cerulean. Although color limitation is prevalent, it is not the rule. Occasional bursts of secondary hues are in evidence, but Givati's accepted norm of variegated colors is blatantly absent (but not missed) from these canvases.

A recurring theme is a headless female torso. Graphically stated and superimposed onto the surface rather than painted into the composition, it possesses the qualities of symbolic reality posed amidst the abstract swirls of pigment and illusionary space. On one hand the torso is a heavy-breasted fertility figure from pre-history, and then again she appears as a graceful classical marble, reminiscent of the Victory of Samothrace. The inclusion of a solidly painted slap protruding from the free flowing brushwork indicates some form of architectural structure and adds mystery, if not literal meaning, to the abstract fields.

Givati's plunge into spacial and symbolic illusions has resulted in marvelous canvases of a sprawling romantic nature. Despite their abstract base, the scale, dynamism and total concept curiously parallel the grand tradition of Italian interior decorative painting epitomized by masters like Correggio, Tintoretto and Veronese. Whatever his ultimate objectives may be, Givati has taken the right step by cultivating a change from bold and pragmatic delineation to a more mellow and intuitive style.⁵⁰

Another view regarding Givati's treatment of the human body was offered by Nitza Flexer in *Davar*:

Givati created adaptations of the formal options and dynamic postures of the human body. Attempts had already been made at realizing conceptual ideas and articulating an existential view by painting the human body several years ago; Givati continues this line, by using the body as a source of inspiration for projection of amorphous color stains that fuse to form figures in various poses. The figures unite with the backgrounds, and the surfaces break with the introduction of anomalous levels that hint at a change in perspective.

The artist's treatment of the human body calls to mind the approach of Italian Renaissance artists to weight and the emphasis to volumes, generating a strict style. Givati uses the heavy style without the volumes, neutralizing the figures of any similarity to a personal portrait. His monumental figures are somewhat reminiscent of the presence produced by Michelangelo from his human depiction. Light and shade disappear, and are replaced by factures and color tones.⁵¹

Varda Chechik wrote in *Al Hamishmar*:

The paintings presented in the current exhibition are fine looking; they contain a subtle sensuality, and the exhibition gives the viewer great pleasure. Something in the contact between color and canvas surrenders a different painting mode. Approaching the canvas, one may discern the textures of paints in traces of rubber shoeprints, and in the naked body – in the impressions of the skin, with its various orifices and signs. On further viewing from a distance, the beholder feels a sense of conclusiveness-inconclusiveness, a certain tremor that the artist has managed to bring into the canvas.⁵²

The same article also includes an interview with Givati, where he explains the work process on the series of body imprints:

50 *The Jerusalem Post*, 12 April 1974.

51 *Davar*, 24 April 1974 [Hebrew].

52 *Al Hamishmar*, 10 April 1974 [Hebrew].

I stretch a large canvas on the floor, and initially construct the color texture of the work with the models (two of them). At this point I am still not particularly interested in the body shapes. In the second phase I emphasize loci of my choice. At times, when I want to obtain a different contact with the canvas than the quivering touch of the body, I wrap one of the models in a material such as polyethylene, thus generating artificial, synthetic sub-forms within the forms of the naked body. At times I subsequently process the canvas laboriously, and then the initial forms burst forth. Sometimes there is a phase in the finished work where the viewer can discern both the work process and the finished result.⁵³

But the canvases that were characterized by airy, fluttering touches and distinctive aquarelle qualities did not find favor with all the critics. Sarah Breitberg's article, "External Mannerism or Real Necessity?", indicated a different view from that of her aforementioned colleagues with regard to the works' implications and reflections:

When I think of quintessential lyrical-abstract painting, Stematsky and not Zaritsky, considered the forefather of this current, comes to mind. Stematsky's work is wholly a quest for the unclear, whose touch is truly hesitant and whose painting (for this type of painting intends to document and expose the painter's inner self) attests to his being an introverted figure trying to hide itself even on canvas.

Givati, at least formally, belongs to this current. The color application and choice make him stylistically a young follower, even an innovator of this school. But here I go back to start – because in Givati's work the Lyrical Abstract appears like external mannerism rather than a real necessity that truly reflects a state of mind and a worldview. Lyrical Abstract, like the more aggressive Abstract Expressionism, requires high involvement of the artist in his work. The entire painterly process in such work is like a seismograph that conveys the artist's character and feelings via the brush

strokes, their intensity, and the colors of the painting. Since we are concerned with an entirely abstract painting, the artist does not have a theme to cling to in order to cover himself, and he paints mental self-portraits.

It is hard to determine why Givati's refined painting seemed to me as though it uses this technique outwardly. I don't know the artist, and even if I had, I would not have purported to analyze his character and compare it to what is reflected in his paintings. Nevertheless I would like to argue, based on this painting alone, that his work as a whole appears too elegant, too calculated and too intentionally refined to be perceived as genuine.

I was told that in the current exhibition Givati's painterly point of departure was 'live imprints' on canvas. Givati colored a nude woman, pressed her body onto the canvas when the paint was still wet, thus obtaining a live print of a female nude (indeed, this is not an original idea). Thenceforth, he started processing the canvas, where the print of the nude body served as a realistic reference point around and on which he developed the abstract. The finished work is so processed, that it is hard to tell it originated in a real, live print of a naked woman. The viewer thus misses the interplay between real and imaginary, which could have been an interesting element of tension on the canvas.⁵⁴

Ran Shehori's review in *Haaretz* was even harsher. He negated forthwith the idea of stamping the canvas with the naked body, regarding it as an absurd, imitative phenomenon. In his review he emphasized that Givati:

...repeats Yves Klein's method, who smeared models with paint and let them rub against the white canvas. What was, in Klein's case in the early 1950s, the beginning of daring, innovative artistic thought and a search for meaningful expression that largely paved the path to neo-figuration and 'Pop' – becomes in Givati's case a 'gimmick.' Stamping the naked body against

53 Ibid.
54 Yedioth Ahronoth, 26 April 1974 [Hebrew].

the canvas undergoes a meticulous brush reworking, so that in the final result – large, airy, saccharine-sweet canvases replete with details – nothing is left of the initial process.⁵⁵

. 166-172]

In effect, however, Givati did not try to revive or imitate Klein's method, but simply to use it for his needs. The significance of the body prints was manifested precisely at the point where the eye captured the loss of reality in the split second of the body's fluttering touch on the large canvases, and in the stamped figure's inclination not to be fixed on the body of the canvas, but rather expropriate it each moment anew. Consequently the feeling of a body simultaneously in a state of entry and exit was invoked. Despite the aesthetic observance of balanced composition, and the complementary "treatment" given to the female body, the imprint of the ostensibly-a-priori-erased body was but a part of an indefinite, dissolving space.

In the mid-1960s and early 1970s, before the Yom Kippur War, Israeli avant-garde artists engaged in environmental art and created conceptual-political works with a political-utopian air. In the wake of the war, however, the political artists were infused with a new spirit that made them even more radical. This tendency gradually evolved in the 1980s and 1990s, and continues to this day. The spirit of the 1970s, which bore the echoes of conceptual art, pushed painting aside. The pure aesthetic discussion of painting lost its relevance with the younger generation of art critics.

