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Houses and yearning

By Ruti Direktor

Two group shows on homes join the intensive engagement of Israelis in the past and in identity. Almost at the same time, two group exhibitions are opening in Petach Tikva and in Jerusalem with the word houses in their titles. As expected, they do not engage in domesticity but the opposite: the difficulty in feeling at home, the ghosts of houses that have disappeared or whose residents are missing. The exhibition in Petach Tikva [21.2 -10.5.2008] has two-part title: the first from a poem by Avot Yeshurun, "The houses at home live in apartments" while the second boldly takes initiative on the background of Israel's 60th anniversary, "Emotional charges from the past in Israeli Art and Film."

[...] The intensive engagement by Israeli society in the past and in identity is well-known, and art cannot be satisfied with contents. It must formulate the contents in a way that is not in the "cookie cutter pattern.

This happens, for example, in Orit Hasson-Walder's animation piece: the artwork is titled "Hebron: Build yourself a house, build yourself a family." It is structured as a SIMS-like computer game. Cartoon figures unfold the history of the artist's own Hasson Family during the pogroms in Hebron with a musical background and soundtrack in Hebrew, English, and Ladino. In contrast to the other artworks engaged in family-national trauma with deep seriousness or nostalgia, Hasson-Walder's animation succeeds in bypassing the traps of pathos with ease and charm, including reference to the commercialization of 'home' and 'family' and the potential of fiction.