

Landing the Joke is Life or Death: An Introduction to the Work of Noa Ironic

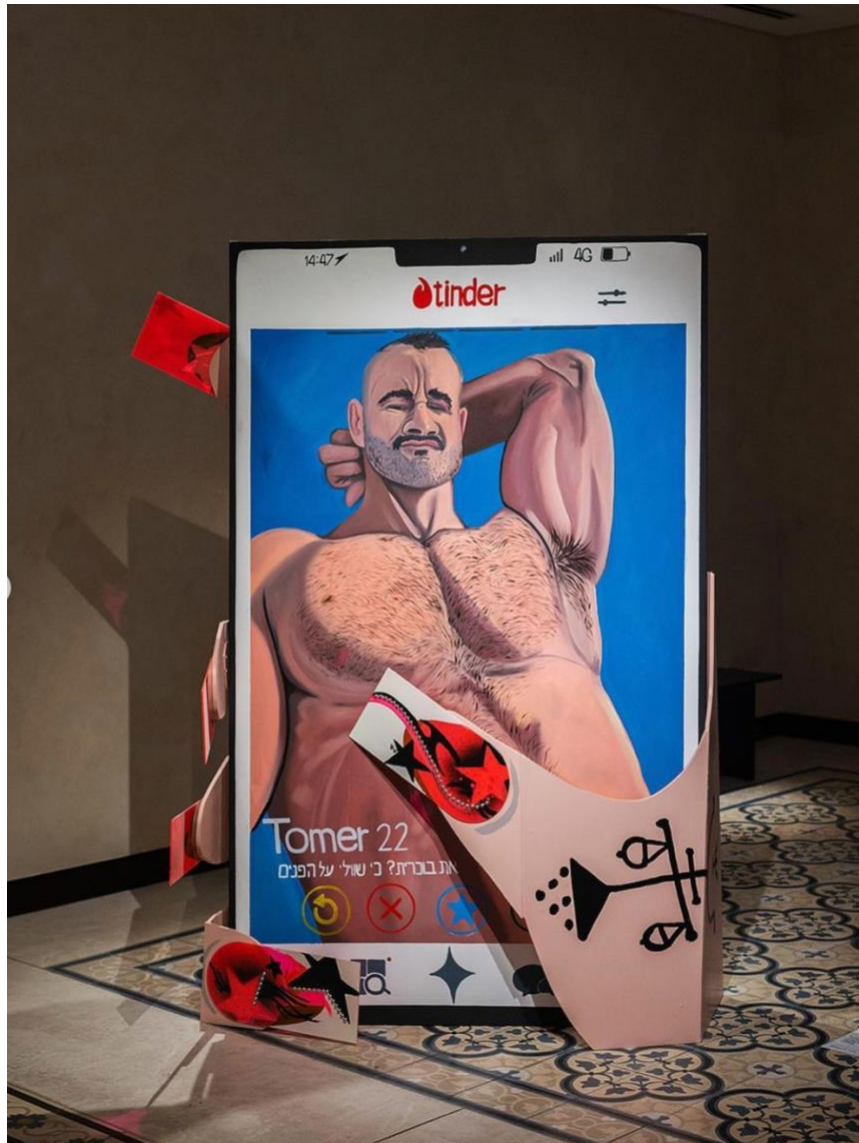


Noa Ironic, *Beautiful People Only*, 2022.

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Noa Ironic is a young Israeli artist currently living in Tel Aviv. Using a combination of storytelling and humor in a loose, inviting style, Ironic creates work that documents and critiques deep and difficult societal issues in Israel. In particular, her work shines a light on Israel's macho

military culture and the ways in which Israeli men identify with, and express, their masculinity. The brilliant interweaving of humor and gender critique within her works is one of the many reasons she is today one of my favourite Israeli artists. I suspect I am in good company here. Ironic and her work have been well received within Israel and abroad, and she is firmly established within the Israeli art scene as painter and sculptor. It was a real treat, therefore, when I had the opportunity to meet with her at her studio in Tel Aviv and spend a few hours discussing her work and getting to know her as an artist.



Noa Ironic, *Swipe Right*, 2023.

