

# The Color of Carefully Ordered Chaos

## The Work of Nir Segal



Background (Taxi)

# ArtistProfile

By Amy Har-Even

Nir Segal is nothing if not prolific. One look at the Israeli artist's website and his dizzying array of work—paintings, drawings, photography, and installations, poetry and essays—and a person starts to feel downright lazy by comparison. Even as I write this, Segal is putting on an exhibition in Bangkok, including paintings, photographs and installation pieces. It's his second in Thailand in a year: he had an exhibition in September 2009 at Bangkok University—called *Which Wait*—and its success led to an invitation from the Israeli Embassy in Thailand to show at Bangkok's National Gallery this summer. This show, called *Sit-You-Ate*, incorporates some of last year's pieces and a selection of new works, which, knowing the artist, means there will be plenty to see characterized by bold colors juxtaposed against darker and subtler tones and a carefully ordered chaos.

As Segal explains, “some of the new work will take on the playfulness of the previous show, where people had to situate themselves within a sea of plastic stools in order to view the works on the walls.” Once set up, the exhibition space from 2009's *Which Wait* could have been mistaken for an outdoor food market awaiting its first customers, if not for the presence of the paintings. The colorful plastic stools that covered almost every inch of the floor mimicked the oil and acrylic works on the walls...as well as a few on the floor. The riot of bright, organic shapes against sharp white backgrounds in works such as “Soup” and “Background (Taxi)” appeared again in “Heavy Paint,” a collection of fake gems and bright pebbles painted with acrylic and gold and silver leaf in an attractive pile on the floor, inspiring the imagination of viewers who see this work through a multitude of diverse lenses and allowing for an active interaction with the art.

“The Same But Lighter,” a 105 x 210-centimeter acrylic painting, is another brightly colored work, this one depicting tube-like shapes which are echoed in the actual fluorescent tubes attached to the front of the canvas. Referring back to the stools that cover the exhibition floor, Segal says, “I basically like the idea of people having to make some effort in order to find the optimal way in which to experience the work.”

Segal has his own effort to make as well, which is with painting itself, and with finding the inspiration to create it. “I do not take inspiration for granted. It is not always that I have it,” he admits. “However, it is within this life that I find inspiration: patterns of everyday life, human relationships with nature, personal experiences and mostly my life as an artist. These are all reference points to the work I make.”

And especially lately for Segal, his real inspiration seems to come from within: “My most recent works are inspired by personal issues that I have with my paintings. I am trying to create this ideal ground where the figure and image exist

in peace with the painted surface. In other words, I feel a constant struggle with painting. The figures fight for their right to exist, reflecting the struggle between abstract and figurative painting.”

He also draws heavily from the world around him, pulling emotion and complexity out of the ordinary. One can almost feel the chaos of the Bangkok streets bubble beneath the paint even through the abstraction. As far as artists he is inspired by goes, Segal's list is long and as varied and diverse as his portfolio. He mentions Roni Horn. As he explains, “Horn approaches nature in a unique and inspiring way. I specifically relate myself and my work to the way Horn defines duality in nature. He is likewise inspired by Allan McCollum who he simply describes as, “an American artist whom I find very exciting.” He also cites the work of Anselm Kiefer, the German painter and sculptor. “What I find really admirable is the sense of place that can be seen in almost all of Kiefer's works.” His diverse list also includes the prominent British artist, Prunella Clough; Laura Owens, a contemporary American artist; and the work of German Imi Knoebel.



