

# ***Memorial Spaces***

TRANSLATION BY JUDITH SPITZBERG

"Dear Families" ...Each year, on the eve of Remembrance Day we receive a decorated letter from the Minister of Defense, in which he expresses his personal feelings of grief. "We are accustomed to saying that your sorrow is also the sorrow of our entire nation. There is no other nation that mourns its sons so deeply. Only you carry on your backs and in your hearts the pain that will never diminish..."<sup>1</sup> Standing at the edge of my father's grave, all the people are looking with shared sorrow and I do not know what I feel or how I should behave. Is he mine? Is he theirs?

As a daughter in a grieving family, I have been present in various cultural events related to memorials. There is a great need to take part in national ceremonies and to receive upon myself the public embrace bestowed upon me. There is also the need to find the intimate connection with my father of flesh and blood (and not the hero).

Throughout the years, I observed how the fallen soldiers were memorialized in Israel. I saw that the memorial ceremonies were planned mainly as expressions of national interests, whose goals were to glorify those sacrificed for our nation. The work for this exhibition helped me see the complexity of the mutual relationships between the bereaved families and the national establishment: Many families are encouraged by that approach and receive national recognition of their tragedies, beyond their personal one.

The exhibition of ***Memorial Spaces*** deals with various perspectives of private and public bereavement and the relationships between them. It is a unique Israeli cultural experience to be a part of the ***Joint Israeli Bereaved Family***. Bereavement, a personal experience, sensitive and unique, has in it an inherent component of state and local ceremonies - with specific dates, and special glorifications. The Israeli bereavement has a wealth of words of its own: emptiness, fallen, bereavement, heroes, sons - "in their death they swore us their lives"; "they died the death of heroes". The meeting of the mourning individuals with the bereavement rituals is often done under the collective criticizing eyes.

Empty spaces are those made by the absence of the soldiers who died and we are all obligated to remember them; Empty spaces of memorials are empty holes within personal memory; Empty spaces of memory are places in which we "remember" the fallen.

The exhibition ***Memorial Spaces*** does not try to formulate a unified version of memory. Each artist brings his own personal perspective and his own particular

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<sup>1</sup> Yitzhak Rabin, 1986, from a letter to the bereaved families

view. The exhibition presents the breadth of Israeli bereavement from many various and conglomerate sides.

More than half of the artists presenting in this exhibition are from families that have experienced grief caused in various Israeli systems. There are also works that are connected in some way to a 'bereaved family' or express anxiety and fear that one can become a part of it.

The exhibition is divided into two sections: In the first part - are works dealing with national customs and rituals of memorial forms through the personal perspective of the artists. The works raise questions about the relationships between memory and history, memory and forgetfulness and the national-collective perspectives versus the personal statements. In Part two- the works present the various faces and experiences of **personal** bereavement that allows the viewer a peek into the intimate - the space that was created between those mourning and the fallen soldier

Michal Shachnai, 2012

## **PART ONE**

**NAVA HAREL-SHOSHANI**



### **Pyrrhic Wreath**

**Pyrrhic** Wreath is part of a collection of works called ***There could have been a paradise here...***

The leaves of the Sabra (prickly pear cactus) represent the Native-Israeli - Jews and Arabs alike. The work describes the metamorphosis of a laurel wreath of victory into a cactus garland of mourning. The distance between a victorious celebration to that of the pain of bereavement is short. The title of the work is derived from the expression '**Pyrrhic Victory**', referring to the Greek King Pyrrhus of Epirus whose army suffered an overbearing burden of casualties in its victorious battle against the Romans.

The artist believes that every casualty caused by a war that could be prevented or ended – is unnecessary and bears unbearable 'price' (even if it is a victorious battle).

