



RISA BROOKE OZE at 'Kat World.' With 'Meow York Times Mourns the Demise of Khatmeini' illustrating propaganda's strange glamour. (Photos: Yaakov Blumenthal)

'Kat World'

Artist Risa Brooke Oze brings her whiskered satire to Nahalat Binyamin

• ERICA SCHACHNE

On a typically sizzling summer weeknight, the bar-and-restaurant strip of Tel Aviv's historic Nahalat Binyamin near the Carmel Shuk got a little more colorful – and a lot more feline. Friends and admirers packed in to see the latest paintings from mixed-media artist Risa Brooke Oze, whose series *Kat World* turns Israelis' daily life during wartime into a satirical pop-art universe, narrated entirely by cats.

Oze's signature style filters big, uncomfortable themes through a distinctly feminine lens – bright, playful, and unmistakably her own. Oze has already exhibited other work in New York, before bringing the cat showcase to Tel Aviv-Jaffa through the middle of August. She is currently showing in a group exhibition at Zielinski & Rozen on Dizengoff Square, and her paintings are held in private collections around the world.

Oze herself, a longtime friend, is as vivid as the work she makes – bright, magnetic, and clearly well-traveled. She's called the ooh-la-la corner of New York City's Gramercy Park home and has made her way out to the Black Rock Desert in Nevada for Burning Man, the sprawling art-and-desert gathering that draws free spirits from across the globe.

That mix of downtown polish and dust-on-your-boots adventure shows up everywhere in *Kat World* – a show that's as worldly as its creator.

'The kat is the commenter the news forgot to hire'

That's the tagline for the show, and it's the whole thesis in one line.

In Oze's own words: *Kat World* is a pop-art universe seen through the eyes of the cat underworld – the ubiquitous Israeli feline.

In robe and vintage curlers, she reads the *Meow York Times* while it eulogizes war criminals, and reclines in a bomb shelter with a glass of *vino*, because this is just another Tuesday in Tel Aviv. It's pop art as a weapon – funny, because the alternative is unbearable to contemplate.

The whole series was made during the last war with Iran, and it's full of local in-jokes: "*Meow York Times* Mourns the Demise of Khatmeini," "Azaka [Siren] in the Café (Cat Runs Away)," and more.

Oze's cats are stand-ins for the rest of us – watching politics and pop culture collide in real time, reacting with the kind of deadpan disbelief that a straight news broadcast can't quite capture. It's pop art as a weapon, aimed gently and humorously.



Among the works on view was "The Catneset in War" – Oze's furred send-up of Israel's parliament, and something of a centerpiece for the evening. With a Knesset full of paw-liticians (my pun) with claws bared, the piece turns national crisis into absurd theater – where everyone is still arguing, scrolling, and surviving under a pink-purple sky.

Sharp, chaotic, hilarious, and exhausted: That's Israel for you.

The room's verdict came fast: One of the paintings sold on the spot, to a buyer who could barely wait to get it home and on their bedroom wall (confidential: buyer was me and hubby Coby, who dug it just as much).

A very Tel Aviv opening

The crowd was the kind that only a good gallery night pulls together – friends who'd made the trip from Jerusalem and Modi'in alongside White



Clockwise from top L: 'THE CATNESSET in War': Paw-litical circus. 'KATERINA': KITTENISH muse in molten pinks and golds – Tel Aviv's puss in slippers rather than boots. 'BABY CAT': Compact pop object with turban, attitude, and energy. So purrfect I purchased it! 'AZAKA IN THE CAFE' (Cat Runs Away): Coffee, phone, sunglasses, and sudden motion.

City regulars, all mixing on the *mid-rachov* (pedestrian sidewalk) and spilling into the restaurant as the evening failed to cool down. Special mention goes to Rebecca, who came with her dog Stevie in tow, instantly the most photographed guest of the night who wasn't framed on a wall.

The ongoing war and all its ramifications have been hell – but as glasses were raised, by the end of the night it was clear *Kat World* had done what good sat-



PASTA ALA BRAVA. (Coby Shalev)

Wined & dined: Brava Gente does the honors

The exhibition took place in Brava Gente (known as Barbara in Hebrew) – and the restaurant didn't just host; it fed the whole party in style.

The vibe: Urban meets Europe in a chef-driven restaurant and wine bar – putting you in the center of the action while giving you permission to relax; music is pumped up on weekends

Wine: Ya'acov Oryah chenin blanc – crisp boutique perfection, certified kosher (plus cocktails: a custom riff on an Aperol spritz, mixed in honor of my go-to order)

Mains: Mediterranean-inspired sharing plates for the table. Of note: pistachio pasta, plus a sweet potato-cheese concoction that had us going back for seconds

Dessert: Cookiekida, of course – a crumble cookie paired with vanilla chocolate-chip ice cream

Good art, good wine, and a gaggle of people who came for the cats and stayed for the brûlée.

Brava Gente: 45 Nahalat Binyamin, Tel Aviv
Not kosher. Kosher wines on menu.
On Instagram: @bravatlv (in Hebrew)

ire is supposed to do: made a room full of people – including Oze's sister Shira, hours before a flight to Paris – laugh at something they'd otherwise have to process in private. ■

See Oze's art for yourself: www.risaozeart.com; Instagram @risabrookeart
Contact her to get on the newsletter list: risa.oze@gmail.com

Coby Shalev contributed to this article.