

Uri Katzenstein, one of the unique artists working here, explains how the shock of the battle he suffered during his army service permeated his work and why he chose to treat post-trauma with a swastika chair.

A huge head sculpture is placed on the floor in the space where Uri Katzenstein's exhibition is exhibited at the Tel Aviv Museum. His ear is eager to hear something, as he listens to voices that are not from this world. A collection of machines playing a musical piece without human contact, yet somehow they do not look futuristic but rather from the past. And a group of sculpted figures aiming at invisible planes scattered in space, some of them on magnetic chips.

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boundaries are more defined and predictable. Uri Katzenstein's world has uniformity, coherence, and yet you can not call it style. Style is something whose boundaries are more defined and predictable. In Katzenstein it is impossible to guess what the next thing will look like, and yet - when it comes, it makes sense. Of course it's Katzenstein. The conversation with Katzenstein also takes place in a similar manner. The ideas turn out slowly, clean of cliches, it is hard to guess what the next word will be, and more often than not, that Katzenstein speaks in a Katzenstein, a language that requires a dictionary of terms. But somehow it falls in place. That is, in Katzenstein's place. Not anywhere else.

In his new exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum, "Backyard," which he calls the midlife exhibition,

viewers get a glimpse of Katzenstein's past, present and future. In the first room he placed the things that "heap" him, he says - objects and parts of installations. You can find small statuettes in the shape of Katzenstein - one figure swimming, one sitting, one man climbing. Hammers of all sizes, a chair that looked like a swastika, drum machines, skeletal models, ice shoes. "I chose to put it this way because that's how I'm used to looking at it," he says. "I wanted to create something like a warehouse."

Katzenstein explains that he continues to live in his everyday environment.

with some of the objects he created. Instead of calling it inspiration, he uses the



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This is how the future of the human race is Illustrated by the artist Uri Katzenstein

term from the electric field and calls it "generators": "There are objects here that come from different periods of making, and they talk about a process. In such an exhibition, it is sometimes worthwhile to show things that are analogous or primary. I believe that every exhibition should have something preliminary that is not fully processed. Then you can make your own moves. There are about one hundred objects, some are experienced and some are not really experienced, some of them you have to imagine and others are just parts of something, and there is a very fruitful dialogue with materials that are both planetary and invented. There are plastics here, representations of drugs from nature and drugs from industry, sculptural motility versus the motility of a machine that simulates human movement, magnetism, electricity, sound."



One can believe Katzenstein that this is not just an archive, or a reminder of what he did in the past; Because the periods of his work are integrated into one another, coming and going, and in general he looks at time - as on many other categories - as something fluid. Fluid categories, says Finance Minister Yigal Zalmona, who was present at some of the key points in Katzenstein's career, are one of the main characteristics of his work.

Constant motion

Katzenstein was born in Tel Aviv in 1951, the only son of German-born parents who came to Israel before the Holocaust. In the army he served as a medic. In 1972 he went to Italy and studied for a year at the Ferrara Academy of Sculpture in Milan, but he understood that it was not right for him and returned to Israel. In 1973 he participated as a reservist in the Yom Kippur War and suffered a battle shock. He studied art at the Avni School in Tel Aviv and then went to the United States. He studied art at the University of Indiana and an MA in San Francisco. After his studies, he integrated into the performance scene, which took a significant place in the art world in New York.

As someone who believed in a circular perception of time, Katzenstein does not want to indicate which of the moments was most significant to his work. "At school in Indiana, I was allowed to flourish, and in San Francisco, I learned how to live in the city as artists and how to protect art. In New York many very special things happened. I worked at Kitchen (a multidisciplinary art space), I participated in the first sound exhibition in America. And in the end it's not a big wow, it's another place where you walk and from which you walk to another place. Everything that I went through was an experience, and it includes cooperation, study, teaching, relationships, children, family, and you learn what to take out of this whole pot of stew. "

One of his teachers in San Francisco was performance artist and sculptor Chris Burden, who died last week. Bardan became famous after he began his artistic career in which he asked a friend to shoot him with a rifle and was wounded in his hand. Katzenstein, who is also exhibiting drawings in his own blood, is prepared to say in an unusual manner that Burden had the greatest influence on him in the field of art. "Also in the performance field, also in the sculpting field and also in the spiritual field. There's one sentence he told me that I'm carrying to this day, I submitted a photo shoot and he said to me, 'Uri, you have to start putting yourself inside.'

