

Upon this Bank and Shoal of Time, 2006

Ink drawing, woodcut and watercolor on pine wood panels and paper,
105.6" x 427.2"



Orit Hofshi.

Israeli artist Orit Hofshi, whose work was shown last spring at the Print Center in Philadelphia, works by hand on very large formats, achieving grandeur and monumentality while retaining an intimate quality in her depictions of landscape. I visited her earlier this year in her studio in Tel Aviv, and what struck me most, knowing the scale of her prints, was the tiny size of her working space (which, on top of it, was half-occupied by shelves with materials, prints and books leaving only the space for a small working table). This tension between grandeur and intimacy is, in my opinion, an important feature in her work.

Hofshi works primarily in woodcut, a technique that has experienced a revival in contemporary printmaking; its atavistic associations (being arguably the oldest of the

printing techniques) contrast with the visual output of the technologically-driven society we live in. Hofshi always works on a fixed format (the size of a sheet of pine wood commonly found on builder's supplies stores), and adds panels if needed as she works the image. Pine is soft but tends to have knots, something that is not seen by Hofshi as a drawback. Rather, she takes it as a positive condition of the material which, while complicating the physical task, often determines the composition, as the inherent quality if the wood ends up integrated in the work in a permanent conversation between the artist, her subject matter and her material. As Meira Perry-Lehmann, Curator of prints at the Israel Museum has observed, "At a certain point, the drawing ceases to be primary focus and the wood becomes the subject matter with which she is preoccupied." Once the matrixes are ready, Hofshi inks them and transfers the image on Okawara paper with the aid of a wooden spoon, disregarding the need for a press. "The self-reliance on the actual pressure of the hand, releases me from dependency upon the mechanics of the press. In fact, the directness and immediacy of the media lend to a clearer and more expressive creative process." Sometimes she integrates the yet-to-be-printed matrix within the composition, which makes even more explicit her dialogue with material.

Hofshi's iconographical sources come from newspaper clippings of landscape, architecture and daily occurrences -and sometimes from photographs taken by the artist- which are combined and reinterpreted freely during the carving process. The result is slightly unsettling, not entirely romantic nor overtly political, even though many of the images depict the current situation in her country.

Landscape is a multi-layered archetype, which in different cultures and times has come to symbolize the sublime and the realm of dreams, but also a haunted place -the stuff fairy tales are made of. It has also evident historical associations as a place for protection that harks back to war and resistance. Is this archetypal forest which Hofshi alludes to, even though her imagery comes from reality in the form of news photographs. The details of the material draw the viewer close to the surface, and due to the scale of the composition, the body is integrated in the experience of the works, which are not seen but rather felt, a bodily experience rather than a visual one.

José Roca.

Artistic Director, *Philagrafika 2010*.

Datum collectanea, 2005

Woodblock, drawing, carving

105.6" x 430.5"

