

THE JEWISH STATE

Partnership begins between between Jerusalem school and local Peddie School

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Yonatan Ullman, 'Self Motion' (detail), 2008

When Eric Drotch, an art teacher at Peddie School, discovered that his own school and the Bezalel Academy for Art and Design in Jerusalem had a common benefactor, he used that fact to establish a cross-cultural relationship between the two institutions.

He got the ball rolling in 2008 during a trip to Israel funded by a continuing education grant from Peddie to explore Israel's art scene. While there he began conversations with Bezalel's director of international relations, and now a year-and-a-half later, he has completed the first step toward of realizing his dream of creating a relationship between the two schools - a solo exhibition by 2008 Bezalel graduate, Yonatan Ullman titled 'Gremlins', will open at Peddie and will run through February 17th. Drotches discussion with Bezalel started by exploring how to develop a mutually beneficial relationship between the schools, and they decided the best place to start was to find a Bezalel Graduate with an interest in teaching - Ullman fit the bill perfectly.

Its Main Aim is Dialogue

Ullman would meet with students one-on-one to critique their work. He attributes his ability to quickly analyze the student's artwork to the critical tools he developed during his studies at Bezalel, which gave him as he said: "a way of visually understanding a work of art you are subjected to." Although Ullman has been somewhat reluctant to offer technical suggestions to the students since he will not be meeting with them on a regular basis, he will often see typical mistakes and try to suggest alternative approaches.

After the first year in Bezalel, which offers foundations, students are mostly on their own, working under an advisor-mentor. By the end of every semester each student is expected to produce a solo exhibition. You meet with advisors and discuss the work you are developing," said Ullman "but it is set up in a way where you are not required to specify media or a type of work."

"Art is not only a means of self expression; its main aim is dialogue" said Bezalel Director of International Relations and student exchange Liv Sperberg. "The Bezalel Academy for Art and Design, Jerusalem encourages the practice of dialogue with partners around the world, and certainly via our graduates. Any exposure of Israeli art and artists to the international scene is important to us, and we are delighted to have started a relationship with Peddie, which we hope will continue to flourish.



Yonatan Ullman, 'FORCE' 2008-1010

Ullman's Art Exhibit

In his own work Ullman observed two consistent themes. The first is that he is process oriented. "I don't think of a concept and then engage in a process to get that idea across." He said "Rather, through the process I am engaged in I understand what the conceptual concerns are."

The second characteristic of his work is its installation format. "Even though I work mostly in painting and sculpture, these often add up to create an environment. An example of this can be seen in Ullman's reflection on the travel many Israelis undertake as a transition between their military service and their reentry into civilian society. Ullman's 2008 - "Self Motion" - rotates 22 drawings on a conveyor belt, that alludes to the baggage claim conveyor belts at airports, and uses the images to tell a story about himself as a metaphoric backpacker.

"The post military trip," Ullman explained "serves almost as a rite of passage for young Israelis. "What sets it apart from other forms of travel" he wrote in an email "Is that these backpackers aren't trying to get to anywhere. Rather, they are trying to get away. I would argue that their motivation is to travel to a 'non=place'. However, even as they travel as far away from Israel as possible, these travelers look back intensively toward Israel." he added "These travelers rarely mix with local crowds, mostly travel with other Israelis with whom they often discuss israeli life."

Ullman recalls the moment he realized the role of this travel: "At a certain moment during my travels applying to multiple graduate programs abroad, I again found myself facing a baggage claim conveyor belt, when I realized this stalled moment serves as a critical moment between being 'here' and being 'there' and is therefore somewhat equivalent to a rite of passage."

Ullman spent time in the United States as a youngster, due to his father's work in neuroscientist working both in M.I.T and the Weizmann Institute, his family shuttled between Boston and Israel, they finally settled back in Israel when Ullman was approximately ten years old.

When asked whether being in Israel has influenced his artwork, Ullman responded, "The experiences we go through in life - they have an imprint on us in different ways. I find more often than not, even if I don't consciously choose to, the work has contents that can be interpreted as relating to Israel.

As an example he describes a large project he has been working on since he began his graduate program, which involves creating large-scale, multi-layered paintings. As he adds layers of paint, he applies masking tape between layers; then at a certain point he pulls off the masking tape to reveal the layer of color beneath it. Over time, he began to incorporate images in to these paintings, which eventually revealed themselves as industrial vehicles reacting to the surrounding landscape of paint layers. "In my mind I only thought about these works in purley conceptual terms as metaphors for the creative process." Ullman said "However, the aggressive relationship between the heavy machinery and the landscape has often been interpreted in relation to the Israeli conflict."

Drotch is hopeful that eventually Peddie will be able to send one of its faculty members to Bezalel to see how it operates and also to visit other schools in Israel. His thought is that Peddie might give Bezalel students an opportunity to experience an American school education as a possible career path while they bring to Peddie community a more global perspective. To set the program firmer footing, Drotch is applying for a grant to go back to Israel next spring. 'Gremlins', Ullman's solo show at Pedie is open to the public during school hours. and runs through February 17th.



Yonatan Ullman, 'Gremlins' (detail), 2010