## ANAT MASSAD



### **In Tears (B'DIMAH)**

from a series *End of the Ceremony*

digital print 80x120 cm, 2008

In Massad's works there is a major dialogue between public and personal identity - in themes of ceremony, ritual, death and memory. Anat Massad deals with ritual ceremonies that are still practiced today in Kibbutzim and in youth movements - using symbols and words written in fire - which are used to bring the youth into the national ethos. The group ceremonies provide the framework and foundation for encouraging values focusing on defense, unity, solidarity and responsibility to the collective basic objectives. Massad photographed fire inscriptions that a youth group organized specifically for her works.

Her fire inscriptions enable new interpretations to sayings that were used to formulate the ideological ethos of the nation, the army, the collective and the youth movements. She printed them on black 'flags' emphasizing the ideal of heroic bereavement and restraint pain. Massad uses well known Hebrew sentences and expressions, dismantle them and builds them anew with references to memorial ceremonies in Israel. For example - the name of the work in this exhibition refers to the consulting prophecy: "Those who sow **in tears** will reap with songs of joy" (psalms, 126: 5). Massad emphasize the resemblance between the words (in Hebrew) "in tears" and "in her blood" and the consulting prophecy for the future becomes the present grief of a mother - mourning her fallen son...

## YEHUDIT MATZKAL



### My Son (B'NI)

From the series *Born Dead* 1999

Black and White photography

The military graves and the texts that appear on the gravestones, raise an issue between private and personal bereavement. The official policy maintains a uniform text on the tombstones whilst the bereaved family's request that a personal statement be added. Matzkal started an obsessive journey to photograph military graveyards soon after a tragic accident in which two IDF helicopters crashed in February 1997. Capturing the words carved into the stones with her camera, she gave them a life of their own.

Paradoxically, isolating the words in such a manner helps to sharpen the essence of the bereavement - the emptiness and the pain - and creating a new meaning for **pain**: A world of morbid sentences - "Anonymous Born Dead", "The Emptiness filled by you".

Matzkal's photographic journey portrays the artist as a mother of a soldier. Her photographs of the cemeteries may act as a personal protection against maternal fears and against all evils; as a statement against the public policy of unification versus individualism with regard to the military attitude towards the fictitious uniformity of the graves and tombstones.

## NAOMI LESHEM



### Untitled No. 2

From *Beyond* series, lambda printing **120x120 cm**, 2003

In the series of photographs called *Beyond*, Naomi Leshem photographs places where people faced their sudden death - places where striking beauty lies in contrast to the bitterness of terrible disasters. She accompanies people to the disastrous areas where their dear ones were killed and is thus able to commemorate the very place where pain and beauty collide.

"I discovered that these places hold great significance. From my point of view this is a point of transference from one shelter to another; from present life to what lies ahead; the place in which one breathes his last breath and saw his final vision. I am not dealing with the horror or the difficulty of the situation, but rather with 'gliding' over to another place. These places are peaceful and beautiful despite the meaning that hides under their surfaces - or in the case of this photograph, in the water. With regard to the combination of beauty and pain here we find more pain. It expresses the dissonance between beauty and terrifying in the world. The places we visited were so stunning beautiful that it only sharpened the pain."

The photos in the exhibition show the actual place in which an IDF plane had crashed. The video that accompanies the photos was taken by an IDF robot while searching for the plane's and pilots' remains.



Leshem edited the video and cut it off from its original goal: "I've seen this film as dealing with search, with knowledge and the lack of knowledge of what is there – what will be revealed in a second or minutes; what is still there that we are not able to see..."

The "place of death" (where one's beloved one died) is an important issue among the bereaved. For some it is even more significant than the grave or the memorial monument that commemorates the dead. Monuments mark the scenery and immortalize what happened there. Naomi Leshem prefers to see the place as it is – without any man-made sign or mark.

