

## "The Scrolls of Concealment and Revealing"

Impressions from a visit to Alma Itzhaky's new exhibition, "Pupae".



Ouzi Zur



Alma Itzhaky, "Pupae," Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv

As one contemplates the continuous developments unfolding from end to end in Alma Itzhaky's scrolls of concealment and revealing, it's hard to believe that these intricate works originated in a compact studio. The limited size didn't allow her to spread out the paper to its full length, but forced her instead to a procedure of unfolding and refolding one section at a time, rolling and revealing.

This act of revealing and concealing gives rise to a visual language marked by a seamless flow, subtly divided into chapters, verses, words, syllables, and letters. Itzhaky's spectacular panoramas envelop the viewer, reminiscent of Claude Monet's garden and water panoramas at Giverny for the oval spaces in l'Orangerie. This transformation in Itzhaky's work is profound,

abandoning the thick thematic painting of everyday scenes in the south of the city. Scenes of divided apartment rooms, crowded streets, day and night, previously painted in a style reminiscent of implicit surrealism combining the monumentality of Diego Rivera with the dreaminess of Bruno Schulz's Central Europe, are left behind. Itzhaky brings the light of the raw paper into her breathing paintings, transitioning to allegorical art rooted in the abstract—a departure from a specific place and time to the realms of her imagination and life's sediment.



On the scroll to the right of the entrance, titled "Flowing, and Flown," Itzhaky intentionally leaves the drawing-painting phase in oily pastel chalks as a linear foundation before applying the watercolor layer. Imagining Itzhaky's hand in motion with colored chalks, a sweeping, curling movement unfolds, initially appearing as abstract lyrical painting. Upon closer inspection, internal and external conflicts between the forces of nature come to light, revealing fragments of allegorical stories. The lower part of a woman's body, symbolizing the source of the world, is surrounded by curly pubic hair, kissing the water's surface, while a yellowish bubble erupts as an act of male and female creation in unity. On the opposite bank, a watermelon is ensnared like a fish in a transparent reddish bag, resisting the water's current with roots and dry thorn stalks. A unified gaze encompasses the surface and depth of these intricate scenes.

In other scrolls, when watercolor is added to the pastel chalk map, the oily pastel lines transform into threads, ropes, or stalks that resist the watery colors and the images they create, forming and outlining their structure. The tension between the storm of lines and the storm of spots, the contrast and complementarity, is remarkable.



The texture of the works, the technique, and the non-fixed continuity evoke the continuous softness of imaginative textile models on rolls of fabric, extending endlessly. In the mesmerizing scroll "Stages of Decomposition," painted in late summer tones, the water lines dry up, dissolving the landscape's spots seen from above. Here, before the disintegration, we witness a vulnerable dead starling, the jagged foliage's greens, the tuber heralding autumn, and endless roots reaching into the skyless space.

The world revealed in the scroll "Rummage" resembles the bottom of the sea, where landscapes of inexhaustible wealth are illuminated by precious light, ethereal corals, and the dreamlike movement of algae and seaweed. In the midst of this beauty, Itzhaky incorporates human waste, eventually disintegrating into beautiful negative monoprints. However, on the far left, Itzhaky draws a life-size red wild pig, resembling raw meat, hanging upside down from a swirling pit, its red teats longing to nurse those forbidden to come into contact with her.



An exception, to some extent, is "The Hoopoe," not a scroll but a single painting, easily imagined as a fragment of a continuous scroll. A naked man lies on the ground, whether asleep or dead is unclear. From the earth's bowels, thin and bright roots crawl to the mass of the old or dead head, while a perfect Hoopoe perches on his shoulders, thrusting its thin and sharp beak into the man's ear, seemingly unnoticed. This work is a poignant blend of sharp and soft beauty, a parable full of light at the end of all flesh.