



## (In)Organic

# Tamar Berger

I'll start with the cat. He's weird. He has a huge body and a very small head (perhaps an intentional antithesis to Toony's unforgettable hair). The rest of him is familiar. He's ginger, sleeps on a cushion, sits in the sink, pricks up his ears, solicits attention, and so on. He appears in Toony's Instagram handle, and I mention him here for two reasons: firstly, because Instagram is, in my opinion, an integral part of the sphere in which Toony's works transpire; and secondly, because he is a whole living creature and a character, which are relatively rare in this sphere. (I must add that I am not familiar with the works by the order of their creation; I know some of them in their actual manifestations, and others through their representation. The following comments will thus depend on this fact). The aforesaid Instagram account interests me because it is not as personal and informal an authority as it could have been, being essentially subject to Toony's strict representation regime. In it, she captures moments in the world and arranges them. More accurately, she captures them already arranged. Yes, Toony sweats when she tries to push the intimidating blue ball in the scary suburbs of Yavne or Ashdod. She started her career with a pilgrimage on foot, but her mother tongue is different: momentarily deceptive, because it is ostensibly simple, and sometimes funny, and confusing, because at the same time it is also serious. In the end, towards the end, the message is tough: you hit a wall. And this is already a drama. I shall get to the actual end very soon.

At the heart of the drama lies plastic: that's what I'll call her raw material; plastic as a specific multi-faceted substance ("more than a substance, plastic is the very idea of its infinite transformation," writes Roland Barthes),<sup>1</sup> and mainly — as a representative embodiment of the serial, the industrial, the utilitarian, the ephemeral in its location and use (polymers and aluminum as opposed to steel, stone, and the like). Plastic is actually a figure that emerges in different material incarnations

*Extension 03: Awning, 2018, PVC fabric and aluminum (Yehiel Shemi, Fact III, 1995, iron); installation view at the exhibition "Extensions," Atelier Shemi, Kibbutz Cabri, 2018*  
 הרחבה 03: סוכך, 2018, שמשונית ואלומיניום (יחיאל שמי, עובדה III, 1995, ברזל); מראה הצבה בתערוכה "הרחבות", אטלייה שמי, קיבוץ כברי, 2018

and has typical characteristics: it serves as a device (a conduit, a shade-casting awning, a reflective window), appears as the thing itself (a tarpaulin sheet, an office chair, a tile), and its movement, which sometimes occurs (the roller blind goes up and down), is circular and empty. Plastic is flat and impervious (nail polish sets). Its transparency, when it exists, is not as essential as that of glass (and if glass, then glass bricks, for example, disrupt transparency). From this substance Toony builds environments, apparatuses, spaces reminiscent of work or residence or both, which shuffle the stable dichotomous distinction between exterior and interior, between concealment and exposure. Everything is at the discretion of the transient.

Toony creates these environments via a double act of disassembly and assembly; construction a-la modernist collage and disintegration in the deconstructivist tradition, as it were, but with one essential difference: the absence of a whole which is the result of a hermeneutic process (the portrait that was reconstructed; the building that revealed its essence even if it is a mere fragment). The elements comprising the object presented to us are not organized under a title. Their distinct concreteness — their being themselves — distances them also from the abstract.

But between the nature of the materials and the undeciphered clustering of the elements, between the things-in-themselves and their farfetchedness, and by virtue of the very fact that we are facing one physical object, the original meaning of the work begins to form. A called-for first layer is its interpretation as a bitter, hard expression of a world that is all surface. The work's powerful design will then be highlighted (basic shapes, primary colors, the collagist drawings — everything can be read in this way). Here is your world, our world; the world after the image, the image as a world.

One may stop here, but it would be unadvisable. I, for one, needed Toony's response work to Yehiel Shemi's sculptures in







pp. 103-104: installation views at the exhibition "Extensions," Atelier Shemi, Kibbutz Cabri, 2018 ● p. 103: *Extension 01: Winter Sealing*, 2018, PVC fabric, aluminum, Keter Plastic chairs (Yehiel Shemi, *Sculpture*, 1990, iron) ● p. 104: *Extension 04: Yard*, 2018, PVC fabric, aluminum, Keter Plastic chair (Yehiel Shemi, *Syllables*, 1980, iron)

עמ' 103-104: מראות הצבה בתערוכה "הרחבות", אטלייה שמי, קיבוץ כברי, 2018 ● עמ' 103: הרחבה 01: סגירת חורף, 2018, שמשונית, אלומיניום, כיסאות כתר פלסטיק (יחיאל שמי, פסל, 1990, ברזל) ● עמ' 104: הרחבה 04: חצר, 2018, שמשונית, אלומיניום, כיסא כתר פלסטיק (יחיאל שמי, הברות, 1980, ברזל)

Kibbutz Cabri to understand everything in retrospect, differently. Vis-à-vis Shemi's heavy, masculine iron sculptures, Toony installed her materials whose language is light, transient, colorful, and concrete. To all appearances, it is a sequel to the same thing — an ironization of that reality-seeking modernism. But this is a limited reading, because when one perceives the dimension of craft innate to these works, the proficient hand of the artisans, and the creative process (the object's isolation from the whole and its decontextualization draw attention to them) — then Toony's seemingly defiant acts become tributes: one craft next to another, work next to work (soon it will be possible to resume using the word "creation," to reinstate the work to its rightful place in the world, and shed greater light on its possible appearance in art). It thus becomes clear that Toony is conversing with Shemi, and not teasing him. The connections she makes with his works may be somewhat odd, but there is no short circuit there. It works. Then we realize: the world which Toony presents to us is a continuation of its predecessor, a phase in the process of growth and metamorphosis of a large organism, which is created and changes through our action, from within itself, dissolving and tangible at the same time.

1 Roland Barthes, "Plastic," in *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill & Wang, 1972), p. 97.