

Al Hamishmar

31.7.1989

Dorit Keidar

The Herzeliya Museum is currently showing two exhibitions apart from those recently mentioned in our weekend column. The first – the statues of Datia Landber, to be exhibited through July-August, and the second – a permanent sculpture by Israela Hargil, “An Environmental Sculpture of Termite Structures.”

With regard to Hargil's exhibition, we should quote the sculptress' own comments after a trip to Africa where she encountered termite structures: “Soil structures ‘growing’ out of the ground, intertwining around tree trunks and hanging in clusters from their branches. They are made from red loam from the Sharon area with the addition of binding materials...in Africa they gave rise to myths. One of them deals with the God ‘Ama’ who wants to unite with the female earth and, together, give birth to the human race. But a termite hill stands in his way. Enraged, the God takes out his sword and cuts off the top of the hill that fertilizes the soil. In a certain area of Mali, the custom of circumcising girls (as customary among the Bedouin) is attributed to this myth.”

In relation to her artwork, Hargil comments: “right from the beginning stages of my work, the duality of the termites' roles roused my interest – they simultaneously destroy and build. This duality faced me with a challenge – to express not only my wonder at their ‘artistry’ but also my resistance to the destruction they wreak. We do not permit them to penetrate our world, if they dare – we destroy their nests and bombard them in every way possible. My cold iron

sculptures express our war against insects. However, there is another factor involved in this intervention.

The spraying materials we use on them also poison the air we breathe. The smog above our heads is like the layer hanging beneath the treetops and above the completeness of the sculpture.”

The artist’s words indicate the intention manifested – ambiguous feelings about the invasion, control, and use of soil to build huge, sealed, dark and deterring fortifications. Forces of darkness that take control of the foliage and natural environment. One could perhaps compare this to the termite army - like a human army – that constantly attacks and builds fortifications, wonderful soaring towers that also give a sense of conquest and violence. But there is also deterrence, as Hargil notes – as well as a certain enjoyment of this erupting power, enjoyment of a warring creativity.

The immovable shining towers of iron – this cold mineral material – located like a power from another arrow, but, in fact, the two towering forms indicate a grip on the same principle of conquest. The termite structures are a metaphor for the magic circle of a war against war, on one hand a construction for the purpose of support, and, on the other hand, for the purpose of destruction. A metaphor for human termites who build themselves Towers of Babel. Hargil constructs an inspired sculptural environment that is definitely worth coming to see.