

Exor Galleries in Boca Raton Proves There Is Local Gallery Life

By Michael Mills

published: April 02, 2009



One of Sharon Karni's ventures into abstraction, *Breakers*.

Details:

"Into the Deep: Sharon Karni & Ari Hirschman" Through April 30 at Exor Galleries, Royal Palm Place, 291 Via Naranjas, Ste. 45A, Boca Raton. Call 561-361-7474, or visit exorgalleries.com.

A new gallery is always cause for rejoicing, especially in these uncertain times. And so it was with great pleasure that, after a series of miscommunications about my impending visit, I finally discovered [Exor Galleries](#), which just celebrated its first birthday in Boca Raton's Royal Palm Place.

Exor is really a refreshing two-in-one combination: the airy, well-lit main gallery and, a few doors down, an annex that's a suite of additional smaller rooms. The main gallery is currently home to **"Into the Deep: Sharon Karni & Ari Hirschman,"** which will eventually rotate to the supplementary display space of the annex. The work of Israeli artist Karni has little in common with that of Hirschman, an American based in Boca Raton. Each, however, complements the other beautifully, if somewhat oddly.

Karni's mixed-media paintings draw primarily on a palette of earth tones, augmented by some aqueous blues and pale greens. The nautical underpinnings of her work give the show its title and focus — while much of her output is abstract in varying degrees, what figuration there is involves ships and the paraphernalia of sailing.

Several of Karni's pieces, for instance, contain the notion of a porthole. *Window I-VI* is a suite of half a dozen 24-inch-square canvases, each with a big circle at its center. They display the heavily worked-over surfaces typical of Karni's work here, surfaces that

look to have been artificially aged, as if they're rust-encrusted or otherwise deteriorating. *Windows to the Sea* is a diptych of long, narrow canvases that form a variation on the same theme.

In *Breakers*, Karni goes for the feel of a boat's hull, which is more suggested than actually portrayed. And for the large, horizontal *Centurion 1740*, she ventures even further into abstraction, giving us what might be the nebulous remains of a ship, floating on the watery lower third of the canvas, which has been affixed with forms resembling barnacles. The artist's strength in these works is in her uneasy melding of abstraction and figuration, in which the two are held in unresolved flux. By way of contrast, *Water Remembrance*, which comes closer to being a more literal rendering of a boat, is not nearly as interesting.

She's better still when, as in *Returning From the Sea* and *Going Out to Sea*, she constructs her imagery with a garment of some sort as the base. The former painting, for instance, starts with what looks to be a fisherman's apron that has been spread out and flattened, then painted and manipulated to create a turbulent whirl of abstraction. From a slight distance, you probably won't even recognize that there's an item of clothing caught up in all the painterly activity. In the latter piece, the sleeves and buttons are still visible, although they tend to get lost in a sea of blue the color of oxidized copper.

That blue, and its earthy-colored surroundings, are just about the only clear visual link between Karni's work and that of Hirschman, whose sculptures here tend to draw on the same palette. Whereas Karni's paintings are utterly devoid of a distinct human presence other than those items of clothing left behind as remnants, Hirschman's metal-based sculptures are all but obsessed with human signifiers, specifically heads.

Hirschman, a conceptualist, is at his most arresting when he creates groupings of his elegant figurines, which consist of tall, thin rods of varying heights extending from cubed metal bases and ending in flattened metallic heads. Like people in social situations, the components of these works can be arranged and rearranged in various juxtapositions, depending on what the artist wishes to communicate. Sometimes Hirschman appends tiny masks on his little heads, which adds another layer to contemplate.

For the freestanding *It's Complicated* and its wall-mounted correlative, *A Bit Complicated*, Hirschman presents metal hammers and mallets along with gigantic nails, some of which are driven through big books and all of which have human faces. Given your predisposition to such conceptual whimsy, multiple readings of these pieces are possible.

I found less leeway for interpretation in a work like *As Time Goes By*. This elaborate construction consists of four low, long, narrow carts, connected like train cars, each bearing half a dozen rods leading up to small platforms holding tins full of human heads in various configurations. The tins, reminiscent of those you might get sardines in, are obviously laden with metaphorical import, and the whole enterprise might come off as heavy-handed if it weren't also so physically engaging — in short, the sculpture is just plain fun.

Like any good gallery, Exor has a few surprises stashed in its back room. The largest of the spaces in the annex now hosts the main gallery's previous show, featuring the work of American Terryl Best. Her perfectly competent but overly self-conscious tributes to the master artists who have influenced her left me cold, but there was more to see in the tiny spaces beyond.

A real find was a pair of still lifes by Hernan Miranda, a Paraguayan now living in the United States. Working so confidently in the tradition of photorealism that his work would fit right in a few miles up the road in the Boca Museum's photorealism survey, Miranda creates voluptuous surfaces that make you want to reach out and touch. He also incorporates texture by painting on fragments of tapestry instead of canvas, which proves to be a striking innovation. If Exor previously featured a Miranda exhibit and I missed it, shame on me; if the gallery has a solo show in the works, I can't wait to see it.