It was the simplest but most formative sentence for me. Like him, I too felt my violence, but I took it to my own provinces. I was very lucky to meet this man and be with him. He was not much older than me, only in five or six years. But by then he was Chris Burden, already making the change. And it was amazing to me, because when I started to study art in the United States I arrived at the conceptual stage, and many people like me feel that our job was to refill everything. Meaning, action. Modernity. In the contemporary world around us."

In 1985 Katzenstein returned to Israel, and under the influence of the American performance spirit of that period, began to exhibit at the exhibitions of young artists. According to him, he formulated the wild things he did in New York for works with a more theatrical structure, with beginning, middle and end, dramaturgy and music. After participating in several group exhibitions, Zalmona, then curator of Israeli art at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem, invited him to create his first solo exhibition at the museum. The result was a "Fatshagan" exhibition in 1993, an exhibition in which Katzenstein presented sculptural objects, music machines and a performance art performance.

Smadar Shefi, Haaretz's art critic, wrote that "this is one of the most interesting and fresh exhibitions that have been exhibited in the museum over the past year." Katzenstein, who deals with issues related to the body and violence, enjoys creating unexpected, nerve-racking situations portrayed in a fascinatingly aesthetic manner. Katzenstein intensifies absurdly to signs that have long become popular associations to body organs. The sausage that dangles from the barrel of a rifle connects two phallic symbols, and the lungs replace Katzenstein with cigarettes as a symbol of degeneration ... the feeling that death has already visited a strong place. "

Katzenstein: "When I was a child, I understood that the society within which I grew up was not the society I wanted, it was like an inner coil that I call resistance movements, because in my heart I am a kind of punk"

Zalmona says there was a clear sense that Katzenstein came from somewhere else. "The subject of the body was one of the most interesting subjects, and there were not many Israeli artists who dealt with it. He was not an Israeli artist in the conventional sense of the word, and his preoccupation with sexual ambiguity and his androgynousness were not so accepted and undermined the masochist image He was an alien. A combination of a sweet child with a certain kind of violence. The impossibility of keeping him between niceness and threat and aggression is one of the most prominent things in his works. His works are nice but also terrifying. The character of a scattered professor whose art is connected to some New Age, the aesthetics of horror films, dealing with blood very cleanly. It was not very poor matter. Even then there were many contradictions in his work that are difficult to grasp. He once had a job of mocking eels on the floor, and he himself was a kind of eel that was hard to nail to the floor. This elusiveness has made it very difficult to read, but this secrecy is charming. "

When he studied in Indiana, Katzenstein began to become more interested in modern music, and after his return to Israel he performed with musician Noam Halevi in the Midas ensemble and in the rock opera "Samara" composed by "The Tractor's Revenge".

with musician Noam Halevi in the Midas ensemble and in the rock opera "Samara" composed by "The Tractor's Revenge". On his relationship to music versus art, he told musician Yishai Adar in a conversation quoted in the exhibition catalog: "I get to work on sound when I'm free of thinking about where it goes. Flexibility is a central value in the form of my work. I'm in love with elusive elements that can penetrate and fit into all kinds of provinces, and be different every time. It's not just a conceptual move, it's a love of this quality of jolt, of being sent to places where things are different. Of the many materials I work with, sound and music are, of course, the most flexible and motile, so they are a great vehicle through which ideas move from place to place. When I started doing art, I soon came to realize that music is the thing I love most about the world. "

In 1992, Katzenstein met musician, artist and performer Ohad Fishof, inviting him to write for the catalog of the exhibition "Fatschgan". From there began a collaboration that yielded several works in Israel and England during the 1990s.

of the exhibition "Fatschgan". From there began a collaboration that yielded several works in Israel and England during the 1990s. "I would come to him and sit with him for hours and he would talk and I would listen to him, and I would leave after four hours exhausted and hypnotized," says Fishoff. "I felt as though he was speaking in four voices, as if he were the only person in the world who had polyphonic speech."

The first work they created together, in 1995, was called The Frogman's Report. In this performance they both appeared in slow dance, and Katzenstein even made a sound for the microphone while he chewed glass. The highlight of their joint work was the "Home" show they created together with Renana Raz for the Israeli Pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2001, in which Katzenstein was chosen to present. Katzenstein says about working together with musicians: "This is a point of contact and a place that has both influences and reciprocity, because there is also a taste that is in a certain way similar, and intentions and desires ... some eccentric and esoteric taste that is unexpected in others and in us it is."

According to Fishoff, "Uri is a partner, a close friend of mine and I never stop learning from him." I often understand Uri's imagination more than the concrete, when he tries to explain to me I am less understanding of the content, but I understand the spirit of things more easily.