## **RICKI PUCH**



### **Memorial Jewelry**

Mixed Media, Silicon and Paint, 2012

Imagine to yourselves that as you are exiting a memorial service, there is a store - similar to a museum store - that sells memorabilia to friends and family members. Ricki Puch offers for sale items suitable for our era of consumers: "Everything is negotiable, everything is sellable, and everything has a price". Puch makes jewelry memorabilia, souvenirs, rings, necklaces, bracelets -including embedded images taken from the myths of Israeli battles legacy: the battle of Tel-Hai, Battle of Kibbutz

Nitzanim (where her father was taken captive) and others. At the beginning of the statehood of the country, Israel developed the 'cult' of the fallen soldiers as an important part of the formulating the mythical heroic sacrifice. The artist creates an intimidating and annoying Israeli myth in her tourism-like keepsakes and jewelry. The jewelry is displayed in a vitrine and the viewer is unsure whether these works are commercial or hand-made "personal memorial objects" for all.

## SHACHAR MARKUS



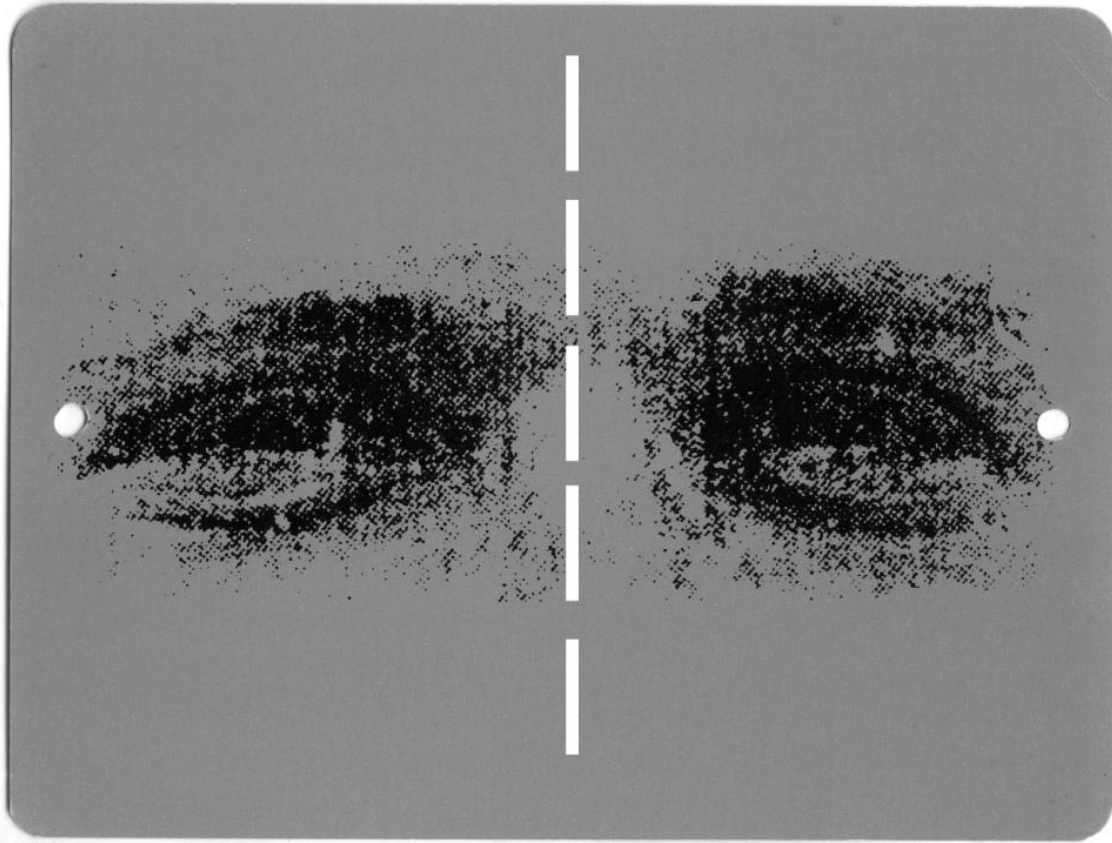
### **1,2,3, Dag Maluach (Herring – children's game)**

