

## “Half of them dreams...” | Ruth Cohen and Esther Cohen

A duo exhibition at The Bialik House Museum | The Second Floor

Ayelet Bitan Shlonsky – Chief Curator and Director of the Bialik House Complex

Dr. Smadar Sheffi – Exhibition Curator

October 2021

*On this tapestry, all of it blue of firmament and green of grass, are now woven the sights of my world in those early days..., half riddle-me-ree and half dream...*

-- Bialik, *Safiah [Aftergrowth]*, Chapter I, p. 42\*

Modes of reading and decoding visual and written language are the focus of the exhibition “**Half of them dreams...**” Esther Cohen’s series of works refer to Haim Nachman Bialik’s poetic autobiographical novella *Aftergrowth* published serially in Hebrew (1908-1934).

**Esther Cohen** embarks on an artistic journey through her heritage, personal and collective memories, circles of family, community, tradition, religion, and history of Israeli, Yemenite, and European art. The journey is shared with her mother, **Ruth Cohen** showing dense, colorful pattern drawings. **Danny Cohen**, Esther’s father, participates through his contribution of a lexicon of Aramaic, his mother tongue, on display as an alphabet book drawn by Esther, homage to Zeev Raban’s Hebrew alphabet book for children.

In *Aftergrowth*, Bialik describes his memory of learning to read as an encounter between the letter as a consensual sign and the letter as form, the sign as a key to an associative flow.

Other works in the exhibition by Esther are drawings of Yemenite jewelry and Yemenite Jewish amulets, plants, and details of nature and of fine metalwork, rendered in ballpoint pen and ink. Esther Cohen researches through the act of drawing, isolating objects and formal motifs, marking points of encounter between the symbolic, magical, faith, and daily life.

The exhibition integrates artworks in different modes into a place that is an outgrowth of reality and memory, but also remains half enigma and “half dream.”

**Dr. Smadar Sheffi**

\* *English quotations from Hayyim Nahman Bialik, Aftergrowth and other Stories. Translated from the Hebrew by J.M. Lask, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1939).*

\*\* *Zeev Raban (1890-1970) designed the beautiful ceramic tiles in the living room in Beit Bialik.*