

THE ROTHFELD COLLECTION

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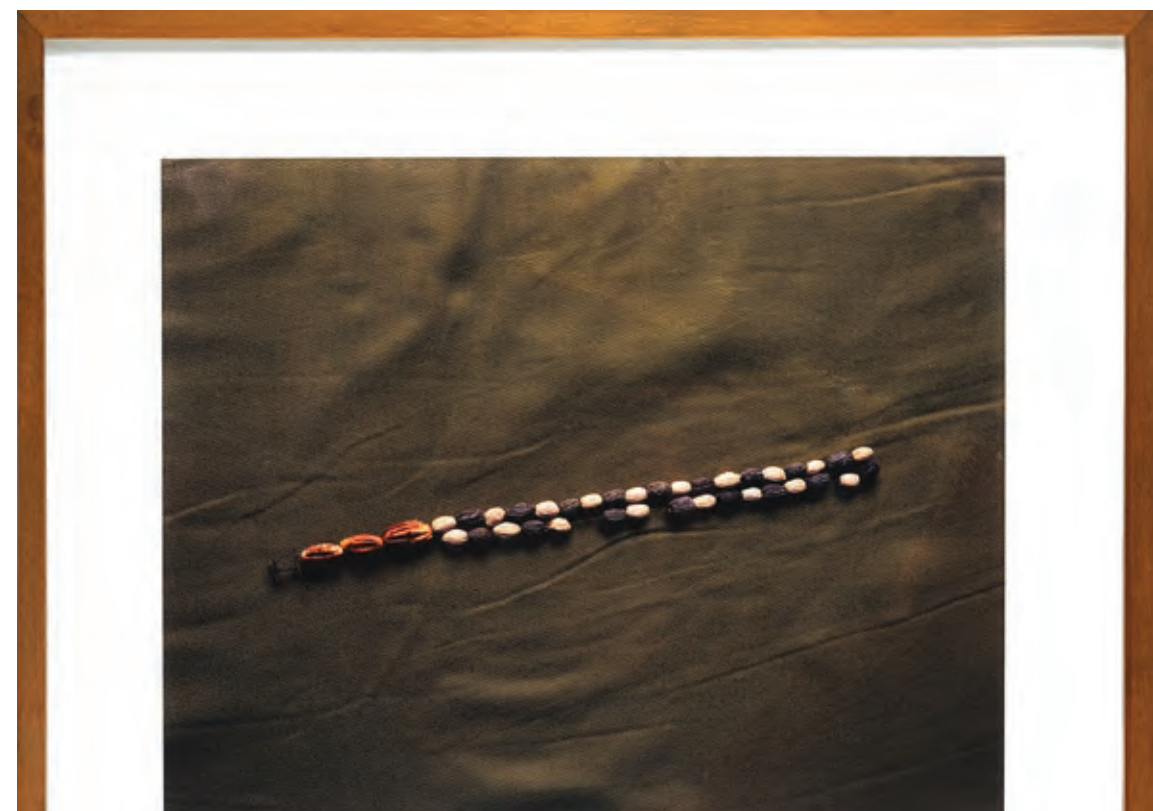
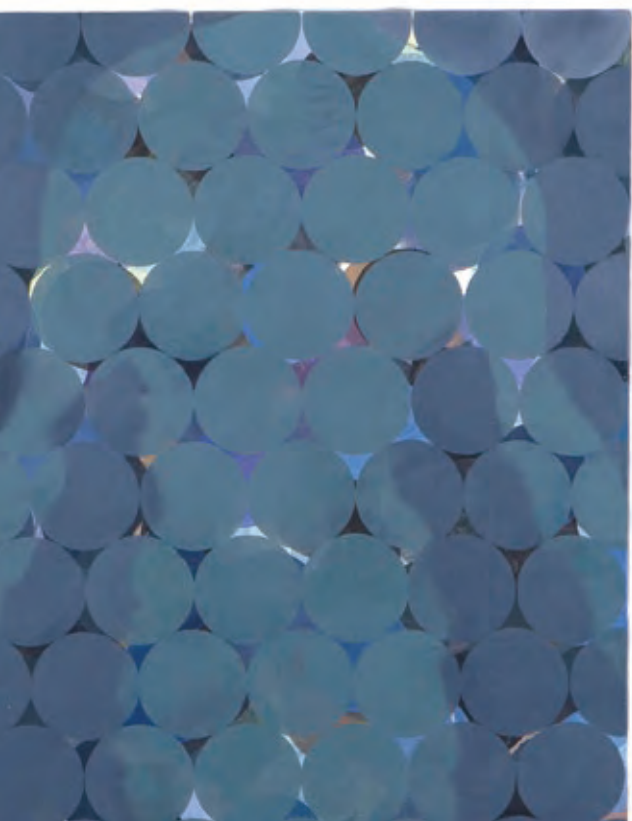
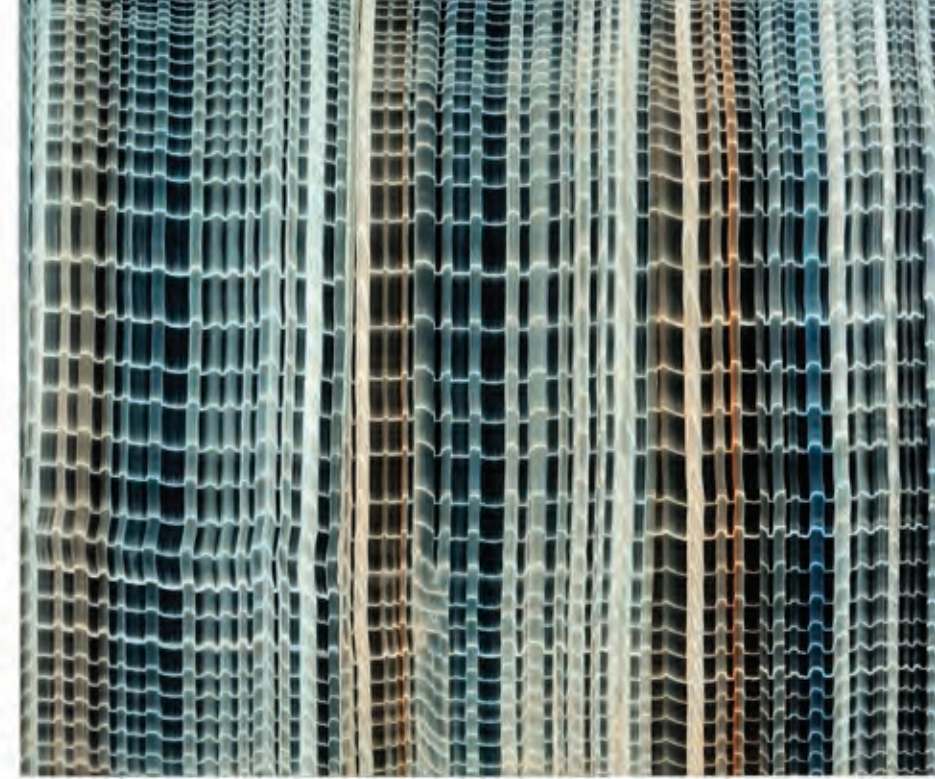
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This book is dedicated to Michael Oren,
Israeli Ambassador to the United States.

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THE GOLDEN FLEECE





מֵלֶךְ







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The Rothfeld Collection consists of one hundred and sixty pieces of Israeli art that are being donated by Donald Rothfeld to The Katzen Center for the Arts at the American University in Washington, DC. Over the past twenty-five years Donald Rothfeld has been actively engaged with many of the artists featured in this book, collecting artworks that vary in style, content, and medium.

In many ways this collection mirrors ‘the canon’ that constitutes Israeli art: it includes many of the Israel’s most prolific artists, while inadvertently excluding many marginalized figures, groups, and artistic practices. The Rothfeld Collection is united mostly by the shared identity of their creators: they are all Israeli.