Givati himself continued to pursue painting and print techniques. Following the exhibition at Dvora Schocken Gallery, and after donating one of his body imprints series to the collection of the Tel Aviv Museum, Haim Gamzu invited Givati to present a solo exhibition at the Museum. In the contract signed between them it was agreed that the exhibition would be staged at the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion on October 15, 1975. Immediately after signing the contract Givati left

for New York, mainly to rest from a long and tiring reserve service. Yael and the children stayed in Israel. Two of them were already serving in the IDF.

New York: 1974-1982

Givati landed in New York in October 1974 together with printer Arie Moskowitz. He spent the first night in a jazz club near Columbia University, where the leading musicians used to perform. The next day, Ovadia Alkara took them to the Chelsea Hotel, which was famous for its place in the history of New York art, and where Israeli art and culture figures also used to stay for shorter and longer periods. At the Chelsea Hotel Givati met George Chemeche and Pinchas Maryan. Maryan was a friend of Yehuda Ben-Yehuda, and of Ruthie and Danny Shani, brother of poet Rina Shani, also among Givati's friends. In the couple's apartment at the hotel Givati met poet David Avidan, who was also staying there during his visit to New York. Givati recalls that Maryan bought a wooden horse for Ruthie and Danny's son, and a similar horse appeared in his own paintings as well. While visiting Givati (in the loft to which he later moved), Maryan complained that he was not invited to present his works in any leading museum in Israel. The Chelsea Hotel foyer walls were lined with original works by prominent American artists who had lived there over the years. It was there that Givati first encountered Larry Rivers's artworks, to whose works critics in Israel compared Givati's earlier paintings even a decade before. Givati later saw a monumental painting by Rivers at the office of an American publisher with whom he worked. It belonged to one of Rivers's series addressing epics from American history. It was an abstract painting which Rivers traced with quick pencil lines, and it left a profound impression on Givati. At the entrance to the Chelsea Hotel there was also a work by Christo, as well as paintings by Lea Nikel and George Chemeche.

Givati met Lea Nikel – who arrived in New York immediately following her solo exhibition curated by Gamzu at the Tel Aviv Museum in 1973 – at the Chelsea Hotel after he had already moved elsewhere. Adam Baruch and Ariela Shavid also lived at the Chelsea Hotel. Givati stayed in the Hotel for a month, and then decided to postpone his return to Israel for a while. He was determined to withdraw from the contract he had signed with Gamzu, and canceled the exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum. The hotel owner's son offered him a studio on the premises by a special arrangement, but Givati preferred to move away, and rented a large loft nearby. Together with Moskowitz he once again set up the screenprint workshop, and stayed to live and work in Chelsea.

In New York Givati met Roni Lavie whom he would later marry after his divorce from Yael. She was an art student who lived and worked in New York. They met through a mutual friend who brought Roni to Givati's studio. Following the visit, Roni started working in the screenprint workshop, and eventually moved in.

On April 9, 1975, Givati's solo exhibition at AICF Israel Art Center, New York, opened. Meira Gera organized the exhibition which featured some forty large prints as well as works on paper that Givati had brought with him from Israel. The 30th issue of *Tarbut* (a periodical published in New York by the America-Israel Cultural Foundation, providing up-to-date information about the goings-on in Israeli art and culture for the local Jewish community) contained an interview with Givati by Doris Cylikowski. Cylikowski described the house/studio/workshop as a great big open loft with numerous windows, devoid of partitions between the various functions of work and living. She then went on to review the works Givati painted in New York – large-scale silk screens reworked with brushes, oils, pastels, pencils and ink, and occasionally – spray. In the interview Givati explained that he does not paint "ideas":

I am not a philosopher or an intellectual. I paint

beautiful paintings. On the other hand, if art lovers find ideas in the paintings, they are experiencing their own discovery. My touch on the canvas is my story.⁵⁶

In the summer of that year, in his absence, Givati's screenprints were presented at Goldman Gallery, Haifa, and Arta Gallery, Jerusalem. During his stay in New York he painted the series "Equus," inspired by a play by that name staged on Broadway. Givati saw the play twice, day after day, once with Richard Burton, and once again with Tom Courtney, who was double-cast with Burton in the same role. Written by Peter Shaffer, the play, which was also staged in Israel at the Cameri, recounts the story of a psychiatrist exploring the motives of a young man who entered a psychotic state and blinded six horses with a spike. The representation of the horses on stage was obtained via silhouettes, and these inspired Givati's images in the series of paintings where he returned to the horse motif which had already been present in different variations throughout his oeuvre. Originally, the horse image served Givati as a means of communication in early childhood. When he was returned at the age of five from his grandmother's home in Khotin to Israel, and could not yet speak Hebrew, he used to sit and draw horses that his mother's friends and relatives deeply admired, often "purchasing" a painting from him in exchange for an apple.

Givati's life in New York evolved differently than he had planned. He painted very little, made a living in real-estate, among other things, and spent a great deal of his time at the movies. With a loan from Bank Hapoalim he purchased the loft on the sixth floor in the building where he lived, and moved the workshop that was theretofore housed in his residential apartment. Later he also purchased the loft on the eighth floor, sold the property where the workshop was housed for a fair profit, and moved the screenprint workshop to the next street.

Givati and Joav BarEl maintained a correspondence, and in 1976, when BarEl took a sabbatical from the Technion, he came to New York, straight to Givati's loft where he stayed for six months. Givati recalls:

He was a wonderful guest. He hung around the city a lot and enjoyed every minute. Joav was an excellent chess player, but because I had no idea how to play chess, I taught him backgammon, and from the fourth game he constantly beat me. Roni and I joined him twice to see plays, and we once went out together to some club. Since he was a 'man of ideas,' he used to sit and invent things, and conceive of countless original ideas. At the time he talked about mass distribution of a 'Love Glove' he invented, and Roberto Cavalli, the Italian fashion designer from Florence whom he met in New York, created it for him. The intention was to market it through the American *Playboy* magazine. Joav didn't make contacts with the Israeli artists who lived in New York at the time, and hung out with various local characters.

New York of the 1970s was teeming with Israelis. Michael Sgan-Cohen, who arrived in the city in 1973, after several years in Los Angeles, accurately described the life of the Israeli artists and cultural figures in New York. In an article he published in the periodical *Kav* he recounts how he met Michael Gitlin, whom he had met previously in Jerusalem, as well as many artists whom he met for the first time in New York, such as Yehuda Ben-Yehuda who exhibited at OK Harris Gallery. He also met Koki Doktori, who like Ben-Yehuda, engaged in environmental latex casts which he exhibited at Rina Gallery. This was the focal point of Israeli artistic activity in New York in those days, featuring artists such as Joshua Neustein, Michael Gitlin, Zigi Ben-Haim, Georgette Batlle, Pinchas Cohen Gan, Buky Schwartz, George Chemeche, Benni Efrat, Micha Laury, Micha Ullman, Gerard Marx, Mirit Cohen, and others. Sgan-Cohen:

As for the interrelations between artists, one must

recall that this issue was always accompanied by great tension. To wit: the idea that mutual influence is something that cannot and must not be avoided was not common, and the artists, I believe, did not always understand that excessive openness and generosity in such matters could benefit them more than threaten their identity, including their personal identity as artists, and could even promote the Israelis as a group with standing and power. For me, as one who came from the field of Art History, groups and manifestoes were a precondition for the creation of a 'group,' but this was not the general spirit. The Israeli artists in New York never dreamt of joint practical-theoretical activity, and, as Gerard Marx once told me: the mutual influences between the artists occurred 'despite the personal relationships,' rather than out of free will. At the same time, there was some collective atmosphere, and there were gatherings, mainly social, of Israeli artists.⁵⁷

