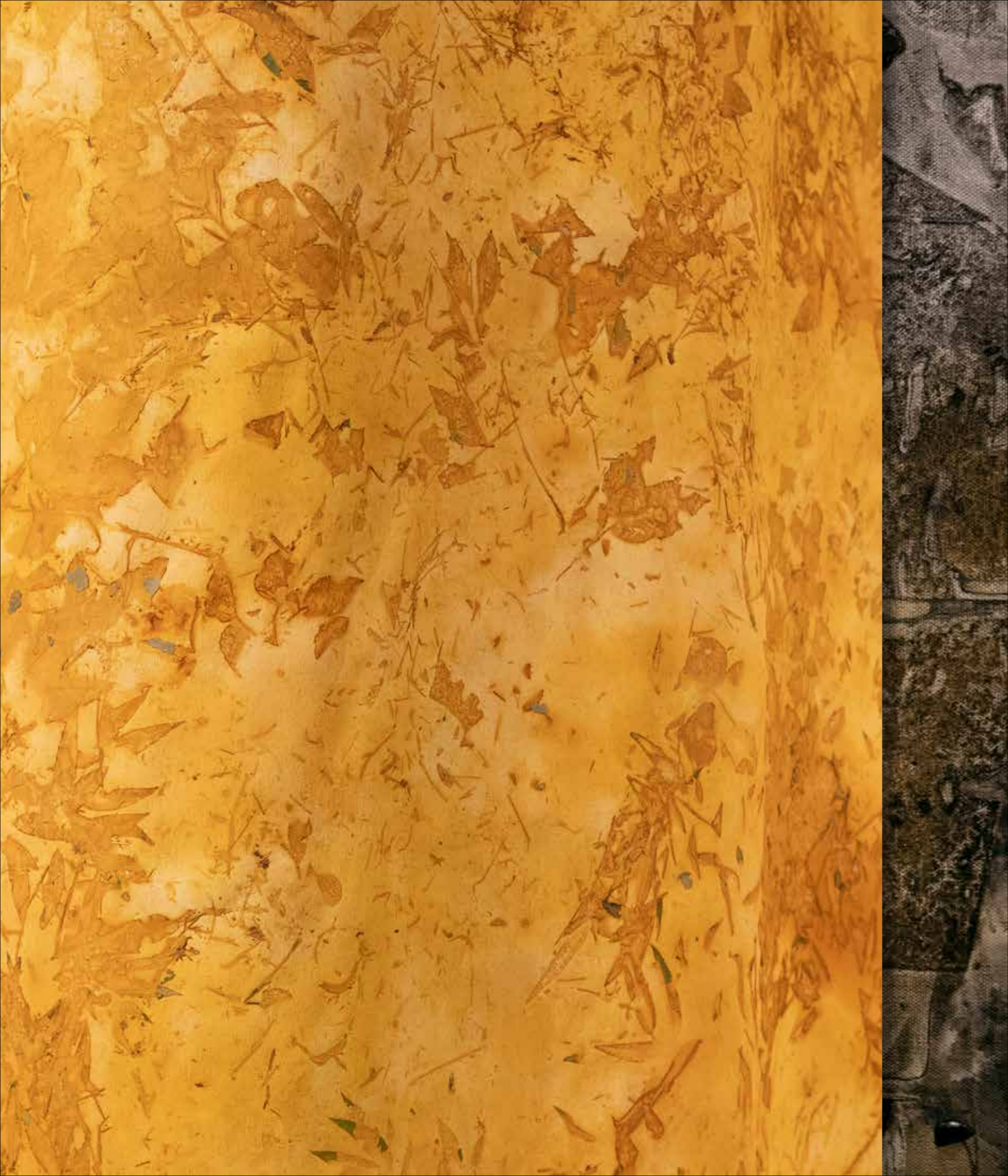




ROTEM RESHEF: VISTA



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Rotem Reshef

Vista

January 26 – September 6, 2023

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Printing: A.R. Printing Ltd.

This exhibition was organized by Bakersfield Museum of Art, with assistance from Rachel McCullah Wainwright, Sagi Refael, and Peter Frank

Presented by the City of Bakersfield, with additional support from California Resources Corporation.

Bakersfield Museum of Art (BMoA) strives to enhance the quality of life through art appreciation and educational opportunities in the visual arts for Bakersfield and Kern County residents and visitors. For over 60 years, BMoA has provided outstanding exhibits and offered unique educational opportunities in the visual arts to Bakersfield and its surrounding communities.

BMoA's mission is to inspire and engage diverse audiences by providing a broad spectrum of creative visual arts experiences through the exhibition and preservation of fine art, educational programs, community outreach and special events.