The book’s final form evolved as a response to the diversity of the collection: there are ten different texts, ranging from personal memoir and historical analysis, to academic inquiry and curatorial commentary. I made a decision to select texts that introduce complex questions and issues that many of the artworks in the collection are in dialogue with. My inclination was to include cultural fragments as lenses through which the artworks could be interpreted and re-understood. Printed on trimmed pages that are interspersed amongst the art, the texts resemble islands of history and testimony surrounded by a sea of images.

When I met with Donald to talk about his collection, he repeatedly brought up the name of Bertha Urdang, an art dealer who introduced him to Israeli abstraction in the mid-eighties, igniting within him a love and a passion that has carried over until today. *An Interview with Donald Rothfeld* is followed by Joshua Neustein’s text *Bertha Is Dead*, a brilliant and heartfelt character study that filled in many of my own questions and curiosities.

A Short History of The 1970’s Revolution in Israeli Art was generously written for the publication by Dr. Gideon Efrat. The essay meticulously details the various artistic schools, trends, and exhibitions that emerged in Israel in the 1970’s. Ilana Tenenbaum’s *Check-Post: Art in Israel in the 1980’s* documents the many post-modern changes that continue to influence art and life in Israel while also providing a geneology of Israeli art through the early 1990’s.

Moshe Kupferman is one of the most featured artists in the collection, with over twenty-six works. *You Never Really Get Rid of Anything*, an interview with the artist conducted by Stewart Kalans in 1995, provides fascinating insights into the artist’s background and process. The interview and images were generously provided to us by Galia Bar-Or, who had previously included it in her catalogue *Moshe Kupferman: In Addition to the Expected*, printed in 2012 by The Museum of Ein Harod.

Mother Tongue, Father Tongue is a searing memoir written by Ariella Azoulay that deals with the intersection between linguistics, heritage, and social justice. Azoulay thoughtfully and provocatively reminisces about her experience growing up as a Mizrahi woman in Israel, addressing the alienation, estrangement, and civil injustice that continues to plague equality in Israeli society. The text was translated by Talya Halkin, and appears here for the first time in English.



Nissan Shor’s essay *The Flickering Decade*, originally included in Doron Rabina’s catalogue *Eventually We’ll Die - Young Art in Israel of the 90s*, details the various forms of escapism that emerged as Israel evolved from a socialist and collectivist society into a highly individualistic, globalized and neo-capitalist space. My own essay, *The Political Potential of Art*, is an excerpt from my upcoming book about art and cultural memory in Israel called *The Huleh Project*. The text considers the political potential of art to provoke broader societal transformations.

The last pamphlet of text in the book features an original essay by Noah Simblist titled *Performing the Other, Re-Forming One’s Self: Rona Yefman, Yael Bartana, and Tamy Ben-Tor*. Noah was invited to curate a subset of the collection, and he chose to write about acts of role-play in Israeli contemporary art as a way of tackling the schizophrenic condition of Jewish and Israeli identity post-1948. Ilana Tenenbaum’s essay *Regarding the Grotesque in Gilad Ratman’s Work* examines Gilad Ratman’s video *The 588 Project* in the context of his larger ‘oeuvre.’

I would like to thank Lea Abir and Sara Breitberg-Semel for sharing their insights and recommendations. Keren Schwartzman was invaluable in completing the design; Gil Lavi, Greg Staley, and Bruce Wick from The American University provided great assistance in documenting and categorizing all of the artworks.

This book’s dedication is further shared with all of the artists in Israel and Palestine who have been left outside of the canon of Israeli art; to all of those unheard voices alienated by the artworld - with its residencies, art fairs, museum, and gallery shows. Art enables the mute and the invisible to provide themselves with agency, and find ways to express thoughts, dreams, and critiques that would otherwise remain unheard.

As this collection continues to grow, I hope that it will begin to reflect a society that stops fearing difference, and starts celebrating the plurality of voices, cultures, and sub-cultures that make up Israeli society. One day perhaps the new civil contract that Ariella Azoulay discusses in her essay will spring forth from her imagination into political actuality.

Ian Sternthal

A white door with a black doorknob and the text "i Love my life!" on it. The text is in a bold, sans-serif font, with the "i" in lowercase and the "Love" in uppercase. The "my" is in lowercase and the "life!" is in uppercase. The door has a simple, rectangular design with a black doorknob on the left side.

**i Love
my life!**

An Interview with Donald Rothfeld

with Ian Sternthal

16

Tell me about your childhood...

I grew up in Hillside, New Jersey, in a heavily Jewish neighbourhood. There was a great deal of anti-Semitism, especially after football games on Saturdays. I was raised in a firmly Jewish home. My father was a business man and a closeted Talmudist. I remember on Saturdays he would sit with different tractates in front of him, looking up things in the Talmud.



So your childhood affirmed Judaism as an important part of your identity?

I've always said, I do not know what I would be if I were not Jewish. I think one of the biggest turning points of my life was the 1967 war. Up until that time, like most Americans, I harboured a ghetto attitude. There was a great deal of anti-Semitism in America, and we were afraid to make waves. When the Six Day War happened, I was a physician in the navy, and I became a totally different person. I lost that ghetto attitude. I wasn't afraid to open my mouth. If a Jew was in trouble in the New York Times, I didn't care, and I still don't. And that was a very big change; Israel changed me in a very remarkable way.

When was the first time you travelled to Israel?

I first went on a synagogue trip, in the early 1970's, right after the Yom Kippur War. Nobody was going to Israel, and the country welcomed us with open

arms. I then went on several Federation CJA missions, as well as for my son's Bar-Mitzvah, but then eventually I started to go to Israel just to look at the art and vacation and so on.

Were you exposed to art as a child?

I had little exposure to art growing up. I am first and foremost a musician; a classical and jazz pianist. Music was my first love. I started getting involved in art when I was in the military. My late wife read an article in Vogue about Soho, and she suggested that we check out the burgeoning art scene when we moved back to the city. It was a level playing field, because neither of us knew anything about it, and as a newly married couple we thought it would be a nice way to grow into our marriage. So I started going to Soho. I'd walk into these shows, and I had no idea what I was looking at. There were four to five galleries at that time; I remember Sonnabend had a show where a man on a horse was walking around in a knight's outfit. Both the man and horse were staring at me. The room was so claustrophobic it was frightening, and I don't scare easily. I quickly exited, and began to wonder what I was getting myself into? I didn't reject what I saw, but began to wonder what I was missing. I think that is one of the key elements to being an art collector. We started collecting blue chip artists, because that's all we knew. We bought a large Helen Frankenthaler, some work by Frank Stella, amongst several others. By the mid 1970's I grew totally turned off with the art world. I started to read about the shenanigans that went on; the bidding at the auction houses, about people dumping art when one of their artists was having a museum show, and so on. I remember being called by somebody wanting me to get into an art consortium to buy up an artist's work so we could control the market. I grew disgusted. A few years later I was invited to a dinner party, and there was a presentation by an art collector from Philadelphia

who had this gigantic collection of Soho artists. He would stay in the artist's lofts on weekends, and he was a voracious buyer. He would buy five, six, eight works at a time, and he got me very excited. I started going to Soho with a friend every Thursday, on my afternoon off, and he'd teach me how to look at art. He'd take me up to his studio, and tell me how to analyze paintings.

What do you think propels people to collect?

I have read a lot about what makes a 'collector,' and I think it comes down to a certain kind of personality, an inquisitive quality. Part of it is the hunt, looking for what you want to buy or acquire. There is also the respect you get when you own certain artworks, that gives collectors a kind of satisfaction. For me the most thrilling part is engaging with the artists, talking to them, getting into their heads, finding out what propels them. I enjoy asking them formal questions about their work. It fulfills an intellectual need of mine. Ultimately, you don't collect with your ears, but with your eyes. Its important to collect according to your own perspective.

