The Furnace of Time // Noa Peleg

Curator: Nitza Cohen Mohr

Phoenician merchants sailing a trading vessel from Egypt were carrying a large cargo of natron. A storm arose, forcing them to anchor for the night. They went ashore on a sandy stretch near the mouth of the Na'aman River, in the Acre area. As they began preparing their evening meal, they discovered there were no large stones available on which to place their cooking pots. They went to the ship and brought back blocks of natron to support the pots. Throughout the night, the campfire burned intensely. The fierce heat melted the natron, causing it to fuse with the local silica-rich beach sand. The next morning, the merchants were astonished to discover a new, transparent, and sparkling substance amidst the remains of the fire - material that had flowed beneath the pots and solidified. This was the first glass. (Pliny the Elder, Natural History, 1st century CE)

Noa Peleg, a Bezalel Academy of Arts graduate based in Nahariya, is fascinated by glass. In recent years, she has been studying, researching, and experimenting with this ancient and unique material, focusing primarily on drawing, casting, and fusing techniques. In this exhibition, she connects the material with a local, historical, and international context. In 1959, during archaeological excavations at the Beit She'arim National Park, the world's largest ancient glass slab was discovered inside a rock-hewn cave. A rectangular slab measuring approximately six square meters and weighing almost nine tons. Operantly this cave served as a workshop for producing raw glass during the eighth century CE, the Early Islamic period. Local artisans built a massive melting furnace, filled it with raw materials (sand and sodium), and maintained a fire reaching temperatures exceeding one thousand degrees Celsius for weeks on end. They intended to break the resulting large glass mass into smaller pieces and ship them to workshops across the country and around the world, where they would be remelted to manufacture glass vessels.

In this exhibition, Peleg presents works that embody the historical and mythological context of the glass industry in Israel, and the Kiryat Tivon area. Her work is a process of trial and error, an exploration of material that yields varied, often unpredictable results, much like the work of the local artists who preceded her. She utilizes glass bottles as raw material, melting and casting them into molds (*Cauldrons*), testing the material's limits and points of convergence (*Conglomerate*), and attempting to recreate it, akin the myth (*Experiment with Sand, Salt, and Fire*). Peleg repeatedly returns to the fusion technique, melting and re-bonding the glass (*Composition* and *Fire*), and uses it to illustrate the historical-mythological narrative (*The Furnace of Time*, *The Glassblower*, and *Connection*).

Although the glass slab found at Beit She'arim was probably flawed in its chemical composition, which is why it survived intact, it helps prove that this area, the Lower Galilee in particular, continued to be a global center of glass production for hundreds of years. Peleg takes this knowledge and makes it accessible to us. With grace and captivating color, she depicts processes connected to the material. With playfulness and curiosity, she experiments. Reminding us that what was is what will be, and that the present and the past are linked and connected to one another.