

Housewarming

Housewarming

What does it mean, to live in a room? Is to live in a place to take possession of it?

What does taking possession of a place mean?

As from when does somewhere become truly yours?

Georges Perec; Species of Spaces and Other Pieces

The name of the inaugural exhibition at the Galil Gallery is taken from the widespread cultural practice marking the transition into a new home as an event to be celebrated. This custom dates back to the middle ages, when members of any given community would bring wood and kindling to light the fireplace in the new home of a member of said community. As such, through this custom, the term "housewarming" was born into the English language (literally, to warm the house).

Still today, housewarming is a joyous event – a symbol of a new beginning, a new life; another chapter in our lives that requires a special mention. But what is it about a home that makes it significant for us, that we feel the need to celebrate our place of residence? What connects us to this one special place – the home?

The image that immediately comes to mind when we think of the word "home" is typically a relaxed and pleasant one. For some, the word can remind us of a certain dish we enjoyed as a child, for others, the smell of the laundry detergent or the music playing on the radio in the evening. But what happens when that home, the warm, loving, and sheltering place becomes alien or dangerous? What happens if the home is blocked or restricted, and we cannot return? Or when the home becomes unstable? What if a major disaster occurs within it?

In his essay *The Uncanny*, the famous psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud characterizes the feeling that can result from a known and familiar object suddenly losing its familiarity, thus causing anxiety and discomfort.

The works in this exhibition seek to deal with that uncanny feeling of alienation that arises, of all places, in the domestic space, and to respond to this very personal, memory-filled, inclusive place. Upon entering the exhibition, we encounter a dark and chaotic world, and any connection between it and the concept of "home" seems entirely coincidental. The space is dark, and a deep and disturbing sound resonates through it. The sight of various houses spread before us offers no consolation: they are unbearable.

The concrete houses of artist **Sharon Pazner** scattered throughout the exhibition space are solid and heavy. They are supported by rusty nails and it seems as if at any moment they will collapse due to their instability. There is no way to enter these houses, let alone to get out of them. At the same time, the crooked iron houses of **Hila Laiser-Beja** create a feeling of suffocating pressure: they wrap around the central pillar, piled on top of one another, as if the houses were being trampled by one another as they attempt to climb and breakthrough.

The innocent and sweet image of a house appearing in children's drawings – square house, a triangular roof, a door and a window – is completely reversed by these two artists. It is taken out of context and put into a harsh and barbed world; a world of sharp corners that transforms the home into a dark and closed place. These houses are closed off, hard to the touch: there is no escape and no entrance.

The concept of the home is given yet another interpretation through Pazner's concrete tents, which offer another possibility: they bring to the forefront the notion of the temporary house, lacking in foundation, able to fold into itself repeatedly and reopen in a new place. The tent is the home of the wanderer or the traveler. It embraces the lifestyle of migration, drifting; unending pathways on one hand, and total freedom, which is bound to constant choice, on the other. However, despite their nomadic connotation, Pazner's tents are made of concrete, and cannot be removed from the place in which they are fixed. The promise of freedom is not fulfilled, nor is true shelter provided. A similar idea emerges from Pazner's massive wall installation, depicting migratory birds rising from the floor to the ceiling on their path to freedom, only with wings made of rusty nails.

The birds envelop another work; that of Laiser-Beja, made of iron construction rods. The iron rods, which are used daily in the construction of real buildings, are bursting through the wall, surrounded by vague silhouettes of two houses drawn on the wall by drilling holes. The rods fail to realize their intended purpose of creating a new place of residence. Similarly, the outlines of a houses that surround them also remain hollow and dismantled; incapable of providing the stability or permanence we expect from our own homes. These rods reappear in another work by Laiser-Beja, where they are assembled together in a pile, creating the façade of a drawn house. This house is solely composed of contour lines, and therefore remains empty and vacant.

The sound resonating in the gallery comes from **Nava Joy Uzan's** video installation. Uzan uses her late grandfather's photo archives, which document New York City during the construction boom of the 1920s and 30s. Uzan connects these photos with her own sense of claustrophobia that accompanies her while photographing cities in Israel, which are undergoing massive construction projects. The formal connection between the new and old photographs, their dissolution and their processing, allows Uzan to create one historical complex, connecting her autobiographical roots originating in another country to the present Israeli reality in which she lives. The visual outcome of this process is almost impossible to perceive: the cut-off images are blended into each other, creating a complete mixture and neutralizing any sense of orientation. Thus, Uzan creates a fictitious surrounding, which despite its totally realistic origins, doubtfully manages to grasp the actual reality.

