

More than little green men

The Bezalel MFA Gallery in Tel Aviv is giving space to students' imaginations

• By DAVID STROMBERG

Sculptors Boaz Kadman and Lihi Chen have been peers throughout their undergraduate and graduate art studies, and their ongoing dialogue has been not only personal but artistic. For the first time they turn this dialogue public – in the form of a curated exhibition at the Bezalel MFA Gallery in Tel Aviv – and we learn that their latest subject is science fiction.

"We tried to think about the essence of sci-fi and less of its symbols," says Chen, whose work consists of installations with a fetishistic attention to surface and detail. "To focus on what the genre forces the writer, the director – or in this case, the artist – to think about. And then we tried to see whether an artist can create a science-fiction artwork."

The result is an exhibit titled Real Sci-Fi, for

which Chen and Kadman went searching for art that was aiming to engage with reality in an innovative or inventive way.

"If you leave out fantasy and escapism, you're talking about making art," says Kadman, whose works have varied from small-scale collage and poetic Hebrew cut-ups, to large gallery, museum and site-specific installations. "Sci-fi is like a model or map: You lose a lot of details to have a bigger view."

Chen and Kadman sought out works that were fascinated with technology, including some aspect or result of it, and which, like literary science-fiction, would reflect where and when it was made.

In science-fiction literature, the sense of time seems to be paradoxical. "[Sci-fi] is about trying to think of what would happen next,"

says Kadman. "But isn't that futile? Shouldn't we deal with the now?" Yet he suggests that the "now" is inescapable, and that this kind of exploration helps "widen the spectrum of what we think about beyond the minimum, beyond just what's necessary."

One example is Rotem Tamir's balloon-making machine, which involves mechanics and chemistry and which Kadman jokingly dubs "stupid science." The mechanism is used to make rubber from scratch, form it into a double-holed balloon with a tube on each end and then pump air into it until it pops. There's a sort of "experiment" involved in which the artist measures how large the balloon gets before it bursts. The process repeats indefinitely.

The work's lo-fi quality is important for the show as Kadman and Chen were interested in things that a person could do alone, through personal effort and without a big production. As Kadman puts it, "It's a question of: what can I actually do?"

He adds: "We use cars and jets, but we don't know how they work technologically. Which explains why we're excited when we see a slide projector. It's not just nostalgia – like seeing a windmill – but we can actually see how it works."

He gives the additional example of a washing machine: "First someone made a rotating drum. Someone else made better detergent. There were a lot of inputs. No one teaches you who invented the washing machine, but it's a very-complicated machine, and they're everywhere."

It may seem silly, but it illustrates a deeper point: "It's about learning to participate in something larger."

In art, this participation can be quite literal: In *Judean Desert*, Karin Mendelovici took a photo of the hilly landscape familiar to many of us – one which already resembles the popular idea of a barren distant planet – and stuck several clumps of yellow putty in a few places. Suddenly we not only imagine an alien terrain, we realize that in our imagination the simplest material can be turned into some creature inhabiting that terrain. Despite its "simplicity," this action has the capacity not only to alter the landscape, it can even turn into a challenge of that landscape's presumed sanctity.

"It has to do with a relationship to society," says Kadman. "It's the model of a place that supposedly doesn't exist and people who sup-



Sharon Glazberg, 'Black Moon and Dead Sea,' 2003, lamda print, 70 cm. x 50 cm.



Gil Lavi, 'Black Butterflies,' 2008, collage and marker on cardboard, 13 cm. x 17 cm.