Video Art, 2:25 minutes, 2011

In his video art of 'Dag Maluach' (Herring) - the artist plays the familiar children's game with cartoon images dressed in grey clothing - probably from the uniforms of the soldiers from World War II or from the early days of the state of Israel. The scene takes place at kibbutz Yad-Mordechai where there are flat iron figures of Egyptian soldiers depicting their attack on the Kibbutz in the war for Independence in 1948. The relic battle that went through changes became a memorial structure such as the water towers of the settlements in southern Israel, the Syrian tank in Degania, and the abandoned armored tanks on the road to Jerusalem.



## GUY RAZ



### Tags

print and Xerox, 1994

As a photographer, curator, researcher and an artist - Guy Raz deals with questions of memory and forgetfulness in the Israeli society. The military Dog-Tag identifies the soldier in case of death or severe injury. Those who deal with identifying the soldiers will break the tag and use the information for their archives. On the tag are the details of the soldier: his name and personal number. These are alienated details that cannot contain the complexity of the human personality of the soldier. Absent are his smile, his gaze, his love, his passions, the tone of his voice and his silence. In his work, Raz does not show the soldier's identity number but his staring eyes. You can ignore a number but never the eyes. The exhibition reminds us of the memorial halls like Yad Lebanim (memorial building dedicated for the local fallen soldiers). There are rooms with walls on which portraits of deceased local soldiers are hanging. Their eyes gaze at us from the walls, as if they are all part of the general community. The soldiers become our "sons" evoking a passionate and intimate connection between the general nation and the fallen soldiers.

## YONI GOLD



### **A Pair of Lions I**

Oil on Canvas 55x57 cm, 2003

In 2003, while attending the Bricks Academy in Holland, Yoni Gold began a series of paintings depicting memorial monuments. From a distance, he was fascinated by that cultural experience. Israel has the highest amount of memorial monuments in the world, relative to its small population. The monuments that formed a connection between scenery and bravery defined links that could attract tourists and be witnessed by the general community. While he was visiting in Israel, Gold purchased the book "Galed" (memorial structure) from which he chose the images for his paintings. He was fascinated by the eclectic variation that the monuments presented

- from the Figurative style, the Brutal style, and the Modern to the Post Modern. The paintings were made quickly with shades of grey concrete and the European light. "I wanted the viewer to see the paintings as discoveries from past cultures, as if they have 'lost their ability to decide for what they were created'. Sometimes, in science fiction or movies, the heroes encounter in a foreign culture monumental sculptures that show past glory. Usually the encounter implies a violent continuance."

