

art

By NAOMI WONNENBERG



## Mercurial memories

*An exhibition at Bat Yam's Ben-Ari Museum reveals remembrances from a childhood of migration*

**B**at Yam's rather small but very worthwhile art museum built in the Bauhaus style is currently offering an exhibition entitled "Displacements," which deals with artistic expressions of childhood experiences of immigration.

The 12 artists participating in this exhibition all immigrated to Israel at a young age or experienced the decisive influence of immigration early in their lives. Most of the artworks were especially made for this exhibition that evolved out of individual, personal and biographical experiences.

In **Olaf Kuehnemann's** work, the desire to preserve relics of his childhood homeland takes shape in the form of *objets trouvés*, a wooden Christmas candle-pyramid integrated into the composition of his paintings, mixed with family photographs. His watercolors and oil-on-plywood paintings faithfully retrace the pattern of the human memory that preserves isolated parts, fragments of scenarios we lived through. As so often happens with childhood memories, familiar objects are removed from their original

context. We stand and wonder when we come across such an object, perhaps a nutcracker, just like the one the family had... but in our memories they are often disconnected from the surrounding events and places in which they originally appeared; they swim like islands of emotions in a mental sea of memory.

Kuehnemann's painterly process involves working in layers, effacing and removing certain figures while isolating and highlighting others. The artist says about the family photographs that he uses as visual points of departure: they are "images for which one can assume responsibility."

The same topic, family souvenirs, is also at the center of **Masha Yozefpolsky's** video installation. However, in Yozefpolsky's work, the dream-like family recollections take a morbid tone. In a dark, corridor-like situation, two videos are screened opposite one another. One shows bats pouring out of the exit of a bunker at twilight: a grainy, gray and eerie image. The other shows an estranged family dinner. The 12 guests



**Olaf Kuehnemann,**  
*Objets trouvés art, 2007.*

(Left and above)  
**Masha Yozefpolsky,** '-273°C,'  
video installation, 2007.



are seated at a long table. The white tablecloth and the polished crystal and silverware shine out against the background. In contrast, the room the dinner takes place in is wrapped in complete darkness.

The scene is captured with a spiraling camera motion. All the family members are eagerly eating, almost devouring the dinner, yet not a word is spoken. The mother at the top of the table sits with a frozen view, holding a large carving knife in her hand, motionless. Opposite her is a little girl, perhaps representative of the artist, whose immigration at age six meant separation from her mother. Slowly the hand with the car-

ving knife is rising, the knife shines out in a silver flash and slices into a perfect white custard. Every family member goes on eating silently. More cutting of the exquisite pudding, more slicing, more eating. The little girl gazes at the silent family members. She seems utterly lost. All the while the camera spirals round the table. The mother remains motionless with her eyes closed. An image of beauty and pain, this ceremonial dinner where everybody is present – yet apparently unreachable – stands like a dream metaphor for the beauty and pain of the memory of separation from a beloved family.

The exhibition is accompanied by a film program on the topic of immigration to be screened every Tuesday at 6 p.m.

*On view through March 31, The Ben-Ari Museum Museum of Contemporary Art, Rehov Struma 6, Bat Yam tel. (03) 659-1140.*