At this point Sgan-Cohen shifts to a description of an Israeli party held in George Chemeche's suite at the Chelsea Hotel. He names the participants and finds that in these "parties" came together:

...expatriates of sorts, with common troubles, a lot of Hebrew, a shared distant flavor, and an unsurprising affinity to the base camp. But many of these parties were familial, parve, whereas each infiltrated America individually, in his own way. There were no long conversations into the night; the events were 'social.' Still I remember one night in Gitlin's studio, when a spontaneous conversation evolved about Israeli identity: there were Kupferman, who came to New York for his exhibition at Rina Gallery, Pinchas Cohen-Gan, Doktori, and Gitlin even recorded the spontaneous conversation... The contacts between the artists were more mundane: exchange of information, and mainly work contacts and concrete help.⁵⁸

Givati avoided social contacts with the community of Israeli artists, including those who used to call on Joav BarEl. His New York path differed from that of the Israeli artists who came to the city. He painted very little and did not hang out in the "right places" to promote his career, but he loved New York and lived there his own way. Talking about BarEl he recalls:

Joav also felt that New York was the place for him. He opened a bank account there and planned his next moves. When he decided to go back to Israel to close out his business there, he gave me power of attorney for his account and left. He intended to end his work in the Technion nearby, sell his apartment in Tel Aviv, take his wife Esther and move to New York. After he left I started attending to the legal side of his move to New York, as a specialist in Plexiglas design in my workshop.

Roni went to Israel and Joav was supposed to pick her up at the airport. He never showed up. She called his house and someone told her that Joav died. Roni still made it to the funeral. I immediately went to the Bank in New York and informed them of his death. Roni took care of transferring the money to Esther, and Roberto sent her the 'Love Glove.' Two weeks after Joav's death, his US work permit arrived.

That same year Maryan also passed away at the Chelsea Hotel. Givati went to hear the eulogies at the funeral home in New Jersey, where his widow sent the body to be cremated:

She insisted on it. Roni went with her to buy an urn. They sent the urn to Paris where it was finally buried in the Jewish Cemetery. He was supposed to be buried at the Cemetery of Père-Lachaise, since he received the French Legion of Honor before he died, but things became entangled because of French bureaucracy.

After Maryan's death, Marc Scheps arrived in New York to organize a comprehensive exhibition of Maryan's work at the Tel Aviv Museum. He

wanted to take the opportunity to meet Givati as well, but the latter thought there was no point in a meeting at this point in his life, which ran its course between "one hangover and the next."

Givati and Moskowitz operated the screenprint workshop for some two years. They employed approximately seven workers, usually art students, and produced quality prints, some for the Graphics Department of the prestigious Pace Gallery. Following an economic crisis in the print branch Givati was forced to close the workshop at the end of 1977. He moved all the equipment to Moskowitz's possession. A year later he sold the property where he lived, and bought a loft on 36th Street, in the confection industry area. Roni, who became pregnant in the meantime, gave birth to their daughter Shifra in November 1979. About a month after her birth Givati went to Israel for his mother's funeral, and shortly thereafter, visited Israel again for the wedding of his daughter, Vered.

From 36th Street the couple wandered on to Crown Heights. On Purim Givati befriended a group of young Chabad Chassids whom he met through his friend, Yehuda Atai (who had purchased several of his paintings from the New York period, the only ones that survived from those years):

I was caught up by the whole business. I was empty inside, and it intrigued me. The Jewish ghetto of Crown Heights attracted me. A twenty-minute subway ride from the city center there was a Jewish *shtetl*, just like those described in pre-World War II literature. We moved there, and I loved the place. At home I lived as I pleased. I had a television and a stereo. Talented Yeshiva students from among the Chabad youngsters liked to visit me, watch television, listen to music, and smoke a joint. They always had conflicts about the food, they were not sure everything was quite 'glatt-kosher' in my house. I later realized that *kashrut* was so deeply-rooted in an ultra-Orthodox Jew, that even if he 'left religion,' the need to be wary still accompanied him for a long time.

Roni stayed in Israel at the time with her parents at Kibbutz Kfar Masaryk. Following a letter I had written to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, where I described my condition, they handled my divorce from Yael through an emissary (so I didn't commit a sin), and when Roni and Shifra came back, they arranged a lawful wedding for us, separating men from women, and with a spread that the Rebbe's chef prepared for us overnight.

We lived in Crown Heights for a whole year, during which I had three personal meetings with the Lubavitcher Rebbe. During one of these I was photographed going in to meet him. I enjoyed listening to him talk and explain things in his unique way. In the Jewish neighborhood I finally found some peace of mind, and even painted. I used to pray in a small *shtibel* where I arrived every day late in the morning. I never left the ghetto. Everything I needed was at arm's length, including grass which I got in an Afro-American shop that bordered the neighborhood. There was a synagogue there that housed Afro-Americans who had converted to Judaism years back, among them the Ben-David family. Their children learned in ultra-Orthodox *cheder* and *yeshiva* schools. For some reason, all the community's 'outcasts' prayed there. I liked that synagogue because they had a piano, and instead of sweet *Kiddush* wine they served whisky, and there was also first rate grass.

During the eight years in which he lived in New York, Givati painted very little. He created a series of "Black Paintings" on which he worked at the loft on 36th Street. Henry Shelesnyak visited him there and liked the series. He made a collage on a white canvas that stood at the side and left it for Givati as a gift. Givati took the black works with him to Crown Heights, where he traced over them with paint. When he returned to Israel, he gave the canvases to a friend for safekeeping, the friend forwarded them to Ovadia Alkara's studio, and from there their whereabouts have since been lost.

The Return to Tel Aviv: 1982

In the early 1980s Roni and Moshe Givati decided to return to Israel. Even though Shifra had a nanny, and the couple led a rather comfortable life, Roni had difficulties adapting to life in Crown Heights, mainly because she could not relate to the ultra-Orthodox lifestyle. Their Chabad friends offered them an apartment in Kfar Chabad, but in the end Givati rented an apartment in Tel Aviv, on Hayarkon Street, across the street from Atarim Square. For a while he used to pray in the Chabad synagogue on Nahalat Benyamin Street, occasionally together with Moni Moshonov. One Friday evening, when the two came back from synagogue, after the meal, Moshonov was preparing to leave for the theater for the last night of the play *The Last Striptease Show*, where he performed alongside Shlomo Bar-Aba. Givati recalls:

I wanted to see the play, and I told him that I would walk with him to the theater, but then I realized the grotesqueness of an ultra-Orthodox Jew entering a play in the theater on a Sabbath eve. I at once removed the yarmulke and the fringed garment, and we took a taxi to Tzavta. It was still a long time before I could go into just any restaurant and eat. The Kosher issue clings to you and doesn't let go all that quickly. Quite soon I started working and became myself again. We lived on Hayarkon Street for about six months, until Roni was pregnant again. I rented an apartment on Alharizi Street, near the Artists' House, which served us for living and work. I always worked where I lived, which I still do. While I lived in New York, the general situation in Israel changed. There was serious inflation, and I still hadn't gotten back to selling paintings. Pinchas Abramovic organized a paid job for me – I taught screenprint at the Artists' Association print workshop.

