

**"7 Minutes in Heaven"**  
Ventilator  
23 November 2019

For the past couple of years the nomadic exhibition space Ventilator, founded and run by artist-curator Ishai Shapira Kalter, has mounted pop-up exhibitions in unorthodox locations like a beach, a garage, and a meeting room of a co-working company. Its latest group show, "7 Minutes in Heaven", cocurated by Shapira Kalter and fellow artist-curator Naama Arad, is staged at the Independence Park in Tel Aviv, a raised green area facing the sea, but more precisely on, in, and around the sculpture *Gate of Piece* by Pietro Cascella: a monumental post-Cubist zoomorphic stone construction from 1972.

The walls and niches of this edifice are appropriated by the participating artists as spaces for ad-hoc interventions. Eden Bannet, for instance, crammed two sandbags and an arched piece of wood in a crack; Adam Kaplan hung up a blown-up red backpack, from which visitors can grab hard-boiled-egg sandwiches; Tchelet Ram made a bench shelter for the homeless from a bent projection screen; Omer Halperin installed a delicate drawing of a kissing couple in the cave-like inner passage (the very narrow "gate of peace"). Against the eternal logic of the monument and the macho aesthetics of 70s public art, these interventions offer the counter-logic of precarity: art that is ephemeral, fragile, minor in scale and pretension. A contrast best felt when our eyes move from Cascella's gargantuan, resolute, stone beast to Ruti de Vries's untrimmed, droopy, pitiful, straw quadruped *Savage* (2017).

Many of the artists involved in this exhibition could be linked to the not-so-new international tendency towards the "unmonumental" – to borrow the title of an important exhibition

trilogy held at The New Museum in 2007–08. But they also reflect a more particular aesthetic attitude shared by a group of young(ish) Tel Avivian artists

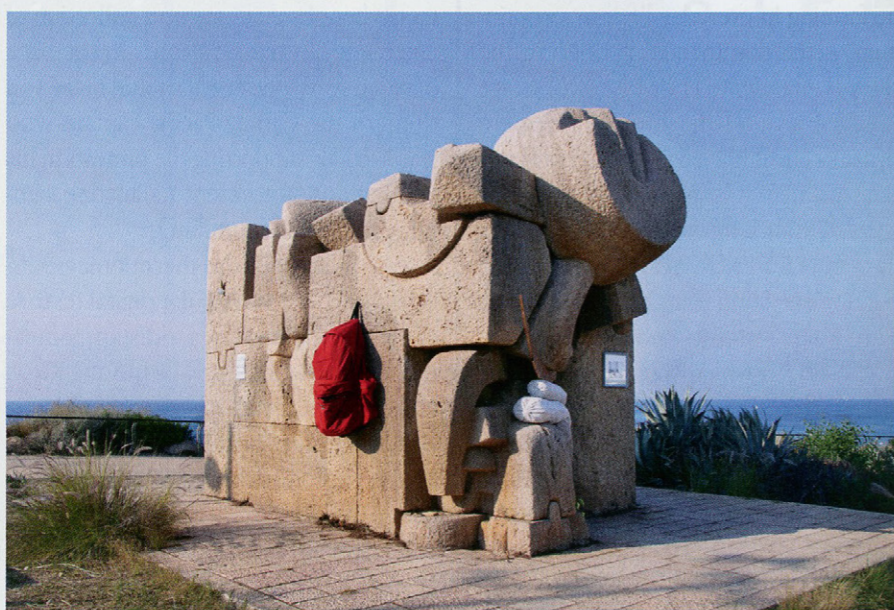
## PROSAIC MATERIALISM

(mostly 80s-born), a certain "prosaic materialism", which forsakes topicality and politicality in favour of material exploration with a penchant for the mundane. Such artists almost unequivocally work with the traditional object-oriented mediums of painting and sculpture, sometimes expanded into installations, and are more concerned with questions of texture, density, weight, and materiality than with those of identity, geopolitics, or the environment. They do not strive to engender intellectual insights with their works, but rather distinctive micro-sensibilities and embodied

affects, manipulating the materials, objects, and images of the everyday in order to discover them anew. Their practice is led more by crafty intuition than by cerebral considera-

tions, and often yields works of nuanced tactile specificity. In stark contrast to the burdening self-seriousness and solemnity of much of Israeli art, their disposition is often playful, anecdotal, and willingly self-indulgent, avoiding dramatic gestures or elaborate conceptual frameworks.

Paradoxically, it is precisely this unapologetic escapism, this sensuous withdrawal into matter, that ties this exhibition to its actual environment and generates a productive dialogue with this environment's social reality. For decades, the hidden spots of the Independence Park served as a site for gay cruising, the search for random sex in pre-Grindr times. In 2007 the city



View of "7 Minutes in Heaven"

Photo: Pat Verbruggen. Courtesy the artist and YARAV



Micha Bar-Am  
*Hotel Alexander (Beirut), 1982*  
Silver gelatin print, 17.5 x 26.5 cm

trimmed the thick bushes and amplified the lights in the park in an attempt to put an end to this activity. Cascella's sculpture could not be dismantled, however, owing to its status as a work of art. Its inner passage is an ideal secret spot, and thus remained as a last haven for clandestine sexual activity. An unholy matrimony was established between the "high" realm of public art and promiscuous public sex. It is this accidental union that serves as a springboard for the curators to engage in a more profound reflection. Arad's own collage of fake condoms, made from rubber bands filled with transparent caulk and glued to a kitchen towel, evokes an analogy between art making and love making – a strong urge followed by a depleted satisfaction. The analogy, though, goes deeper: as the works of art replace the cruisers inside the sculpture, a certain kinship emerges between the "for itself" of artistic creation and the escapist "for

itself" of carnal pleasure – two realms of radical sensuous freedom.

The exhibition title, which refers to a game where two kids go into a dark room and do whatever they want for seven heavenly minutes, hints at this escapist, verging on hedonistic, bond. It is not by chance that many of the works in the show engage basic corporeal needs and pleasures: eating (in Kaplan's backpack), smoking (in Eran Nave's manipulated pack of cigarettes), sleeping (in Ram's makeshift bench shelter), shitting (in Noa Glazer's toilet-paper sculpture), fucking (in Arad's condoms collage and Nave's phallic flower drawing) and kissing (in Halperin's drawing). Art making, in the eyes of these artists, is much closer to these earthly bodily satisfactions than to lofty ideals. As art today becomes more and more concerned with "issues", such a re-alliance with the senses comes as a breath of fresh air.

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