Nir Segal at *Sit-You-Ate*

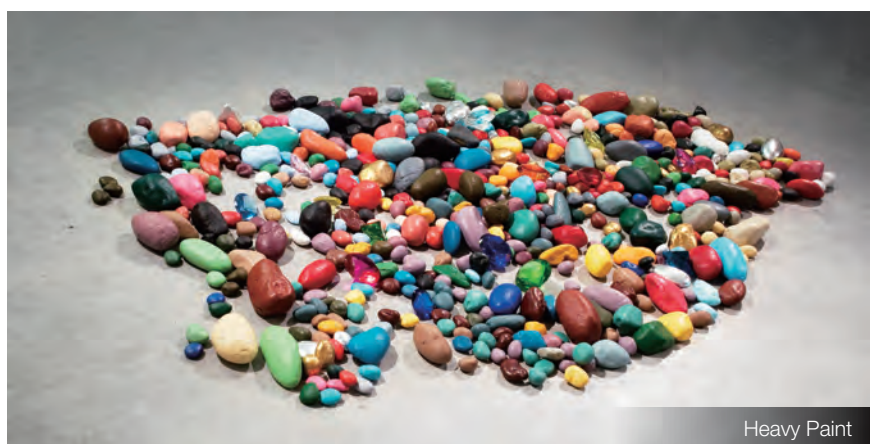
What's surprising is among Segal's list of inspirational artists are those he doesn't mention: the Fauves, or even David Hockney. Many--if not most--of his paintings from 2009 recall Andre Derain's and Henri Matisse's vibrant canvases ("The Dessert, Harmony in Red," comes to mind) or Hockney's "Nichols Canyon," from 1980. Strong colors, simplified forms and painterly brushstrokes all describe Segal's works, and the struggle between abstract and figurative painting that he mentions above is apparent, but in an altogether pleasing way. Segal says, "When I reach the point of making my work, I try to depict local imagery, mostly images that already exist in, or as, a pattern." Evidence of that is on display in "Black Eye" and in one of his many untitled works from 2009: both appear to be newspaper photographs that he's painted his own version of, but where he's left intact the structure of the newspaper page, along with the photograph's caption.

And these are just the paintings. His far reaching oeuvre already includes photographs, drawings, installation pieces, poetry and essays as well. Is there anything left? Is there any medium that he has not experimented with? "Lately I have been very very interested in the moving image," Segal answers. "Even in my last residency in Bangkok I started looking into ideas of moving patterns within a still image. I would also be interested in exploring the different techniques of sculpture such as metal construction and wood structures." And if that's not enough, "Have I mentioned performance?" he adds. "It's something I will definitely consider and would like to do in the future."

Clearly Segal is an artist unafraid to try new things, and one seemingly happily immersed in his work. In fact, when asked what he does when he's not creating art, Segal replies, "I usually



Black Eye



Heavy Paint

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By Amy Har-Even



cheap frills: A woman shows off her pet - with booties

La Conjillo de Indias

spend most of my time thinking about creation: basically that is life for me.” A series of works from this show, called Facing Thailand, attests to that. The collection of photos shows everyday scenes wherein Segal has found a smiling face: a pair of clouds flanking a setting sun (the eyes and nose) above a sidewalk in the foreground (the smile) in one; a streetlamp (the eyes) in front of hanging bunting (the smile) in another. The photographs speak to his fertile creative mind; he finds art everywhere.

So what about when he’s not creating, or thinking about creating? “When I am not painting I go to see shows, or hang out with my family and friends. I enjoy the time amongst the people who are close to me. I also work in Sommer Gallery in Israel and as an independent photographer shooting events and weddings. I love playing the piano, listening to music, cooking and eating and dancing. Pretty much like every person.”

But for now it’s all about the art. *Sit-You-Ate* runs through July 30, and after Bangkok, the artist has an unsurprisingly ambitious list of things he’d like to accomplish. “Hopefully more shows in Israel and around the world,” he says. “I have applied for master courses so there is a possibility that next year I will be doing my postgraduate studies. Other than that I plan to keep on making work, and to hopefully start teaching at some point. Most important I hope that soon I can settle down and work toward having a family of my own. Can’t wait to be a dad!”

Having a consistently full plate is obviously what makes Segal happy. He seems unable to resist keeping it that way; taking on new mediums, working when he’s not technically working, finding inspiration in nearly everything he experiences. As he summarizes while he scans the room, breathing in further inspiration, “This art world and generally this life are so full of material and ways of making art and all of it is inspiring.”



Installation view