After returning to secular life, Givati resumed his former routine: painting now filled the void

created during years of artistic “drought.” In one of the openings at Sarah Levi Gallery, he met artist Ami Levi, Sarah’s son. Levi wanted to work with him in the print workshop at the Artists’ House. Givati was pleased to discover that he had no prior knowledge in print, and gave him professional training. Shortly thereafter Levi offered him to exhibit in his mother’s gallery. In May 1983 Givati staged a solo exhibition at Sarah Levi Gallery.

Since the exhibition at Dvora Schocken Gallery in 1974, Givati had not exhibited in Israel, and nothing had been written about him in the local press. The limited exhibition he now staged received favorable references in the art sections, which for some reason abstained from any mention of Givati’s long absence from the local art scene. Nissim Mevorach, in his article “Depth without Perspective,” noted Givati’s avoidance of all figurative elements positively:

Moshe Givati is interested in suggestions, mainly in transparencies. His point of departure is the canvas and the occurrences thereon. He concocts small, entirely abstract stories without any overt link to the landscape, as one can mistakenly think. His large-scale works, which somehow find their place within the small gallery space, are replete with detailed sensitivities that must be followed, a fact that furnishes the viewer with deep pleasure, as he scans the surface bit by bit.

Moshe Givati works without waiting for the undercoat to dry before applying another layer of oil, and yet, with great dexterity, he constructs a system of colorful, expressive layers, obtaining superb visual qualities.

The artist tries not to draw away from his base, the canvas, and this aspiration is more than a mere technical matter. It is an expression of the principle of clinging to the means themselves, without redundant wallowing in thematic mud. Although reality here, and perhaps in the entire world, needs fixing, Givati does not attempt to rectify it in his paintings. This is not his job, and unlike many others, he is well aware of this. There is no trace

in his paintings of what one encounters in a prevalent kind of works charged with all types of ‘pros and cons,’ which enables many inferior artists to hide their artistic powerlessness with a highly charged thematic fig leaf. In this respect, Moshe Givati’s highly recommended exhibition is practically an exception.⁵⁹

Ilan Nachshon, in his article “The Covert and the Overt,” indicated the return of the lyrical abstract into Givati’s work:

Moshe Givati, who is known as an artist and a print teacher, exposes a different facet of his artistic persona this time. Vis-à-vis the colorist ‘insensitivity’ of the manual reproduction technique, he presents oil paintings that emphasize a panorama of color qualities.

His large-scale canvases attest to his being a seasoned professional who strives to display his experience rather than to innovate. Indeed, he is fluent with the material as far as 1950s lyrical abstract is concerned. Of the three painterly masters representing this style, he is closest to Streichman’s hinted approach and hues.

Givati’s point of departure is a landscape view of which he leaves only a few traces at the end of the road. His practice focuses mainly on construction of structural and color textures, their covering and exposure, delving into the depths and unfurling a soft range of sensibilities which he juxtaposes with accentuated sections.⁶⁰

Raffi Lavie largely concurred with Nachshon’s observation regarding the lyrical abstract, and praised Givati’s works:

In a week full of shallow exhibitions one ought to go as far north as Sarah Levi Gallery to see two beautiful large paintings by Moshe Givati. When I say beautiful, I don’t mean beautifying-decorative. The style is somewhat Streichmanesque, but with a more melancholic, turbid orientation, with fascinating nuances of color and matter. It is pleasant to see an artist who tries to find himself at home – in the good

59 Haaretz, 20 May 1983 [Hebrew].
60 Yedioth Ahronoth, 20 May 1983 [Hebrew].

old lyrical-abstract painting. And he still has something to say therethrough.⁶¹

Collectors started visiting the "painters' shop" once again (as Givati used to call his workshop after a term coined by art critic Psel Friedberg years earlier). Givati sold none of the works at Sarah Levi Gallery, but one diptych exhibited there was later purchased by the Phoenix Assurance Company.

About two months after the exhibition, Rami Rosen published an article that reviewed Givati's turbulent personality and life. He met him in the afternoon sipping cognac and talking with Yosl Bergner at Bernard Gallery at the end of Dizengoff Street. Rosen then followed Givati from one bar to another throughout the city, and the latter unfolded the story of his life, describing his self-destruction manifested in drunken fights in the city and his aggressive treatment of collectors, colleagues and the establishment. As part of that article Rosen gathered a range of opinions about Givati from friends and other artists. When asked what he thought of Givati, Streichman replied:

As a person, I don't know him enough. As a painter, he is extraordinary. Talented is an understatement. I wish everyone would like his paintings as I do and say about him what I feel for him as a painter. It is a shame he disappeared from here for ten years. I cannot understand what made him become a rabbi in Brooklyn. Otherwise he would have long occupied the first rank of Israeli artists.⁶²

Kadishman added:

He is a wonderful, great, sensitive painter. I wish I could paint like him. It sounds like a eulogy, but that's the truth. I like his wisdom, his bluntness, and his pure scale. His inability to bend his artistic ethic, as others do, has prevented his extensive success with the public at large.

Garbuz thought that Givati got into trouble

because of the alcohol:

I think his becoming orthodox was a mental hitch due to the bottle. Now he is finally painting as he never did before. Without any 'isms,' without unnecessary ideologies. Let's hope that he does not get involved again in fights with artists and the establishment... that he will engage in painting, because he does that extremely well.

And there was another old friend of Givati's who wished to remain anonymous and talked about:

...a bitter, tormented struggle of an artist who strives for wide recognition, and when it comes – destroys it with his own hands. The self-destructive powers possessed by this man are simply unbelievable. He is a fear-stricken man who requires a great deal of recognition from his surrounding. His insults and curses are like those of a little child who doesn't know how to please his kindergarten teacher. But behind the brutal appearance lies a vulnerable artist. His best paintings remind me of angels' song. He paints for the sake of painting, and his one and only friend is alcohol.

In his conversation with Rosen, Givati openheartedly confessed his alcoholism and its implications on his interpersonal relations. In that same interview he also settled some accounts from the past with collectors who were potential buyers until he offended them and sent them away, with artists with whom he had collaborated, and with establishment injustices. To Rosen's quandary about the strange story of the secular Jew from Hashomer Hatzair who returned to the fold of religion in the Lubavitcher Rebbe's court, Givati replied that there was nothing strange about it:

Because the Lubavitcher's court is not any different from the court of Meir'ke Yaari in Hashomer Hatzair or the artists' court on Dizengoff Street. The conceptual collectivity, like the fact that you are exposed and judged every single minute without having a place for yourself, is shared by all courts.

At the end of the interview Givati announces that he has no regrets:

Neither for the wanderings, nor for the lost paths whereby I have made peace with myself. Today I paint directly from within myself. In the past my inner need in wide and immediate recognition created some kind of dependence within me. Perhaps this is why I became an alcoholic. I have managed to kick that dependence, the alcohol – not yet...

Those who followed Givati's work throughout his long career should already know that he never fully and exclusively adopted abstract painting, but rather returned to it in different variations each time, and from there embarked on a new search. At the beginning of October that same year Givati opened another solo exhibition at Bernard Gallery, where he presented paintings created during the Lebanon War, this time based purely on figurative painting.

Raffi Lavie once again reviewed the exhibition in an article entitled "The Warm-up Phase":

Moshe Givati presents small amusing paintings at Bernard Gallery, at 207 Dizengoff Street. On a printed base he has added and painted illustrations replete with humor and rich coloration. Animals, flowers, roller-skating figures, etc. – all these appear in the series entitled 'Little Stories from Manhattan.'⁶³

Under the title "Lewd Stories" Ilan Nachshon wrote:

Artist Moshe Givati is an experienced professional known as a lyrical abstract artist whose power lies in the creation of refined color fields charged with nuances and moods. This time he has taken a break and decided to have fun. He presents small, hand-colored prints containing New York stories, the city of sin where he lived for several years.

