**Ba-Pardes: In the Orchard**
**Tamar Shalit-Avni**

Tamar Shalit-Avni's photographs suffuse us with a sense of mystery, enigma, and secrecy, as they raise questions that may not necessarily have or demand an answer: who are the women portrayed, how did they get there, what is their significance, and what is their purpose?

The women tread across agricultural fields – some fertile and flourishing, while others are deserted and growing wild. Despite their disproportionate scale relative to the setting, each of the women constitutes an important part of it.

The women's power stems from their individuality. In spite of their relatively small size within the frame, their body language and positioning reveal something about them and their relationship with their surroundings.

While staging the scenes, Shalit-Avni engages in a covert dialogue with the subjects of her photographs. Yet, it appears to be a one-sided conversation, as though they are simply wandering through the pictorial space, unaware of the layers of meaning intended by the photographer.

A wide range of ages are represented – from twelve to eighty and above. The women were selected as a result of the artist's quest for figures who can relate to her and to the landscapes she photographs, in terms of both personality and physical attributes.

The photographed landscape, in which she currently resides, is akin to that of the artist's homeland. She has been shooting the fields and orchards – both inside and out – for years. Shalit-Avni follows the fields and their rotating crops, as well as the perennial orchards, capturing the seasonal blossoming and bearing of fruit.

The photographs of the orchard (*pardes*) serve as a key for the decipherment of the exhibition – images whose power lies in the fact that the weight embodied by their light and color is equivalent to that of the troubling gloominess that seems to conceal a secret, as though drawn directly from the Talmudic legend of the *Pardes*.

Naomi Leshem