

TEMPO RUBATO

Lutz Hatzor (1921-1975)

Touch Me Not

January 21 - March 8 2014

Tempo Rubato is pleased to announce the first individual exhibition of Lutz Hatzor.

Thirty-eight years have elapsed since Hatzor's passing in 1975. That year, Hatzor had turned 54 and was a prolific painter with over 30 years of artistic activity behind him. But if this was known to his close friends and family, he had made a conscious decision to keep his production away from a wider audience. Hatzor belonged to a kind of artist either invisible or extinct nowadays. With virtually no exhibiting history, the extent of his urge to make works was only matched by an enduring reluctance to exhibiting his production. Living in Israel most of his adult life, Hatzor strayed away from the tribulations and politics of an art world he was most certainly convinced would not receive his work favorably.

Today, almost forty years since his death, delving into Hatzor's body of work feels like a plunge into the world and mind of a fantastically complex and conflicted man. With an estate archived by the artist as if to be ready for later discovery, one can assume that Hatzor had imagined or hoped for a day his work would be brought into the light. For this first presentation as a solo exhibition, Tempo Rubato has selected 16 watercolors and pastel works on paper ranging from 1965 to 1975.

Lutz Hatzor was Born Ludwig Hoffmann in 1921, in the German city of Breslau, now Wroclaw in Poland. Early on, he demonstrated an attraction to the Arts and poetry in tight connection to the German culture. It was under the tutorship of Willy Braun and Heinrich Tischler - two former students of Otto Müller – that he received the premises of his art education, while Arthur Schwartz taught him the basics of graphic design.

At the age of 17 in 1938, Hatzor's life was abruptly interrupted as he was arrested and jailed in the Buchenwald work camp following Kristallnacht. Upon his release, he fled to Israel, settled in Jerusalem and enrolled at Bezalel Academy where he studied under Mordechai Ardon and later Isodor Ascheim. Upon receiving his degree, he moved to Tel Aviv along with artist friends and former classmates including Gert Rötler, Dan Hoffner, Barbara Bubber, Joseph Hirsch and Ruth Schloss to name a few. They would regularly gather in the basement of Dr. Paul Löwy - then a prominent figure in Israeli theatre and master puppeteer - to discuss literature and philosophy. It is also around Löwy that Hatzor started creating puppets and miniature sculptures based on his own written stories.

In 1949, shortly after marrying Shoshana Feig, he settled in Ramatayim where he started working with disadvantaged youth. Hatzor was known for his advanced psychological approach to dealing with the children and using art - specifically drawings of trees - as a basis to his method. In pursuing making puppets and being a man of many talents, he was regarded as a magician by many of the children.

Parallel to this teacher's job, Hatzor also wrote cultural commentaries in the pages of the communist newspaper "Kol Ha'am" that he also hand distributed regularly. As a figure in this political party, Hatzor would receive the favors of a number of its leaders by acting as a consultant of sorts and hosting weekly Friday meetings attended by many.

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But despite an extensive social, political and cultural involvement, Hatzor had a hard time feeling a part of a society whose ideology did not fit his own. Eventually in the early 1960s, his inability to live off of his art as a puppeteer and his understanding that the life of a traveling artist was not for him led him to abandon puppet-making and to favor painting, which he returned to in 1963.

Torn between the German culture he had loved so deeply but could no longer embrace and the instability of an Israeli society in the making, Hatzor retained a deep inclination towards story telling. In fact Joseph Hirsch said of him that “he was more of a story teller than a painter. He couldn’t make use of the German language as it reminded him of the his past, otherwise he would have written more”.

And indeed, Hatzor’s pictorial production can be read as a system of reflections of personal states of mind as well as a satire of society as he saw it. But if the extent of his political involvement is not immediately visible in his work, a general feeling of estrangement and discomfort certainly perspires throughout.

One of the works in the exhibition, *Gulliver in Houyhnhnms* (1968) is a rendition of Swift’s famous fictional character portrayed in a tight close-up, a hand on each cheek, eyes and mouth wide-open in a stance suggesting a scream. This piece is a reference to the fourth chapter of *Gulliver’s Travels* in which the main character meets Yahoos, a type of humanoid creatures with decidedly gross features and demeanor. Appalled by such beings, Gulliver finds closer affinities in the horses around, rather than in his own kind. Whether or not this character carries any metaphoric resemblance to Hatzor himself naturally comes to mind.

Creating in deep solitude, mostly at night, Hatzor was no stranger to introspection and was certainly intimately linked to a universe of his own. Demonstrating a sensitivity to fantasy and what could be coined a form of personal mysticism, the works exude a raw and free-associative texture whose examination today is reminiscent of a surrealist stance.

Using mythology, literature or historical events as catalysts, Hatzor created seemingly abstract compositions that almost inevitably reveal a complex underlying and hidden narrative structure. Nesting fragments of faces, eyes, limbs or entire figures into the subtle texture of grated pastel or a sharper stroke of watercolor, he never seems to make grasping the full depth of his intention entirely possible. In fact, scrutinizing a piece sometimes leads to the realization of being scrutinized.

Like those populating dreams, Hatzor’s hybrid creatures, part animal, part gods, part humans and part ghosts make up a society of atypical yet oddly familiar beings. Always rejecting a necessity to explain his work, the artist certainly valued the importance of maintaining a cloud of eeriness and mystery around his activity. In setting forth a kind of personal iconography, his cry for distance using a biblical reference in *Noli Me Tangere* (“Touch Me Not”, 1967), remains vibrant and intact.