These are tiny, lewd stories, basically he-she stories, with humor and direct, blatant, raw lines. Men with cock-heads and pricks. I preferred those

where Givati created compositions and soft color surfaces as well. I liked less the ones that look like hasty press illustrations.⁶⁴

The exhibition at Bernard Gallery was concluded with a party with lots of alcohol and belly dancing, attended by artists, students from the print workshop, family and friends. The party received full-page coverage in the weekly magazine *Ha'olam Haze'h*:

All the guests enjoyed meat refreshments from the restaurant next door to the Gallery, and toasted Givati. The paintings on the walls represented a long period in the artist's life. The theme: transvestites. The time: the early 1980s. The place: New York.⁶⁵

Exhibition at Dvir Gallery: 1984

In early 1984 Givati approached painter Shimon Avni offering to exhibit one of his works at Radius – an exhibition space that Israel Discount Bank allotted to artists in the Dizengoff Center mall, where exhibitions were held in the format of "colleague brings colleague." Givati's work consisted of four panels. Lea Nikel, who passed by, left him a complimentary note, flattering him for the large-scale work. The work was later purchased by the Migdal Insurance Company and partially damaged by some fault in the plumbing system in the company's offices. Only two panels survived, and thus it was transformed from a polyptych to a diptych.

Dvir Intrator, owner of Dvir Gallery, came to see the exhibition, where he met Givati for the first time. Givati later called him and asked for his help in selling the painting because he needed the money. Following the conversation, Intrator came to Givati's house to view other paintings, and a date was set for Givati's next exhibition, this time at Dvir Gallery:

He asked whether I would make new paintings before the opening. At first I thought I wouldn't. But then I remembered that I had a large roll

[pp. 195-201]

63 *Ha'ir*, 7 October 1983 [Hebrew].

64 *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 7 October 1983 [Hebrew].

65 *Ha'olam Ha'zeh*, 26 October 1983 [Hebrew].

of canvas in Nahariya. He arranged for it to be brought over. Yaacov Mishori stretched the canvases for me, and I started painting in an inexplicable furor. I painted until the last minute, and in the exhibition we hung still-wet canvases.

In June 1984 Ruti Rubin (Direktor) published an article that reviewed Givati's life and art upon his turning fifty. For that article she visited Givati's home and Dvir Gallery, conducted lengthy conversations with the artist and the gallery owner, and published a two-page article in the weekend supplement of *Hadashot*. Under the pungent title "Fifty Years of Solitude," the article set out to assemble the complicated jigsaw-puzzle of Givati's life, and understand how at fifty he still continued to kick in all directions:

'Bad painting' prevailed, and the audience, as usual, was thirsty for innovations.

Givati's good painting, really good painting, fell in the cracks – it is too good, too high quality for commercial galleries or home exhibitions in Ramat Hasharon, and not 'bad' enough for Tel Aviv avant-garde abreast of the times.

Givati was a good example for the history of painting, but in the current-artistic pressure cooker he had no chance. The favorable reviews were a bear hug – suffocating, blocking, and lamenting one who in fact hasn't even started. The artistic community in Israel expects that at fifty an artist will have characteristics identifiable from a distance – such as Raffi Lavie's scribbles or Gershuni's screaming inscriptions.

Deep within him Givati knows that he hasn't started yet, that he hasn't delivered his message, and this was the hardest thing of all. The truth was biting, the alcohol and solitude threatened to paralyze him. A fifty year old artist, who belongs to no clique, graduate of no school... Months have passed until suddenly, in one of the last exhibitions of the late Radius Gallery, a new painting was noticed, a painting by Givati, which made more than the usual number of people stop in front of it: four attached canvases that together

formed a monumental abstract landscape, very green with red-pink stains bursting forth from below. It possessed more than mere professionalism and virtuoso mastery of color. Standing close to it, one felt enwrapped by the green. Anyone who saw the painting from up close said that something continues to burn in Givati.⁶⁶

Throughout the article Rubin (Direktor) attempts to "take snapshots" of Givati's life, to describe entire biographical scenes that seem as though they were drawn from "a film that the God of Painting makes in the heavens about painters who struggle on earth." She focuses on the painter staring at the blank canvas before him, on the empty cans of beer scattered all around, on the creative outburst that invents new images emerging from canvases saturated with color:

Givati paints new canvases, less lyrical, more defined, stronger. Something has happened to his painting. Something new has come out of him onto the canvas. He was alone in those moments, great moments in the life of any artist. What does one do with the new canvases? Paintings need an audience, otherwise they die in the studio, placed back to back by the wall.

It was probably late afternoon when Givati called Dvir Gallery. His life story, in addition to the gallery situation in Tel Aviv and the dynamics of artist-gallery relations, weighed down on Givati's hand, the same hand that picked up the phone and called Dvir Gallery.

A white gallery with minimalist décor, in the middle of Gordon Street, Tel Aviv; a small shrine of contemporary Israeli art. Prestige, straight tall walls, what is called in gallery-talk 'a good space.' On the other side of the line Dvir, the owner, recalled the green painting, from Radius. Something told him at the time that the green painting would not be Givati's last word. He was right.

Two people traveling in the same circles for years, saying hello, familiar with each other's biographies, examining each other with suspicion, appreciation,

curiosity. One sits in a white gallery with a good space, the other – no longer a young painter, operating near the margins of the art world, sharpening arrows of bitterness and despair, hiding behind the appearance of an aggressive, growling bear. Inside he conceals a big, vulnerable, easily-offended child.

It took a miracle, not a big one, but a miracle nonetheless, for something to happen here. Dvir stood before the new paintings and saw the spark. He saw new paintings and knew that he wanted to exhibit them.

Shall we make an exhibition? – he asked – perhaps in a month?

Givati said it was fine by him.

Only of the recent canvases...

Yes, that was fine by him too.

They selected seven new canvases, among them the green one from Radius.

'Do you think, perhaps,' Dvir asked cautiously, 'you could try to paint another large canvas? To have something new for the exhibition...'

Givati was dumbfounded. He hadn't yet digested the idea of an exhibition, and was already offered a new challenge.

Look – he hesitated – it is going to be a tough month, I'm going to be pressured, I don't think I will be able to paint.

They agreed on the seven existing canvases. The invitations were printed and a date was set: June 24. This conversation, by the way, and what followed, is recounted by both Givati and Dvir separately, but identically. For both of them it was a click at first sight. For both, the exhibition was a sweeping, fascinating joint adventure.

In the meantime, Givati couldn't resist the temptation, and thought perhaps he should, after all, try to create a new canvas. He connected two canvases he had at home, together 4x3 meters, and for four weeks, in seizures of work and drink, he created the best, most surprising and powerful four canvases he has ever created. He breeched the boundaries of abstract with figurative images that emerged from within color stains. He painted

layer upon layer, each one better than its former. He worked long nights and drank whole days. He was in creative ecstasy.

At nights Dvir would come over, observe dumbstruck.

There were powerful blues and reds and oranges. Blurred figures, people and objects, hinted and swallowed back into the background.

