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‘The Young Israelis’ Capture the Wisdom of the Old

By Maya Klausner



Lior Shvil: Still from “Rough Cut,” 2007, 5:40 minutes.

There is nothing puerile about “The Young Israelis” exhibit, which opened on the Lower East Side of Manhattan on June 16. Curated by Lilly Wei at the Lesley Heller Workspace, the event showcases a new wave of cutting edge video artists in their 20s and 30s who have cultivated an innovative language through the imagistic narratives of cinematographic art.

While the artists’ visions and methods bloom in unique patterns, they are all rooted in a profound sense of national identity and pride. This is reflected in the impassioned Israeli flavor and emotion that weaves itself throughout their artworks. Whether the message is dramatic, farcical, poignant or downright absurd, the effect is unwaveringly provocative.

Many of the artists manipulate their art form to supply a contemporary stage for the philosophical complexities of violence, injustice, and the glaring awareness of imminent destruction. The experience is not all Kafkaesque, however, as many of the videos explore universal human connections, transcending cultural and religious borders.

Oded Hirsch and Deville Cohen's pieces thrive on a meta-dramatic engine, as both artists create mesmerizing universes that drip with surrealism, making the viewer aware of the medium in which their ideas flow while catalyzing emotive discomfort.

Gilad Ratman, Karen Russo, and Tom Pnini utilize a more direct approach, juxtaposing the real against the imagined with clear precision, such as Pnini's comical use of a false moon making its descent next to its true lunar twin.

Whether through the use of props, theater, traditional documentation, installations, or graphic animation, these profound artistic projects careen between the artificial and the authentic, the otherworldly and the real, the normal and the paranormal, all calling to the perennial forces of change and the unknown, spinning on the axis of inevitable mutability. These electrically charged fluxes resonate with the constant ebb and flow of everyday life, in the larger context of grandiose events.

"The Young Israelis" exhibit offers an existential voyage that questions the human condition using edgy visual poetry and thoughtful artistic expression. The experience is as contained and boundless as the lenses through which these stories have been captured, and one is left feeling paradoxically flustered, exiting one unsettling world to re-enter, perhaps, an even thornier one.