



THE MISERIES OF WAR RONI TAHARLEV

Roni Taharlev is an Israeli artist with a primary focus on the human figure. Born in Kibbutz Yagur (1964), having raised four children in a small village up in the hills of Western Galilee, she now lives and works in the mixed town, with both Jews and Israeli Palestinians, of Jaffa near Tel Aviv. Specializing in painting human figures from observation, Taharlev wishes to observe women's bodies from a 21st-century female viewpoint. She shows women and gender-fluid bodies without the cultural constraints that Western civilization places on them. Taharlev's intimate relationship with the traditions of Western art leads her to place models in classically derived poses while subtly altering the bodily effects of these poses. Taharlev has exhibited in various museums in Israel and around the world, including the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, The Israel Museum, the National Portrait Gallery in London, and an exhibition at the galleries nationales du Grand Palais in Paris. Recent exhibitions have been concerned with how bodies are gendered and with the social and cultural expectations from supposedly gendered bodies, reflecting relations of power in 21st-century contexts. In 2022, she was awarded the Haim Shiff Prize for Figurative-Realist Art, Israel's most significant award in this field, which also led to a year-long solo exhibition in 2023–2024, disrupted by the war of the 7th of October. Taharlev teaches painting and drawing at the Bezalel Academy of Art in Jerusalem. – Address: 19 Yehuda Meragusa Street, Jaffa, 6813615, Israel. E-mail: rtaharlev@gmail.com.

At Wiko, I continued a series of paintings that began on October 7, exploring the fear embedded in the feminine body. It was an extraordinary privilege and an immense inspiration, one that even now, two months after returning to Israel, continues to shape my work.

At Wiko, I was developing an exhibition conceived as a total space embodying the fear in the feminine body. The walls are dedicated to the idea of the female body as a war zone. The total space is completed with a ceiling, one that transforms the space into a contemporary “Miseries of War” painting in the tradition of Goya and of Picasso’s *Guernica*: a vision of the horrors of war as seen through the female gaze, or more precisely, through the feminine body: the passive side of war.

This ceiling is inspired by Giambattista Tiepolo’s depictions of biblical massacres, especially *The Scourge of the Serpents* (*Castigo dei Serpenti*, ca. 1730). The influence of Wiko, with its quiet, light-filled atmosphere and its profound respect for creativity, gave me both the mental space and the courage to envision this radical expansion of my project.

The privilege of being at Wiko was extraordinary. The beauty of the place, the indefatigable support of the team, staff, and Fellows, and the faith in the significance of creative and spiritual work allowed me to dedicate myself fully to painting. This immersion opened new avenues of thought—and not only thought. Subtle changes in perception and palette occurred: the green light filtering through the Grunewald trees seeped into my paintings, leaving a lasting mark. These seemingly minor shifts led to profound changes in my work and enabled me to complete my *Swing* series, which had been my initial goal.

But 2025 was also a painful year, following a previous year of difficulty and loss. The public and the personal intertwined. Even I, usually secluded in my studio reflecting on femininity and women, found myself drawn into the public sphere, driven to paint the female body as a site of war as an immediate response to the horrific acts committed against women on October 7, 2023 and the suffering of women on both sides in the war that followed. I felt conflicted: painting, for me, is intimate, personal, and ambiguous, not a public statement. And yet the confusion after October 7 blurred the boundaries between private and public, between the small-scale and the monumental.

At Wiko, these tensions were palpable. I had been at Wiko before, in 2020, as the spouse of my partner Dror Wahrman. That year—cut short by COVID—was full of conversations about climate, Borges, Freud, Assyrian gods, legal models, mosses, bees, and miniature gems. Detached from the world, it embodied the full glory of the ivory tower.

This year was different. War and politics invaded the Colloquia, just as they invaded my studio. Gaza and Israel, Ukraine, Iran, blood libels, expulsions, genocides—these were no longer abstractions but urgent presences. I am not surprised, but wistful, since there was something to be marveled at, something pure and magnificent, in the academic peacock tail that soared above any immediately useful imperative and sported the

privilege to shine with no apparent reason. Or as I once heard a woman utter in a vaporetto in Venice while looking at the labyrinth of canals: “Venice is not practical.” And for me Wiko was Venice, and painting is Venice; and Venice is not practical. But when so many young girls are raped and killed, and so many children and people are dying of hunger or bombs, and the whole world is on the brink and stunned into silence, it is not the right moment for Venice.

And yet, despite the heaviness of this year, the experience was invaluable. The ceiling project—born at Wiko and shaped by the spirit of Tiepolo—is the outcome of this tension: between ivory tower and war zone, between Venice and catastrophe, between the private intimacy of painting and the public weight of history. For this, and for the extraordinary privilege of time, reflection, and support, I am deeply grateful.