We have been influenced by the performance scene that began in the late 1970s, and by the very natural connection between music of a certain kind and plastic art. With Uri, the connection meets many times in the most concrete way, as in the musical instruments. We both think about music the way we think about art, it's part of the same thing."

Fishoff believes that the new exhibition in Tel Aviv allows the "Katzenstein logic," as he calls it, to emerge. "Uri has something eccentric in his work on the one hand, and on the other hand it's in a discussion, it's not something that has no words. There is a very comprehensive and specific and personal vision. One that does not make assumptions that are not found within the common cultural narratives, where 80% of all things are found. I noticed that when you write about his work, it often takes the word 'moving'. There is a lot of moving art, but there is something about him that allows people to feel excitement even in a slightly sentimental way, precisely because of a certain cold or a certain distance in the work, which is not manipulative or adopted or melancholy. People feel that they can afford to declare themselves excited. "

Haaretz's art critic Galia Yahav wrote that the new exhibition, "as cold as it seems, is so exciting." According to her, "Katzenstein's exhibition reaches the peak of his occupational precision in the body and instrumentation or in the manipulated body and navigates within the system...

Indeed, according to Katzenstein, intimacy is an impossible or dangerous category. Every nuance-syllable, material, expression, gesture, sound-reverberates in the vacuum. But more than that, all the hyperactivity on Rick is a major disability. Everything demonstrates futile potential. This is performed convincingly. "Yahav calls Katzenstein's exhibition "generous," one characterized by "the right combination of meticulous professionalism, but one that does not fall into the spirit of experimentation, the artist's mental readiness to be exposed and lead the viewer along his path of interest as a laboratory path. Without swelling and without false modesty, Katzenstein not only meets these challenges, he is an example of a balance between these values and others. "

After being chosen to exhibit at the Israeli pavilion at the Venice Biennale in 2001, Katzenstein chose Tzama to curate the pavilion. Katzenstein presented bronze sculptures in the Biennale, as well as a video work that was simultaneously screened on several screens along the walls of the pavilion; All of them starred in figures that are copies of Katzenstein himself, in a variety of acting scenes, violent quarrel, love relationship and finally a wedding. Smadar Sheffy wrote about the work at the Biennale: "Katzenstein writes in unisoned words in a red blood-like fluid and cries out for a defeated and closed culture."

One of the most fascinating aspects of watching the show is how much Katzenstein's work is anchored in a very specific Israeli culture - Hanoach Levin's plays, The choreographies of Ohad Naharin. " Zalmona says that Katzenstein's work received excellent echoes at the biennale. "He turned the pavilion into a mental space, seeing Uri Kantanshteinim doing things to each other, it was fascinating."

First experience

At the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, curated by Varda Steinlauf, they will be able to get electrocuted with Katzenstein, who comes there for a few hours a day, takes on the character of a strange doctor and offers people his special treatments, which include low power current and songs he performs while sitting on a bed.

"It's a very comical position in all," he says. "When I do this, I look like an outlaw, like in India when you come to an optometrist's shop that is both a gynecologist and a dentist. There is a feeling that you cannot rely on me and it becomes a kind of solicitation..."

... Many people recoil, many laugh, many are surprised. You do not get an electric shock, but a very low electric current, a little less than 40 volts. And it came along with me. It's a shared experience. It is something that creates something, an experience of the first time. It's not sex, it has nothing to do with it, but it's like. It is something very private that happens in such a space. It will be managed according to the entities that will revolve around here, because they feel, are felt. "

His electrocution shows began about three years ago. The attraction to electricity stems, he says, from the desire to engage in a space that plastic arts do not usually touch - the hypodermic space. "We always talk about interior and exterior and the private and the public, and so on, but we do not touch the space of sensation and skin, but I do not care about creating a conceptual boundary between myself and the audience. But I do not want to be the standard performer we know from the 60s, 70s, 80s, 90s that create a barrier, a stage, proximity, duality, polarity, etc. with the audience. Or, alternatively, the daring artist, who was also that I was actually doing things that anyone can actually do but do not dare. For example, many years ago I suggested that Naomi Aviv do a tattoo of a climber, and then other people from the art world jumped on my proposal and got tattooed, because it was a solution to some fantasy they had. The tattoos were the first time I did an intrusion into the hypodermic space, and then it took me a while to realize that this was what I was interested in doing, and I began experimenting with myself and with friends until I realized it was possible. "

Electric and tattoos are refined versions of the much more violent and destructive performances of Katzenstein in the 1980s in New York, including crushing, explosions, Hitler's speeches, drugs, and more. Zalmona defines that period as "borderline expressionist anarchism."