What opened your eyes to what was going on with the art scene in Israel?

In the mid 1980's I visited the Bertha Urdang Gallery. I knew that she showed Israeli art, but until that time I thought Israeli art consisted of pictures of dancing rabbis that I had seen at synagogue fundraisers. When I walked into Bertha's gallery, I was astounded by what I saw. I didn't know they



were doing it! This was the mid eighties, and they were very strong in conceptual work, there was a lot of arte povera, painting, and minimalist sculpture that was stunning. She showed me some pieces by Micha Ullman and Nachum Tevet. She opened up my eyes to a wonderful world that I knew nothing about.

What was the first thing she said to you?

The first thing she said to me as I walked into the gallery was *'My husband was killed in the 1948 War, and I had to raise my three daughters by myself.'* As an American Jew you always feel that the Israelis gave their lives while we just gave the money, so she got right to my heart. I came back many times to talk to her about Israel art and she taught me. She was head to toe Israeli



art. She was very abrasive, with a chutzpah that was beyond description, and she used four letter words more than I would, but she was phenomenal with her analogies, she was passionate, and she

got me involved. From then on, I started to go to Israel on art trips to visit galleries and do studio visits. I still go on an annual basis. From day one Bertha wanted me to purchase works by Moshe Kupferman. She brought the works out, and I didn't get it. I'd been looking at art for fifteen years, but it was too dense for me. When I asked why there were so many layers in his work, she said, "he's digging into the canvas, he's looking into his family. He lost his entire family in the Holocaust, he's searching, he's looking, trying to find them." Kupferman signs his paintings multiple times, in Hebrew and in English, and she interpreted this as his way of asserting his existence. The more I look at the works, the more I think she's right. She kept saying to me, you have to get a Kupferman, and I kept looking. It was very much like when I first looked at de Kooning. I had a lot of trouble with de Kooning, and then finally one day I saw a de Kooning, where I saw the scaffolding of the painting and I got it. I bought my first Kupferman during the first Gulf War in 1991. I was near Madison Avenue, near her gallery, and I heard someone say 'They're landing scud missiles near Tel Aviv!' I got so excited I ran into the gallery, and I said 'Bertha, I want to buy a Kupferman!' Just like that. Irrational. That was the first one, and since then, I have purchased twenty-six works by Kupferman, so he got to me. She once told me that once I bought one, I would buy many, and she was right.

You have a photograph by Pavel Wolberg that depicts a Palestinian woman pleading with soldiers in a tank. You describe yourself as a Zionist, but does collecting this kind of politically critical art change your perspective on Israeli politics?

Most of the artists I know are left-wing. Though I'm not particularly Left, I don't see any conflict between my own beliefs and the works I purchase. There are some anti-war statements here, and



Pavel Wolberg - Jenin, 2001, C-print 60 x 80 cm, #154.

while I wish there was no more war, I'm more to the center. I would not say that the artists have swayed my political affinities, though they have tried to! {Laughs}

Tell me about some of your favourite works.

The photograph *Crazy Tree* by Tal Shochat is an image I am very fond of. She places artificial pink wallpaper behind a fruit tree. I think she's dealing with the demise of the original Zionist impulse. The original pioneers were always associated with orange trees, lemon groves, and so on. I think the background represents the building of Israel, the mass of construction which has come at the expense of this poor tree, which looks like it's dying. It's a very powerful image. Looking at it makes me feel both sadness, and a sense of



Tal Shochat - Crazy Tree, 2005, Photograph, 43 x 43 in., #143.



Shay Kun - Dark Ages, 2010-2011, Oil on Canvas, 56 x 38 in., #71.

pride. The transformation of the country is in many ways a miracle.

Dark Ages is an oil painting by Shay Kun, which also stands out in my memory. I was in his studio, and it was on the floor, and I looked at it and I asked him why there was so much smoke in the sky. The image portrays the view from a car, with rain pouring on the windshield. He explained to me that the smoke was in fact the horizon of trees that lined one side of the road. It's a very powerful image, with many diagonal perspectives. I asked him what the work was all about. In a previous conversation he told me that his father was a camp survivor, and he described what a road looked like to the one of the camps. I asked him what camp he was in, and how he survived. He told me that his fathers' job was to cremate the bodies in the ovens. He kind of denied the connection, but the relationship between the painting and his own biography was apparent. I didn't want to push him, so I dropped it.

Tell me about the image *Burned Field after a Missile Attack on Maghar* by Shai Kremer.

Shai is a very interesting photographer. The image



is from a series called 'Infected Landscapes', a group of photographs he shot in Israel. At first glance his landscapes look very beautiful, but when you look more closely there's always a disturbing element: either tracks from a tank, or images of fake Arab villages that are used for IDF training. This particular photograph shows what looks like a beautiful golden haze, reminiscent of a September afternoon on the east coast, where around four o'clock everything looks golden. But when you look in the foreground you see some smoke: A katyusha rocket had just landed from Lebanon.

Israeli art has recently gotten a lot of international attention. Why do you think that is?

I think the interesting thing about Israeli Contemporary art is that since the 90's, the Israeli's really seem to have found their artistic voice on the international stage. Up until that time, I feel they were looking to Europe and America. I



Artworks hanging in Donald Rothfeld's apartment.

myself have many of these minimal works from the 70's and 80's, but there is something exciting about the young generation of artists, and how unique their vision is. For many years Israel was being built, and the nation was focused on establishing itself. Ideology was strong. Now that it firmly exists, and even has begun to prosper, I think the artists are asking important questions

Shai Kremer - Burnt Field after a Missile Attack on Maghar, 2006, #70.

about what Israel has become, and in which direction it should head. I think that is why they have such a powerful voice on the world stage.

Why did you decide to bestow the works to the American university?

I did not want to give them to a Jewish institution; we have been in enough ghettos. These artists need to get out into the world and compete with everybody else. The Katzen Center at the American University in Washington is committed to incorporating the work into the curriculum. We're going to have a show at the American University in the fall, and most of the work will be up, including the videos. My hope is that people will add to the collection. I do hope the work is loaned out. I'd like this to be a forum for Israeli art. I would also like to see Arab-Israeli artists included in the collection as well.

Israeli artists are often fetishized; loved or hated, their names are never separated from their national origin. What are your thoughts about this?

Unfortunately it is very hard for them. They are constantly classified as being 'Israeli', and that comes with a lot of baggage. I don't think it will be easy to get beyond that until there's a resolution in the Middle East. I think the stigma is only really transcended when an artist goes international, and for that to happen, they have to have the right breaks.

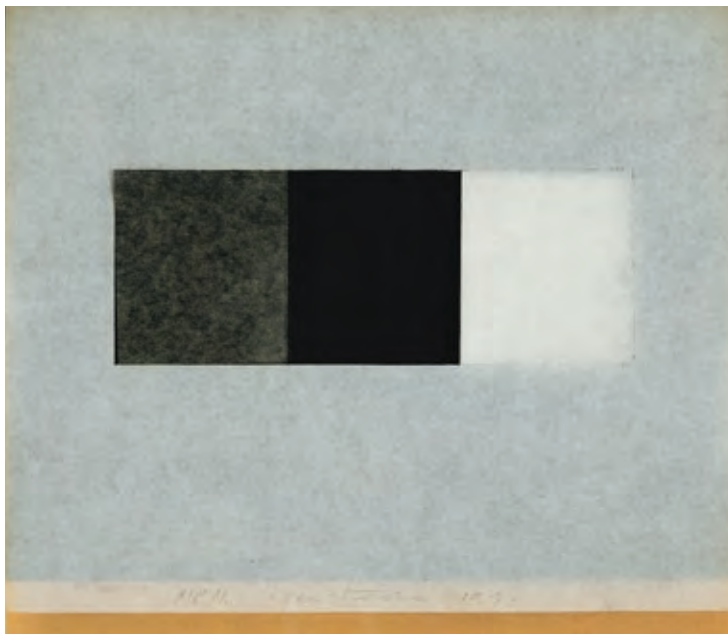
Uri Aran, Untitled (Coconut), 2010, #4.



