

## Michal Luft | Still-Life Aided

19.9.19–9.11.19 | Curator: Maya Frenkel Tene

The concept of *Vanitas* ("Vanity of vanities. All is vanity,") is mostly identified with allegorical Still-Life paintings, which gained their popularity in Spain and The Netherlands during the 17th century. These paintings depict commonplace objects originally intended for leisure and pleasure, like musical instruments, wine goblets, decorative artifacts and different food dishes– all reflecting the luxurious lifestyle of the Middle Class of the era. In many of the Still Life paintings, elements of decay and death appear as reminders of the fleeting moment. In a well-known painting by Philippe de Champaigne from 1671 ,an hourglass, a skull and a single flower are set side by side on a table, symbolizing the passing of time, impending death and the transience of life.

Michal Luft's installation is an ironic and somewhat bleak paraphrase on Still Life, a form of contemporary *Vanitas* if you will. In the center of her tamed-looking space, in what appears to be a generic setting, hangs one single image – a vase with a flower bouquet in it, sealed in an air-tight packaging. This aggressive mummifying act of sealing the live flowers speaks to the familiar medical procedures aimed at conserving, tucking-in, lifting and augmenting the body. The image of the air-tight packaged flowers on the one hand invokes sensuality and attracts us, yet on the other, it appears artificial and ornate, reminding us of our contemporary culture of excess. The anxiety of aging, coupled with the desire for eternal youth is what turns the wheels of the beauty industry, which floods our visual space with manipulated images, that maintain and preserve the illusion of slowing down time. In her attempt to preserve the youth and liveliness of the flowers, Luft offers a treatment that is bound to fail. The flowers' unavoidable withering will start once crevices and wrinkles form inside the tight bag, and cause it to lose its grip, decline and crumble.

Michal Luft (b. 1989), is a graduate of Shenkar Multidisciplinary Art School (B.A., 2018). She is a recipient of America-Israel Cultural Foundation Award for young artists and The Margaret and Sylvan Adams Exhibition Award for an Emerging Artist. Her work was recently included in *Zoom 2019 – Young Israeli Artists* at The Steinhardt Museum of Natural History, Tel Aviv, and in *Surfacing*, an exhibition of art school graduates 2015–2018 at Sklar Levy Gallery, Modiin. Her work was featured in *The Greenhouse pavilion* of Fresh Paint Art Fair, Tel Aviv, 2019.