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COLLECTION

# Invites

TAL  
REGEV

20 MAY–  
27 JUNE 2021

Tal Regev interviewed by curator Paul Luckraft, 8 December 2020

**Paul Luckraft:** Your exhibition features new works, but also some slightly older pieces. I wanted to ask how your work has developed over the last few years, from the figures being quite discernible to now, where they are often on the edge of invisibility.

**Tal Regev:** Back then I felt the need to use a lot of colour. But I realised that sometimes the first sketch, or the first layer, was the most successful. By adding so much, I almost killed some of the sensitivity. Then I started to bring those moments out more and remove other parts. I was aiming to reach more sensitivity, and out of this a different language developed.

**PL:** In terms of the process, were there technical developments in the way you were making paintings? Did you have to find a new way of using paint to achieve the delicacy you were after?

**TR:** It was quite organic. I wanted the painting to breathe more, but also for viewers to have a sense that the images could jump out and stab them, then almost completely disappear. I wanted there to be movement. In my next works I wish to create the sense that the paintings can tap into a psychic space. I don't know exactly how this could be done, but I want to do it through painting and to create a world in which one does not know the rules.

But returning to the Invites show, it's an important point that painting is not a static medium. Painting has a lot of abilities to stretch, to move. There is an Etel Adnan quote that is so to the point of what I am trying to do: that a painting is not a still thing; it is moving, it can come and go, it can disappear or approach you.

**PL:** The word 'movement' feels crucial. You are talking about challenging the perception of painting as a static medium, almost thinking about the works having an unstable flux to them. Moving back through layers of time as well, perhaps? Or even moving from outside the body to inside the body, to different scales of perception?

**TR:** I want them to operate from behind the eyes, or from behind the senses that we know, to cut through some layers. Sometimes, when making a work, there is just this buzz when you hit it: you understand the painting. I do think that paintings can stand outside of time, they can be entities beyond our current existence, because they stay and then they can hit you at different moments. In my recent paintings I have also been thinking about losing the sense of the physical body, which I began to explore during my British School at Rome residency in 2019. But perhaps this idea of the collapsing body is actually more about internal feelings rather than the physical, although they are linked.

**PL:** When you depict figures in your work, are they universal or are they directly linked to particular people with identities or genders?

**TR:** They are more female, because that is more natural to me. On the other hand, I am totally happy for them to slip and be whatever they are. They are not somebody; it is more universal.

**PL:** Is the root of the work your own memories and experiences?

**TR:** I guess so. What acts as a trigger for me is when things happen in life. A key point in my work is my interest in the subtle moments of violence that people inflict on each other, and this comes out of my own experiences and personal observations. For instance, when something is going on, but it is not yet in the open, I guess that I am sensitive to this. I am interested in deep-rooted memories or behaviours that are not fully perceived but that control life.

**PL:** Talking about difficulties and tensions, a lot of the works in the exhibition were made in London in your studio during the first lockdown in spring and summer 2020. Obviously, there are interesting crossovers with some of your interests that precede the pandemic: of invisible forces, constraints upon the body and constraints on interacting with others. How was it to make work in isolation? And did you make any changes to the work in relation to the new situation we are all living through?

**TR:** I've not been making work directly about the pandemic, but it felt connected. Wearing a mask, sanitising my hands, fighting a thing that is completely invisible; it correlated with my interest because it is about things that you don't necessarily see, but are fully happening. It was really interesting for me to be so isolated, because I felt that the only person who could criticise or block myself from development was me.

**PL:** That is potentially both a freedom and a constraint, because it must be tough to be separated from responses to what you are making, thinking or doing.

**TR:** I thought, 'Now I have no excuse not to push my boundaries'. In my work, that was quite a thing.

**PL:** There is a really striking work in the show, *Flames in May*. Did the motif, with the flames rising from the head, emerge from the heightened situation you found yourself in?

**TR:** I was painting it in lockdown. It is based on one of the visions of Hildegard of Bingen (German Benedictine abbess, writer, composer, philosopher and Christian mystic, 1098–1179). But then

everything was going nuts, and this work took a turn and felt connected to the situation. It developed and ended up at a different outcome, so the situation came into my work.

**PL:** Do you often look at particular art-historical references?

**TR:** I do find it interesting where you place yourself as a painter in relationship to the history of art, and especially the mood in which you are in while making work. For that, Agnes Martin is interesting: she speaks about how isolation is important for the artist and allows one to connect fully to the creative process. I also find artists like Louise Bourgeois, Alina Szapocznikow and Carol Rama fascinating. Other artists I've been thinking about are Charlotte Salomon, Kai Althoff, Rita Ackermann and Maya Deren. Contemporary dance is also an influence.

**PL:** It's interesting that you mention sculptors, film-makers and choreographers, not exclusively painters.

**TR:** I look at painters, but I look more at what is behind an image and what influences their process.

**PL:** When writing about your work, you've expressed an interest in the dissolving of borders between things. Yet the limits of a painting – a two-dimensional surface with edges – are defined quite clearly. You are not making room-size installations; each piece is a separate individual moment. Is it important that you have some kind of boundary to respond to?

**TR:** Yeah, I think I am interested in these edges, in how much you can stretch things. I have thought about whether I should do things differently, be more immersive, but then I think 'No, this is really my space'. Naturally, that is where I am interested in being. There is a lot still to do there.

**PL:** One painting in the show, the *Talismanic Snakes* piece, doesn't depict a human body. Could you talk about that series of works? Where does the snake motif come from and what might it symbolise in your work?

**TR:** My friend did an ayahuasca ritual and had a vision of snakes going through her body and detoxifying her blood. I found it so striking, I asked her if I could use it in my work. I was preparing for a ceremony myself at the time, and those paintings were part of my preparation process.

**PL:** How many works are in the *Talismanic Snakes* series?

**TR:** Quite a lot – I insert the motif quietly into my paintings. But I do want to push the idea that these snakes can cleanse.

**PL:** When you are putting together a show, like you have done for *Invites*, are you thinking about creating one particular type of mood in the show, or do you think that each work in the show potentially has a different atmosphere?

**TR:** I think it is more that they are a certain pitch, and that is why I decided on these works and not different ones that may be more recent. I feel that the paintings I'll present hit the same frequency.

**Tal Regev** (b. London 1985) lives and works in London. She completed an MA in Painting at the Royal College of Art, London, in 2017. Prior to this she studied a BA (Hons) Fine Art at Goldsmiths, University of London. In 2019 Regev was awarded the Derek Hill Foundation Scholarship, The British School at Rome. She has exhibited internationally, with a solo presentation at Alice Folker Gallery, Copenhagen (2019), and numerous group exhibitions. These include *December Mostra*, The British School at Rome, Italy (2019); *Futures of Love*, Magasins généraux, Paris-Pantin, France (2019); *All in green went my love riding*, Calle Zucchero, Venice, Italy (2019); *All our Friends*, Unit601f, New York, USA (2018); *Artagon III*, Petites Serres, Paris, France (2017); and Birth Rites Bi-annual award, Media City, Salford, UK (2015).

**Zabludowicz Collection Invites** is dedicated to solo presentations by UK-based artists without UK commercial gallery representation.

**Image:** *Flames in May*, 2020 (detail)  
Oil on canvas, 100 x 180 cm. Courtesy the artist.

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