Bertha Is Dead

Joshua Neustein

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Top: Joshua Neustein, Carbon Series, 'Levels of Grammar', 90/91, #129
Middle: Joshua Neustein, Carbon Series, "MCM", 1990, #128.
Bottom: Joshua Neustein, Two Hues of H, 2001, #131.

Bertha Urdang was Joshua Neustein's dealer for thirty years and was involved in the development and dissemination of his work. This text was written and published by the artist in Studio Magazine, Tel Aviv, August 16, 2001.

The legs feel more like logs arranged for fire. Bertha Urdang died yesterday, February 22, in the midst of conversation in the Bialik Street Bet Hakerem apartment gallery. I received a phone call from Rina Sugarman and then spoke to Miri Urdang Laufer, her daughters. "*Bertha will be buried in Sanhedria on Sunday*". An eerie sequence of events followed. Almost immediately, for the rest of the afternoon and evening, thousands of miles away and totally unconnected to Bertha's death, except the way it reflected my view and mental state, a soft, constant snow fell. I watched it out of my studio window on Howard Street in Soho, N.Y. The world went minimal, just the way Bertha liked her art. In the white powder, nearly a foot deep, silhouetted pedestrians search for solid footing, that winter gait, the way they search the ground and amble cautiously on the covered sidewalks. In the thirty-five years that she dealt with my art and was my friend, I wanted to kill her at least 20 times. In the years of my dialogue, arguments, & reconciliation with her, ideas were always more important than credibility. I witnessed soaring wonders, a fierce attack on the commonplace, and some devastating destructions left in the wake of her passion. She was the mad hatter that brought Israeli art to the world forum, who made a pact with her vocation, she would "*labor for Israeli art, not if it is as good as, but only if it is better than done anywhere in the world.*" She pronounced and lived this dictum in a fever pitch. She battled for the art, against kitsch and against folklore. She battled demons, her perceived enemies and who she thought might be potential traitors. She never apologized or doubted the art she represented. She had so much energy it seemed unnatural that it could be extinguished and contained in a coffin.

The unforgettable presence which in a sense lingers on in the shape of a hundred anecdotes from the lips of friends and foes alike. I was both a necessary impediment, and one of her 'causes' - one of the artists she 'owned' - and when Bertha owned, you were a conquered province. She also adored and worshipped, and her greatest commitment was to create something grand and universal for Israeli culture.

She was a mixture of the English lady - polite yet defensive - and the pioneer - always ready for a spat - like a cat with a permanently arched back. When a dinner invitation wasn't as forthcoming as she felt it should be Bertha exploded and abruptly became the lonely war widow who'd sacrificed everything for her nation, her people, ideals and who nobody cared about...She thought everyone should share her awe and dedication to art and had no patience with people who didn't quite measure up. She berated those who came to her gallery with what she perceived as the wrong attitude and informed them that "*she wasn't selling vegetables*" and they might lower their voices and open their eyes and minds.

Bertha Urdang was born in England on an undisclosed date at the beginning of the 20th Century. She went to school at North London Collegiate and grew up as a Fabian socialist and a Zionist, which at that time was not contradictory. She studied at the University of Manchester and the Sorbonne. She came to Israel, married, and settled in Bet Hakerem, a peripheral neighborhood of Jerusalem.

In 1948, her husband died, leaving her a widow, the mother of three daughters, Rina, Daphna, and Miri. She plunged into the promotion of Israeli art. Bertha's art dealings, exploits and failures reached folklore proportions. "Rina" was the name of her first gallery on Shlom Zion Hamalka Street, near the Central Post Office in Jerusalem, which she managed with a partner, and took two months a year to go to America to spread the word and sell the work. In 1966 she separated from her partner over an ideological difference: "*He loved money, I loved art,*" is how she summed it up.

She moved her art activity to her own home in Bet Hakerem where she mounted annual "Collector's Choice" group shows. In those days, Jerusalem was the center of Israeli art, and Tel Avivis would come to her gallery to see what was happening on the scene. Her exhibitions were not so much innovative as they were of extraordinary taste and quality. In the Duveen tradition, Bertha's Michael Gross or Zaritsky was better than anyone else's Gross or Zaritsky. A studio visit from her was an existential experience. She gave me my first solo show in Israel. From then on, she 'owned' me. When I worked with other people she considered it a violation of a fundamental ethic. The energy in the gallery was always at a crescendo. Bertha had her favorites; Oh my G-d, did she have favorites, and she

played the artists and the collectors off each other. Bertha understood jealousy: she shaped it, she cultivated it, and she suffered from it. She knew it was an irresistible force of human nature. In the late 50's early 60's, she was battling to include Arie Aroch in the first Israeli exhibition at the MoMA. He was a marginal choice at the time. Later, she fought with the same ferocity for Ullmann, Pinhas Cohen-Gan, Beni Efrat, Gitlin, Margalit Mannor, Tevet, Gross, and Kupferman.

In 1972 she opened a New York Branch of her gallery across the street from the Whitney Museum and that became her residence and show place for twenty years. She negotiated museum exhibitions, 'read' her artist's paintings into American collections, and promoted drawing and photography on the world arena. For her, Israeli abstraction was unlike any work done by artists from other countries, because Israeli abstraction did not develop from a synthesis of figuration, but from the fact of a non-imagistic God - it did not matter whether the facts did not corroborate the theory. Nowhere was minimalism more of a presence than in her vision. Her aesthetic - no, it was not an aesthetic, it was absolutely, unqualifiedly, a religion - was abstraction. She occasionally showed non-Israeli artists like Tuttle, Joel Shapiro, Heidi Glück, Gerry Marx, Zeinstra, Jeremy Gilbert Rolfe.

Her passion for art steamrolled over decency, manners, and reason. She desperately wanted Israeli minimalists to succeed in the world at large, because that aesthetic would truly resonate the heroic values. "*It's the only art without sentiments, and corroborates the invisible G-d*" she would say. It was a charismatic all consuming life: That was her path of blood and guts. Art was her first testament. "*The day I stop loving art will be the day I close my eyes and die.*"





1973 P. Cohen Gm. p. 113 1970











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A Short History of the 1970's Revolution in Israeli Art

Dr. Gideon Efrat

The beginning of the revolution that shook Israeli art through the 1970's can be traced to 1964. The New Horizons group – the hegemonic representative of Israeli lyrical abstraction (1948–1963) – had just broken up several months earlier. Several of its members, together with a large number of young artists, participated in the group exhibition 'Tazpit' (Observation Post) in Tel-Aviv. The exhibit aspired to present 'the next thing': Paintings in the spirit of American action painting that were nevertheless still infused with traces of 'Tachisme' and 'Art Informel' from Paris – the city that had nourished Israeli modernism for several decades.

The members of this new artistic generation were born in the 1930's, and most of them were natives of the country. Their works, which were exhibited at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art's 'Autumn Salons' (1965–1970), all gave expression to a playful and experimental avant-garde spirit. The Americanization of Israeli culture was underway in a range of different fields (Coca Cola, the Hilton chain, American fighter planes, etc.). In the five-year period between 1965 and 1970, a group of young avant-garde artists in Tel Aviv founded the Ten Plus group, which was led by the painter Raffi Lavie. Over the following two decades, Lavie replaced Yosef Zaritsky (the leader of the New Horizons movement) as Tel Aviv's most charismatic artistic figure. Lavie and the other members of Ten Plus created a local genre of pop art, which embraced collage and other signifiers from the studios of Rauschenberg, Wesselmann, Larry Rivers, and others. Following the first modernist chapter in the history of Israeli art during the 1920s (Cubism, Constructivism, Expressionism, etc.), and the second chapter inspired by Parisian-style abstraction, local avant-garde art came under the influence of New York.

