

Erev Rav / Lee Barbo / recommendation of the week

June 28, 2018

**Recommendation of the week: "A Shining Meteor will Light the Path of the Worker."**

The first solo show of Noam Toran, who lives and works in Rotterdam, is refreshing and fun: it comprises a stage set for an imaginary production by a fictive theater group, about an obscure historical event – the railway workers' strike in Haifa in the 1930s.

RawArt Gallery, Tel Aviv

As a regular visitor to galleries, I sometimes feel as if I've developed muscle memory. The body enters and moves like someone returning to their own home for the umpteenth time. Therefore I'm always happy to discover shows that disrupt the automatic response upon entering. Such is "A Shining Meteor will Light the Path of the Worker," Noam Toran's show at RAW-ART gallery in Tel Aviv. One of the works juts out from under the front door of the gallery, turning the threshold into a disruptive, stimulating space. The disruption continues inside: the show/installation is like a stage set for an imaginary play, never to be produced. Some objects turn their backs to the viewers as they stand at the entrance, forcing them to move around the space complexly, to climb up on the stage, linger on the details, to hang back. Under such opening terms, the level of curiosity is exceptionally high.

Toran was born, now living and working in Rotterdam. It is his first solo show in Israel. The topic of the show is an obscure historical event – the strike of the railway workers in Haifa in the mid-1930s, and the activities of the Jewish-Arab labor unions in the city, which had then been mostly working-class. The show is backed by impressive research, which informs a play written by Toran for an imaginary theater group, the "Steam Theater." The gallery distributes copies of the script in the form of plainly printed booklets in Hebrew, English, and Arabic, and the objects on display serve as the stage set. The short piece addresses the railway workers' strike through the figure of Chaim B. Haimlich, a Jewish immigrant who ends up in the railway workshops in Haifa in the 1930s, and there he meets for the first time Arab colleagues, harassing supervisors, and a flying donkey who preaches Communism.

The objects maintain the impermanent feel of a stage set. The images are painted on panels, like wings, but the backs, usually hidden from view, are exposed and set far from the wall. The viewers are invited to stroll around the set. The richly-painted, highly-detailed monochromatic images ground the play in a specific time and place: miniaturized cranes refer to the port, carved prickly-pear cacti locate the action in the Middle East, the workers' outfits point to the 1930s. Round plaques bearing symbols of various worker and trade unions hang among the panels, as do paper flags with portraits of forgotten labor leaders, their faces covered with cardboard objects that recall abstract theater masks.

The show is refreshing and fun, on top of the fascinating historical context and the questions regarding solidarity and a shared destiny that might have been. It creates a lively world that you can sense even without seeing the play. The temporality of the objects, whose physical mechanisms are visible and straightforward, responds with humor to the familiar theatrical pathos, inviting visitors to submit and to play.

**"A Shining Meteor will Light the Path of the Worker," by Noam Torn**

**Curator: Leah Abir**

**RawArt Gallery, Tel Aviv**

**Closed on July 7<sup>th</sup>, 2018**

**On the day of the show's closing, there was a reading of the American Communist play "Injunction."**