



**Rotem Reshef**

returns to the reaches of her childhood and family lore – featuring a dynasty of pioneering intellectual farmers who helped establish the Jewish Yishuv and revive Hebrew culture in the Land of Israel starting in the late 19th century – and invites spectators to stroll inside an installation of expressive drawings comprising a three-dimensional painting. In a series of scenes that surround visitors, Reshef brings forth abstract representations of the orchards of Rehovot, her parents' house, thick veranda foliage, nature viewed through a window and a captivating garden tended by her father for years on end.

The local landscapes she symbolically describes are becoming distant memories of personal and Israeli history.

As she captures recollections, Reshef also freezes moments in time on enormous canvases, turning mundane material into multilayered and many-hued depictions





**Me** **Rotem Reshef** is a painter and installation artist who lives in Tel Aviv and New York. She engages in expressive action painting as a physical and conceptual tool for making an emotional, visual impression. The installation *MomDadMe* is a family biography that presents a series of abstract/figurative pieces addressing transitions in time, objects and elements that turn memories into images, as well as cultural, political and social narratives referencing life in the State of Israel, and hinted at in the painted images.

**Great-Grandfather** **Moshe Smilansky** was a member of the First Aliyah, a Zionist leader, a farmer and scholar who helped build the Land of Israel. He was one of the first settlers of Rehovot, where Rotem Reshef was born and raised. As part of his extensive work and activities, Smilansky worked to establish peaceful ties with the Arab residents in the Land of Israel, organized the colony farmers and helped found the national Farmers' Association, presiding over it for many years, as well as initiating its newsletter and serving as its first editor. He also authored numerous literary books and articles documenting Yishuv life.

of what was, what now exists, and what is becoming extinct: scenery, home, family, and the individually and nationally upright worlds in which she grew up. Through her action painting on dozens of meters of canvas, she creates scenes, some with a narrative dimension, incorporating elements from reality – plants, wood fragments, articles of clothing and other items – into the layers of diluted paint, commemorating the story of a family and a place within the long scrolls.

The installation strums the strings of remembrance, inviting visitors to immerse themselves in contemplation as they gaze at vistas of a lost paradise – a garden of resurrected memories simultaneously concealing/revealing magical moments of family intimacy and intergenerational love for earth and nature.

## Orchard

*“If our agriculture is here, our homeland is here”*

– Moshe Smilansky

Orchard, the introductory scene to the *MomDadMe* installation and to Reshef's story, is the first point of encounter with "Citrus City," as Rehovot used to be known, and with the first representative of the family dynasty, Moshe Smilansky, who was a leading figure in establishing citrus-growing as a major agricultural branch in the Jewish Yishuv in the Land of Israel in the first half of the 20th century.

The canvas scroll spread out to represent the orchard is suffused with the spirituality of vision. Through the airy colorfulness that grants a sense of floating and soulful uplifting, Reshef evokes the historic existence and memory of the orchard lands, the tree roots, the verdant leaves, the citrus fruit and the cobalt skies rife with promise and hope. The sculpted display of the canvas creates an organic three-dimensional spatial structure that enfolds the beholder in abstract, dreamlike images.

## Veranda

*“Tsila has a green thumb”* – Hezi Avivi

On the land where Moshe Smilansky built his house, and where his children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren were all born, there now stands an apartment building. The Avivi family lives there now and they still recall the boulevard of ancient olive trees leading to the historical house, the huge eucalyptus trees that shaded it, and the abundant vegetation in the yard surrounding the family home. Those memories reverberate on their flourishing veranda, teeming with garden plants and lovingly cared for by Tsila Avivi's skilled hands.

The splashes of color and abstract shapes based on the veranda foliage – including ferns, pothos, pitanga, leafy spurge and sweet potato – are spread in transparent layers like seven scarves that both hide and expose a rich world of plants whose actual remnants are held between imprints of memory.

## House | Bookcase

*“Jew, speak Hebrew”* – Rina Smilansky (as a member of the Battalion for the Defense of the Language)

Precise, articulate language, both spoken and written, is part of Reshef's family legacy. On the bookcases filling her parents' house, one will find a complete set of "Chapters in the History of the Yishuv," written by her mother's grandfather, Moshe Smilansky, and describing the modern development of Jewish settlement in the Land of Israel, as well as the role of the family in his life and Yishuv life, which were intertwined. Alongside those volumes are world and Hebrew classics, modern Israeli literature, books of prose and of poetry, art books and science books, history books and the Bible – an Israeli-Hebrew-Jewish library starting with the Bible and evolving along with the Hebrew language and the Israel experience, laying the cornerstones for its values.