This third chapter in the history of local modernism, however, was rivaled by other avant-garde trends that continued to develop during the 1970s, and which are significantly represented in the Rothfeld Collection. The artists who shaped these developments operated at a removal from Tel Aviv (although they did participate in the "Autumn Salons"), while gravitating towards environmental art, Minimalism, and Conceptualism, trends that dominated the New York art world during that time. Suffice it to position the groundbreaking Conceptual art exhibition 'Information,' which was staged at the Museum of Modern Art in 1970, in relation to the exhibition "Concept Plus Information" – the first Conceptual art exhibition in Israel, which opened at the Israel Museum in 1971 under the curatorial auspices of Yona Fischer. One of the prominent works in this latter exhibition was the documentation of an environmental project initiated by Yitzhak Danziger together with scientists and students, and centered on the rehabilitation of an abandoned quarry in the Carmel Mountains.

Two years earlier, in 1969, Joshua Neustein and Georgette Battle scattered 15,000 pairs of shoes throughout the galleries in the Jerusalem Artists House, while the sound of recorded footsteps resonated throughout the exhibition space. Neustein moved from New York to Jerusalem in 1964, and his (and Battle's) shoe environment



An invitation for an exhibition by members of The New Horizon Group, Ein Harod Museum of Art, 1963.



The western side of the Dan Hotel in the 1960s. Photo by Photos by Avraham Hay and Yitzhak Kelter

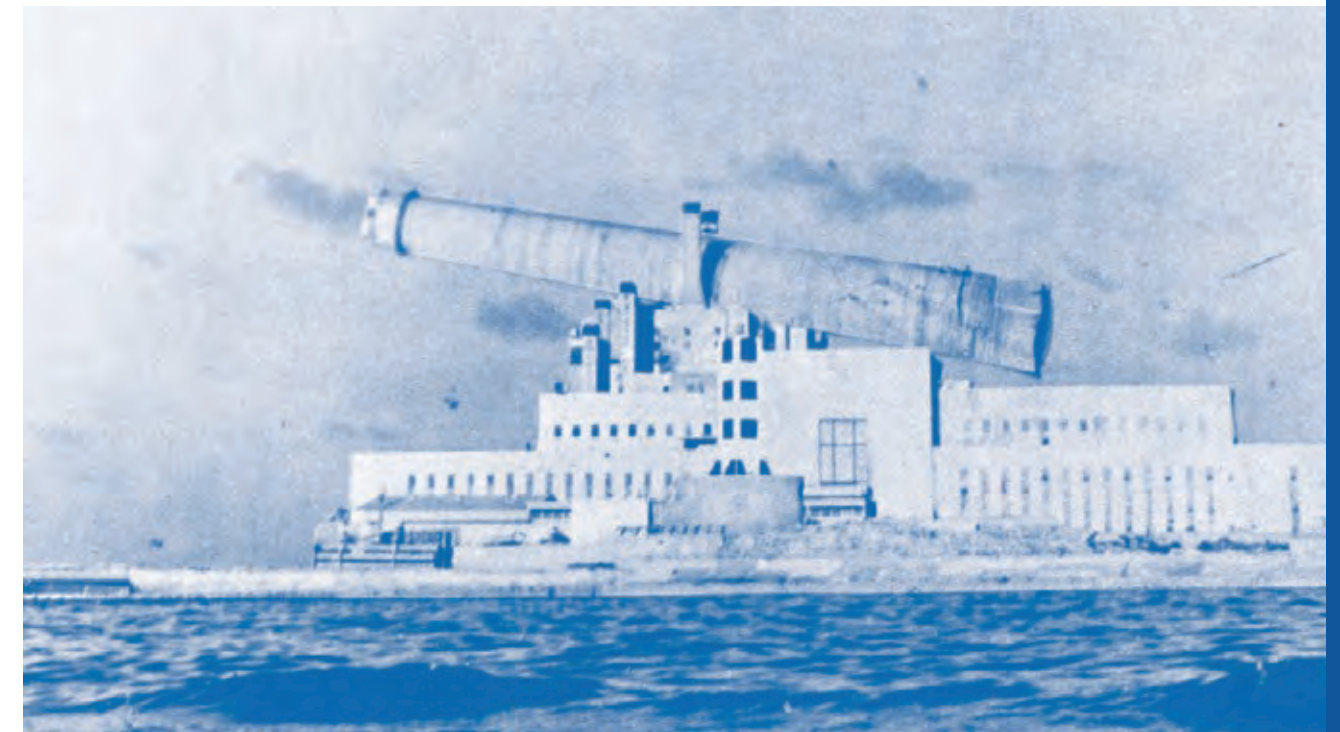


A group of artists create a painting at the opening night of the Ten Plus groups 'Large Works' exhibit held at the Artist's House in Tel-Aviv in 1966.

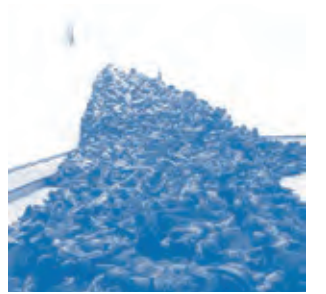
was read both in relation to the 1967 Six-Day War (military shoes) and in relation to the mounds of shoes associated with Auschwitz. Within several months, Neustein and fellow artists Gerry Marx and Georgette Battle created the Jerusalem River Project, in which the sound of trickling water emanated from 150 tiny loudspeakers set along a near-mile-long trajectory in the Kidron Valley.

Sensory experience was definitively replaced by Conceptual experience. In 1970, the "Autumn Salon" in Tel Aviv included Neustein's Road Piece – an environment composed of bales of hay arranged in a grid, and accompanied by a soundtrack of cars speeding down the freeway. Once again, a 'ready-made' landscape (a field) seen from a moving car was displaced and transformed into a Minimalist structure in order to be reconstructed in the viewer's mind.

Significantly, that same year a Tel Aviv gallery presented an exhibition of works by members of the Ten Plus group. This exhibition, which consisted of humorous painterly and sculptural variations of Botticelli's Birth of Venus, was still defined by a pop-art focus on the deconstruction of canonical forms and themes. During this period, a significant gap began opening between the avant-garde artists of Tel Aviv and those working in Jerusalem and its sphere of influence.



In 1972, the Conceptual-environmental approach adopted by local artists took on a more political significance. That summer, a number of artists including Moshe Gershuni, Micha Ullman, Avital Geva and others (some of whom are represented in the Rothfeld Collection) met outdoors in different areas lying between Israeli



Boots, Gallery House, Jerusalem, 1969. An installation by Joshua Neustein and Georgette Battle, and Gerry Marx.

'Monument' by Michael Druks, from the Exhibition Catalogue for 'Concept + Information', #76, February 1971, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

kibbutzim and neighboring Arab villages, and created a series of metaphorical environmental works – ‘earth works’ of sorts that were imbued with a utopian political spirit: Micha Ullman, for instance, invited Jewish and Arab boys to participate in digging two identical pits, one on an Israeli kibbutz and one in a neighboring Arab village – subsequently refilling each pit with the earth dug out of the other. In 1974–1975, Pinchas Cohen Gan (who presented a solo exhibition of his etchings in the cowshed on Kibbutz Nirim in 1973) performed a series of artistic actions imbued with an existential and political character: he pitched a tent of his own in a Palestinian refugee camp in Jericho; walked along the country’s borders, burying bricks of iron in the earth wherever he was stopped by security forces.