**DRORA DOMINI and PARNASS LIBAH NADAV**



**All Places –Israeli Scenary with a Memorial Monument**

Photograph of Batia Lishansky's memorial monument in Kfar Yehoshua

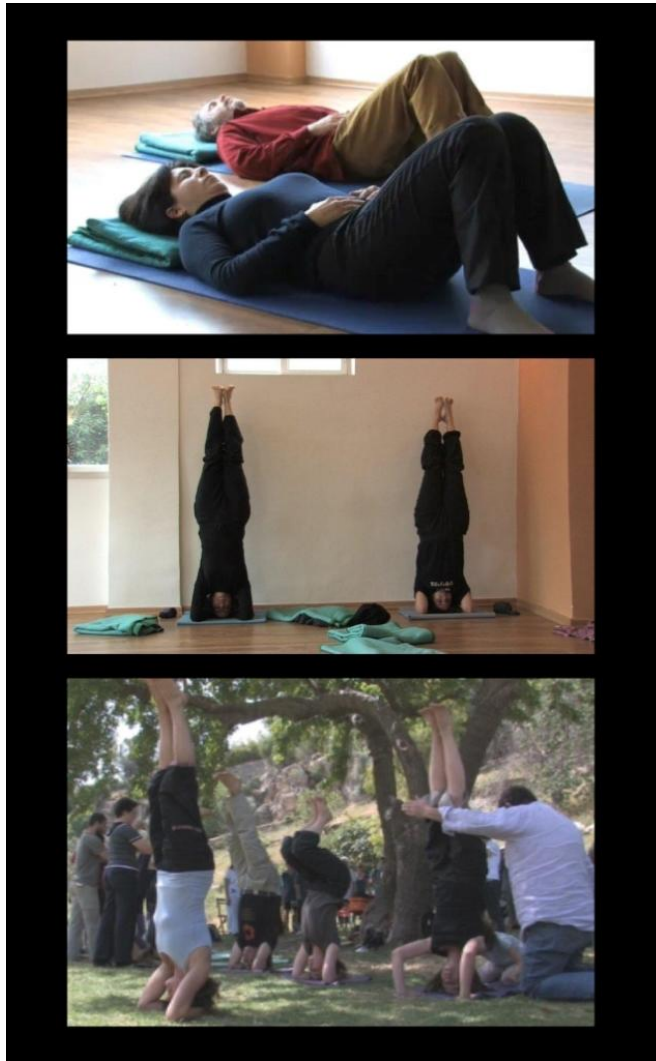
Ben Gurion was clearly against large memorial monuments in the place of the traditional simple tombstones amidst the stones and trees. He depended on maintaining the traditional Hebrew simplicity of the past without images, without added materials, in order to preserve a sacred spiritual appearance. Yet the memorial books did not display the dramatic effect of a direct connection between the monuments and the landscape. The monuments as commemoration emphasize the themes of heroic sacrifice and the story of military campaigns and victory. These monuments are Zionist points that stand out in the topography of memory and patriotism.

The artist Drora Domini and the photographer Frans Leba-Lahav collaborated in an art project they called ***Every Place:Israeli scenary with a Memorial Monument***<sup>2</sup>. They went for a documenting journey for two years and photoed 180 monuments throughout Israel. They chose to take the photos of the monuments from such angles that will decrease the monumental effect or will merge it in the background, as opposed to the conventional official perception of glorification that is conveyed by frontal photographs. The result of that decision is "Memorial scenarios" of the view with a monument rather than a monument with the view... The name ***Every Place*** evokes common guides for tourists and offers trips to the memorial monuments – to places that one passes by carelessly daily and visits them (physically or mentally) only once a year during the siren of the silent moment in the Remembrance day.

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<sup>2</sup> Exhibition in 1997 and a book published in 2002.

## TAMAR PAIKES



### **Standing on Head**

Video art 11 minutes. 2011

Tamar Paikes lost her father and all her brothers. She couldn't find herself in the traditional memorial ceremonies. She suggests an alternative way to commemorate the Memorial Day by standing on her head. Bereavement and memory are essential aspects of her creative works. Her father, Michael Paikes, a high ranking officer, was killed in the battle of Abu Tor in Jerusalem during the Six Days War and all her brothers died from various causes such as war, accidents, and illness. Thus the subject of death chose her, she says. Tamar wanted Memorial Day to be the time for contemplation and focusing at the pain of loss of all the beloved people that she lost. She believes that the experience of loss is the basic experience that could lead to dialogues between people who belong to different ethnicities. Paikes wants a ceremony that can be accepted by Arabs, Jews, and anybody who wishes to memorialize those who died and wants that common experiences of loss will form a bridge to link them together.



## PART TWO

VERED NACHMANI



### **Four Seasons in a Day**

Three paintings from a series of four panels, oils and colored pencils on wood, 170 x 80 cm, 2004

Vered Nachmani lost her father in the Yom Kippur War (1973). She shows a world devoid of men; where women have to gather the broken fragments, and try to make them whole again; but the broken will never be restored to its former 'wholeness'. In the three panels, from the series of four, titled ***Four Seasons in a Day*** are female images of the women in the artist's family, amongst them are her mother and her grandmother. The figures are painted as if they are seen through fence-like vertical lines that create fragmentation, detection and concealment of the figures, and representing the visible and the invisible. Vered Nachmani deals with bereavement through her painting - the memorial spaces become pictorial spaces. The images are built from emptiness and hidden to visible pieces through which the material is reflected. "I was just one year and eleven months old when my father disappeared from my life. All through my childhood I waited for my father to return: I prayed for one single memory that would linger in my heart; a mere fragment of a memory..."

