

BERTHA AND KARL LEUBSDORF GALLERY

132 East 68th Street New York, NY 10065

Nahum Tevet

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Born on a kibbutz in 1946, Nahum Tevet was by his midtwenties an ascendant figure in Israeli art. This exhibition surveyed twenty-six of his works on glass—virtually the entirety of this subtle body of work—produced between 1972 and 1975. The informative catalogue by Thierry de Duve, the exhibition's curator, explains that, in the forty years since their creation, a few of these works have been lost, a few repaired, while others are not on glass at all but rather are on Plexiglas.

To create the works, Tevet taped, pinned, clipped, or otherwise adhered translucent papers, cardboard rectangles, and an occasional postcard to the transparent grounds. His curious pencil drawings, kin to Dubuffet's art brut markings, are also often part of the mix. In many cases, these layers are held in place by small binder clips, the fold-back handles of which are frequently tied together with lengths of knotted or bowed twine or wire—surrogate lines—thereby allowing the works to hang from a wall and not just sit on a shelf.

Since the glass surface allows for the tape, or paper, or stray notepad markings to be viewed recto and verso, the blanched color of the wall here contributed to an errant sense of Cubist collage, an effect that counters the cat's cradle of the loosely geometric shapes delineated by the wire or cord. The works are small mixed-media events, tentative, emotive assemblages embodied by "meager" materials—dal in Hebrew—as the catalogue explains. In this way, the Minimalist impulse of the day—think Donald Judd or Carl Andre—was married to Robert Rauschenberg's smaller Combines of the early 1950s.

In fact, one can find a similar attitude obtaining to work made by the Arte Povera artists in Italy, just as it resounds throughout the efforts of a number of post-Minimalist Americans, among them Dorothea Rockburne and Mel Bochner. It is therefore of no scant importance that

several Israeli artists of this sensibility were also living and working in New York City, either as long-term binationals or on extended fellowships. Tevet himself eventually joined the American ranks, arriving here in 1979.

By coincidence, Rauschenberg was in Jerusalem in 1974, preparing an exhibition for the Israel Museum. Encountering Tevet's work in a gallery, he acquired several of the glasses included in the present exhibition. At that moment, the Yom Kippur War had just ended. Tevet served in that conflict, and this wartime experience may have spurred certain changes in his art: his move to somewhat larger, more distinctly rectangular sheets of Plexiglas and his introduction of a generative new figure derived from the circle. After all, it is not solely the dialectics of modernism—the famed formalist triad: thesis, antithesis, synthesis—that transforms style.

By the mid-'70s, Tevet occupied a secure niche within an extraordinary generation of Israeli artists—Joshua Neustein, Benni Efrat, Buky Schwartz, among many others. Heirs to the Ofakim Hadashim (New Horizons), a group of utopian abstractionists who arrived in Israel during the Palestine mandate, these artists generally rejected the illustrative imagery still typical of a broad reach of modern Israeli art: pictures of stalwart collectivist chalutzim and kibbutzniks, ecstatic dancing Hassidim, Rembrandtish patriarchal rabbis. Though such provender surely nourishes a sense of national selfhood, for this younger generation of Israeli artists—particularly those born to survivors of an irremediable wound—a reverential sense of belonging could also be coded within the "actual poorness" of the modest, at-hand studio materials Tevet employed. And thus, with the passage of time, Tevet's glass works—in their dal—played their role in contributing to a new, non-mimetic form of artistic embodiment of Israeli identity.

— Robert Pincus-Witten