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Israeli dreams are made of this

By [Ahron Shapiro](#) | MARCH 6, 2005, 7:00 PM



Etty Abergel is one of the many Israeli artists whose work is represented in artis05.It was last spring, and the various exhibits from artis04, the first Israeli Contemporary Art Week, had just finished their run in several galleries around New York City.

Rivka Saker, managing director of Sotheby’s in Israel and founder of artis, had much to be proud of. She had carefully timed artis to coincide with the New York Armory Show – one of the world’s largest contemporary art exhibitions – as well as the first Sotheby sale of Israeli art held in New York. The response was gratifying. artis04 had, from all accounts, been a smashing success, reaching out to a wide range of new audiences for Israeli artists.

Yet Saker was already thinking of ways to make artis better. artis04 had focused solely on visual art, which, Saker felt, was like showing the world only part of the picture. What’s more, artis04 was decentralized. The art was spread out among many galleries, and there was no focal point.

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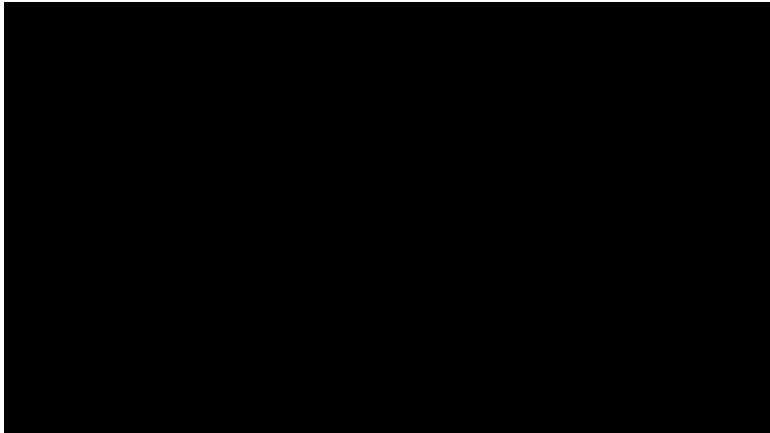
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“It was great. but it did not have enough weight with the art scene that we wanted to create,” Saker says.

That, she resolved, was going to change. Choosing the right museum space and curator for an exhibition is something akin to matchmaking: It is not a simple decision. However, by the early summer, Saker had made the shidduch (match). The Chelsea Art Museum had opened its doors in 2002 with a stated mission to provide a venue for art, especially international art, that might not otherwise be seen in New York. It had been one of the galleries used in artis04, but this time it would have a much larger role. The curator would be Manon Slome, a forward-thinker who had come to CAM by way of the Guggenheim.

In the fall, Slome flew to Israel several times to pick the artists and the artwork for the exhibition. As curator, Slome had complete discretion in the selection process. She immersed herself in art, crisscrossing the country, visiting studios and taking notes.

“I was struck by the range of art, the dynamism and sophistication. Here I was, coming from New York and I had nothing to teach them, and they had much to teach me,” Slome says.

Slome says she was also impressed by the level of support that Israeli art gets from all levels of Israeli society.

“The range of support that went into artis itself is a perfect example of this,” she says. artis is backed by the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs; the New York Consulate General; the Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport; the Israeli Council of Culture and Art; the Israel National Lottery Council for the Arts, among



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others.

“It’s just tremendous,” Slome says. While it is true that artis05 has focused itself around the CAM exhibition, Saker has capitalized on opportunities to further expand the range of the festival throughout the city and cover more aspects of art and culture.

And so, there are additional installations at the Andrea Meislin Gallery, the Jewish Museum and the Manhattan JCC, a selection of Israeli art showcased at smaller galleries around the city, concerts at CAM and the Symphony Space, and music, theater and film events organized by Israel Non-stop, a cultural festival that had previously been marketed separately but this year is being held in conjunction with artis.

The name of the exhibit at CAM, Such Stuff as Dreams Are Made On, was taken from Shakespeare’s Tempest. Manon explains her rationale for the title: “[Israeli art] is an art forged in a political and cultural hothouse, that meets a violent reality with an exuberance for life, ever conscious of its extinction: Hence the exhibition’s title. The work of these artists combines the muscle and visual drama of an engagement with materials, the ‘stuff’ of everyday life, with a fragility, a transient, fleeting sense of the ‘dream.’”

On the top floor of the CAM, five days before the opening, the cavernous floor space is a hive of activity as the artists work feverishly to assemble installations. ISRAEL21c had a chance to speak with two of the artists, Doron Rabina and Etty Abergel.

Rabina was trained at Hamidrasha in Ramat Hasharon in the ’90s and has since collected awards and accolades for his work in Israel and Europe. The stubble on his face and his workman’s clothes are a testament to the artist’s intensity as he assembles his exhibit. The artist points out the twinkling facets of the automobile headlights that comprise one part of his installation and how they play with the viewer’s visual perception. He calls attention to another part of the installation, where an ordinary Israeli plastic trash can has been perforated like Swiss cheese, giving a sense of three-dimensional spatial texture to an everyday article.

“The objects in my installation were chosen to appear uncomfortable with their environment,” he says, helpfully.

How does being an Israeli affect him as an artist? Rabina sees it

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as a positive.

““Being an Israeli artist has allowed me to be part of the world’s art community both as part of the center and the periphery, as an insider and also with the perspective of an outsider.”

Etty Abergel studied at the Bezalel Academy of Art & Design and has been honored with a coveted invitation to the Vienna Biennale. Her installation at artis is a work in progress – literally. For two days after the exhibit opens, she will continue to labor inside her creation in a performance aspect of her art.

This is Abergel’s first visit to New York, and she is somewhat apprehensive about how her art, which has always been a deeply personal narrative, will be interpreted on this foreign shore, and how it will affect her.

In a moment of reflection, though, Abergel reveals the soul of an artist that needs to create as part of living and not to seek validation.

“I create art out of the pain of memories, but afterwards, I feel better.” she says with a hint of a smile. As for how her art will be received in New York, Abergel says she is prepared for whatever will come her way.

“I want them to love it, but I am ready to be lonely again.”

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