

# THE JERUSALEM POST

Petah Tikva Art Museum's Apocalyptic caravans and balloon armored trucks

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By [Hagay Hacoheh](#)

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A SCENE FROM Ayelet Carmi and Meirav Heiman's 'Israel Trail Procession.' (photo credit: Courtesy)

Women, elderly and younger men and children travel using odd-looking contraptions. Some walk on stilts; a woman walks on her hands; a man labors inside a wooden icosahedron (polyhedron with 20 faces) to make progress, aided by a half-naked man on top of the structure. In unison, they attempt to march on the trail crossing Israel north to south.

These are just some of the scenes depicted in The Israel Trail Procession, an impressive video art installation featured in "Last Chance to See," a new art exhibition in the Petah Tikva Art Museum.

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Jointly curated by Petah Tikva Museum art director Drorit Gur-Arie and Isabelle Bourgeois of the French Villa Tamaris gallery at La Seyne-sur-Mer, the exhibition is part of the French cultural season in Israel.

When I ask Meirav Heiman, who created Procession with Ayelet Carmi, if the icosahedron is related to the fantasy board-game Dungeons and Dragons, where it is used to determine the fate of a character, she laughs and says the inspiration came from the role it has in Platonic theory, where it is one of the five building blocks of all matter.

Procession is strangely beautiful; some of the travelers sing or blow horns to flesh out the musical score created by Dganit Elyakim. Others raise banners painted by Carmi. Refusing to touch the ground, they use stilts, street lamps and tires strapped to their feet as part of fantastical costumes designed by Elisha Abargel to avoid doing so, evoking an odd mixture of religious pilgrimage and a Mad Max-like post-apocalyptic world. However, unlike movie logic, where things have to at least seem to function well, or the fantastical illustrations of Enki Bilal featured in Heavy Metal magazine, these humans use tools that only cause them extra work. Even the woman shown riding a sort of bicycle must use her hands rather than her legs to advance, making even the usage of wheels extra laborious.

"The banners they carry are blank," Heiman points out. "We never explain why they can't touch the ground. Maybe the ground is too hot to tread on, or sacred."

This major decision shapes the choreography of the work and charges it with meaning. Walking the land has long been a major, ongoing force in Zionist ideology. Young Jewish men and women were encouraged to not only build their lives in Israel, but also to become familiar with the mountains and

rivers, the deserts and historical sites. The Israel National Trail, which crosses the entire country, had been an astounding success since it was created in 1995, gaining praise from hikers as well as National Geographic magazine, which included it in its list of “20 Epic Trails.”

Heiman points out that the more one pays attention, the more one can decipher the roles of each performer. There are paramedics of sort, acrobats, a woman who is strapped to a wheel and spun during the progression who might be a priestess, a woman leads the way carrying a banner.

The project, presented on three movie-size screens that engulf the viewer, was supported in part by the Israel Lottery Council and took four years to complete.

“We had nearly as many people on set as the performers,” Heiman says, “to help them into their costumes and in case, God forbid, something went wrong.

We filmed on location, so it’s like any other trek; people get thirsty and need to rest. Once in a while we encountered trekkers on the Israeli Trail and they were blown away by us, they stood aside wondering what exactly are we doing.”

The logic of trekking extends throughout the exhibition space with the names of the artists presented on milestones and the theme of travel explored by Leor Grady, who presents a huge paper boat covered with gold, and French Artist Pascal Simonet who presents the domestication process of a cream-colored stallion fitted with a video camera and confined to a vacant lot between buildings in “Section B1, Plot of Land 148.”

“We wanted to maintain the experience of traveling in this exhibition,” Gur-Arie said, “so in this exhibition, there won’t be any texts on the walls explaining art to people. Instead, visitors will be provided with paper maps to explore as they like.” This expands on the theme of maps and journeys, which the museum touched upon in June when it displayed the works of French artist Tatiana Trouvé.

The topic of journeys and their dangers is further explored in the short documentary Very High Frequency by Maayan Amir and Ruti Sela, who delve into maritime ex-territorial issues. The film focuses on how the MV Struma, with 800 Jewish passengers on board, attempted to reach Mandatory Palestine under a Panamanian flag before it was sunk by the Soviets, leaving only one passenger alive.

Jewish sovereignty and its costs are also explored in Butterflies, by Orit Raff, who walked to Jerusalem carrying a large collection of helium-filled balloons, each shaped like an armored truck. Every few steps, she releases one into the air and it floats away, bringing to the mind of the viewer the heavy losses suffered by armored convoys used to support Jewish residents of Jerusalem in 1947-48. At the time, the city was nearly isolated from the rest of the Jewish community of pre-state Israel and relied on these convoys for food, clothes and ammunition. Jewish-American general Mickey Marcus built Burma Road, which gave the Jewish forces access to the city.

“Last Chance to See” at the Petah Tikva Museum of Art. November 8, 2018 to February 9, 2019 30 Arlozorov St., Petah Tikva.

<http://www.petachtikvamuseum.com/en/>