

Maya Bloch – Fate May At Times Seem Abstract¹

The Jerusalem Artists House, 9/12/23 – 10/2/24

Curator Drorit Gur Arie

Overflowing, partly morbid, and ostensibly hanging by a thread, Maya Bloch's world touches the darkest recesses of the soul, and is at the same time infused with subtle black humor. The figures in her work suggest hallucinatory apparitions or layers of consciousness; emerging like ghosts that come out at night to dance on the canvases.

Bloch's canvases are large, sometimes painted on both sides, as if the artist feels the need to stretch the story. At times she paints over an earlier painting, and the remnants of the previous layer emerge and fuse with the new narrative.

Graphite works in gray-black offer a key. Partially exposed women with internal baggage seem to be keeping a secret in their bellies. Their postures appear painful at times. Bodies fold into bodies, heaped up. Their agony is evident. It is a death journey, perhaps a dirge.

The ritual in the works leaves room for doubt. In *Reverse* (2020) a woman is carried on the back of another figure, surrounded by a tangle of limbs. The limp figure calls to mind the woman stretched across the bed in Henry Fuseli's *Nightmare* (1781). Other works feature multiple figures, but they remain a static, anonymous mass. The expressiveness is charged, yet the works contain a measure of abstraction alongside a grip on realism. For the most part, the paintings oscillate between the familiar and the alien, which Bloch "carves out" in the act of painting.

¹ Excerpt from Yona Wallach, "A Picture Takes Shape before My Eyes," in *Poetry* (Tel Aviv: Siman Kri'a/Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1976) [Hebrew]; trans. Safra Nimrod.

The colorful oil paintings are more sensual: portraits and figures surrendering a degree of intimacy along with the aforesaid foreignness; they belong to the here-and-now, or maybe not quite. The figures stretch their limbs on the canvas, often appearing to float out of a watery environment. Their diffuse appearance infuses them with life before they plunge into the abyss of oblivion.

In a series of drawings depicting children, Bloch captures small moments. In *Back Seat* (2023), a child is sprawled out wearily in a booster seat, his hand holding a ball indicates his being asleep. In *Theater* (2023), children stare at the stage, and even a routine action such as sipping juice takes on a nightmarish air, as the facial expressions echo horror or anxiety.

Bloch does not frame the works, but leaves them exposed like skin: "You can roll the paintings, carry the burden on the journey of the soul." In view of her fragmented, painful, ongoing stories, the question arises: When is the painting 'finished'?

Drorit Gur Arie