## MEIRAV RAHAT



**Absence-Presence,**  
Formica, mirror glass, 190x122x100 cm, 2009

***Absence-Presence*** is an object from a series that deals with the presence of absence. Meirav Rahat is conducting a conversation between fantasy and reality in this exhibit. Shadows and reflections are turning the absent into real objects. The objects in this series grew from the well spread 'empty chair' theme in the history of art and culture, representing 'absence and presence'. "The choice of materials for these objects is taken from my personal 'absence-presence' – my husband Yotam, an artist-carpenter, was killed during his military service in 1994. The technology and materials with which he created defined his image."

Transforming the illusive and the empty into real objects is an attempt to revive the space and make the absent into a physical presence. The mirror-like finish creates a situation in which the emptiness stays imprisoned between the reflections.

The absent who became present and almost tangible, is drowned back in space and the physical representation of the nothingness is illusive once again.

Those works make the private grief attended in the public space and present a reality in which the absent will always remain present and those who love him will eternally wander between illusions and delusions.

## AVIV LIVNAT



### **An Expanse of Shapes**

Double color photography, two panels, 18x19 cm, 2009

A series of images by Aviv Livnat occur at the meeting points between photography and painting. The image perceived by the camera is a mixture of material related to his father and is situated between documentation and the abstract. Within a “game” with the materials of his creation, Aviv gives himself and us a sense of movement in his “stream of consciousness”. “The structure of the studio lies on my head – from the nostrils the corridor rises with steps that are also used as slits for vision. The holes of the air-conditioners blends the visual materials which are constantly shifting in my head/studio - like air – what is called in Yiddish “Luft-gesheft” (‘making business in the air’ meaning ‘nothing will come of it’; ‘waste of time’). My father was a pilot - therefore he was making ‘business in the air’ too – and here he peeps vaguely through the plastic boards. Through strips of burnt plastic he is continuously struggling for presence in my head/studio. Sometimes he is built from the material itself, plastic polycarbonate, metallic copper, and other available materials. He is constantly present in these materials; always in the bereaved mater and the bereaved space. Not only gaping a hole in the life of the loving person, but

creating an internal rift in space itself that exposes an inaccessible and elusive range; pure space, like a 'silver platter' upon which nothing is laid –it is empty yet includes all. Creation itself is concealed within it and calls for a redefinition of the body, the object and memory itself".

## EREZ CHARUDI



### *from the path to the entrance of the mountain*

Panoramic photography from a cellular phone, 74x200 cm, 2011

From June 6<sup>th</sup> 1967 memory has freezed - empty, transparent, uncultivated land...  
The series of works from ***the path to the entrance of the mountain*** is a journey to find the memories through photography and writings.



## LIAT IRIS



**UNTITLED**, 2010, mixed media

Brass instruments sunk deep into the seafloor produce signs of life when they emit air bubbles occasionally. Ritualistic repetition – of preserved movement and pulsing stillness - creates allegorical and living inner strength of the object. Liat Iris builds objects that create reflections from under seas, and a sense of staring into space, trying to capture this endless space - a place where the mind loses its body; a dynamic force of memory between the spaces of memory, emptiness of space itself, and forgetfulness - In memory of those whom we remember, and those that have been forgotten or repressed from memory, and those we want to remember but are paralyzed – cries from the depths of the abyss, poetry that no one ever hears”



**RONIT SHALEV**



**Sand Castles**

Pencil and acrylic on cloth, 70x80 cm, 2009

The 'embroidered' art works are drawn in pencil. Originally, these embroideries were to decorate the home and to convey messages about life. They are considered to be toiling-feminine works, a repetitious ceremony that brings about peace and calmness, but the images in the drawings point at a world in which danger is expected to occur at any moment. At first glance, the sand castles on the beach represent a peaceful scene of an idyllic family- but castles in the sand, as life itself, are fragile and can suddenly fall apart and collapse. The reality reveals instability, danger, loss and pain.

