

Portrait of the Artist as a Young Israeli Woman



HAPPY ENDING: This painting, titled 'Checked Childhood,' sold at a private showing in Antwerp

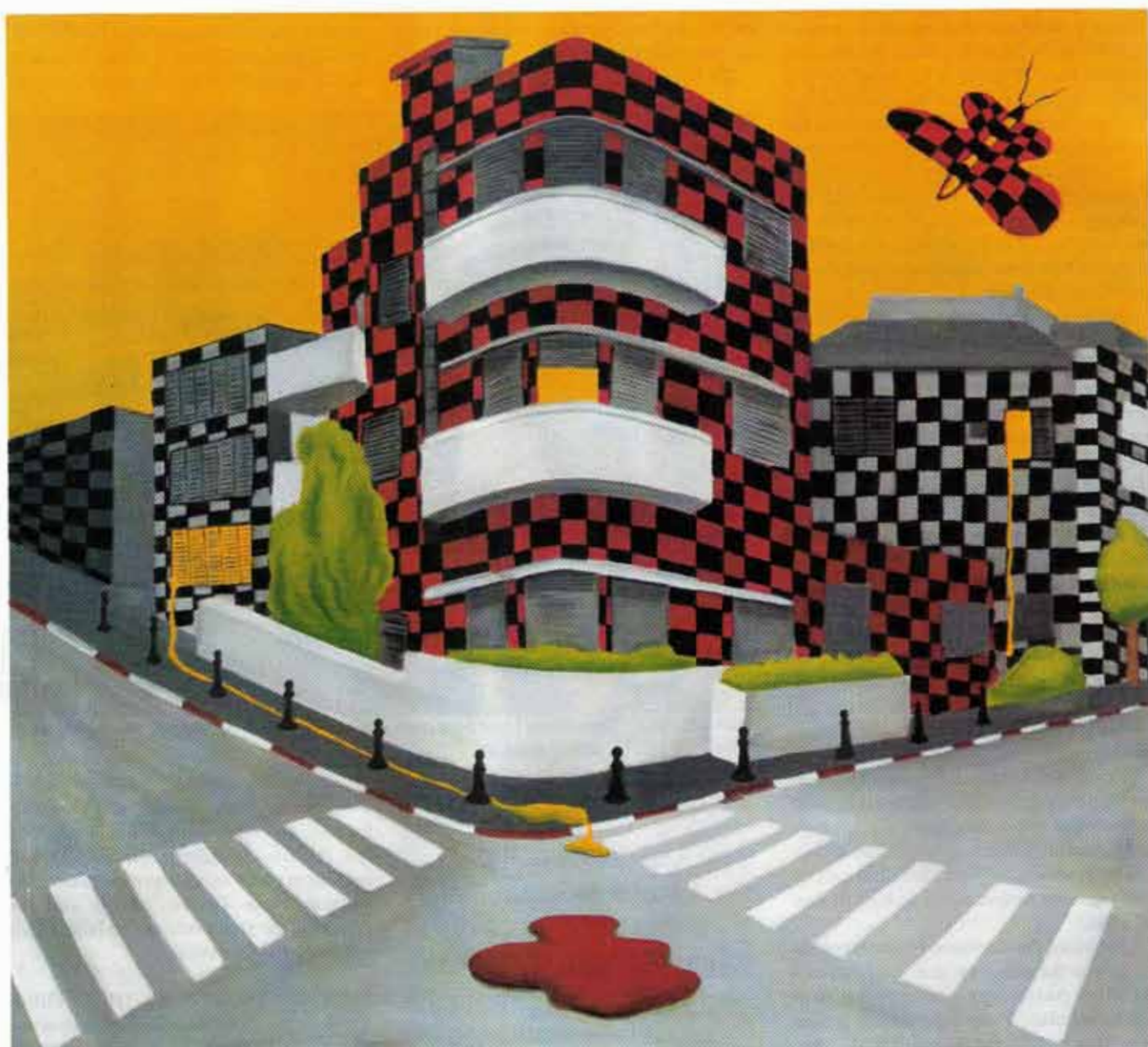
Nava Aizescu takes her first steps on the Israeli and international art scenes

Bernard Dichek

THINGS DIDN'T START OUT well for Nava Aizescu at her first art showing outside Israel. More than a hundred people passed by the young Israeli artist's paintings

in a private home on a tree-lined Antwerp boulevard on a Saturday night in May. The exhibit was hosted by Noemi and Ronen El'bum, a Belgian-Israeli couple eager to promote young Israeli artists. Many of the

El'bum's guests worked in Antwerp's thriving diamond industry; others were art collectors. The El'bums served their guests champagne, strawberries and truffles and introduced them to Aizescu. Reticent by nature, Aizescu, 30,



CHECKERED CAREER: An Aizescu original titled 'Aliya Street'

When Aizescu was 8 years old, her family immigrated to Israel and lived in several places in the center of the country. After her parents separated, she decided to attend high school in Kibbutz Maayan Baruch in the North. "I felt like an outsider who didn't fit in at the school," she says, noting that drawing and sculpting became her way of expressing her inner world. Aizescu refers to a figure of a person tied up in ropes that she had sculpted when she was 15. "I realize now that it was all about how detached I felt from everything around me," she reflects.

While in high school, Aizescu had a pecu-

liar experience that convinced her that she ought to devote herself to art. Working one day, quite ordinarily, on a picture showing a man sitting on the sidewalk, she felt as though "something stronger than me did the painting. I could see myself standing off to the side looking on in bewilderment, trying to figure out what it was that was happening to me as I painted."

Aizescu tells this story quietly and in a straightforward manner, suggesting that it is the first time she has shared it with anyone. She seems unaware that she is echoing a description about the mystery of the creative

process that has often been voiced by artists, calling to mind the way the ancient Greeks viewed artistic inspiration as coming from disembodied spirits beyond human control.

Aizescu pauses to smile and recalls how she felt after the painting was completed, "I just felt so fulfilled that I didn't care if I died right then and there." Not that she attributes the source of all her paintings to transcendental experiences. "Sometimes I just hold onto a glimpse of a strong image I see during a dream and paint it when I wake up," she says.