Through the Fabric

From the beginning of her career, Ruth Adler has been working at the intersection of art and design. In this exhibition of her textile work from the past five years, she combines fabric, her favourite material with different techniques from the fields of painting and printing with an abstract, pictorial sensibility. The variety of fabrics — printed and plain, shiny and matte, bright and muted — serve as the base of colour upon which she creates her paintings. Ruth Adler came to textile design with the freedom of an artist, and returns to painting with a textile designer’s toolbox.

The starting point for traditional painting is the empty white canvas that the painting process covers over but Adler does not start blank: on the contrary, from kitchen towel to evening gown the fabric base has presence and a “story” of its own, in texture, colour, print or purpose. Adler adds paint with a squeegee and by spraying stencils repurposed from locally found objects and collages textile remnants that she cuts and sews. This brings the painting into focus as a material object, first and foremost. To this end, hanging the fabrics loosely without a frame emphasizes the works’ physical softness. Whereas traditionally textile design is characterized by repeating patterns, visual harmony and internal logic, Adler’s works rebel against order and “good taste”. There is something unpolished in them – unrefined and raw; mysterious combinations and unexpected connections between colours and partial patterns may bewilder or even prompt discomfort and demand penetrating contemplation.

Originally from Canada, Adler divides her time between Tel Aviv and Toronto and in recent years also spends time in Hawaii. Wherever she is, she creates work from local textiles which she finds in her investigations of the distinctive aesthetics and spirit of the place and time*.* The fabrics from Israel from which most of this exhibition’s works are made – while not produced locally but imported according to local tastes – are characterized by the bright colours of a sun-drenched country. Working from Canada, the fabrics are opaque and their colours deep. And the brilliant Hawaiian triptych of floral fabrics reflects the richness of nature and the abundance of flora in that aesthetic.

Ruth Adler moved to Israel on her own in 1975 as a young woman and a year later began studying textile design at Shenkar College. In the 1980s and 1990s she designed bedding for Macy’s and Martex in the U.S. and designed the concept for a children’s hospital: pyjamas, linens and colourful wall designs at the Schneider Medical Center in Petah Tikvah. Her best-known project is the brand “Lipti Art to Wear” (1985-2000) which she founded (with Avi Dayan) and designed in Tel Aviv. Optimistic illustrations of places and landscapes from all over Israel in bold colours were printed onto white-T-shirts and were a huge hit. The Shenkar College gallery held a “Lipti” exhibition in 2014.

In the early 2000s, Adler began making colourful, abstract prints on the computer which met with great success in galleries in New York and Canada. The desire to return to painting and work by hand led her to a MFA Degree in the U.S. and this brought about a recognition of fabric as her material, informed by knowledge, experience and love, from years of collecting textiles all over the world. Thus began this chapter of her work in textile which until now has only been shown in Canada and is on display here for the first time in Israel.

Dalia Manor, Exhibition Curator