



John Byle, 'Dialog,' 1985, acrylic on canvas, 120 x 120 cm.

## It's all about color

■ By GIL GOLDFINE

The octogenarian painter John Byle shows himself, via his acrylic and oil paintings and works on paper, to be a lot younger in creative spirit than his 80 years. His current exhibition, *Between Concept and Image*, includes a sampling of his works of the past 20 years.

Entering the main gallery of the Zaritsky Artists House in Tel Aviv, the viewer is confronted by a small, glass-enclosed case in which Byle has installed three black-and-white prints created in 1954 describing whimsical, almost decorative, images of cats. Although these works on paper have little to do with the corpus of the exhibition, they provide an interesting prelude to understanding the dashing capricious canvases, most of which are ebullient colorful abstractions.

Byle, born in Detroit in 1928, studied at the Chicago Art Institute before immigrating to Israel in 1951. Involved in art education for most of his career, Byle was the head of the art department at the Bezalel Academy from 1967 to 1977, where he attained the position of full professor. Over the decade he maintained a particular manner of painting without diverting into alternate styles. His compositions are based on a craggy subdivision of the pictorial plane. In a dynamic fashion with lots of lines interspersing each other and planes



John Byle, 'Untitled,' 1982, acrylic on canvas, 40 x 40 cm.

overlapping, the larger shapes get smaller with each and every division, something like a pocketknife game of mumblety peg.

On the rare occasion Byle will allow a figurative element to emerge from his compositions, it is reduced, however, to basic geometric shapes without details and without anatomical references. *Dialog* (1985), an acrylic painting on fabric, is one such picture. Two individuals neutered and reduced to a series of rectangles and triangles are animated through a bombastic palette of raucous hues. Bright vermillion, cyan, Kelly green and violet form the core of the work with scores of tints and tones of each basic color adding a dynamic reso-

nance to the subjects.

These pure, sassy colors brushed on as flat opaque panels, diluted into thin washes and scumbled into visually active segments, weave their way in and out of most of Byle's paintings – sometimes more powerful, other times more diluted, but there nevertheless.

Another recurring feature of Byle's work, in addition to his being a 21st-century Fauve, is the diagonal lines his compositions run along. I can't remember seeing a Byle painting in which the underlying structure runs parallel to the picture's frame. This, of course, provides additional pictorial energy to the turbulence of his palette.

Above the trio of cats mentioned above are three small paintings that run contrary to Byle's major oeuvre. Although his basic premise of deconstructing the surface into small and large segments has been retained, this untitled triptych from 1982 has none of the virulent color schemes that sparkle in the rest of the exhibition. They are subdued canvases controlled by a panel of pale beige, whitish tones and a fairly comprehensive scale of the color turquoise.

In one square, there also seems to be the skeletal image of a couple, but they have been analyzed and understated to the point that their human features become more a figment of one's imagination than a mirror of reality.

This exhibition is by no means a retrospective of Byle's 60 years working as a painter and muralist. There is a corner in the exhibition devoted to several mural designs he created for interiors, including *Chaos and Insight*, a comprehensive mural installed in the Brenda-Moss Library of the Tel Aviv University.

Describing his composition for this work, which is based on the shape of an open book or butterfly wings, Byle said, "Man searches for meaning and order in the chaos of his surroundings. The scientist, the poet, the philosopher, the theologian and the artist – all seek, in their own ways, meaning and order."

Throughout the mural, a red circle – evoking a computer disk – appears and symbolizes the growth of knowledge. The theory of chaos is half-jokingly referred to as the butterfly effect. ■

Zaritsky Artists Pavilion, Rehov Alharizi 9, Tel Aviv. (03) 524-6685. Monday to Thursday, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.; Friday, Saturday, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.