The "home" that emerges from Uzan's work is thus not a physical place of residence, but rather a mental framework in which the family past and personal history form the basis of the sense of belonging to the time and place; and migration represents a cornerstone in the creation of cultural identity, both private and social.

Like Pazner and Laiser-Beja, who work with concrete and iron, **Amir Tomashov** also chooses to assemble his works with materials from the world of construction. At the first glance,

Tomashov's installation looks like an abandoned construction site: a pile of building debris, broken wooden planks, and a rounded frame - likely intended for a circular opening in the ceiling. Only upon looking closer do we realize that an entire city is supported on these planks: small houses, empty, broken, destroyed, their shape is reappearing in the larger houses surrounding the central demolition site. We are now looking at a violent, hostile, and depleted living space that has ceased to function. White paint covers the destruction, as if to disguise the horror that has taken place leading to the final dismantling of the house, the street, the city, possibly even the world. This is the quiet after the storm: now, with the ruins spread in front of us, perhaps we have no choice but to attempt to reconnect the pieces.

An additional three pieces by Tomashov are placed in the side space of the gallery. Each representing a different stage of the destruction of the house: one shows intact residential structures, however in rows which are too crowded, not allowing for enough air to breathe. Another represents an imaginary city which is collapsing into itself, broken walls and fragments of windows lay in disarray. The final work shows only a basic remnant of what once was - concrete blocks used for building construction, arranged in a pile, as an eternal monument of the house that could have been.

The exhibition closes (or opens) with a painting of Laiser-Beja on the wall facing the exterior of the gallery. The image in the painting is difficult to decipher: it appears as if the structure in the picture has not yet been completed, but at the same time has already begun to fall apart. The steady lines depict the contours of the house, but simultaneously drip across the canvas. The image of the house presents a controversial space: present and stable, but continuously dissolving and disintegrating. The questions emerging from this house, as they emerge from the entire exhibition, remain open:
Can we rebuild a home which we have lost?
Can something new truly emerge from the rubble?
Is the decision of where we belong truly ours?

Hagar Bril
May 2017

Navah Joy Uzan

Navah Joy Uzan is a new media artist and photographer. Born in New York, Uzan currently lives and works in Ra'anana, Israel.

As a multidisciplinary artist, Uzan's works falls between the categories of photography, sculpture, sound, and video. Uzan studied Industrial Design at Bezalel Academy of Art in Jerusalem and Art and Education at HaMidrasha Faculty of Arts in Beit Berl College. She is a graduate of the HaMidrasha Postgraduate Program of Fine Arts.

