

# A stone's throw away

A trio of exhibitions at the Jerusalem Artists' House puts three women artists in the spotlight

• By BARRY DAVIS

When it is suitably crafted, photography can offer much more than just pleasing aesthetics, especially when the subject matter is portraiture – and having Aliza Auerbach's index finger on the camera button ups that interest ante severalfold.

Auerbach died last year at the age of 75, shortly after an expansive retrospective exhibition of her work opened at Ein Harod. The show, appropriately called "Life," was curated by Guy Raz and it is now being reprised, in a reduced format, at the Jerusalem Artists' House, as "From Stone to Sea." The current exhibition was also curated by Raz and looks at Auerbach's incisive and sensitive oeuvre produced over close to half a century.

"From Stone to Sea" is one of three exhibitions on show at Artists' House, all of which feature works by female artists. The ground-floor area houses an intriguing photographic study installation of a gargantuan-scaled construction project in Tel Aviv by Hana Primak, titled "The Contemporary City Is an Imaginary One," curated by Yaakov Israel. Matia Oren's explosively hued display of paintings, "Through a Distorted Glass," curated by Maya Israel is on display on the intermediate level.

THE TITLE for the Auerbach layout alludes to the photographer's origins, her principal place of residence and her return to her place of birth. The masonry element refers to the fact that Auerbach lived most of her life – and produced of her work – in Jerusalem, after relocating there from the northern coast.

"She goes from the stones of Jerusalem to the sea of Haifa. In the end she returns to Haifa," explains Raz. "The exhibition closes with shots of the sea."

The latter are not realistic pictures of the Mediterranean. They are surrealistic portrayals of shimmering reflections of sunlight and furrowed watery surfaces that curiously echo a couple of prints of palm trees in the adjacent room on the top floor of Artists' House, with their biblical-looking gnarled trunks.

All of the prints are monochrome and the textural ingredient comes to the fore frequently, including in

Auerbach's portrait work. The exhibition incorporates a slew of VIPs, with French philosopher Simone de Beauvoir, pioneering Jerusalemite artist Anna Ticho, iconic fellow townsman poet Zelda and famed German contemporary dance artist Pina Bausch in the lineup. French-American sculptor Louise Bourgeois is also in there in a mischievous life-celebratory pose.

There is a vibrancy and emotive humaneness to Auerbach's work that comes across powerfully in her pictures of elderly pioneers from the Jezreel Valley region, captured in the early 1990s, and the poignant photographs of immigrants from various places around the world, particularly in a cross-cultural context of Ethiopian and Russian olim seated side by side but in a clearly ne'er-the-twain-shall-meet situation. Typically, Auerbach finds a chink in the collective cultural armor, as she catches a couple of Ethiopians and a couple of their counterparts from the former USSR attempting to make eye contact with "the other side."

Raz says he was keen for the Ein Harod exhibition, or at least a part thereof, to be shown to the public in the photographer's adopted hometown.

"I worked with Aliza on the event on Ein Harod – she was very sick then – and I told her that some of the works had to come back to Jerusalem, to Artists' House."

Raz is an unabashed fan of Auerbach's work.

"She should have received the Israel Prize," he declares. "Her contribution to local photography is no less important than the work of [recently deceased Israel Prize recipient David] Rubinger, [86-year-old Israel Prize laureate Michal] Bar-Am (best known for his war photographs) or [72-year-old photojournalist and street photographer Alex] Levac."

The curator feels that Auerbach did not get the recognition she deserved.

"I think she fell between the cracks a little bit. She probably didn't have the right connections. You could say that Rubinger was known for a single photograph – at the Western Wall [during the Six Day War]. Aliza had her trilogy, with the Pioneer series she did. To get up in the morning, in Jerusalem, in 1990, every two weeks or so [to go to the Jezreel Valley and the Galilee] to photograph elderly people, no one else was doing

that. She took pictures in Nahalal, Kfar Yehoshua, [Kibbutz] Geva and all those places where the people who built this country lived. The state doesn't do things like that. But Aliza did."

AUERBACH DID not begin her shutter clicking exploits until she was in her 30s, but Primak started even later.

"Hana is 65 and she started taking an interest in photography when she was 61," explains curator Yaakov Israel. "She studied with me at Musrara."

The latter refers to the Naggar Multidisciplinary School of Art and Society, to give the institution its full titular due. Israel says he was moved to overstep the age group bounds.