CHAVA LIVNAT



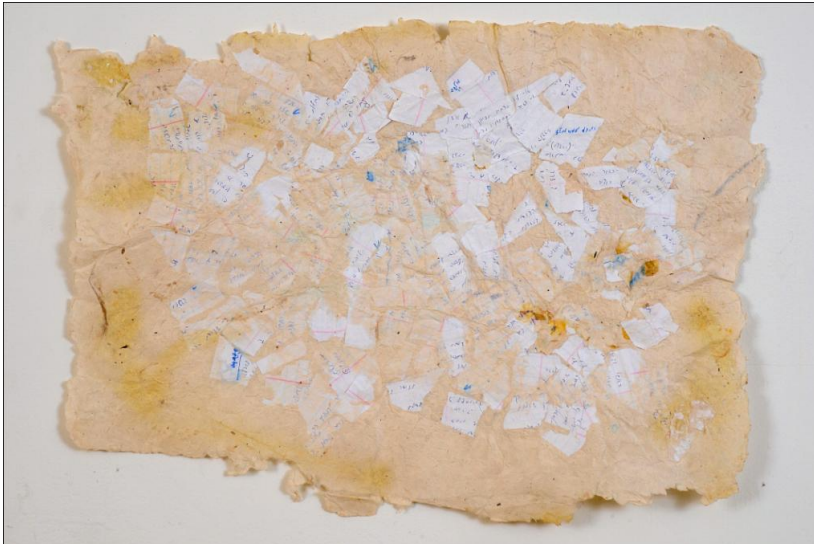
### **The Golden Peacock**

Watercolor on Paper, 2005

In Judaism, the Golden Peacock in flight symbolizes the lost connection between the present and the past, and the continuance of time. This is not the zoological colorful peacock but a golden peacock - an idealized peacock that represents longing and craving. The 'embroidered eyes' made of feathers, seem to be viewing the world from above - observing the past and the future. Maybe it is the bird close to the throne in heaven and its eyes hold an ancient secret. For this secret the soul expresses itself through a Yiddish poem by Itzik Manger ***The Song of the Golden Peacock***: "...fly golden bird to search for yesterdays." He searches all over the world and finds it only with a woman in black garments - a widow of the past days. Only she can preserve the channels of memory and conjure up those days from yesteryears. The watercolorist, Chava Livnat, daughter of the artist Arie Merzer, lost

her husband - pilot Arnon Livnat - in the Six Days War. The multi-directional movements which are rooted in many sources -historical, mythological, Jewish and universal- are seated between the eye of the artist posing in her self-portrait and the 'dismantled golden peacock's expression' displayed in her various compositions.