Sometime earlier, in 1972, a number of artists including Gershuni, Neustein, Avital Geva, Benni Efrat, Michael Drucks, Menashe Kadishman, and others came together to present their works in a group exhibition in London titled “Affidavit.” This exhibition included both environmental works and body art (Gershuni) and works on paper (Neustein: I Remember Georg Grosz Here, a reproduction of a painting by Grosz copied unto the wall with carbon paper). During the entire period in question, artists concerned with Conceptual environments also created Minimalist artworks, while developing what Robert Pincus-Witten called “epistemological abstraction” – a term he used to point to the parallel evolution of this style of abstraction in both New York and Jerusalem. In other words, artists in 1970s-Israel closed the historical gap between Israeli and Western art, while creating their own original version of a trend that was developing simultaneously in New York. This trend was featured in 1974 at the Israel Museum in the exhibition “Beyond Drawing,” which included works by a significant number of artists represented in the Rothfeld Collection: Pinchas Cohen-Gan, Moshe Gershuni, Joshua Neustein, and Moshe Kupferman. New ‘concepts’ related to drawing and working on paper – such as tearing, folding, cutting, erasing, frottage, writing, sewing, and measuring – replaced the traditional medium of pencil on paper. Neustein employed strategies of tearing and folding (echoed in the Rothfeld Collection by the early works on paper created by Pinchas Cohen Gan, who re-defined drawing in 1974 by writing: “A drawing is the idea of a drawing”); Kupferman presented drawings that combined the documentation of manual motor activity, minimalist series, and erasures; and Gershuni tore a sheet of paper, marked its torn outline in black, and wrote on it – “The paper is white yet black on the inside.” The concept, in all of these works, undermined visual perception. That same year (1974), Gershuni combined photographs of his father with textual excerpts from the Christian Mass (hung behind miniature screens) in the solo exhibition ‘Benedictus’ at a Tel Aviv gallery. This was one of the first signs heralding the future development of religious themes in Gershuni’s work from the late 1970’s onwards.

During this period, the artistic polarity between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem reached its apogee. One of its expressions was the gap between the avant-garde character of the Israel Museum, under the direction of Yona Fischer, and the establishment-sanctioned French modernism associated with the Tel Aviv Museum, under the direction of Haim Gamzu. The same polarity characterized the tension between the



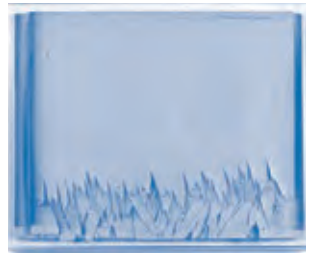
Pinchas Cohen Gan, *Touching the Border*, 1974. The artist sent four Israeli residents towards the four borders and marked the place where the army detained them. He then buried blocks of iron with demographic information at the point of their arrest. At the same time he sent four letters to artist associations in Lebanon, Syria, Egypt and Jordan, asking them to perform the same action on their borders.

Bezalel School of Art (in Jerusalem), which privileged the creation of artistic ‘actions’ (later redefined as ‘performances’) and the Midrasha School (located back then in Ramat Hasharon, to the north of Tel Aviv), which privileged the combination of painting and Conceptualism championed by Raffi Lavie. In 1976 and 1979, the first performance festivals took place at the Artists House in Tel Aviv, with the participation of teachers and students from Bezalel (such as Gershuni and Micha Ullman). At the same time, one cannot ignore the body of works created at the Midrasha during the first half of the 1970s, which may be described as closer to the medium of performance art. The Midrasha paved the path for the emergence of a generation of artists who all studied with Lavie, and who would later represent the strain of local art defined by an interest in the “want of matter,” as the curator Sara Breitberg would call the seminal exhibition she organized in 1986 at the Tel Aviv Museum.

Among the representatives of this strain are the artists Michal Na’aman, Tamar Geter, Yair Garbuz, Henry Shlezniak, and others who are not represented in the Rothfeld Collection. This is due in part to the fact that most of this collection was created in New York, where the Bertha Urdang Gallery worked to promote the Israeli Minimalist-Conceptual avant-garde. At the same time, Raffi Lavie’s student Nahum Tevet, who began his career in the early 1970s as a painter and collage artist, adopted, towards the mid-1970s, an ascetic, restrained Minimalist language. Tevet continued studying in the United States and even exhibited at the Bertha Urdang Gallery. In 1974, his solo exhibition at a Jerusalem gallery featured an austere installation titled *Beds* – white plywood surfaces propped up on wooden legs, which both defined the surrounding space and were defined by it. Two years later, in 1976, Tevet’s works were already featured in a Minimalist-Conceptual solo exhibition at the Israel Museum.

It should be noted that in 1975 the Israel Museum held an avant-garde event called “Summer Workshop,” where students and teachers from Bezalel and the Midrasha jointly presented actions, objects, and paintings distinguished by their Conceptual character; nevertheless, the artistic polarity between the two cities did not dissolve until the early 1980s. At this time, a new freeway reduced the physical distance between Tel Aviv and Jerusalem, and the same teachers began teaching in both places, while the rise of postmodernism served as a catalyst for the undoing of oppositions and dialectic relations.

This new spirit was also given expression by developments at these two cities’ museums: in 1977, Sara Breitberg was appointed Curator of Israeli Art at the Tel Aviv Museum (under the directorship of Marc Scheps), and began staging a series of solo exhibitions featuring works by Raffi Lavie, Cohen Gan, Neustein, Kupferman, Menashe Kadishman (neo-Expressionist and Fauvist paintings of sheep) and others. In 1979, Yona Fischer retired from the Israel Museum, an event that marked the completion of this change. During this period, the arrival of postmodernism in Israel was marked by a number of group exhibitions: the exhibition series ‘Ulam’ at the Artists House and ‘Here/Now’ at the Israel Museum, both in Jerusalem; and “Different Spirit” at the Tel Aviv Museum. These exhibitions all revolved around a



Pinchas Cohen-Gan, *Untitled*, 1973, #29. Four Studies: Sheets of news-print folded, torn, and stained.

return to (mainly neo-Expressionist) painting, and a shift away from Conceptual art towards sensual, erotic art.

In this context, a significant number of the Conceptual and environmental artists mentioned above adopted a neo-Expressionist language. Moshe Gershuni turned to pursue a semi-abstract, Primitivist, 'anal' form of figuration; Cohen Gan created human figures in colorful contexts, gradually moving from Minimalism to Expressionism. In 1980, Gershuni and Micha Ullman represented Israel at the Venice Biennale: Ullman (whose solo exhibition "On the Surface" was featured that year at the Israel Museum) dug trenches/burial plots into the ground floor of the Israeli Pavilion, while the first floor featured a bloody, apocalyptic and tragic environment by Gershuni, which was related to the Holocaust.

The late 1970s and early 1980s in Israel were marked by a pervasive sense of crisis: the failures of the Yom Kippur War (1973), the rise to power of the political Right (1977), the First Lebanon War (1982), and the international energy crises. These developments led to increasing political extremism in the works of artists previously identified with utopian environmental projects. In 1975, Joshua Neustein and Gerry Marx created political environmental works in the occupied Golan Heights: Marx positioned photographs of Jerusalem on the ground and then shot at them; Neustein followed a dog and hung signs reading "vital territory" in the areas where it urinated. The rise of political extremism led Avital Geva to retire from the art world in 1978; Gershuni and Ullman joined the Peace Now movement; at Bezalel, an anarchist "Student Revolt" was supported by Gershuni and Ullman (who were fired) and additional teachers. During this time, the political and local elements in Tsibi Geva's works acquired a figurative, expressive, Primitivist character (notably in his paintings of kaffiyehs, terrazzo tiles, soot-covered birds, and morbid flowers). The growing politicization of Israeli art was given expression at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art's exhibition 'Artist-Society-Artist' (1978), as well as in the exhibition 'Borders' at the Israel Museum (1980).



Micha Ullman, Land Exchange, Etching.