"When I was asked to curate an exhibition for Artists' House, you know, you normally, go for a young artist, but Hana has a special spark and passion."

Primak's oversized shots exude a sense of urban alien-



Matia Oren's dynamic mind-set comes through clearly in 'A Workshop with Shay.' (Matia Oren)

Auerbach's portraits are at once simple-looking and emotive.



Iconic Jerusalem poet Zelda. (Photos: Aliza Auerbach)



Aliza Auerbach, in her early days as a photographer.



ation, and insensibility, as the observer catches a generous eyeful of the unfolding a grandly scaled construction project.

"You can sense Hana is passionate about this place," says Israel. "This is the [former] wholesalers' market in Tel Aviv.

Legendary jazz trumpeter Miles Davis once advised: "Do not fear mistakes – there are none." That could be applied one of Primak's pictures, a multiple exposure nighttime shot.

"This started out as a mistake but I told Hana to run with it," says Israel. "This conveys the sense of the crazed chaos of the city's growth."

CHAOS IS not exactly an epithet one would attach to the works of Matia Oren, but her "Through a Distorted Glass" collection tends to take you out of your comfort zone, as any work of art of any creative value should. The exhibition is awash with bright and almost dazzling hues, forms and lines. There is an irrepressible dynamism to the paintings that is immediately alluring.

"Matia paints at high speed, and you feel a sort of impatience in the creative process, as if she wants to get on with the next layer as soon as possible," says Maya Israel, the curator.

One of the common denominators between the three artists on display at Artists' House, besides all being women, is the fact that none of them started out on their creative path in their youth.

"I have known Matia for around 12 years and I have followed her development," says Israel. "I think she brings a lot of wisdom and life experience to her art."

Israel feels that Oren makes a strong statement with her art.

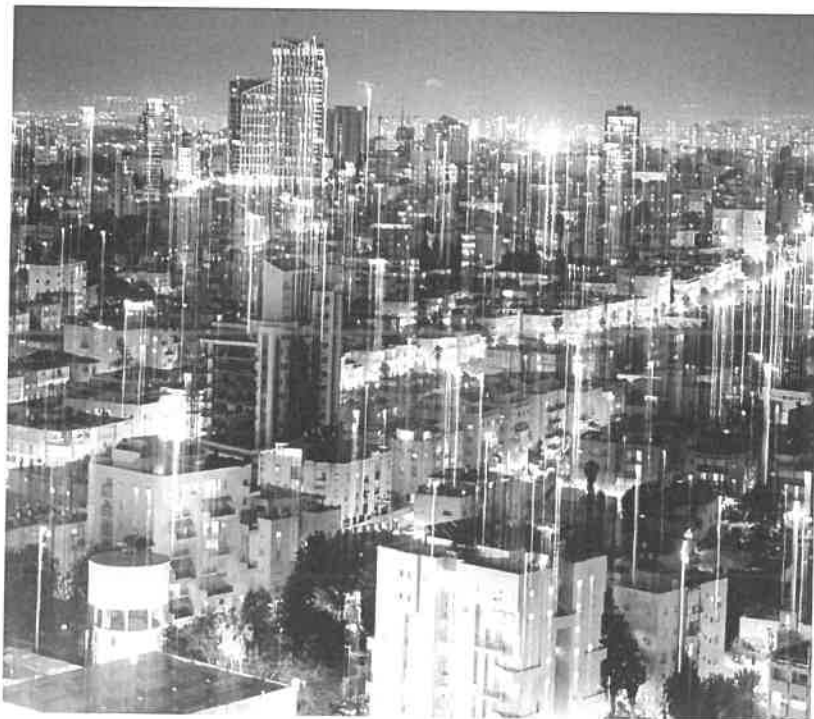
"She has her own artistic language. She works from a very personal place. She doesn't try to hide anything."

Oren, indeed, clearly lets it all hang out. There is something appealingly visceral about her choice of bright shades, and the almost childishly crafted lines and shapes, and the juxtapositioning of a wide palette of colors.

"It is naïve and also wild, and it is also very expressive."

There's no missing that.

*The exhibitions will run until April 22. For more information:*  
[www.art.org.il/](http://www.art.org.il/)



Hana Primak captures the essence of accelerated urban growth.  
(Yaakov Israel)