

## ART

## AROUND THE GALLERIES

## Conflict and intrigue grow

CHRISTOPHER KNIGHT  
ART CRITIC

A strange and marvelous three-channel video installation by New York artist **Irit Batsry** pits a dislocated scene of a seemingly exotic event against the routine experience of looking at art. The result is a subtle disorientation that is at once vaguely tribal and spiritually provocative.

The side walls of the darkened main room at Shoshana Wayne Gallery are washed with a pair of projections. They require a bit of description.

At the left, "Wave Breaker" focuses on a rocky shoreline. The time appears to be dawn or dusk, and buildings at the margins of the scene suggest an urban locale. The shallow but steadily lapping waves chip away at the encroachments of civilization.

At the right, "Vanishing Line" shows what appears to be a nighttime encampment and menacing fence, along which shadowy figures move. As a gallery visitor walks around the space, his actual shadow gets tangled up with the illusory ones. When a projected shadow suddenly darts into view, it's a loosely threat-



Shoshana Wayne Gallery

**IRIT BATSRY:** Part of the artist's three-channel video installation, "Beach at Nightfall" sets a rocky shoreline against what appears to be a nighttime encampment. The work is at Shoshana Wayne Gallery through March 28.

ening surprise, like encountering an unexpected stranger at night.

Batsry has positioned the two video projectors at an angle close to the walls, with the projected images filtered through small, upright Plexiglas panels. The result is steeply raked images on the side walls, emphasizing their physical qualities as projections and distorting the scenes.

On the end wall the raked images straighten out and

overlap, reflected off the Plexiglas panels; a coastal boulder seamlessly merges with a cinder-block building, nature fusing with culture into a virtual reality.

There's more. On the floor in the center of the room, a third projection on a small, free-standing screen shows young beach-side fire-twirlers, their flaming bolos creating blurs of white light that starkly illuminate milling crowds. An audio background features

drummers, muffled crowd noises and occasional whoops and hollers.

The scene is like something out of Goya. But the wild and inexplicable ritual performance unfolds within a gallery space created between a looming fence and an indifferent sea. It takes a while to get absorbed by Batsry's confection, but as the manifest contradictions grow — fun and fear, release and confinement, document and fiction, nature and culture,

depiction and actuality — they build into a compelling experience.

"Beach at Nightfall" was shot at the so-called Drummer's Beach in Tel Aviv, a hang-out for local kids and itinerant young backpackers who gather on Friday nights for a free-floating festival with no particular purpose, save social interaction. Batsry's installation was first shown at the Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, in a coastal town

just north of Tel Aviv. (This is its U.S. debut.) Both are wedged between the Mediterranean Sea and the West Bank, with its proliferation of conflicted Jewish settlements.

It's easy to read the unvarnished contradictions of "Beach at Nightfall" in geopolitical terms. Formally, it is also powerful — a flickering video "fire twirler" for the gatherings of the contemporary art world, in which galleries and museums are their own tribal versions of Drummer's Beach.

In a side gallery, Batsry shows a group of four less successful, large-scale color photographs. Their subject is yellow caution tape, the kind one finds at a construction site or a crime scene, which the artist configures into elaborate loops or tosses into the breeze. Catching the light and sometimes shimmering with a spectral glow, the tape is transformed from a utilitarian warning into a fanciful abstraction. But the effect is strained and monotonous, especially after the delirious seductions of "Beach at Nightfall."

**Shoshana Wayne Gallery**, Bergamot Station, 2525 Michigan Ave., Santa Monica, (310) 453-7535, through March 28. Closed Sunday and Monday. [www.shoshanawayne.com](http://www.shoshanawayne.com)

## Fluent in the language of paint

The 14 works in Hawaii-based artist **Tom Lieber's** lovely show at Craig Krull Gallery are virtuoso displays of paint-handling. The smallest canvas is barely 8 by 10 inches, while the largest is almost 4 feet square. In either case, Lieber manipulates paint so that it seems to have a life of its own.

[See Galleries, Page D15]