While the exhibition "The Want of Matter" at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art focused on the tradition of collage-related abstraction, fragmentation, low, found materials and an intentionally unfinished quality, a parallel neo-Expressionist trend could be identified in Tel Aviv in the works of young artists who had yet to win the support of the establishment, forming various artistic groups in developing areas of the city. At the same time, it is worth noting the inclusion in 'The Want of Matter' of artists such as Tsibi Geva or David Reeb (one of the leaders of the Bezalel "revolt" and an artist whose political paintings were shaped by a Primitivist, figurative style). Despite the apparent hegemony of 'The Want of Matter,' a growing degree of pluralism began to characterize the Israeli art world during the 1980's.



Joshua Neustein's 'Territorial Imperative', 1976.

Members of the Bezalel Revolt.



Check-Post: Art in Israel in the 1980's

Ilana Tenebaum

The 1980's were a period of great change in the field of Israeli art. Although only a fraction of these changes came to fruition during the decade itself, several of the period's cultural trends – even if manifest then only in embryonic form – would exert a continuing influence on both the creation and reception of contemporary art in Israel. The aim of this text is to summarize the postmodern developments in Israeli art of the 1980's, as they were reflected through two generations of artists: the one that began its artistic career in the late 1970's and the one that began exhibiting in the early 1980's, when Modern-conceptual art interfaced with the new postmodern idiom.

The ruptured atmosphere that accompanied art created in Israel in the early 1980's should be understood against the backdrop of the era's political developments: the rise to power of the Right Wing, for the first time in Israeli history, was instrumental in the development of new conceptions of Israeli identity along post-Zionist and postcolonial lines. The Lebanon War and the great number of casualties sustained in it inflamed a public debate that would grow even more extreme following the outbreak, in 1987, of the Palestinian popular uprising in the West bank and Gaza Strip known as the Intifadah.

The gradual dissipation of the formerly constitutive collective 'we' in favor of a radical transformation of the boundaries between public and private spaces paved the way for new identity politics. These ideas were well reflected in artistic practice, manifest both in the emergence of new themes, and in a transformation of the conceptualization of artistic objects. One of the most notable developments in Israeli culture of this period was the rejection of conceptions of Israeli identity as discrete and somehow distinguished from the rest of the world. This would finally manifest itself, towards the decade's closing, in a new critical art, the crux of which was the reevaluation of that identity. Three major artistic events that took place during the 1980's themselves – the exhibitions 'A Turning Point' and 'Here and Now', and a series of exhibitions entitled 'Hall' attempted to formulate, in real time, the transformations then taking place within Israeli art. 'A Turning Point' (curator: Sara Breitberg-Semel), characterized the new direction of the art of the period as a return to painting, to the image and to qualities of Romanticism, Expressionism and Primitivism.¹ Yigal Zalmona, one of the curators of 'Here and Now' (Israel Museum, 1982), posited the arrival of postmodern painting on the scene as heralding a crisis in Modernism, which in the Israeli context, he argued, was never pure, since it had itself originally included qualities of lyricism and expressiveness. The project entitled 'Hall' – a series of nine exhibitions at the Jerusalem Artists' House in 1981-1982 (curator: Gideon Efrat) – reflected a postmodern approach in the rejection of one, singular line in favor of a plurality of styles. These shows dealt mainly with the reemergence of materiality and the political, encompassing painting and sculpture alongside live events that included other media, such as fashion and poetry.



Israeli tanks roll into Beirut during the 1982 war.



Menachem Begin after the Likud won the 1977 Israeli elections.



A scene from the first Palestinian Intifadah.

¹ Sara Breitberg-Semel, *A Turning Point: 12 Israeli Artists* (exh. cat.), Tel Aviv Museum, 1981, p. 4., 1986.

The Postmodernist Shift

Generally referring to a greater degree of pluralism and a differing degree of distance from or break with Modernism, the term Postmodernism can be understood through two distinctions: the first refers to the prefix ‘post’ as a temporal category (i.e., the period after Modernism), while the second refers to the term as whole – an epistemological category and a critical perspective.² Defined as a stance rather than as a period, postmodernism can be characterized as a new ‘shallowness’; the waning of concepts of ‘historicity’; and/or the fundamentally new relations between the two, and new technologies that illustrate a new global financial order.³ The triumph of Capitalism, which became all too apparent in the 1980’s with the dismantlement of the Communist bloc and the massive rise in the power of media, was accordingly apparent in the rising power of the image and of culture as ‘merchandise.’⁴

Another tenet central to Modernism was the idea of the artist as ‘author’ and of the artwork as ‘original.’ Postmodern art, on the contrary, yields to the artwork’s culturally contingent value, stressing its historical and financial aspects. The rise of new interpretive models in the discourse on art – among them Psychoanalytical, Marxist and Deconstructive critiques – greatly influenced the establishment of the new field of culture studies, which imposed a new investigative gaze on the age-old categories of ‘culture,’ ‘art’ and ‘politics of representation,’ regarding them as problematic and fluid. From that point it was a short road up to the crowning of ‘the social difference in gender, ethnic, and historical contexts’ as the central theme in the art of the 1980’s and 90’s. A deep transformation of Culture – and the art field within it – is indeed the condition sine qua non for the postmodern shift, since rather than being formulated through specific media, postmodern work is formulated in general cultural terms.⁵ The debate over the art field, then, was one of the central impetuses for artists and intellectuals during this period.

The Transformation of the Art Field

The 1980’s were a watershed period in Israeli art, as both the art field itself and the discourse about it underwent fundamental transformations. The single most important exhibition for our understanding of its structure, as well as the themes deemed valid within it at the time, ‘The Want of Matter: A Quality in Israeli Art’ (curator: Sara Breitberg-Semel), was held at Tel Aviv Museum in 1986. Delineating a constant tension between ‘here’ (Israel) and ‘there’ (Europe), the main thrust of Breitberg-Semel’s argument in the show was that Israeli art is a discrete phenomenon unlinked to the art of the Western world, which is grounded in the Classical world and in Christianity; the first link between the two, she claimed, was established in Modernism. Israeli art, Breitberg-Semel’s argument continued, was born under the aegis of two great myths – Modernity and Zionism – which she was later to describe as ‘identical twins’.

2 For this distinction in a post colonial context, see: Yehouda Shenhav, *Coloniality and the Post-colonial Condition: Implications for Israeli Society*, Jerusalem: Van Leer Institute and Tel Aviv: Hakibutz Hameuchad, 2004, pp. 9-10.

3 Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1992, pp. 1-54.

4 While the mainstream of postmodern art has indeed capitulated to both the culture industry and novelty’s trade value, the influence of earlier styles (most notably the “neo-avant-garde”) allegedly preserved art’s self-criticism. And as opposed to Modernism, which touted a non-reducible individuality, the “neo-avant-garde” is bent on highlighting “narrow” minority interests. See: Hal Foster, “Re: Post”, in Brian Wallis (ed.), *Art after Modernism: Rethinking Representation* (exh. cat.), New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art and Boston: David R. Godine, 1984, p. 189.

5 Aesthetic autonomy was transferred in postmodernism from the individual-cognitive realm of an artist’s engagement to the realm of institutional debate; but whereas the Modernist artwork degenerated due to a radical internal critique, it would seem that the “neo-avant-garde” underwent the same process on the organizational level. Nowadays, for instance, the degree of the art world’s assimilation into the culture industry is unclear. See: Foster, “Re: Post”, p. 189.