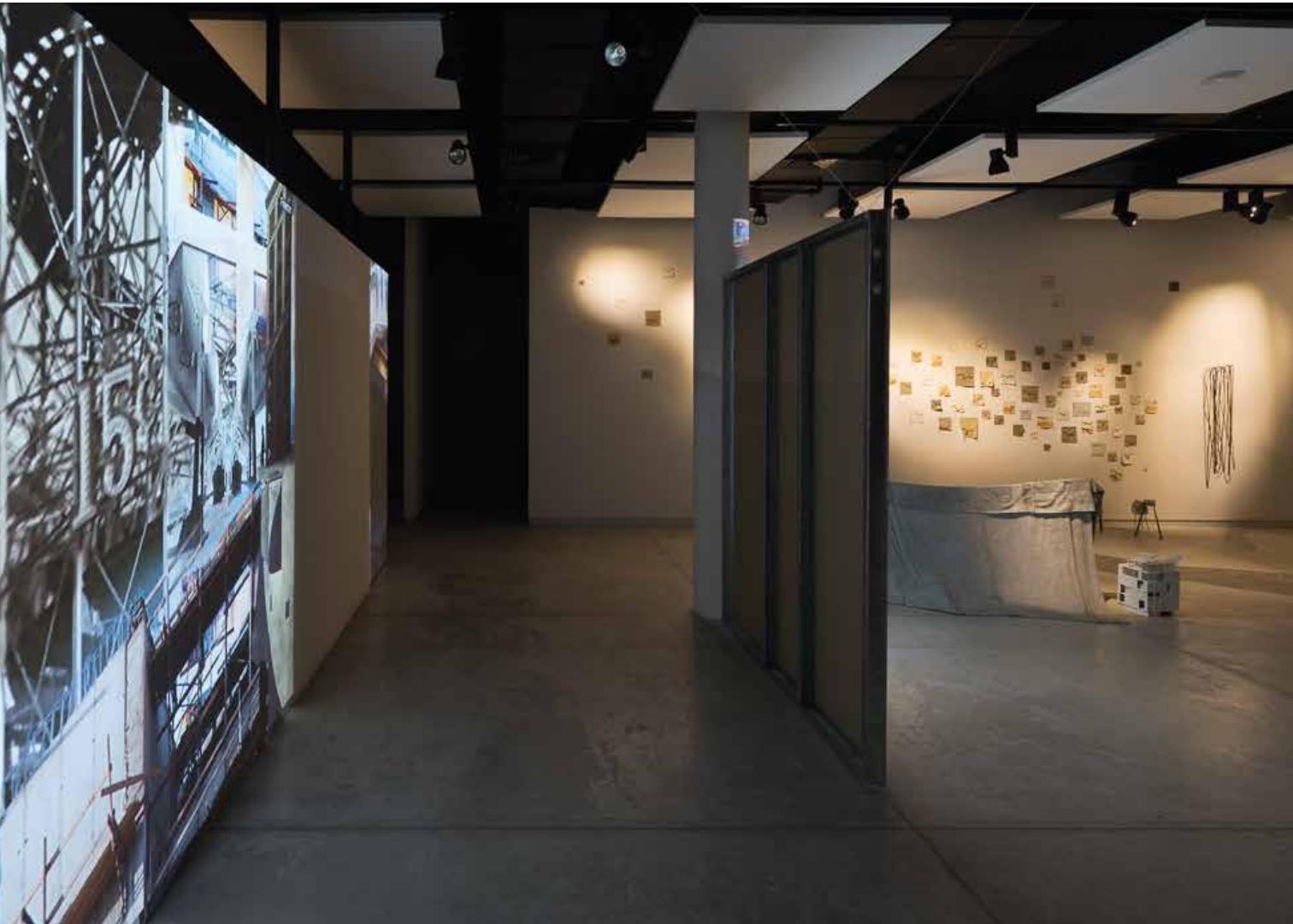
Her work explores the breakdown and reassembling of reality and investigates issues of scale, simulation, and visual perception. She challenges the space between visualization and local, concrete reality, and displays her findings as a form of futuristic archaeology. Uzan's work process begins with an interest in physical spaces or biographical materials; locations which she photographs as she documents her journey within them. The photographic documentation then undergoes a digital editing process of separation and dissolution of the image, and the result, stripped of all identifying features, becomes the basis for video works.

Through the addition of monotonous and hypnotic animations, Uzan transforms the locations into fictitious spaces, resulting in a hybrid of different elements; formative spaces that do not rely on physical laws. The environments created are characterized by a sense of alienation, by the absence of human presence and by the disruption of the sense of reality.

Uzan's works are primarily large-scale installations, projected on large surfaces with accompanying sounds that allow viewers maximum immersion into the imagined world. The sound that accompanies her works is created by a synthesis between human voices and the digital processing; thus contributing to the dystopian atmosphere and to the sense of boundlessness, and allows the viewer to transition from place to place without interruption.

Uzan is a member of Binyamin Gallery, a cooperative gallery for contemporary art in Tel Aviv. Her works have been exhibited in a variety of spaces and events such as PrintScreen Festival for Digital Art at The Design Museum (Holon), Janco-Dada Museum (Ein-Hod Artist Village), Photo Fair (Jaffa), and Hayarkon 19 Gallery (Tel Aviv).











Editing: Ortal Sadoun

Translation: Miri Frenkel

Design: Anat Ganor

Documentation: Tal Nisim

Additional photography:

Eyal Beja

Iris Hassid

Shir Nidam

Shiraz Solomon