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Scratching the surface

Israeli artist and architect Avner Sher scratches, scorches, and gouges the surfaces of used corkboards in his show at Clark Gallery. They read like palimpsests, embedded with messages, covered over and eroded. His scratched imagery often grapples with power. Whether that power is political, parental, or the wrath of an unpredictable god is left to the viewer to reckon.

Tiny troopers frequently show up in the shadow of looming figures. In "The Queen," Sher fills his surface with an eight-winged insect. Rows of miniscule insects cross the queen's body and set up in soldierly rows at her tail. On its face, this could be a metaphoric portrayal of the female/male dynamic among certain insects. The queen rules; male drones serve her.

"The Feast" takes us down a dark road. The head of a multi-eyed crocodile, mouth open, looms over zig-zagging tunnels below - the critter's saw-toothed mouth and gullet. Fish parade down the tunnels to their end. In "Life Is Just a Game (after Benigni)," rows of serpents are inhabited by railcars, suggesting the Holocaust's human cargo shipped to concentration camps.

Sher's questions about justice and clout read as age-old allegories, written on worn out templates, to which there have never been answers.

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