



*Portrait Of A Young Woman #2*  
oil on gesso / wood box

Barkai's works from this period, on display for her exhibition a Nau-haus, are complete and masterful paintings, full of expression and allegory. They are almost narrative, and perhaps originate more from remembered experience, even a heritage, than a story unfolding in the moment. Her works become less narrative, and less "complete" as the time to the present grows shorter. Works from the "Cross" and "Indifference" series start to pull apart and fragment as if the story is still unfolding or there is no narrative at all. The need to complete every detail diminishes leaving only the truth as an observed fact now understood in the eyes of the artist.

Hagit says about the "Cross" paintings, *"I try to create a way to see threats and potentials as similar entities. By using images of babies moments after birth, dying people in hospitals, and babies with deformities or trauma to the face, I construct a space that is inhabitant by lives that are not fully there anymore, lives that are not fully there yet and lives that are there but for one reason or another are not considered to be there."* Regarding the "In Difference" works the artist says *"I collaborate with couples to explore the paradoxical fluctuation between wanting to be part of something and wanting to be separate, longing to be same and longing to be different."* Hagit Barkai's works from both of these later series are much less a narrative, and much more of a perception about our experience. They reach no conclusion and are often left in an unfinished state, while still whole in their intention.

I first wrestled with the elegance and power of "incomplete ideas" while preparing an exhibition for a young artist several years ago at Nau-haus. Aware that my doors of perception were being inched open by the artist and his work, and curious about my fascination for the lack of specificity in subject and seemingly unfinished objects he was presenting me with, I still had to agree with the artist that what was necessary to qualify in every way as works of art ready to hang in my gallery were indeed met. After all, my favorite portrait, and the most famous portrait in all of Americana is Gilbert Stuart's unfinished portrait of George Washington. It's a great work of art as it is and "unfinished." The hopes of a young nation yet to unfold. The canvas would be a lesser work if it had been completed and we could count all the buttons on George's snappy frock instead of wondering a little about the fate of nations and perhaps the great men that lead the way. Not many of my collectors got what my artist was doing that month, and to be honest I only had a feeling at the time about the validity of the work, while I had no doubt about the artist's sincerity.

*cover page image: "Choice" oil on canvas  
tacked on salvaged pine stretcher bars*

Good painting is always sincere. Great art is always honest, and artists arrive at greatness by channeling a burning desire. They take what is known and what is felt, and place it before us for our consideration so that we may stop a moment to think and feel a little more. Their original mark is as singular as a fingerprint and needs no comparison to the others for any reason other than historical reference. Originality is never the intent, but rather the result when the work has evolved from the inside out, from the heart of the individual and the burning desire that leads them.

We find Hagit Barkai and the evidence of her journey nearer the beginning than the end, but can still see an evolution from her earlier body of work.

She says about the paintings in the series *"Every Body Knows"* completed in 2009 *"the paintings question the borders between victim hood and victimizing. While growing up in the ideological atmosphere of a Jewish Settlement Bet El in the West Bank, I was at the center of an increasingly hostile moral and political quarrel, which resulted in extremely defensive attitudes. Part of my education included a rewrite of events and ways of thinking that did not sustain the religious and national convictions .... while at the same time assuming to hold ideals such as liberalism, democracy and basic human rights. The problems at the center of this work revolve around ethical demands of self discrimination and a nostalgic longing for self justification."*



While I lived with the work in my gallery something interesting happened. I found that when I left behind the preconceived and expected notions of covering the entire canvas with paint, of carving every last toe, of specifying every last idea in a work of art, and holding the artists as the complete and sole witness of the truth about their work, I was pulled into an interaction with the art much like a visual devise artists might employ to pull the viewer into the scene of a painting. (Think of the Renaissance master and a figure beckoning from edge of the image frame calling the viewer to join in.) I became part of the dialogue as well as a witness to the artists intent, while re-supposing the works completion over and over again. Much like my first blush with "outsider art" I had to unlearn my expectations, feel it first and withhold judgment until I had spent enough time with the art to let my mind catch up to my heart.

I don't expect very many patrons to get all of what Hagit Barkai is doing in her exhibition "Resistance" at Nau-haus this June, or for that matter want to take in home. The earlier works Barkai presents are powerful and deftly executed in an almost Old World aesthetic, while confronting her audience with some food for thought about the politics unfolding in Mideast and elsewhere. Cruelty is lurking in the shadows of all men in all times. Her most recent works will put the collector ill at ease if for no other reason than the artists unwillingness to lay down anything but context and the perceived moment while discarding all but the essential trompe l'oeil and atmosphere she seems to be able to call on at will. Why would the artist paint such things? Why dose she abandon the visual illusions we find so amazing? Why would we take that work home and want to live with it?

While Barkai's work is truthful and smart, and she reminds us that we are not always pretty but sometimes just vulnerable, unaware and exposed. *".... I construct a space that is inhabitant by lives that are not fully there anymore, lives that are not fully there yet, and lives that are there but for one reason or another are not considered to be there."* We need smart artists to challenge our preconceptions so that we might overcome the prejudice of our perspective and allow ourselves the happiness that comes from a wider view. Hagit Barkai demonstrates all the skill and desire she needs to share her vision, and the intelligence, honesty and heart to see it all.

DMA - Nau-haus 2011

*"Contextual art is the process of realizing incomplete realities. Its behavior is one continuous transformation from subject to object and from hidden meanings in deep structure to surface structure. An artist is in a double role. He is the subject who makes artistic operations and, at the same time, while showing himself in his work, becomes the object of his own activity."*

Jan Swidzinski

Portrait of a Young Woman (friend)  
oil on board, 8"x 9"

