The Sea Was a Mirror / Matan Ben-Tolila

"The sea was a mirror" is a familiar expression describing a calm, smooth sea, inviting leisurely swimming and perhaps quiet, contemplative drifting.

This exhibition presents two series of paintings: ***The Rower***, in which the artist paints himself rowing through the sea that becomes a mirror to his inner consciousness; and the later series, ***Light on the Water***.

Carl Gustav Jung wrote that "*The sea is the favorite symbol for the unconscious, the mother of all that lives*," and it is one of the most common symbols of our collective unconscious. These days are filled with constant battles; terror, anxiety, and anguish grip each and every one of us, and our shared consciousness, here in this place, finds little rest.

As you look at this sea, of day and night, it is not calm, smooth, or tranquil. The solitary rower swims within its depths, surrounded by its threatening blood-red waters. Even when the upper currents clear again beneath the sunlight, the crimson sediments that once filled them still flow in the depths below. And in those deep waters deprived of sunlight, where darkness steadily gathers, the skies above still cast their rays, perhaps the last light of sunset, perhaps the afterglow of bloodshed, across ominous currents.

Yet in the series ***Light on the Water***, the rower has detached from the self, shed the body that once contained him. He swam far, far away. Here, in the depths, the self has released from the body and immerses itself in light. The body disappears, and with it, the terrors of the unconscious.

Here the brushstrokes reveal the painters gaze, delighting in the light falling upon the water: shimmering glimmers, gentle ripples spreading outward, sprays and droplets. Is it light, or water? A line that is color or color that is line? Space containing nothing but color, wash, and beauty itself.

Light on the Water belongs to a long tradition of painting that observes the reflection of light upon water. While these paintings depict the image of reflected light, they moreover invite the viewer to contemplate the very act of seeing: the moment in which eye, light, and the pleasure between them unite.

Look at the line stretched across every canvas, separating sea from sky. The artist acts as the Creator of the world. For the line dividing sea from sky is itself the act of creation: the act of painting. That primordial line marks the separation through which the world itself was created.

And God said, "Let there be a vault between the waters to separate water from water." So God made the vault and separated the water under the vault from the water above it. And it was so. God called the vault "sky." (Genesis, 1: 6-8).

Tsila Hayun, writer and multi-disciplinary curator