In the morning Dvir would call Givati and tell him: This is the best thing you have created so far, but I think it is not the end of it, perhaps you should try some more.⁶⁷

In his article, "Signs of Distress," Ilan Nachshon referred to Givati's attempt to take a big stride from the 1950s and 1960s to the 1980s:

From painting founded on touches, feelings, occupation of space, and qualities of color – to painting channeled into several images. It is a careful attempt by a seasoned professional, made with a confident hand, without losing his balance and personal identification.

Givati claims passionately that his sources of influence were the British Turner and American abstract which he encountered from up close during his sojourn in the USA... His new paintings ostensibly wish to affirm his own version of American abstract. His color melancholy has been replaced by an accentuated color gamut where red, blue, black, and purple are conspicuous, while the soft strokes were pushed aside by vigorous and highly expressive brush strokes. The canvases themselves have grown to 'cinemascope' dimensions – 2 by 3 meters; various images protrude from them in a manner reminiscent of the new painting: sea, boat, a chair that loses its balance, figures, whale – that convey feelings of anxiety, escape, threat, distress, and loneliness. Givati possesses the gift of formulation. Just as much as his paintings can be construed as personal-mental landscapes or a private nightmare, one can also assemble them into a political jigsaw puzzle hinting at current affairs.⁶⁸

67 Ibid.
68 Yedioth Ahronoth, 29 June 1984 [Hebrew].

Dorit Kedar discussed the duality underlying Givati's new paintings in her article "Plastic Ambiguity":

The artist positions the figures behind lines and stripes. These acquire a plastic ambiguity: on the one hand they indicate their superficial essence, and on the other – they emphasize the dimension of depth. The dualism is manifested in the canvases themselves. The works consist of two parts that together form a single grooved piece. Joyful, highly-nuanced, vital coloration is juxtaposed with deterring, expressive articulation. A distorted head whose features have been erased, oozes in all directions and downward, all the way to the vertical line from which it grows in a chaotic outburst.

Hanging left of the entrance are two works based on pure formalism. The ambiguous conflict occurs here as well: a combination of regular and irregular stripes, geometry and stains, but in the rest of the works there is the emotional factor that furnishes the whole with vitality, interest, and a desire to penetrate this strange beautiful world still further.⁶⁹

Nissim Mevorach, who had previously commended Givati's abstract painting, once again praised the non-thematic paintings in his article "Painting as a Narrative Text." At the same time, the article indicates that Mevorach's appreciation for Givati's abstract strives to keep him in the fields of abstraction, and that figurative manifestations, however implied, cast doubts in him:

There is no sign of publicist contents that must be deciphered. He has gathered painterly statements in large quantities on extensive areas, whose fusion into one text is not discernible at first sight.

The exhibition consists of six works altogether. A certain fear is invoked by the fact that four of them, the later ones chronologically, display hinted human and animal faces. At this stage, there is no visual damage, but if the tendency

continues to evolve, Givati might start opting for literary themes over the painterly values he has been creating. Givati's power lies in the abstract, which best displays his qualities despite the difficulties which it causes the viewer.⁷⁰

In contrast, Rachel Engel, in her article "Figures Returning to the Canvas," prefers the new paintings:

There is a rather clear division between the two parts of this exhibition. The 'old' part painted some two years ago, and the other part, the new paintings, created in recent months. The latter display a great improvement and are marked by conspicuous awakening. Unlike the abstract of the past, the 'present' in Givati's work is inclined toward the figurative, and as opposed to the somewhat opaque, somewhat faded coloration, it shifts toward sharper, more contrastive coloration.

Quasi-figures, human characters or animals, or a mixture of the two, dominate Givati's new compositions. Behold: an ostensibly very large red head at the heart of a blue painting, a one-eyed head. And in the adjacent painting – two figures, possibly two heads, one – human, the other – a horse or a donkey. The artist paints with big, broad gestures, with heavy, saturated, momentous color strokes. He uses lush, dark, subdued, indefinite blues; shades of brown and red and green.⁷¹

Gil Goldfine too, in his article "One of a Kind," introduced a clear-cut division between reticent abstractions and bellicose expressionist canvases. His preference is clearly stated:

Givati's monsters, drawn with tendrils, nostrils and broad beamed anatomical appendages, echo contemporary new paintings. They show a determination to enter the foray of that style with a bang. ... This does not occur in two horizontal abstractions painted before the more expressionist fare. They are beautifully brushed and planned. Givati plays with veiled

69 *Al Hamishmar*, 5 July 1984 [Hebrew].

70 *Haaretz*, 6 July 1984 [Hebrew].

71 *Ma'ariv*, 6 July 1984 [Hebrew].

transparencies and opaque densities, pitting one against the other with sensitivity and a knowledge of exactly what to do. ... In the most rewarding picture in the exhibit, Givati harnesses a central 'X' configuration with stripes and open horizons in a perfectly balanced and delicately constructed composition that borders on a dynamic grid. His use of a warm grey with a mellowed rusty violet (akin to Kupferman) supports the composition, as if the glove was sewn to perfectly fit the hand. Here is one occasion when a painter has assembled form, shape, color and texture into one superlative painting.⁷²

Another view, an outright rejection of the change that led to the new works, was presented by Raffi Lavie in his review "Half Baked":

Searches. Kitchen exhibition. Moshe Givati has undergone numerous incarnations in the past 25 years, from the lyrical abstract of the late 1950s, through figurative painting with influences of Pop Art, and back to abstract with fine nuances (as he recently exhibited at Sarah Levi Gallery). Apparently he has now become tired of applying one green on another green, and of the interplays of transparent and opaque. He now tries to introduce a more narrative statement. The result: hinted figures in his recent works. The problem is that these hints have not yet come to full fruition. Ultimately the color strokes and hues remain the main speaker. The change of composition by inverting the place of two attached paintings, does not solve the problem. To my mind, the works should not have been exhibited; rather, he should have continued to struggle with his thematic material and shown the public a more finished result.⁷³

When Ruti Rubin (Direktor) met Givati and Intrator, they were under the impression that an ultimate encounter had occurred, a summit meeting that would lead to the big break – of artist and gallery alike. She wrote:

There was some fuse that awaited the right

circumstances for many years, the right moment and the right people, for the flint to be rubbed, igniting it. Those who know the old Givati will not believe it when they see today's monumental canvases at Dvir Gallery. The friction occurred, Givati was ignited.⁷⁴

But the fire was short-lived, and reality soon slapped the new partnership in the face. Givati is not the type of artist who adapts himself to given aspirations – however good they are. He is a born rebel. The attempt to "shape" him and influence his work did not yield the expected results. Such collaborations were not Givati's forte, and his reservations soon showed.

The rift did not occur at once. In view of the great success, another exhibition was scheduled for the next year, and thus Givati achieved the heart's desire of any artist: a show scheduled in advance. But the occurrences of the following year frustrated the hopes that accompanied the new path.

56 Ben-Gurion Blvd. – Home Exhibition: 1985

The "love affair" between Givati and Dvir was relatively short-lived. In December 1984 the exhibition "New Works," featuring Jacques Greenberg, Yaacov Mishori, David Reeb, and Moshe Givati, was staged at Dvir Gallery. Raffi Lavie wrote succinctly that in this exhibition "Givati presents a beautiful work. Non-beautifying: a red sphere within a square set within a rectangle."⁷⁵

The next solo exhibition planned for Givati at Dvir Gallery never materialized. For unclear reasons, Intrator suggested moving the exhibition to the Kibbutz Art Gallery. Givati was offended, maintaining that he didn't need to have exhibitions "fixed up" for him. "I called Pichhadze and we organized my private apartment on Ben Gurion Blvd. I moved the family out and turned the place into a gallery,"

72 *The Jerusalem Post*, 6 July 1984.

