

*Zigi Ben-Haim*

90 DAYS OF BERLIN

Drawings, Paintings & Sculpture

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STEFAN STUX GALLERY

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## Zigi Ben-Haim

Zigi Ben-Haim's recent series of drawings, paintings and sculpture address essential questions of proximity and distance, and the heterogeneous, constantly shifting layers of culture and meaning that fundamentally characterize contemporary life. Ben-Haim recently spent three months living and working in Berlin on a DAAD fellowship. Completing 90 drawings (in various mixed media) in 90 days on A4 size paper, he captured fragmentary impressions of this cosmopolitan city that is so rich in culture and history, (not to mention problematic questions of identity), ultimately generating a new body of work that serves as a simultaneously deep and jubilant exploration of the present moment, refracted through his experience of the city.

Ben-Haim's work embraces the contradictions inherent in this journey. Recognizing that no matter where you go, you bring your own past, your own identity and experiences with you, elements of his own iconic vocabulary rise to the surface in unexpected places. Glimpses of his stylized leaves and bricks, personal emblems developed in his earlier work, crop up in the midst of processed and distorted photographic images of the motifs he discovered in Berlin. While it is about his Berlin experience, traces of his cherished New York can't help but remain a part in his work. Layered across rows of aluminum tiles, hung together on metal hooks, in grids of industrial wire mesh and metal, in Ben-Haim's signature fashion, an organic whole is built of these visual fragments.

Fascinated with the rich and varied architecture of Berlin, Ben-Haim's new paintings manifest a strong architectonic structure, cutting through the grids of digital printing imagery with broad, dynamic shapes that simultaneously refer to modernist building forms, and the swaths cut by sidewalks beneath our feet. The strength of this body of work lies precisely in its ability to negotiate - and to find ways of clearly articulating - many levels of meaning, the accretions of so much history, while generating in the finished paintings a holistic, recognizable totality out of all this chaos. The drawings, which served as Ben-Haim's visual diary of his residency, and ultimately as studies for the paintings, are here presented pinned directly to the wall, the entire group identified by the artist as a single work, thereby reiterating the dialectical play of order and chaos that characterizes the work as a whole.

Raising humble subject matter to a level of heightened aesthetic attention - whether leaves or cobblestones or snippets of typography - Zigi Ben-Haim's work inventively recapitulates the contradictory character that marks contemporary life itself. Never shying away from the conundrum of conjoining the near and the far, the present and the past, and in this case, the German and the Jewish as well, this new body of work provocatively opens a novel space in which to experience the paradoxical, fragmented unity of contemporary life itself.

An established international artist for more than 30 years, Ben-Haim's work is in the collection of museums such as the Guggenheim, the Jewish Museum, the Brooklyn Museum, the Israel Museum, the Tel-Aviv Museum and in numerous public and private collections around the world. His public sculptures have been traveling and exhibited for last seven years in many locations throughout the U.S. and Israel. Thirteen of them are currently on view at the German Embassy in Washington, D.C.

Beth Wilson, Art Critic and Independent Curator