

Maty Grunberg: Erosions by Curator Hagai Segev

Tel Aviv Artists' House, October 2012

More than forty years ago, Maty Grunberg began his journey in the world of art, living and working for the most part in New York and London. He returned to live in Israel five years ago, and now works in a spacious studio in Bat Yam. He is presently exhibiting his work for the first time at the Tel Aviv Artists' House.

Grunberg's art focuses on his perceptions of the world and his surroundings, the forms and feelings that emerge from his personal experiences, and from his familiarity with the sea as an ardent underwater diver. His unique and eye-catching images are revealed as numerous strata and "erosions," the name he chose for the series which is the focus of this exhibition. The works, produced over a period of years, beginning in the 1970s, go beyond conventional artistic renderings on paper.

There may be a parallel between studying the secrets of the underworld of the sea and the strata of the earth, both visions portraying the complexity and mystery showcased in Grunberg's works of erosion. One generally sketches or draws on the surface of a sheet of paper, sometimes cutting the paper to create configurations of various two or three-dimensional forms, known as the art of paper cutting. In contrast, Grunberg examines the hidden, intrinsic dimension of the paper itself; he delves into the depths of the flat surface to discover layers usually hidden from the viewer's eye.

The special and thick sheets of paper that Grunberg uses are "marked" during the work process by steel brushes cutting through the layers of paper. The marks and act of laying the flat surface bare reveals the unknown dimension of the paper, a perspective that is generally familiar only to those who produce the paper and to the artists who use paper as a medium and not only as a material on which to draw or paint. The technique of subtracting parts from the whole reveals this unfamiliar dimension; the material's fragility invites a different perception of the way color is absorbed by the paper. This "wound" to the strength of the paper allows the paint, when applied to the surface of the paper, to seep into the layers and create fascinating forms that leave a distinctive and rare imprint deeply impregnated within the paper.

The simultaneous seeping and permeation of the color typify the process involved in the artist's work. Grunberg suggests examining the process, including the time involved in creating the work as well as in viewing it. In addition to considering the material and amorphous form of the erosions, the work confronts and calls attention to the dimension of time, the need to delve into the depths of the paper; the viewer achieves the goal by penetrating, layer upon layer, to

the depth of the artist's intension, revealing one sheet after another, one plane after another of white and color.

The work "Passages," the first in a series of erosions, was done in 1981. Complex layers of paper, each combination a collection of compressed and convex sheets of paper are maintained within nine oblong sheets of Plexiglass. The layered sheets allow the shapes and colors to diffuse under the surface. Each set of papers passes on the topographic outline and colored message to its neighboring set; similar to sketches of geographic maps showing the topography of the earth's surface, Grunberg creates variable boundaries, different in their figurations and curvatures.

Another inspiration for the layered design of the sheets is found in the process of producing books, an endeavor for which Grunberg shows a particular interest. He engages in an examination of the paper and the book as a stack of pages, one upon another, and their ultimate integration into a whole. Throughout the years, he has created over twenty unique art books based on Judaic sources and texts, including the poetry, paintings and prints of the verses of Natan Zach, Yehudah Amichai and others, as well as art books depicting the Book of Esther and other Judaic texts.

The binding of pages, one on top of the other, illustrates the stratification resulting from the erosion of nature, similar to a look into the strata beneath the outer shell where one discovers the gradual revelation of the world beneath the visible surface. Grunberg succeeds in depicting reality through the process of forming images, while simultaneously passing on his message not in descriptive parts, but in a whole aesthetic metaphor; he thus creates a sensory experience, which is an essential element in any artistic endeavor.

Another pairing of works which leads us to an understanding of his artistic expression is entitled "Horizon" or "Sunset at Sea" (2006). The abstract images are formed to resemble a view of the sun setting on the horizon above the water. The meeting between the poriferous shapes fashioned in a circle which become immersed in a horizontal surface, similar to the waves of the sea, creates a separation and dislocation upon contact, as the upper part of the circle shifts away from the part below it. The viewer is invited to observe the alteration within the forms themselves, reaching into the depths of the imaginary vision, the dark abyss of the sea. The large shapes are actually formed by an assembly of many small black holes which create a feeling of depth and infinity, not only in regard to the sun setting over the sea, but also in relation to the feelings evoked by the colors and hollow black cavities.

Grunberg is curious about the waning of moments which appear and vanish in time. The relevant works depict the process of erosion or wearing away, but they also allow us to examine the magical moments created in a fraction of a second, during which the material is

altered in form and assumes a unique shape of its own. The serial reproduction of the process depicted in most of his work is the artist's attempt to halt in time the course of change. Each form and each stratum replicates a moment, perhaps a fraction of a second, which could not otherwise be frozen in time.

Beyond focusing on the process of change and deterioration, Grunberg invites the viewer to recognize the minimalistic alterations he produces in his images. The similarity to Rorschach inkblots suggested by some of the images is relevant and significant in this context. The seemingly accidental blots, which each viewer perceives according to his or her imagination, are essential to experiencing the art and sensing the feelings aroused while observing the work. This requires the viewer's utmost attention in order to perceive and understand the minute changes. The process of recognition and understanding the artist's work takes time, as the formation of the shapes into images and forms is not entirely pronounced or clear at first glance. The innovation in the images which are created originates from studying the basic forms in nature, and not only those which are apparent on the surface and readily visible to the eye of the observer.

Some of the works resemble microscopic views of the material, broken down into its most minute elements, and magnified to huge proportions - sponge-like images which constitute the central focus in the series of works, such as "Red," "Complexity in Black" or "Blue and Red." . These elements absorb the colors, but they also embrace the entire cosmos and contain all of its components within the sensory information imparted to the viewer. The feeling aroused by the progression of the round and oval forms suggests a descent into the essence of the form, an exploration that comes and goes with each step of the way as each strata is revealed within an accumulation of thin layers of material.

The images Grunberg creates can be likened to hollow spaces and holes which draw the viewer's attention to observing the underside of the earth and the sea. The difficulty in defining the amorphous forms results from the openness which Grunberg permits his shapes to project. In actuality, the artist suggests an open-ended view of observing the universe surrounding us, both within a specific vision as well as one that is receptive to other possibilities. We may rightly compare some of the forms which emerge to the amorphous images of Jean Arp whose work from the 1950s and 60s examines the morphological essence of nondescript organisms. The connection among the amorphous images allows us to examine the morphological origins of elements afloat in space. As such, the viewer may recognize familiar images based on his or her feelings and sensitivities, rather than on scientific definitions.