

Emotion Accumulated in Silence

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"To extend being, to make it vertical, one must internalize the mundane [...], transforming the non-subject into a singular instance."¹

Beholders of Yossi Mark's works feel as though they cannot escape themselves. The restrained, meticulous works, the immaculate gray space, the monumental image that often dominates the center of the composition like an exacting icon—are mesmerizing. Mark strives to create a sacred, meditative space for the viewer, akin to a temple.

To all appearances, it is a painting from the here-and-now; a depiction of the slow depletion of his elderly mother's life, gathered into the armchair, as a sober testament to the awareness of inevitable mortality, juxtaposed with images of young women, fully aware of the ripeness of their bodies, their expressions incredulous. A girl holds a book in her hands, her troubled gaze averted from it, as if she had been confronted by disconcerting news, and her body language conveys acceptance and submission; a youth in profile, facing a window, gazes at a vision of light invisible to the viewer; a seemingly banal bathroom—all convey contemporary signs, but then the heavy silence permeates the painting. Silence, introversion, clarity.

¹ Avigdor Arikha, "What Modernity?," *Studio, Israeli Art Magazine*, 50 (February 1994), p. 13 [Hebrew].

The sense of solitude and the pensive quality of the depicted image are intensified against the emptiness surrounding it. Mark empties the space of details, rendering it primordial; a framed, almost ethereal slice of the infinite. The poetics of the void and rawness accentuate the metaphysical quality of the painting. The visual energies concentrate on the essence. The human image is often immersed in contemplative states, far from the ordinary bustle. It is a cathartic solitude, generating a state of inner attentiveness; the soul's journey to insights into itself, its surroundings, time, and the course of life. The painting is almost religious, reticent, seeking to align the viewer's mindset through its very presence. It evokes in the viewer what philosopher Hubert Damisch identified in Piero della Francesca's *Madonna*: "[...] a prescience of the obscure connection that this devotional image [...] is capable of maintaining with the most archaic strata of his own psychic constitution."²

The painting is static, but its static nature is merely physical. The mental concentration creates a movement, a suspended alertness, slowly trickling into the deep layers of consciousness. Mark strives for a total being, lost in the frenzied, extroverted contemporary culture. "There" is a refined, distilled, archetypal-archaic meeting place. The affinity for the realms of the past is not a nostalgic or romantic return, but a decisive, deliberate move born from the conviction that it is precisely the past that holds a valid and vital fundamental human charge.

² Hubert Damisch, *A Childhood Memory by Piero Della Francesca*, trans. John Goodman (Stanford, California: Stanford UP, 2007), p. 77.

The common emerges as a point of departure. The image, like the space around it, is purified of any superfluous detail. Everything is measured, seeking not to overburden the eye. The figures possess a heavy yet non-extroverted physical presence. The sensuality is barely enticing. It is devoid of joy, disguised as a mere latent possibility. A garment is thrown haphazardly over the body, a covering for the flesh; the body's posture is stiff and restrained. The physical tension is there, but it is subtle and suggested: the stiff neck, the wrinkled fabric, the disheveled hair, the dynamics of the bedsheet folds, the red stains in the bathtub. A charged existence, teeming with silent activity. A mindset rather than an action. Liminal movement.

The painting emerges from prolonged, slow observation; it uses the surface of reality but is not captivated by it. It aspires to refinement, compresses the visible, demanding full attention to what surrounds us, to the closest and most immediate: the light falling on the figure, the meeting of the wall with the floor, the coat hanger reflected in the mirror, the shadow cast by a washbasin.

Depriving the image of its personal-local-cultural contexts and dissociating it from the indifferent amorphous continuum of mundane existence, expropriates it, charging it as an icon. The image, its expression and construction in the space become an existential statement. "[T]he highest densities of meaning lie in the immediate, in the most obviously 'at hand'."³ No longer a woman bathing, a pregnant woman, a sleeping figure, a youth

³ George Steiner, *Martin Heidegger* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991 [1978]), p. 21.

looking through the window. It is an attempt to sanctify the mundane. The aesthetic and ethical act induces a shift, creating new affinities with the signified, bridging classical, archaic, religious formations with those human entities bearing a sculptural, monolithic, stoic presence. An enigmatic, saturated encounter, refined as an apparition which transcends time and place

Sumer, Egypt, Greece, Rome, Byzantium—a rich cultural space, deeply embedded in human consciousness. The latent radiation of the past, its anchored presence in the present, along with the work's sophisticated stratification, evokes a longed-for touch on fundamental human states. Everything feels so distant, and yet ever so familiar, as if it had always been there. The atmosphere steeped in humanity, the deep sorrow, the all-consuming metaphysical light, the beauty, the total tranquility. Giotto, Masaccio, Piero della Francesca, Fra Angelico, Caravaggio...

Mark's painting is a sharp visual analysis grounded in facts, avoiding any drift into the depiction of the cloak. He wishes to share seeing with the seen, appearance with being.⁴ The arid palette suggests an ascetic language, hinting at the inevitable presence of the tragic, the diminishing, which spills into the personal and collective realms, including the Israeli space.

The intimate, introspective exchange flows from the image to the surroundings and from there to the viewer. The dialogue is simultaneous:

⁴ See Claude Lefort's preface to Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'Œil et l'Esprit* [*Eye and Mind*] (Paris : Folio Essais Gallimard, 1964) [French].

inward and outward and inward again into the viewer's consciousness. Eye contact is established, a dynamic of returned gazes in the encounter of gazes between the viewer and the work of art. "[L]ooking at someone carries the implicit expectation that our look will be returned by the object of our gaze."⁵ The image as a vessel of emotion and thought, a receptacle for everything that cannot be contained. Silence becomes active. The void resonates with a medieval echo. "Now I behold as in a mirror, in an icon, in a riddle, life eternal, [...] even the secret places of my soul. [...] to behold is to give life."⁶

The monumentalization of silence, the severity and restraint of the image and the background, dictate an accumulating, focused, moderate mood. The power of the painting lies in its being an echo chamber of thin, distant, secretive strings of quietness.

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⁵ See Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire" (1939), in: *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 188.

⁶ Nicholas De Cusa, *Unity and Reform*, ed. J.P. Dolan (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962), p. 140.