

Maya Cohen Levy shows here three series of paintings, three sequences, and actually – a variation on one wonderment, one attempt: the attempt to decipher the enigma of order and chaos at the core of the world of things.

Maya gets to the very bottom of the three elements she chose to examine, deep into their secret structure, into their hidden kernel. There we discover together with her that the visible form conceals an inner order, swarming beneath the outward appearance of things, an order which composes the visible whole, but also harbours the possibility of its disintegration. We know how a sunflower heart and its seeds should look – from a certain, familiar perspective; we may have approached it, as children, and noticed the spirals which construct this heart and their paths. Maya goes further than that. She shows us a world that all these elements build together – the whole they constitute, one complete feeling, one outburst of colour – but also the fact that this whole is composed

Maya Cohen Levy

*Sunflower Heart*

*Honeycombs*

*Thatch*

Dorit Peleg

of a mass of miniscule components, an infinite mass actually; the unceasing tension inherent in it, emanating from the possibility that behold, soon, in a moment, there will no longer be a whole, only molecules; she shows us that potentially order is also chaos, and vice versa.

That is so, since the whole can always be disassembled again into its elements, into its chaotic components. Order is not static, immobile: it exists by virtue of the endless motion of its components, its "atoms," and in each and every moment there is a possibility that the synthesis will cease to exist and things will revert to chaos. The motion proceeds from the structure or the minutest order, from the molecular structure, from the atomic movement, to the complexity of the superstructure, and the final explosion in which they are all contained in an enormous flash of light. Thus it is impossible to say that the works deal with cosmic order from the point of view of the microcosmic, the miniscule, which is concealed in the very heart of things.

However, these paintings do not move only from the micro- to the macrocosmos, but also from being into the possibility of non-being – and vice versa, simultaneously. From the inside outwards, and from the outside inwards: an endless motion which takes place within the seemingly static painting. And the light, always a cardinal element in the paintings of Maya Cohen Levy, is one of the essential means of the transition.

The sound of restrained explosion is heard, or felt, especially in the works of the *Sunflower Heart* series. In the subsequent series, the *Honeycombs* series, there is a variation on the same theme – microcosmic and macroscopic order, order and disorder – although the manner in which the things are constructed is different, and so is the feeling they arouse in the beholder. The passage from the micro- to the macrocosmic is achieved rather by conceiving the painting as a part – a broken, representative part – of the bigger whole. This impression is born both from the fact that it seems as if this structure was "cut" in the margins and from the strong feeling of depth that prevails in the painting. The manner in which the hexagons have been superimposed (in varying, partial overlapping) contributes to the creation of this dimension, but the principle cause of the feeling of infinite depth is the "subterranean" colours, which constitute a foundation for the "main," upper colour, first apparent to the eye. The background colour sheds light on the colour in the foreground. Thus a feeling of poured out transparency, of honey penetrating the open surface of the picture is created, and also a feeling that an "infinite honeycomb" is concealed behind the small segment presented to us in this particular painting. We see but a small part of it in the picture, and it gradually fades until we no longer see it, although we know it exists: just as we know that a reflection in a series of mirrors, which grows smaller and smaller until it becomes invisible, continues to exist.

What is constructed in the first sequence of paintings, that of the *Sunflowers*, by the sensation of restrained eruption in the kernels of order, is built in the second sequence by creating that dimension of infinite depth, by a feeling of an everlasting flow that transcends the confines of the picture, just like the light that trickles into invisible depths inside the honeycomb. Correspondingly, the warm, even blazing, Van Goghian colours of the *Sunflowers* series are replaced by a completely different scale of colours, which has some warmish, honey-like tones, but is composed mainly of cool, strict, austere, at times almost ascetic shades. From the fist of restrained eruption we have moved on to a jigsaw puzzle that produces a feeling of an endless streaming, the direction of which is the transition from restrained tension to harmony, a transition completed in the third series – the *Thatch*.

Here, due perhaps to the withdrawal into a more familiar observation-distance, to the dealing with a formalism, the components of which – the palm tree branches – are more "articulated," or "distinguished" in our consciousness, and perhaps because we are more acquainted with the object of observation from everyday life,

the feeling is more serene. Although here too only a part of the whole is presented, we do not have a feeling that something is missing, since we are more accustomed to the given angle, to the "given" segment. Most of us have, on more than one occasion, lain under the branches of a palm tree. This "arrangement" was already perceived by our eye, even if it did not record it. For this reason this series is more "human size," and its "arrangement" more formal: less inevitable than that of the honeycombs' hexagons, and lacking the potential of inner explosion of the *Sunflower* paintings. In a way it is also more rationalistic, its consciousness more conspicuous – and we, the viewers, are perhaps the more conscious. But here too, as in the previous two series, the light between the components, the light inside them, the light within and behind the whole, is essential, unifying, dispersing tranquility or uneasiness.

Dorit Peleg is a novelist, the author of *White Lines* (collection of short stories, published by Sifriat Hapoalim, 1985), *Unah* (a novel, published by Siman Kriaa and Hakibutz Hameuchad, 1988), and *Madame Fanny's Voice* (Am Oved, 1992).