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Life and death are in the hands of the game-player

Avi Pitchon, usually a musical icon, waived the SS symbols in his new exhibition, while Orit Hasson Walder provides visitors with the option to choose death or good neighborly relations between Arabs and Jews in Hebron. Tali Cohen Garbuz reviews the shows.

Tali Cohen Garbuz
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Orit Hasson's paternal great-grandfather was a rabbi who held key positions in Hebron's Jewish community. He and his wife were murdered in the pogroms of 1929, but their daughter Hemda and her daughter were hidden by an Arab neighbor and thus saved. The story of their murder and rescue has been visually recreated by Hasson Walder by means of the computer game Sims, enabling players to select various options at each stage.
With the help of animator Arik Pe'er, Hasson Walder created a model that is a hybrid between a Hebron-style house and the American "nowhere" that the computer game offers.

The figures participating in the game, both the Jews and the Arabs, are dressed in traditional clothing that is almost identical to each other. The option that seems to arise from the first moment, to choose death or routine good neighborly relations, brings up the background of fatalism driving the conduct of the war between us and the Palestinians.

In the second option, the rioters change into the quorum for a quickie wedding that the rabbi conducts for some couple in the dead of night. Hasson Walder states, "I came to narrate my family story, not the 'given' narrative in which the Jews are the victims. I also didn't want the artwork to be used by any right-wing group."

" On settlers' websites it's possible to identify the narrative of 'they died and we are fulfilling their wishes,' time and again, as if the fact that there was a slaughter gives us the right to settle there. One day I sat with my aunt after I interviewed her in a research study for the work. We saw on the TV how the Jewish settlers in Hebron went wild in the marketplace and turned over crates of tomatoes. My aunt said, 'How they speak for us. It annoys me.'"

Rabbi Hasson wears the traditional robe, underneath which peek out blue jeans and Adidas sneakers. As for the location, both Hasson House and Beit Hadassa are constructed out of the smooth, synthetic game bricks on the green grass surface offered by the game. In this way, the story remains part of the multicultural model and is not placed into the expected cliché slot.

In the original game, ghosts appear in the finale, rising up from the courtyards of the houses. The spirit comes to repair the situation, to create a tikkun. In Hasson Walder's work, the spirit of her father's grandfather returns to Hebron of 2008. He arrives at Beit Hadassa and says with amazement, "A single family used to live here." A voice responds: "Now five families live here."

The rabbi remembers his neighbor Muhammad and his wife's borekitos pastries; he then looks at the manipulative Boltansky-like exhibition of the photographs on the wall of those murdered in the Hebron pogroms, with a small flickering light above each one. "Who are these people?" he asks as he faces the photo of a couple smiling happily into the camera.
"That's you," responds the voice. Someone else writes his memoirs and uses it as the excuse for his actions. At the end of the work, the rabbi stands facing the option to destroy. If a player activates this option, will it be possible to begin again after wiping everything out?

Orit Hasson Walder in the exhibition, "The Houses at Home Live in Apartments," Petach Tikva Museum of Art, 30 Arlosoroff Street, Petach Tikva, Curator: Anat Gatenio