

ה				ל
א	צ	ו	י	ש
ך	ה	ה		מ
E		Y		E
O				F
T		H		E
M	O	U	N	T
A	I	N		

Michal Sophia Tobiass

***“Understand that everything must take place between the
lightest light and the darkest dark.”***

Pesach Slabosky,
Inspiration Returning for Restoration

The movement of the sun inspired the ancient Egyptians to divide the world into East and West. The East is life, the West death. All their cities were built almost exclusively in the East. A large mountain divides East and West and forms a clear boundary: beyond the mountain is the Valley of the Kings, the burial site of the Pharaohs, and carved into the rock, the glorious temple for the goddess Hathor, the Egyptian goddess of inspiration and the arts, love, fertility, the afterlife and goods. In this case these were copper, gold and minerals; everything that comes out of the mountain, out of the rock. Everything that comes out of the mountain is Hathor and therefore also everything that goes into the mountain – the dead. Hathor is the deity that greets them. She is their chaperon, standing on the verge between life and death.

Those who followed Michal Sophia Tobiass's exhibitions in recent years could witness a dramatic turn in her works. The photographic-formalistic documentation of holes and marks left in the plaster walls of museums after the dismantling of large exhibitions, has given way to a deeper investigation of the hole itself. Tobiass opened it up, creating human-sized plaster sculptures with cryptic-organic forms which viewers could explore with their bodies. The wall was the key archetype generating her work. She orbited around it, sought to penetrate it and to be contained within it. In her exhibition *Rehearsal Space: Measuring the Night* (Tel Aviv Artists' Studio, 2019) she began perforating

the holes herself, sowing in them the planets and Saturn, creating a negative constellation, with the bright white wall as the nocturnal sky and the stars – black holes. It was then that it became apparent that the black hole is the center of her work, not the wall carrying it.

Her preoccupation with the archetypal wall and the archetypal hole led Tobiass to the Dordogne region in France, to the prehistoric caves where 40,000 years ago early humans left their first painted marks. A cave is the perfect blend of hole and wall – being both the internal cavity of a mountain and its face. These early humans conducted journeys into the heart of the earth and in pitch darkness left witness to the existence of animals they saw around them, which were then relived on the cave walls and ceilings. The rock's natural texture was emphasized with drawings and carvings that echoed the natural systems and the star constellations.

Returning from the Dordogne, Michal Sophia entered her own cave, her studio. Inspired by the strong impression of the early human paintings she began to create a series – still ongoing – of monotype prints with images of animals and figures. Now, inside the cave that is Almacén gallery, the monotypes are displayed – each print with its distinct rock form glistening vividly in the center of an impenetrable square of black, opaque Bristol board. The contrast between the print and the black background gives the image the quality of a planet or meteor, as if

created through the pressure applied by bare hands on paper. In fact, Tobiass turns her body into a press, pressing the plate in a recurring motion, reminiscent of first aid resuscitation. The movements create a fluttering effect, spreading the color and sinking it in, preserving the energy of the act. Even when Tobiass reuses the same plate, each monotype has its own singular quality.

Her interest in the planets sent Tobiass thousands of years forward from the age of the caves to ancient Egypt of the 3rd century BC. Perhaps its location in the heart of the desert, on the banks of the Nile River and the Great Rift Valley made this ancient culture more than any other understand the cosmic connections in which humans exist. The three great pyramids of Giza, for example, were erected to give a worldly echo to the three stars that form the Belt of Orion. The relations between earthly monumental structures and the star systems excited Tobiass's imagination. Orion, whose role according to Egyptian mythology was to ease the transformation of the dead, provided a source of inspiration to create new astronomical maps. The maps capture the state of the stars at the time of death of individual people, and Tobiass translates them into exhibition spaces by making holes in the walls. The present exhibition is dedicated to a person whose fate is linked to hers, and she reconstructs the star arrangement at the time of his death.

Michel Tobiass, Michal Sophia's uncle, died on 30 November 1977 at 10:15 in Colmar, France, in a fatal car accident. A painter, the eldest of three siblings whose parents survived the Holocaust, he was forced to give up his place at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris due to his parents' objection and their demand that he continue working in the family's clothes business. Inevitably he became a "Sunday painter" – painting in the solitude of his room, and never exhibited his works. In November 1985, exactly eight years after the accident, Michal Sophia Tobiass was born. She is named after her uncle, and she lives with a sense of being his penance. Aged 5 she vowed never to paint. She worked in all forms of art (dance,

writing, photography, sculpture), but not in painting. When she began to paint, she developed a technique of drawing with pale ink, which is almost completely invisible.

The current exhibition is for Tobiass a wish to break her vow and to separate herself from Michel. This separation is revealed in the exhibition as an opportunity to create new connections and contexts, like the line stretching between two dots. By perforating the gallery walls Michal Sophia reconstructs the star map at the time of Michel's death, yet she also changes it. She banishes the sun and the major planets – the moon, Jupiter, Venus, etc., – and replaces them with her prints, placing the suns and stars she created in the sky of his death.

Breaking a vow is a serious matter. Michal Sophia therefore turns to a high authority, the goddess Hathor, for her blessing and approval to return to the path of her fate. The blue series displayed in the gallery space is called The Seven Hathors, after the Fate goddesses of ancient Egyptian faith. The Hathors are representations of the seven Pleiades, seven bright stars visible from planet earth with the naked eye, which are part of a star cluster born at the same time, whose movements are synchronized despite their dissimilarities. These stars are larger and hotter than the sun, which is why they seem blue to the human eye (at high temperatures light becomes blue, therefore the internal part of a flame is blue, not red.) Blue is also the color of Hathor, and blue was the central palette in Michel's paintings. The monoprints dedicated to the seven Hathors are also blue, proving that only when a person accepts their fate, can their movement begin to flow.

Hila Cohen-Schneiderman