

Israeli artist making American debut at Beach

By MARLENE FORD
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The oil paintings of Israeli artist Raya Talmor are hanging in the Birdneck Road gallery of Durwood Zedd Co. after a long journey and struggle to get them here.

A week ago the 11 scenes of Middle Eastern landscapes and a contrasting series of Manhattan scenes were unceremoniously propped against a random collection of chairs at the gallery. And seven days before that, the same pictures, packed in shipping crates, were somewhere between Virginia Beach and the Kibbutz Yagur in the foothills of the Carmel Mountains in Israel.

Tucked into each crate, between every painting, was a little scrap of paper scribbled with a hasty "good luck" in Hebrew.

"I send my children in wooden boxes," said Talmor, delicately shaping each word. "So I put 'luck' on paper. Like the (Wailing) Wall in Jerusalem, you know which wall, where people slip little notes of prayer."

Talmor is a successful artist and art teacher in her homeland. "Ah, but in Israel everybody knows everybody," Talmor said. "Everything is small except the people." So the artist, who followed her paintings to this country, is now anxious to have her "children" appreciated by those in a much larger land.

The monthlong exhibit of oil paintings by Talmor marks her American debut.

Talmor is tall, dark and a mixture of the exotic and cosmopolitan. During an interview last week she wore



Staff photo by PAT TY DIRIEN '80

Israeli artist Raya Talmor discusses some of her works, which are on display in Virginia Beach.

a loose black jersey dress with a green silk blouse casually over it like a jacket. Her eyes were always intent, looking to see if her English was being understood.

While the visiting artist posed for photographs in front of several of

her paintings, she explained why she was here in Virginia Beach for the show's opening. Also, she spoke about what it is like to be an artist in Israel and about her style of painting.

"You say my name R-r-r-ry-a

Talmor-r-r. Or just Ry-a," she said with an American snap, dropping all the trill of r's.

"We are second generation in Israel now. My mother was from Poland, my father from Brussels. They were really pioneers. The first

fighters they had to do were with swamps and mosquitoes," she said proudly.

Talmor was born at the Kibbutz Ein Hahoresh in 1933. She can

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trace her interest in art to her father, who brought with him the European ideal of culture, and to a schoolteacher who encouraged her.

However, she also acknowledged that while there is historically a long progression of Hebrew traditions, her native country's artistic heritage is not always so obvious in modern day Israel.

"I am sorry to say art is not the most important subject of schools. Israel is also a very practical country, counting its money and putting art to the side," she said.

In spite of this or because of this Talmor decided to study art.

"But first we stop everything at 18 and go into the army," she said.

"I was a lieutenant, a cultural lieutenant, you know," she said raising a finger to point out the cultural aspect of her job.

"We brought popular art, lectures to the army, almost everything in life that was cultural.

"To fight in the field, to fight with Arabs, no. The girls trained with guns, but did other important jobs," she said.

"After the army I became married with my dear husband, who has to stay in Israel. I also decided to study art and become an art teacher to be sure of a salary," Talmor said.

Talmor graduated from the Art Institute at Oranim in 1961. She completed her B.A. in creative art at Haifa University in 1975 and received her M.A. for art studies at Haifa.

The artist currently teaches at Haifa University as well as in a junior and senior high school.

In the middle of introducing herself and her works, Talmor looked back at her landscapes and also recalled she is the mother of three, not children like her paintings, but real children."

"It is morning here, but in Israel it is Friday night. All the family will be coming home for dinner," she said.

One daughter is a student at Haifa University, her son is in the army and her other daughter is still in high school, but "she will serve her two years in the army, too."

For Talmor, being a teacher has several purposes. It allows her to be an artist 24 hours a day, to teach a common art to a country of newcomers and to allow her to make a serious contribution to her kibbutz.

A kibbutz is like a commune. No one has private property, but its members live together contributing their finances and abilities for the good of all. Security, health care and education are provided by the organization.

"The kibbutz — sometimes a problematic, problem to artists," said Talmor.

In a structure that values such total equality and group dependence, highly individualistic artists find themselves frequently at odds or at least limited.

However, Talmor has shown the kibbutz leaders that as an artist she should receive some special concessions. Her dedicated teaching, free contribution of art knowledge to commune members and recent critical approval of her work in Israel have helped to win her this special favor.

She has her own studio provided by Kibbutz Yagur. Talmor proudly displayed color snapshots of herself in a very large and bright studio.

"This is a wonderful studio. I say

always it is in 'American style,'" she said.

The kibbutz also permitted and financed a four-month study period for her in New York in 1984. She explained to the kibbutz that to teach art, she should see the originals of masterpieces, rather than always working from pictures and slides. Talmor also wanted to live and work among other artists for a period.

Her American debut as an artist was also by permission of her kibbutz.

"First we thought we would just send the painting without me," the artist said. To come to the United States for the show would very obviously put Talmor in a different position from the other kibbutz members. "And we are a common society," she stressed.

After several months of correspondence from the Durwood Zedd gallery and from the Virginia Beach businesswoman who had arranged the show and after some convincing arguments from Talmor to the kibbutz secretary, Talmor was given permission and the funds to come.

"Always it has been a kind of fight, struggle. I've needed to work very hard to prove I am serious about art and to be known as an artist," Talmor said. "Maybe next year I will be allowed to be just an artist."

Since 1975 Talmor has exhibited one-woman shows in Israel's largest cities: Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Haifa. She has also participated in many group showings throughout the country.

The main subjects of her works at the Virginia Beach Gallery are Israeli landscapes, a set of Manhattan paintings from 1984 and several biblical subjects.