73 *Ha'ir*, 6 July 1984 [Hebrew].

74 *Hadashot*, 29 June 1984 [Hebrew].

75 *Ha'ir*, 7 December 1984 [Hebrew].

he recounts in an extensive interview for Michal Kapra held in the home-turned-gallery. In the interview Kapra mentions that Intrator refused to exhibit Givati's exhibition, a refusal later to be mentioned elsewhere as well, eliciting speculations as to the reasons. In the interview Givati told Kapra that he invested thousands of dollars in the home exhibition project:

It is all loans. He doesn't have a penny in his pocket, which didn't stop him from inviting a small band for the opening night and organizing a *hafla* at the Bikta for the guys. His second wife, Roni, many years his younger, and his two little daughters, Yehudit and Shifra, were evacuated from the apartment. Givati celebrates.⁷⁶

Givati had difficulties talking about his paintings. He wanted to go to Jacques Greenberg in Bat Yam, to hear the latter discuss his art. Having lost their way in the city, they finally find Jacques. The three sit somewhere, order beer, and Jacques explains Givati's painting.

Givati sent invitations for the exhibition, and on the back mentioned that Dvir Gallery avoided presenting his new works. Raffi Lavie repeated this fact at the very beginning of his review:

Givati, who could not find a gallery to present his works, mounted an exhibition at home. A real gallery. Open daily from 17:00 to 20:00.⁷⁷

Imanuel Bar-Kadma added:

Moshe Givati sums up an interesting experiment of breaking free from dependence on a gallery. His apartment on the third floor of an apartment building on Ben Gurion Blvd., was opened to the public like any real gallery... The effect is not one of a home, but of a gallery. Professional hanging, apt lighting, an atmosphere of pure art. Givati, an excellent painter of color who has returned from abstract to myth, will not let the galleries make a profit on his back – but holding such an exhibition has its price as well.⁷⁸

And Givati was willing to pay the price. In the

interview with Kapra he names the sum he invested and explains that the entire investment was worth it, if only to realize that he had friends – the same friends without whose support he couldn't have mounted the exhibition. He further notes that it was the most important exhibition he had ever staged for himself.

Dorit Kedar wrote about Intrator's refusal to present Givati's new works at Dvir Gallery:

I can rather sympathize with Dvir. Several weeks ago the gallery hosted a political Israeli-Palestinian exhibition whose painterly quality was beneath criticism. The owner must have been burned by the criticism and was reluctant to exhibit Givati's problematic works.⁷⁹

Kedar thought that there was something simplistic in the political contents Givati introduced into his new works. At the same time, she found the artistic result highly deserving, and the act of painting – strikingly powerful.

Ilan Nachshon too, in his article "The Rhinoceros and the Jellyfish," referred to the titles of the paintings and the themes underlying the exhibition as a whole:

Moshe Givati, an essentially abstract painter, is pursuing the figurative and the symbolic with great emotional storms these days. His immense canvases are populated by pressing current affairs that call for definitions such as responsive painting, engaged art, or political art. The titles of the paintings call to mind posters in a demonstration on the city's main square. He opposes Arik Sharon whom he depicted as a rhinoceros and a jellyfish; he is for 'My Palestinian Brother'; against the orthodox (the affair of Teresa Angelowitz's burial); and has decisive opinions in the stowaway affair (incidentally, the latter two are, to my mind, the best paintings in the exhibition). Add to all this themes such as *The Binding of Isaac*, a *Masochistic Grandfather*, and *Teeth Pullers*, and you can guess at the explosiveness of his easel this time.

There is a big gap between the blatant, violent

76 *Ma'ariv*, 21 June 1985 [Hebrew].

77 *Ha'Ir*, 31 May 1985 [Hebrew].

78 *Yedioth Ahronoth*, 16 April 1985 [Hebrew].

79 *Al Hamishmar*, 12 June 1985 [Hebrew].

titles and his artistic skill. I would not have lingered on them, if he hadn't been dragged after them in his paintings. The verbal statement occasionally takes over the canvas, flattening it unnecessarily, mainly when Givati turns to the symbol, Jacques Greenberg style. On the other hand, when he emphasizes practice, his power as a painter is revealed.

The seasoned Givati has a proficient hand and a variegated colorist capacity, in red, purple, blue, and white. His canvases are masterfully constructed. His expressive brush strokes consist of free stains with multiple sensitivities, of contours that create division and balance, and occasionally of figures and symbols. They convey feelings of anxiety, threat, and distress. I prefer his hinted version which maps out a mental state in place and time, over the harsh, overt declaration.⁸⁰

Raffi Lavie, who as aforesaid referred to the exhibition space as a real gallery, never mentioned Givati's titles in his article ("Too Much Purple"). He aimed his criticism directly at the body of the canvas – at the pure painterly problems:

The three large works, which are the core of the exhibition, possess great power articulated by large lumps of color confronted with linear brush strokes. Hints of heavy, raw figures, and the coloration, which comprises mainly pressing earth colors, reinforce this. The excessive use of purple slightly softens the coloration, rendering it less personal.

The group of heads created with soft texture and small, variegated strokes, appears like the work of another painter. Like a blown miniature that gives a near-surrealistic impression. These works are more 'beautiful,' riper than the large ones, but also more anemic. They could have possibly been more impressive had they not been hung side by side.⁸¹

Heads: 1985

Givati's "heads" in this exhibition were not the first in his oeuvre. Other heads emerged prior to this exhibition, in other connotations and times, and were yet to emerge on occasion in his future works as well. Givati, however, never conceived of an annotative code for deciphering the hidden meanings of the recurring image in his works. It is oriented neither to formalist interpretation nor to symbolic interpretation. Givati has always painted from the gut, but without abandoning the critical gaze. Even if it is possible to offer literal interpretations to his painterly language, in any event his signs shed all symbolical and thematic footholds, transforming any interpretation into an abstract compositional element.

While formally the "head" emerging in many of Givati's works interrupts the total abstraction of his canvases, the interpretation required to read the secrets of this figurative element remains within the realm of abstract, perhaps within the realm of the psyche, which is, in any case, within the field of the study of abstract, the field of the unconscious.

The heads emerging by themselves are usually dissociated from a body, dominating the entire canvas. These are horrifying heads that emit their entire content outward. Each head has its own color, texture, expression. Some are more beastly, others almost human. Among them there are aliens, blind, open-mouthed, robot-like, suggested, alienated, frightened, deconstructed, blurred, psychedelic, red, green, pinkish, shrouded in black, green, illusive, crazed blue. These are heads that have been drawn from the vapors of alcohol and hallucinatory drugs; together they form a psychic map of a single self-portrait.

Ten large-scale canvases presented in the exhibition at Ben Gurion Blvd. were photographed for folio-size posters. Ronnie Dissentshik printed them at the *Ma'ariv* press. In September of that year Givati exhibited his

80 Yedioth Ahronoth, 7 June 1985 [Hebrew].

81 Ha'ir, 31 May 1985 [Hebrew].

monumental paintings in the basement floor of Dizengoff Center in order to promote the posters.