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ISBN: 979-888895319-8



Vista, 2022, (Left to right in gallery space):

Grayish Green I, 72 x 172 in / 1.83 x 4.37 m | **Gray**, 84 x 332 in / 2.13 x 8.43 m | **Ocher**, 84 x 222 in / 2.13 x 5.64 m | **Grayish Green II**, 72 x 342 in / 1.83 x 8.7 m | **Grayish Green III**, 72 x 283 in / 1.83 x 7.25 m | **Carbon Black**, 10 units, 24 x 36 in / 60 x 91.5 cm each | **Yellow-Gray Trail**, 62 x 252 in / 158 x 6.4 m | **Brown**, 84 x 263 in / 2.13 x 6.93 m | **Stone**, 84 x 396 in / 2.13 x 10 m | **Grayish Green IV**, 72 x 172 in / 1.83 x 4.37 m | **Blue-Green**, 84 x 623 in / 2.13 x 15.5 m | **Green-Blue**, 84 x 455 in / 2.13 x 11.5 m

All works are diluted acrylic and mixed media on canvas



A work of art sets out to transport the viewer; a color plucks an emotion, an image evokes a memory, and an object's physicality jolts our understanding of space and form. This exchange requires participation by way of intrigue or engagement. Yet, the site-specific installations of Rotem Reshef are so intentionally designed that upon entering, the viewer has no choice but to surrender to the experience, an encounter reminiscent of entering the circular galleries that house the Water Lilies paintings at the Musée de l'Orangerie (conceived by Claude Monet). Reshef's beautifully painted canvas scrolls organically hang from the gallery ceilings and walls, carefully manipulated to create shapes and paths informed by the natural world. The construction defies the intended floor plan with serpentine canvas-covered structures that break the space just as a body of water does with the landscape. Initially enveloped by pure scale, nature is overtly conveyed through color and the ghost-like shadows of plant cuttings, which make their way through the gradient washes of pigment. Reshef's visual language brazenly unites nature, process, and feminist thought, revealing an inherent interest in eco-feminism.

This body of work evolved from Reshef's desire to unite her art practice with activism. In Hebrew, the word "Tikkun" means to amend or fix, and as a painter and installation artist, Reshef is looking for ways to heal our environment—natural and human—by reflecting on ecological themes. Though united in awareness and process, the specific subject matter addressed varies and is explicitly determined by where the installation occurs. Each installation communicates a value of place by employing plant life from the region and addressing geographically specific issues.

With a studio practice that implements "action painting" and is nomadic by design, Reshef begins painting once the native foliage is collected. The scrolls are unrolled, and the plant matter is delicately placed with composition in mind. Each color references the landscape and is communicated by diluted paint (mixed in found water bottles) that is poured with giant sweeping motions and manipulated directly onto each canvas. Once dry, the organic matter is removed, and the canvas section is rolled up so the next section can be completed.

Vista at Bakersfield Museum of Art (Bakersfield, CA) marks Rotem Reshef's first solo museum exhibition on the west coast. Nestled in the central valley of California, Bakersfield's primary economic drivers are oil and agriculture. This is made abundantly clear in the landscape, which is sprinkled with oil derricks and groves of citrus and nut trees. Aside from a few devoted



Panorama Vista Preserve, Bakersfield, CA 2022. Photo: Rotem Reshef

parklands, these industries (and years of drought) have jeopardized the existence of native plants. In recent years, and through private and public initiatives, restoration efforts have focused on balancing this inequity. Upon Reshef's initial visit to the area, she took immediate inspiration from the Panorama Vista Promenade and Preserve, a park designed to regenerate native plant life. Yet, the "vista" in the distance is covered with thousands of oil derricks and a mostly dry river bed.

This duality is compassionately explored in **Vista**; the landscape's tonalities are reduced to washes of color that elegantly transition between each canvas scroll. Native plants of the region are celebrated as their outlines bring rhythm and movement to the manufactured landscape. In the gallery's center, a blue-green organically-formed monolith is marked with the remnants of water plants that struggle to exist. The installation is punctuated by surfaces washed with black and gold, and instead of a texture derived from the foliage, plastic wrapping are used to imprint and leave their mark. Upon entering, Reshef's **Vista** cocoons the viewer and elegantly presents the ecological complexities in the Central Valley. This thoughtful, carefully designed space is an homage to the surrounding environment.

Rachel McCullah Wainwright, Curator









ROTEM RESHEF: VISTA RECOGNITA

By **Peter Frank**

It might seem strange to think of an installation artwork, especially one engulfing most of the museum space provided it, as a "portrait." Then again, it is rather unusual to essay a portrait of a place as opposed to one of a person. Landscape paintings depicting highly specific locales (such as the Impressionists excelled at) could be considered place-portraits; but evocations of atmosphere, topography, and structure – real phenomena occurring in coherent space – afford a very different kind of cognitive experience than do persons bedecked with things and occupying (likely fictitious) chambers designed to define those persons. In a curious way, an installation can even come closer, in terms of somatic experience, to manifesting "portraits of places" than can more purely pictorial renditions of locations. No matter how vivid an environment looks, it seems more vivid when felt beyond the eyes.