Phillip Retsner



Ohad Fishof, taken by Tomer Elfenbaum



Igal Tsalamona, "Blood on the Wall"

This violence raises the question of the extent to which Katzenstein's works are related to his biography. While there are no clear signs of direct influence from his personal life, Katzenstein explains that his basic position toward the world, from which his art stems, is strongly linked to his inner resistance to the world. "In my childhood, I realized that the society in which I grew up was not the company I wanted, that was the result of many things, the music I loved was always a bit more marginal, and the art I loved was always a bit more difficult and demanding, and my friends were always wrong people at certain levels. My experience as someone who grew up in a certain home and the early desire and knowledge I had that I would not be like that remained in me as an outlet. It's like an internal coil that was in me from an early age and I call it resistance movements. Because in my heart I'm a kind of punk. I want change. I see a community I do not like, so getting caught up in the degenerate places of it is a very exciting and stimulating place for me. How you take the degenerate place and create something else from it, or extract it from decay, from its own decay. "

Katzenstein's definition of himself as a punk sits with the big piercing in his earlobe and a lot of tattoos, but in any other way his appearance, his patient personality and his soft voice do not support this image. He admits that he is a restrained person, but warns that there is no connection between this and calm or equanimity. He is especially careful to stay away from what he calls "nostalgia", both in art and in life. "A yearning for something that has been, an old memory that is a kind of truth that one trades in all kinds of ways - I try very hard not to be part of the internal economy of work, the mediums have to dance with each other, like ideas.

It sounds like a constant preoccupation with self restraint.

"Not really, restraint and restraint is a matter of character, not something I have to work for, on the contrary, sometimes I have to try to untie it."



Professor Chris Barden

Katzenstein says that performance artist and sculptor Chris Burden influenced him most. "He said to me: 'Uri, you have to start putting yourself inside'

"It exists there. It's really kind of boring, I make the work cooler because the question is really burning, a very fundamental question, but to put it into something a bit more related to thought and reaction to thought, I feel I have to keep it away from us. I do this at all kinds of levels. If this is plastic work, then sometimes the last layer is without signs. There are no signs of painting, no signs of 'hand'. This in itself becomes my trademark, but it also distances the work. "

Why do you feel the need to cool, make your pieces cold?

"Things that are outside, or we have the ability to talk about them as they are, are of less interest to me, especially because they reveal themselves immediately. Once this is cooled, it creates a more productive dialogue between the object and me and the viewer. I do not want to reveal them completely. "

There are quite a few biographical materials that undoubtedly influenced Katzenstein, even if they do not find a direct expression in his works - including the shock of the battle (post trauma) he suffered from.

When you know your personal story, is this a key to understanding your work?

"I do not know, I believe it's seeping in, but I do not feel I've done anything specifically related to it, which may have been my emotional insights into myself, insights into society. If the crisis had gone too far, it would have turned my art into something therapeutic I think that my power is to continue with my own thing despite everything."

Still, one of the exhibits in the exhibition is a swastika chair built by Katzenstein in 1988 and is related to his experience of battle shock. "The fact that I'm a post-shock fighter is something that plays in my life, that's for sure," he says. "There are certain things I've learned to control everyday, like tantrums, and post-trauma is not a very important issue in my work, but it came in. It's mainly because of how trauma is handled, how it is taught, how it can be used. The chair is a kind of hubris, that you are actually invited to sit on the worst symbol we know. This is total evil. As soon as you sit down on it the question of usage is asked, do we learn from it? Do you teach it?"

In my opinion, part of our conduct as a nation is the lack of learning of the trauma. Here comes the question, who sits on it. In what way do we say what we say about these pressing matters."

Ohad Fishof believes that the new exhibition allows the "Katzenstein logic" to emerge. "It is precisely because of a certain cold or a certain distance in the work that they are not manipulative or adopted or melancholy, so people feel that they can afford to declare that they are excited"

Zalmona notes another element in Katzenstein's work that he believes is related to the background from which he grew up, and he is the mystery and secret that he says is related to his father's membership in the Masonic order. "At work in Venice he wrote in blood on the wall, 'In our culture the language is secret'.

I think one of his main messages is that we are all made of contradictions and if we listen to them, a change will come to us through art. He believes in the ability of art to change people. I think he's an idealist. "

The director and chief curator of the Tel Aviv Museum, Suzanne Landau, wrote in the exhibition catalog that "Katzenstein is one of the pioneers who challenge the standard experience of viewing works of art" and that his work "envelops the viewer and makes him an integral part of it."