In the painting image, Reshef transforms the rich cultural essence into a kind of evaporating ghost library. The Israeli bookcase with its personal and national cultural assets containing the story of the past and present – a moral world in whose spirit Reshef was raised and on which the nation flourished – is fading away into a future clouded in uncertainty. Alongside the library are two figures dressed in work clothes – her parents, memorializing the home that fuses working the land with intellectualism.

## Garden

*“May all friends of the garden have a good week!”*

– Hezi Avivi

The canvas scroll representing the home starts with a look outside the window, and ends by exiting the house to a spacious garden, also visible from the house – "The Rina Smilansky Garden for Biblical Plants and the Colony of Rehovot," which was established in memory of Reshef's grandmother.

The garden itself is rather a local Garden of Eden, a refuge of quiet and nature just a short walk away from the city's first street. Hezi Avivi, Rotem's father, formerly the director of the Zoological and Botanical Garden that was run by the Society for the Protection of Nature at Abu Kabir, tends to the grounds of the Rina Smilansky Garden, doing gardening work and giving tours. Under his care the garden has become an enriching study environment for pupils who come to expand their knowledge, as well as groups of tourists, wandering couples and passersby who enjoy a pleasant rest sitting on the benches.

Reshef's action painting, done on scrolls laid on the floor, corresponds with working the land. She tills, plants, nurtures and takes care of the embedded countryside, paints scenic environments inspired by natural materials, and germinates the landscapes originating in her imagination.

The Washingtonia palms that clap at the actual garden entrance greet visitors in the painting space as well. In the real/artistic relationship, the work technique

**MomDad** **Tsila Avivi** (*née Smilansky, Moshe Smilansky's granddaughter and Rotem Reshef's mother*) is the heart and soul of the family. A native of Rehovot, she is a treasure-trove of Smilansky family memories. She also volunteers at the Rehovot city archives, is an amateur gardener and serves as the family's "minister of culture."

**Hezi Avivi** (*Reshef's father*) is an educator who taught generations of students and for many years headed the Zoological Garden and Botanical Garden at Abu Kabir. Every morning he goes to work at the Rina Smilansky Garden, where he tends to the grounds and plants, serves as a guide, and writes text accompanied by photographs that he takes of the garden.

**Grandmother** **Rina Smilansky, Moshe Smilansky's daughter and Rotem Reshef's grandmother,** was born and raised in Rehovot. She worked at the Volcani Institute and in the Jewish Agency's Settlement Department, and worked voluntarily for the public for many years. The Bible, the Hebrew language, the Israeli landscape and gardening were the main focuses of her life. After she passed away, the Rina Smilansky Garden was established in the city center in her memory.

becomes a tool for physical and emotional dialogue – between controlling and releasing, between holding onto reality and floating amongst fantasy worlds. The ability to control the liquid paint and the way in which it is represented on the canvas, merges with its free movement in the painting space. At the end of the creative process, the garden spread out on the canvas likewise offers a haven for observation, contemplation and silence.

\*\*\*

The story of Reshef's family – a local nature reserve of Yishuv pioneers – is also a story of Israeliness. Through the mark of the environment she grew up in, Reshef mirrors the history/present of a place that is changing by the moment, and offers up a personal call that is simultaneously a social-political call resounding in the Israeli place. By coining representations of reality she preserves memories of both physical and principled landscapes, energies and worlds that are disappearing – nature reserves that can regenerate and flourish, or fade away into extinction.

The installation ends with a triptych of paintings from the *Habitat* series. Three images: mother, father and daughter. Reshef and her parents, painted during the process of embedding their clothes on the canvas bed, dipped in representations of local flora like ghostly scarecrows, either guarding the garden or else vanishing into its midst.

**Merav Rahat**, Curator



# MomDadMe Rotem Reshef

**MomDadMe - Rotem Reshef** 🌸 Curator: Merav Rahat 🌸

Design: Dafna Graif 🌸 Hebrew editing: Goni Rader Weissman

🌸 English translation and editing: Margo Eyon 🌸

Photography: Youval Hai 🌸 Printing: A.R. Printing Ltd.

**MomDadMe** Installation:

Diluted acrylic & mixed media on canvas – 2017-2019

3 painting scrolls: **Orchard, MomDadMe, Gan** – 2017-2019

5 paintings: **Habitat Ima, Habitat Aba, Habitat Bat** – 2019

**Ghost Library #4** – 2017, **Ghost Library #11** – 2018

© 2019 Rotem Reshef. All rights reserved.

[www.rotemreshef.com](http://www.rotemreshef.com)