Reminiscent of cinema stills, Ironic's works use aesthetics inspired by 1970's comic strips to create scenes full of captivating characters and imagery. The characters, she tells me, are integral and central to her works – in fact, they predate the painting process. In this sense, the painting process is

one of trying to mold the character out of the paint in order to convey the story she wants to tell. All of her characters have lives and purpose, names, and backgrounds. When the artist puts brush to canvas, she carefully adorns them with small details designed to elicit the viewers' curiosity. She succeeds. Viewers, once introduced to Ironic's characters, are compelled to ask: Who are they? Where are they going?



Noa Ironic, *Independence Day*, 2022.

Humor is a vital aspect of Ironic's work. It is used as a technical "staging mechanism", and a psychological aid to viewers. Humor, Ironic explains to me, softens the blow of the sometimes harsh narratives and ideas embedded into the stories she tells. The humor of her work, reflected in the aesthetic and symbolic decisions made in many of her paintings, provides viewers a less alarming entry point into the issues her work deals with; as she says to me, "not everyone wants to read an op-ed". Notably, however, Ironic's use of humor does not make the work easier to create or more palatable to viewers. There is gravity in humor, she stresses, and "for the comedian, landing the joke feels like life or death".

While much of Ironic's work deals with the macho military culture in Israel, it does so within the context of the more ordinary moments of Israeli life. Her choice to explore this specific issue came not from a place of hostility toward or judgment of men, but rather from a place of neutral curiosity about and desire to understand the phenomenon she was witnessing. The military macho culture in Israel, she says, has created an energy of "suck it up" directed towards men and denies them a life outside of the conflict. Masculinity is not the issue; rather, it is gender itself which, she argues is ridiculous. Though there have been some negative reactions to her work from men, particularly those who identify with the incel ideology, Ironic pays them no mind. For her, the most important thing is to carry on and keep the lines of communication open, especially with those who disagree with or take offense to her work. Above all, she insists that a middle ground exists between her work and those who feel opposed to it. In spite of the shifting influence of art as a mass medium of communication, Ironic tells me she is not ready to throw in the towel and see art become "decorative bullshit"; she remains optimistic in the future of art to translate complex ideas and narratives to viewers.



Noa Ironic, *Chai Guy*, 2021.

While not dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict directly, Ironic chooses instead to focus on the impact felt on all levels of Israeli society as a result of Israel's history as a highly militarized State. This choice, the choice to create art rooted in the everyday realities of Israel, is one of the

reasons I am so strongly drawn to Ironic's images. The work she is creating is bridging the gap between the extreme environment of the conflict and the everyday reality of life in Israel in an intentional, consequential way. Her work also confronts head-on the international phenomenon of denying Israelis an existence outside of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As an artist, she tells me, she seeks to show a more complete picture of Israel which does not erase problematic or painful parts of reality but includes them *alongside* the many unproblematic stories and elements of everyday people and life here. In this space between 'problematic' and 'unproblematic', Ironic's images have the freedom to reflect complex narratives and stories not bound by political bias or ideology; her characters simply exist and represent the imperfectness of reality.



Noa Ironic, *Mediterranean Nights*, 2022.

Looking towards the future, Ironic shares with me that she is set to begin an MFA at the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). She hopes that an MFA will offer her more resources to expand her practice to other mediums such as printmaking, and also to help her break into the American art scene. When asked why she is choosing to pursue an MFA now, Ironic describes a combination of factors which include the July passing of her art mentor Maya Attoun and a drive to honour her legacy,

the smallness of the Israeli art scene and the difficulty for artists to stand out, and also a sense of fatigue due to economic and political stress in Israel. Despite hoping to settle in the United States, Ironic makes sure to affirm to me her love for Israel, which she describes as being apolitical and strong. When asked about what she hopes to achieve in the near future, Ironic is optimistic. Her goals are both big and small and range from having a successful graduate show and showing in American museums and galleries, all the way to continuing the tradition of art mentorship she feels she has benefited from greatly. It is important to keep her works accessible, she says, and, most importantly, she wants to continue “[making] art for myself and everyone”. I, for one, cannot wait to see what comes next.

Noa Ironic's work can be viewed on her website (<https://noaisironic.com/>) or on her Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/ironic.noa/>).