Since 2003 Katzenstein has been teaching at the University of Haifa in the Art Department. "I learned suddenly that I had to learn to be a teacher, because I was not exactly a teacher, and when I began to understand that I had the ability to help people do art or take art more fully, I fell in love with the profession. I try my lessons not to be violent. Violence in the works is fine, but not violent or violent criticisms between teachers and students. But I do not forgive laziness. I always want more, more depth, courage, intention."

Philip Rantzer, head of the art department at Haifa University, says that the fact that Katzenstein's art can be deceptive does not prevent him from being a clear teacher to his students. "There is a difference between the viewer who comes to the gallery and university students. It seems to me that it's not too bad to understand all the way. Uri cannot always be deciphered. His work is mummified with makeup, this indicates the need for concealment." Katzenstein himself claims that he knows how to be clear when necessary.



From the exhibition: "The Backyard", taken by Revital Tofiu

"There are also quite a few points within the Enigma. You give exercise and you are very specific, and the enigma arises when you talk about the possibilities of exercise. Where they can be confused. I'm not completely enigmatic. I can be understood."

The Beauty of the Foul

The newest part of the exhibition is an orchestra of musical instruments built by Katzenstein and each one of them knows how to play himself, thanks to the software installed there, without human contact. To Katzenstein, these machines are reminiscent of a wedding band. "The machines know how to do only what they are programmed to do, there is a very nice ability to control them and give them color," he says.

"It's a combination of robotics, mechanics, sonification, audio, as opposed to painting or sculpture, here you have to constantly respond to the desires of these things, they do not do exactly what you want, so there is a process that progresses back and forth. , Because it's pretty stupid all this stuff, on the other hand you can go with it to many places."

Yigal Zalmona: "His androgynousness was not accepted and undermined the image of the Israeli macho, he had a job of mocking eels on the floor, and he himself was a kind of eel that was hard to nail to the floor"

Katzenstein often uses words from the field of mechanics and electricity, where other people will say terms from the realm of emotion. In his sculptures he likes to use magnets and creates landscapes. As for the statues of the figures that appear in his exhibition, he warns that these are not human figures, but that for the first time he created a space that is entirely mechanical.

"The characters I made were never really characters, but here I allowed myself a border that is more surreal, the characters here are not proportionate, they are stretched, they have different structures, also limbs, also lengths, surely the skulls. To multiculturalism, they seem to be illustrated, literally."

Katzenstein points out to me that all his sculptured figures are also slightly squinted: " I love to work with the spoilage...These are the things that are incompetent, negligible, like bad roots that grow behind stones, but a lot can come from them like healing plants. Everything that ostensibly has no purpose, but over time can have a very deep purpose. And this is the concept that is in my work. I am interested in taking you on a journey that is dichotomy, is also enjoyable but also horrible, apocalyptic and primary, and primitive."

His sculptures deal, he says, with the human condition and express a vision of mankind and its future fusion with machines and computers. Amma Braslavsky writes in her catalog: "The profound influence of Katzenstein's works is most evident in their humanistic nuances: in those moments when we continue to imagine the behavior of machines, we become more and more like them. When we become flawless, and so will our expectations of behavior, we will be reduced to the level of pure consumer goods, and thus lose our greatest virtue: humanity ... His works document Sisyphus's striving for a more intelligent, humorous and serious future at the same time A belief in the power of art to change."

Katzenstein says: "We are situated between illuminated places and dark places, you can reach every district, and there are also many statements that are actually social, and in this exhibition I talk about conversions, who we are compared to everything, what causes plants to be here for millions of years. How does the planetary material we make of it relate to the world? It deals mainly with a world that interests me, that I will not be part of it: the future. Eternal life does not interest me. So I generate conversions that can be relevant today for the future. For example, the language of the movement. There's a woman statue here, landing a warplane on an aircraft carrier.

Or a man in a distress position. It comes from a district of noise, of dryness, of dirt, of pollution, of tremendous power. It's airplanes, airports, facilities for inhalation and exhalation. It's a kind of machine-man, an emotional machine. Like all of us: we are emotional cyborg. And in this respect the characters are not human, even though they are very beautiful and very reminiscent of a body, but they are not entirely here."

Are you sorry you will not be part of this future?

"I always wanted to know what would happen, and in the eyes of those who will come in another 400 years, this period will look like hundreds of dark and dirty and unclear, they will say, what was it, so I would like to be there in terms of where imagination will lead."

Do you see a union of man and machine? Or a role swap?

It's going to happen, but it's going to happen, but it's hard for me to think of a generic world, it seems to me that the world is still going to be multilayered, even with the machines, it's not just that or that. "Most science fiction today deals with ecology and hunger, not writing about machines and robots, because the situation does not look good."