With "Vista," Rotem Reshef portrays Bakersfield – from the inside out. Reshef does not simply look at the city, she re-embodies its salience. "Vista" brings forth the inner dynamic of a municipality that encompasses and embraces both nature and industry, a town in which extractive commerce is integral to the ecosphere. Reshef does not judge this reality, but recapitulates it, presenting – re-presenting – its bifurcated but intertwined material dynamic as a physical presence, a textured form whose uncanny syncretism can be physically conjured through aesthetic investigation – and vice versa.

Lest it sound as if Reshef were having to walk a tightrope between local business and environmental interests, it should be clarified that she seeks not to satisfy all sides but to regard and present the equilibrium all sides have already established – in effect translating a social and scientific discourse into aesthetic sensation. The installation's title, "Vista," refers to "Panorama Vista Preserve," the name of the recently established park occupying just under 1000 acres on the northeast side of town. Panorama Vista is primarily a nature preserve, one under constant modification as it becomes a regional locus for the concentrated cultivation of native, and in many cases threatened, flora and fauna. At the same time, the site memorializes the emergence of Bakersfield and the surrounding area as a community, one known for agriculture but even more for fossil fuel extraction. Oil was one of southern California's leading products a century ago; Los Angeles gradually outgrew its petroleum industry, but in Kern County and the lower San Joaquin Valley it remains an economic mainstay.

In her painting installations Reshef looks for circumstances, historical and contemporary. And in those circumstances she identifies social and economic factors not as antagonists but as coeval practices, practices which may or may not be harmonious but which can complement

one another in current contexts. Reshef alludes to discrete but simultaneous conditions and standpoints, not to judge them so much as to share them with us so as to prompt our own investigation. Reshef provides the metaphors, we pursue the comprehensions.

As in all her previous installations, Reshef has built "Vista" out of studio and at-hand materials, the latter taken from or based on the organic and inorganic substances that comprise the spaces and the circumstances in question. She weaves tapestries of vegetation, balanced with expanses of petroleum products (e.g. plastic wrappings, acrylics, fluids). Nature is described in this context as a sensuous web – and so is industry. We may personally prefer the feel of sticks and soil to sticky oil, but the artist brings forth the haptic quality of everything comprising the equation. We must feel as well as see our way to an evaluation which itself points to an at least temporary resolution.

Reshef's approach, then, is to render the Panorama Vista, and Bakersfield and environs more generally, as both an abstraction, a rendering of visual and material essences, and a real (if not quite natural) depiction. The character of the place is defined by the character of the space and its myriad substances and components. But we do not see houses or birds or oil rigs or flowers in Reshef's "Vista," we see the ambience they contribute to. This ambience is a distillation of life into a body-enveloping visual flow, a granular tapestry that presents itself as a synecdoche for the intricate realities of Bakersfield.

In composing this elaborate sensorium, this re-embodiment of the city that lies outside the doors of the museum, Reshef has allowed herself to become something of an Impressionist painter herself. There is something proto-modern about her artistic ambitions, and her knowing conflation of painterly virtuosity and presentation of spectacle. For all their literal incorporation of natural and manmade elements and materials, Reshef's installations seem profoundly painterly. They present our eyes with expanses of modulated color and agitated texture, they buzz with evocation of the perceived world even as they blanket their space with abstract gesture, their surfaces brim with physicality. They take off from the seen and known world, but like Monet's Water Lilies, they ultimately carry us away from the shapes and scales we know our world by.

Reshef does not simply work like a painter, she thinks like one – and very deliberately cultivates the mystique of observation and rendition that underlies the act of painting. "The scenery is striking," she writes of Bakersfield and its region. "Hills and valleys in all shades of yellow, brown and gray, with strokes of green and dots of black oil pumps throughout,

scattered around." This aestheticized point of view permits her, and us, a less judgmental grasp of the socioeconomic realities on which she reflects, pointing her gaze and ours at an analysis pretty much unburdened by ideology, or at least untethered to it. She is more artistic reporter than polemicist, setting for us the scene that exists rather than the scene that should. This is not to claim Reshef is naive about the landscape she has put herself before, nor that its protagonists are. The topography, its glories and its scars, readily evinces the drama of its siting, and "Vista" brings attention to this drama by articulating it in a more focused and rarefied way – a way that relies on the nomadic nature of both artist and art object to bring a fixed site forward.

And yet, Reshef provides us with a grand and vital spectacle, vast and encompassing like its cumulative subject, presenting today's Bakersfield and today's Kern County not as sites of contention and conflict, potential or actual, but of coordination and compromise. She may not make a peaceable kingdom of her panorama, but in reviving the cineramic grandeur of pre-modern panorama painting itself, Reshef reminds us that our post-agricultural – perhaps counter-natural – struggles with and over the land emerged with the Industrial Revolution and persisted in the post-slavery colonialism that determined the arc of human history in the 19th century. By manifesting an understanding of given realities as the residue of human decisions both two centuries and two months old, Rotem Reshef reveals herself as that most abstract of artists, a painter of time.

Los Angeles
December 2022













