



Lamm and Velich Studio

Amnon Ben Ami and one of his winning works, "Philadendrum."

## Bezalel awards \$20,000 prize for 'absurd' but 'poetic' paintings

By Daniel Rauchwerger

Artist Amnon Ben Ami was declared the winner this week of the first ever annual Ilana Elovic Bezalel Prize for Painting, awarded jointly by the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design and the Elovic family. The prize consists of a \$20,000 monetary grant, a solo exhibition at the Bezalel Gallery in Jerusalem this coming November and an accompanying catalogue.

Ben Ami, 57, a graduate of Bezalel, beat out 150 other artists with impressive resumes to take home the prize. "Amnon Ben-Ami is a fascinating artist who expands the definition of the field of 'painting' and challenges the conventions about him," wrote the members of the jury. "On the one hand, his paintings are based on a conceptual and intellectual approach, on in-depth thought and an attempt to clarify concepts and experiences such as 'vision' or 'color' and on the study of topics in the field of painting. On the other hand, his paintings radiate a sensuous enthusiasm for color, and for the mere movement of the brush and the creation of the image on the canvas. It seems that everything in his environment, banal as it may be, becomes part of a relentless process of creating a coherent work of art."

The jurors went on to note that Ben Ami's works are ostensibly absurd and nihilistic in their reductive simplicity but at the same time express a provocative and poetic richness, and show a tremendous love of painting, wisdom and creativity alongside theoretical depth.

Ben Ami has had one-man shows at various artists' workshops and galleries and won several awards, including one in 2008 from the Culture Ministry for the encouragement of creativity. His most recent exhibition was his "Artist Wall" at the Artists' Workshops in Jerusalem this year, which was preceded by an exhibition at the Artists' Workshops in Tel Aviv in 2010.

The judging committee was made up of representatives of the Elovic family, Bezalel president Prof. Arnon Zuckerman, Sotheby's Israel chair Rivka Saker, curator Yigal Zalmona and artists Prof. Nahum Tevet and Michal Rovner.

The Ilana Elovic Bezalel Prize for Painting was launched in memory of Ilana Elovic, who passed away in 2006 after a battle with cancer. Her husband said the prize is a fitting tribute to his late wife and to her "exceptional artistic talents." Elovic worked in various media, including painting, ceramics, glass and jewelry.