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Studio Givati: 1987

In 1987 the Givati family was forced to move from the spacious apartment on Ben Gurion Blvd. into a smaller apartment, and Moshe Givati entered an alcohol rehabilitation program in a center in Ramat Gan. Concurrently, he became involved in a quarrel with the Artists' Association board, and quit his teaching position at the Artists' House on Alharizi Street. The new apartment was too small to contain his "painters' shop," and for the first time in his life Givati separated his living place from his work space. He rented a shoe warehouse on the fourth floor of a building on Neve Sha'an'an Street in the city's south. With a big hammer he demolished the walls that separated the two rooms, thus creating one big space. His faithful students from the Artists' House followed him to Neve Sha'an'an, and in addition he advertised in the papers, trying to draw students to "Studio Givati for Painting" near the Central Bus Station. He liked the group of students that gathered around him, and taught them in his unique way. He gave each of them a key to the studio, and they were invited to enter at any time and do as they pleased.

In April of that year Givati staged an exhibition at the Artists' House, comprised mainly of monumental canvases he had painted in the two previous years. Following that exhibition, critic Nissim Mevorach maintained in his article "A Struggle against Grayness" that these monumental canvases manifest the attempt to break free from the coloration typical of the "Avni Institute" school which considered gray to be the richest of colors. Mevorach was highly impressed by the abstract canvases in which hinted natural forms, human profiles and silhouettes of evil beasts were interspersed, but noted that smaller formats would have been more befitting.⁸²

Dorit Kedar in her review "The Taste of Cool

Candy" described Givati's brush as "powerful, expressive, hurting, pressing." At the same time, she regarded the large canvases as an obstacle:

The most convincing painting, which indisputably deserves to be presented in any respectable museum in the country, is a relatively small work addressing the figure of the model Laila. Laila easily merges with the abstraction around, she is not alienated to the empty space next to her, and the rather monochromatic color scale does not make her less expressive. Another good painting is the most radical one, alluding to the abstract form of a skull.⁸³

Raffi Lavie reviewed the exhibition in his article "Plenty of Room," where he commended "one beautiful painting a la Van de Velde, and next to it, another painting which is interesting without reminding anyone else." About the rest of the paintings he wrote that in previous exhibitions Givati presented more serious works.⁸⁴ After the opening at the Artists' House Givati went to drink at the Red Bar in north Dizengoff with friends, among them Avigdor Stematsky, Dvora Schocken, Ami Levi, and others.

Laila Schwartz modeled in those days at the Artists' House. When Givati needed a model, he used to invite her to his studio at the Central Bus Station, where she also participated in a documentary film created by Honi Hameagel about Givati, with the participation of Jacques Greenberg and Nir Hod, who worked as Givati's assistant for a while.

Nir caught me one day at the Artists' Association and asked whether I needed an assistant. I said why not, and he followed me to the studio on his motorscooter. He worked with me for several months and was very diligent. He worked from eight in the morning until noon, and then went to school. We had an agreement, that he doesn't bother me when he has nothing to do. I showed him the wall he could use, the papers and paints, and told him that he could paint when he had nothing to do. I remember that his handwriting

82 Haaretz, 24 April 1987 [Hebrew].

83 Al Hamishmar, 17 April 1987 [Hebrew].

84 Ha'ir, 3 April 1987 [Hebrew].

was entirely illegible. He used to come over from the Thelma Yellin High School of the Arts and stretch canvases. He ran errands like a devil of a fellow, he was truly fantastic. He once invited me to a party with his father. I came with Jacques Greenberg. His father pulled out some quality vodka and we had a great time.

When the exhibition at the Artists' House closed, Givati cut all the monumental canvases he exhibited there into smaller canvases. He was in economic distress and recycled canvases so he could continue working. His money shortage did not keep him from buying materials which he freely gave out to his students.

The studio was regularly attended by Yael and Gigi, Gili and Tsahi, Ruta and Tamar, Tal, Yuval, and Yifat. Gili, who had a cockroach phobia, discovered a large painting by Givati starring a giant cockroach one day. Surprisingly, he asked for the painting which he hung in his room. Three of Givati's students were later admitted to the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem. When they identified their teacher, the puzzled Bezalel lecturers said this was nowhere to be seen in their works. Givati regarded this as a compliment.

The students used to come and go, and come again. In the studio they always found an open ear, a place to work, and unlimited painting materials. Givati remembers them fondly. That same year, one of them, Tsahi Reich, published a profile in *Ma'ariv* which briefly summed up Givati's life, focusing, *inter alia*, on the studio near the Central Bus Station:

Givati, a man with doubts, with anxieties, requires extensive recognition from his surroundings, very long periods of adaptation to unknown places. Today, in his new studio, 'Studio Givati,' on Neve Sha'anani Street near Tel Aviv's Central Bus Station, he sits and waits. Listens to the radio, passing occasional criticism on the radio people in the country who talk too much, eats yogurt and fruit he brought in a bag which Roni, his

wife, prepared for him, and drinks beer he bought in the kiosk downstairs. But he doesn't paint. Not yet. He is busy getting used to this place which up until two-three months ago served as a storeroom for one of the shoe stores downstairs on Neve Sha'anani Street, where most of the bus drivers and Egged members buy shoes for themselves and their families.

On a chest of drawers in the corner lies a small pastel painting depicting Givati, created by Yifat, one of his students at the studio. Under the graying beard in the portrait appears an inscription: 'Moshe Givati is a big man; a hundred kg. at least.' Even Givati, who admits that he cannot maintain close relationships, cannot deny that human warmth, some kind of love, is flowing here. Givati looks after his students. They feel it. They let him feel that they feel it: 'What I have today, for better or for worse, is the studio,' he says. 'I make sure that a person who has just started painting, will have the physical conditions of a professional painter, and that someone who has a strong desire to paint, will be able to realize it, the way a professional painter works, that he will be able to work as well.' It is not an ideology. There is no compassion here for the incapable. 'It is the elementary decency required of a human being, who takes upon himself the privilege of instructing someone else, and I say instructing intentionally. I will not tell a person: paint an apple for two years, and then we'll talk.'

Givati is the most beloved hated person. He has already managed to quarrel with all his friends, to insult them, to speak rudely more than once to too many people, even those who wanted to help him...

Givati's recent exhibition, which included paintings from '86-'87, focused on the theme of Indians. It was exhibited at the Tel Aviv Artists' House. The title 'Indians' was not published. 'For some reason, the Artists' Association decided that it was a nonpolitical body,' Givati tells me, 'so nonpolitical that someone thought that the word 'Indian' was a codeword for Palestinians,

so I was not allowed to publicize the title of the exhibition'...

In preparation for the article Reich went to talk with Givati's friends, actor Asher Sarfati and playwright Joseph Mundi. They had only good things to say about Givati, and expressed their appreciation for him, for his insistence in clinging to his path despite the difficulties raised by the establishment and the harsh struggle for existence:

For the six years since his return to Israel, much ink has already been spilled on him. Givati is what they call 'good journalistic material.' They wrote about the alcohol, the nicotine, the madness, the savage, the tormented artist, the impulsivity, whatnot, the self-destructiveness, curses, rudeness, about all the crap that he does when he gets drunk, how he cut himself with a fork, how he mooned Oded Kotler's dumbfounded face, about anything that might make a headline. They somewhat forgot that he is an artist. Givati is a little angry, but accepts this... In the end, Givati does not equal the number of beer bottles lying daily on his desk, or the size of the scar on his right arm. Givati is, in fact, his paintings. 'Painting is all I have,' he says. 'In my painting there is a lot of the neurosis within me. I paint what I paint. And it is me. My painting is me, for better and for worse.'...⁸⁵

[continued on p. 340]