



Drorit Dror: Never-ending Stories of Moments, Memories, and Myths

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What is more constant in life than something temporary? This is the question asked by Israeli artist Drorit Dror in her body of work *Eich Shehazman* איך שהזמן (roughly translated to 'Oh the Time'). The paintings, bright, beautiful and, at first glance, perhaps overwhelming, offer

viewers a captivating personal visual journey centred around memory, storytelling, and myths. The title of the exhibition came from the artist's realization that her works always return to core ideas of memories and life, and the passing of time which dates and records life.

I had the privilege of attending a gallery visit with the artist and a small group of her friends on October 11th, 2022. The exhibition was displayed in Haifa, in *Haderim*, a multidisciplinary cultural centre. The director of the centre, Danny Steiner, explained to me that the purpose of the centre is to function as a pluralistic, non-denominational space offering Israelis a welcoming and friendly community where they can engage with and participate in Jewish learning and culture. The centre provides religious learnings, such as a weekly Torah portion class and *limmud* activities in addition to book-launchings, art exhibitions, and music events in the city of Haifa.



An image of the interior of Haderim.

In speaking about her career as an artist, Dror told me she had been painting since the age of six, and that for the past twenty-two years she has been meeting four times a week with

a painting group called 'Matter of Colour'. The studio, she stressed to me, is very special, and she describes it as "a greenhouse which hugs everybody". Artist Bruia Hessner mentors and leads the group and has had a large influence on Dror – "because of her, I can call myself an artist".

Dror's painting process itself calls to mind the mechanics of memory recollection: the artist begins with a white canvas, and then overwhelms it with the smearing of paint in a chaotic and unintentional way. The organization and sculpting of the figures, buildings, and patterns occurs afterwards – similar to how one's brain makes sense of events and stories after the fact. The result is a complex painting process which often returns to the same places and figures, pulled from her own memories or myths, and ends with overwhelming visual tapestries filled to the brim and bursting with narrative and meaning. Only very recently, Dror told me, did she start leaving black spaces in her work. These 'empty' areas, while they may serve as breathing room in a technical sense for the paintings, read as gaps in the artist's memory after viewers are made aware of Dror's process. The black spaces feel slightly unsettling, as though something is meant to fill them, but that "something" remains frustratingly out of reach or recollection for the artist.



A piece highlighting the use of black spaces.

None of the works have names, as Dror believes that naming or explaining paintings takes away from the viewer's connection to the work – "paintings are not books, they are paintings". There are other reasons for her choice to leave the works completely subjective and open to viewers, such as the idea of painting being an act which connects the artist to forbidden or private acts of life. Why, therefore, should the artist feel obligated to explain her works? Is the explanation not then turned into an act of privacy violation?



One of the exhibition works, made for international women's day.

Despite these beliefs, Dror did give some context for the imagery which appears in her paintings, particularly in regard to the role of myth in her works. She spoke at length about her love for the Baron Munchausen, who told legends as if they were true and had happened to him personally. Dror explained that she loves the connection between liars and artists and suggested there is a scale from artist to liar. What is the overlap between the two? At what point do the

exaggerations and images produced by artists turn into lies? Do artists have Munchausen syndrome? Singling out one story, Dror told the tale of Munchausen's horse, a recurring character in her work. The tale was that Munchausen had taken his horse to drink and then discovered half of it was missing. What happened to the other half of the horse? He had apparently gone to Turkey and won the battle of Turkey. Half of the horse can be seen in two of her works.



One of the works by Drorit Dror, which features half of Munchausen's horse.

Another recurring theme in Dror's work is her use of strong female figures. These women, hypothesized by the artist to be a representation of her childhood spent in a matriarchal environment surrounded by strong women, never have faces and are meant to offer viewers the opportunity to project their own stories, needs, and wants onto these missing visages. In this sense, Dror explained, everyone can see what they want to, similar to how memories change for different people. I love these women and the strength they embody; they support buildings, occupy space, and also enrich the narrative and emotional depth of the work.



One of my favourite works from the exhibition. Dror explained that this piece began as an exercise in perspective.

Each piece by Dror embodies the idea that the meanings and narratives of paintings are in the eye of the viewer. An example of this is a story Dror told us about one painting in the exhibition. The painting features the figures, buildings, and patterns typical of Dror's work. In the centre, focal to the viewer is a small circle filled with what appear to be objects such as fish on a plate, cups, and other tabletop items. Dror explained that a collector had seen this painting and decided that this centre image was a woman's womb, and that he had insisted on purchasing the work because he loved this element so much. Looking at work during the gallery visit, a lively debate quickly broke out over what this image could be. Is it a womb? Is it a table? Why would there be fish in a woman's womb?



What do you see? A woman's womb? A table set for dinner?

Dror's paintings function as never-ending stories not only because of their endless visual layers and interpretations, but also in that Dror adds to the narrative until the very last moment. In this exhibition, several of the paintings had pencil marks, records of Dror adding final touches to them while they were being installed. Both the process and end result of Dror's work speak to themes of looking for lost things and connecting to and creating worlds of light and colour. The paintings themselves, once they leave Dror's hands, become a shared experience of search and discovery for viewers and the artist – and what a wonderful experience they are. Each painting pulls viewers in, asking them: What do you see? What do you remember?

Readers can see more of Drorit Dror's work here: <https://www.droritamitaidror.com/Eng/>

Information about *Haderim* can be found here: <https://hadarim.reali.org.il/what-are-we-doing/>