## **ARIELLA MEIR-GOLDMAN**



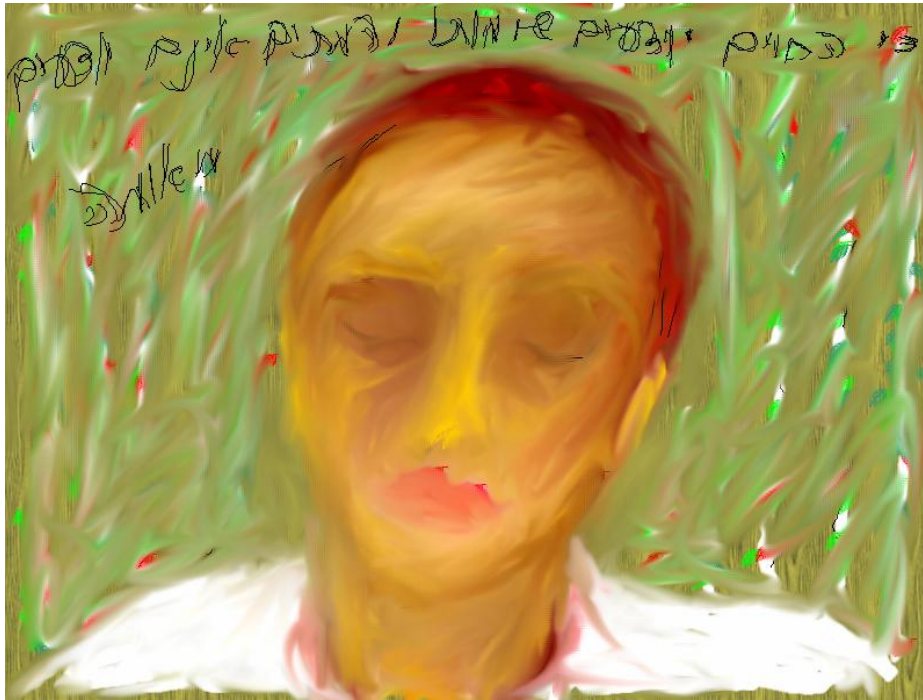
### **Metamorphosis**

Paper with bark, straw, flax and cotton and torn paper from her son's - Noam Goldman who was killed in the 'Second Lebanese War' in 2006 - military training notebook, 2009

Bereaved families often deal with the question: What do we do with the remains of our beloved fallen soldier - their belonging, clothes, and notebooks. There are those who dedicate his room to be a memorial, others prefer to take out all his belongings. The papers such as school report cards and other documentation are nostalgic and heartbreaking. Papers of such a young person who died prematurely at age 27 (as was the artist's son), contain his handwriting, his photos, articles concerning to him or to subjects he was interested in – expose their viewer to unbelievable depth of pain. Ariella Meir-Goldman, who is in mourning for her son, found a way to deal with the all these materials in a way that suited her. She chose to create new paper from her son's papers. The touching and painful works of the artist and the bereaving mother touches universal themes of cyclicity and recycling and yet reflect the most personal and intimate layers of the soul. “I searched for the material that is not material, precious thinness and subtlety of air” she says. The paper is used to unite the image of the beloved person that disappeared from her life at such a young age. “A deep and almost breathtaking strong connection.”



## BIANCA ESHEL-GERSHUNI



### **“Life Knows its Purpose, and the Dead Do Not Know Anything”**

Computer drawing, 2010

A special place is saved for Bianca Eshel-Gershuni with regard to discussion of memorials. Most of her works - jewelry, relief, sculpture or drawings - are related to funerals, ritual altars, memorial monuments and other commemoratives. Her works ridicule and undermine the formal memorial ceremonies in deep and loud cry of pain that finds no consolation. At a very young age, Bianca Eshel became a bereaved widow of an IDF pilot and the pain of her loss became her life-long companion. The official memorial monuments represent stoicism and the heroic sacrifices of the fallen soldiers, while Eshel's works display sensuality and sexuality. Eshel-Gershuni developed a feminine style of mourning. Her works demonstrate pagan and christian aesthetics. There is no ideological or coherent statement in her works. It has, however, an everlasting sense of mourning, as is expressed in their names and inscriptions: "It is possible that the dead are only secludes who want to contemplate on life"; "death is never the end".

She made her painting by the simple Painter (computer software) in her PC. In spite of the limited digital medium, her unique 'hand-writing' is visible. The presence of death is emphasized here as well – the color- saturated figures seem to rehearse and prepare themselves to their death.

"Death is present alongside life. I met it in a very young age when my most precious man in the world left me... We had plans for the next forty-five years. It all ended in one day – in a certain moment – when everything was lost" said Eshel-Gershuni.

