

imagination to fresh levels of engagement with reality.

Ian Findlay

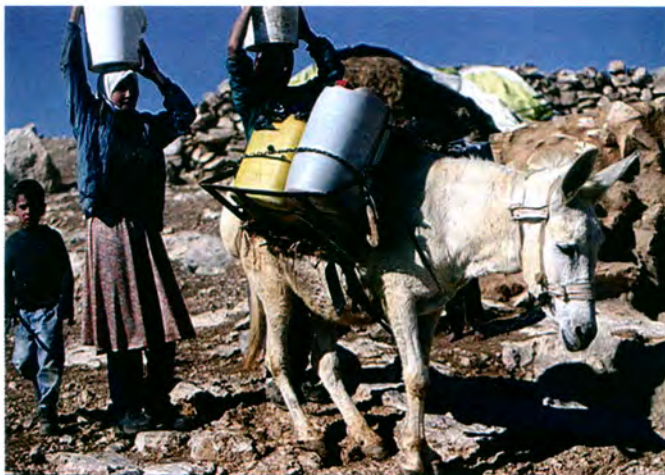
ISRAEL

Beersheba

Donkey Time: The Donkey In Israeli Culture at the Negev Museum

Donkey, ass, burro, dickey, a jack, or a jenny. Call it what you like but understand that this sorry-eyed, incredibly resilient mammal, this *Equus africanus*, a distant relative of the common horse, has assisted, without much dissent, humankind's hauling needs for millennia. The common donkey has been recorded in hieroglyphics, mosaics, paint, graphics, prose, film, and poetry; including a good number of biblical tracts. A working animal for 5,000 years, this "beast of burden" was probably domesticated in Mesopotamia or Egypt and has been celebrated in Middle Eastern lore for centuries, dating back to Egyptian tomb narratives as early as 2500 BC.

Curator Siona Shimshi has gathered a stimulating register of sculptures, paintings, illustrations, documentary films, biblical collages, and



The Sinai Water Carrier, archive photograph.

historical surveys that promote a sympathetic collection of the donkey in a variety of local Israeli-Palestinian activities, from the simplest to the most bizarre. The images include the ass harnessed as a rural "school bus" for Bedouin children, as a pack animal moving everything from furniture and laundry to rice from one place to another, and as a festooned sacrificial replacement for a lamb in a peculiar Ultra-Orthodox biblical ceremony.

The half dozen sculptures stationed in the Negev Museum's ground floor gallery are all rational depictions of the donkey. Aspiring to create something a bit off-center, Ofer Kotler has carved from Styrofoam a figurative life-size Aton (jenny) whose hoofs are painted an alluring "nail polish" red and whose back supports a stylish, boxed-oriental

carpet in lieu of the customary ratty saddle bags. Kotler's amusing work is surrounded by a variety of stylized burros including a small, pedestal-oriented, flattened donkey by David Gerstein decorated in a splashed range of blue, gray, and white and whose flanks and back are ornamented by a quintet of brightly toned graphic birds.

The upper gallery, in addition to more than 150 photographs and several colorful caricatures from the Israeli press, houses large digital prints by 14 different artists who have chosen to illustrate in graphic or painterly fashion a Biblical passage that relates to the donkey and has fired their imaginations.

Shimshi indicates in her preliminary texts that the donkey is cited 131 times in the Bible, more than any other an-

imal and has played a role in nation-building, participating in major events in our history (Israel) faithfully and humbly. But it is the photographic section, overflowing with a range of images that are amusing as well as tragic and symbolic, that makes one understand the intensity of this animal's role and contribution to the local domestic scene—Jewish, Muslim, and Christian.

Gil Goldfine

Tel Aviv

Jan Rauchwerger at The Gordon Gallery

The seasoned figurative painter of enormous talent Jan Rauchwerger has, for his current exhibition *Parthenon in My Life*, forsaken brushes and palette for a set of modeling tools. This turnaround began with several bronzes of a robust buxom female, made in 1973, an indication that his interest in sculpture has always been there. He has never considered sculpture a mere playful medium but how he has applied that interest is the subject of this exhibition. There is little or no imaginative or subjective relationship between his two- and three-dimensional works other than a ceaseless focus, in both media, on the female figure.

Being the artist he is, the range of three-dimensional pieces varies from classical modeling of portraits and nude female figures to quasi-archaeological panels in the form of votive body parts. The works include a handful of door-less cabinets on whose shelves Rauchwerger has placed details of human feet, hands, and small abstract compositions, the latter coinciding with a recent series of massive non-objective cylindrical volumes hobbled together to form *Structures and Altars*.

Several hand-tinted bronze portrait busts dated between 2007 and 2014 are sensitive, unblemished, appraisals of Rauchwerger's female mod-



Above left: Ofer Kotler, Yoel the Aton, Styrofoam, paper, and glue, 1.70 x 1.70 x 60 cm. **Above right: Dudu Geva, Sacrifice of Isaac**, gouache illustration on paper, 28 x 21 cm.



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