Breitberg-Semel further posited a series of formal choices, reflected in a conscious choice of ‘poor’ raw materials (such as the use of plywood and the production of intentionally “humble” surfaces) as an aesthetic and ethical choice, which, although grounded in Western art, became so fully naturalized in Israeli culture as to produce a local sensibility. Israeli artists, she further claimed, were bound to adopt this formal idiom: it sprang inevitably both from the Israeli Pioneer-Socialist ethos and from the anti-aesthetic, non-material aspects inherent in Jewish tradition.⁶

6 Sara Breitberg-Semel, *The Want of Matter: A Quality in Israeli Art* (exh. cat.), Tel Aviv Museum.



“Corner”, by Nahum Tevet, 1974, Industrial paint on plywood and chairs, Installation Shot from the “Want Of Matter” exhibition at The Tel-Aviv Museum Of Art.

Against this backdrop, however, other alternative elements in the art field were dealing with the new trends of postmodernism through the opening of alternative art spaces and galleries (some managed by the artists themselves) in Tel Aviv: these included the Artifact, Rap, Rega, Radius and Antea galleries (the latter dedicated wholly to women’s art), the White Gallery (one of the first spaces dedicated to photography), Tat Rama (which, beyond showing art also published a magazine under the same name), Sheink-in Café Gallery and Shelter 209 (a space dedicated to performances art). Bugrashov Gallery, established in 1986, also held other cultural events besides showing art, and was a unique interface between the political and the artistic.

A further development of this trend was the emergence of artists’ groups, among them Zik Group and Rega Group, one of whose members, David Wakstein, was instrumental in the establishment of art education outside of Tel Aviv.

Another model formulated during the 1980’s – for the very first time in Israeli history – was that of non-commercial, independent artists’ associations, such as Ahad Ha’am 90 Gallery, which was established in 1982. Ami Steinitz, its curator, led an alternative ideological line that challenged the Israeli artistic Canon: the gallery’s artists created social, local, multicultural art; their works signified a return to color-rich, often politically engaged painting with Oriental characteristics, which also dealt with the Holocaust and with personal pain.

The work of the people involved in Tat Rama and Ahad Ha'am 90 galleries brought the fringes into the center of the artistic debate. Their pluralistic display politics and their general preference for young art brought youthful, vigorous energy to these spaces. A gallery well-steeped in the sociological and geopolitical discourse of its day, Ahad Ha'am 90 can be seen in hindsight as inaugurating the paradoxical process that would come to identify all 'alternative' action in the Israeli art field: wishing to dismantle the center's power, it ended up creating a center of its own. A highly fractured one, though, with decentralized borders that defy recognition.



An invitation for a group show at the art space Ah'ad Ha'am 90.



Esti and Dan Zekaim in a performance on Sheinkin Street between Tat-Rama and Sheink-Ein Gallery, Tel-Aviv, 1984.

The New Discourse

The reigning conception of 'The Want of Matter', which was already hotly contested during the 1980's, met its first large-scale challenge with curator Dalia Manor's exhibition 'Perspective' (Tel Aviv Museum, 1991). Ami Steinitz had already formulated a number of distinctions during the period, which described the power-model of the Israeli art field as a 'dominating scheme.' He was referring to what he saw as the necessary conditions of entry into the artistic Canon: artists had to crack an 'international code' which always somehow manifest through abstraction, conveyed through the use of 'poor'/conceptual materials. Steinitz also pointed to a power structure that had begun forming between teachers at the art schools, young artists and the Museums, adherence to which was a further condition of acceptance.

Theoretician Ariella Azoulay further elaborated these distinctions later. She wrote of a "power triangle", namely the affinity between the museum, the Midrasha and the private home of Rafi Lavie, a prominent teacher there.⁷ The material and conceptual "trade relations" between members of this "domestic" discourse inaugurated a new, allegedly alternative, institution that accrued a power parallel to that of the central museums. One of the key components of this discourse, claimed Azoulay, were the laws formulated by Lavie and governing adequate artistic production: rational, non-

⁷ Ariella Azoulay, *Training for Art: Critique of Museal Economy*, Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1991, pp. 216-228.

sensual, idioms stemming from lyrical abstraction, the crux of which was materially-poor, conceptual art, i.e., the same idiom identified by Breitberg-Semel as a "local sensibility."

The writings of Tal Ben Zvi also come out of themes elaborated by Steinitz: they encompass the emergence of Arab-Israeli cultural themes and the presence of Arab artists on the art scene. Accessibility to key positions within the field, she claimed, is a corollary of the identity hierarchies that characterize a national-ethnic culture. According to Sarah Chinski, the romanticization of the 'east' within Israeli culture, turned the figure of the Arab into an instrument of identification with "the authenticity of the land", as well as its "locality."⁸ Even the radical transformation described above – the emergence in the 1980's of Arab-Israeli artists who "narrated" Arab culture from their own viewpoint, not as the subject of romantic identification of the Jewish-Israeli "narrators" – is regarded by Chinski as a quintessentially Orientalist development.⁹

The Return of the Repressed: Trends and Themes in the Art of the Eighties

The noticeable expansion of the art field in the 1980's was also mirrored in the many new modes of working that developed, first outside the establishment and then gradually within it. Postmodernism, which had developed in Europe and the United States in the late 1970's, began exerting its influence on a younger generation of artists, whose works were characterized by figuration, energy, theatricality and appropriations from art history.

One of the central processes that the art of this period underwent was the gradual dissolution of the distance between it and the centers of Western art. Works by many artists featured an anti-heroic, pathos-free stance on life and art – a startlingly new trend when seen against the austerity and paucity that characterized Israeli visual art for many years. Art then was one of the most extreme instances of the renunciation of the overt discourse on a separate, distinct "local culture": artists operated as members of the global art field, the raw materials of which (mainly borrowings from the cinema, advertisement, television and general consumer culture) were shared by Western artists. Israeli artists, however, created a sort of hybrid between global culture and the local-Israeli one.

The gradual undermining of the dominant Hebrew identity transported Israeli culture into a post-national situation, wherein the existence of a local culture was perceived as self-evident, a departure point rather than something that needed to be reasserted or fought for. New Israeli identity bore a strong affinity to global culture. This stance was further elaborated by differing versions of Israeli identity, such as Mizrahi¹⁰ and Arab identities; versions that continued the search for the essence of local culture. The criticism of the "model" local identity was manifest both in work by

⁸ Sarah Chinski, "Silence of the Fish: The Local versus the Universal in the Discourse on Art", *Theory and Criticism* 4, Autumn 1993.

⁹ Chinski, "Silence of the Fish."

¹⁰ The Hebrew-Israeli term Mizrahi (literally 'oriental') refers to either Jewish-Israelis who immigrated to Israel from Arab counties, or to the second-generation Israelis whose parents had done so. Formerly a derogatory term (stemming from the deeply Eurocentric character of Israeli Zionism), it was reclaimed in the past few years to denote a positive, identity-affirming break from hegemonic Zionist conceptions. - See more at: http://www.artiscontemporary.org/features_detail.php?id=75#sthash.si90QJWY.dpuf

Jewish artists, such as Yair Garbuz and Arnon Ben David, and in the gradual entrance of Arab artists, such as Asad Azi and Asim Abu-Shakra, into the canon of Israeli art.

Another significant development in this context mirrored a more general shift within Israeli public discourse concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The 1980's saw both the first decade of peace with neighboring Egypt and a dissipation in Israeli collective identity following the Yom Kippur War. It is therefore unsurprising that when representing conflict, the political art of the period tended to be much more critical – even blunter – than the art created in preceding decades. This was clearly also influenced by the rise of live coverage television: the events of the Intifadah were represented by the Israeli media with growing intensity. References to these images – albeit in different ways and using different techniques – can be found in the work of photographers Anat Saragusti and Micha Kirshner, painters Tsibi Geva, David Reeb and Gabriel Klasmer, and in the work of graphic designer David Tartakover.

The 1980's also saw a rise in the artistic representation of personal subjects, notably as related to gender. Alongside diverse representations of “femininity” (mainly by women-artists such as Jenifer Bar Lev, Pamela Levi and Diti Almog), male artists such as Jacob Mishori and Motti Mizrachi began exploring the borders between the genders. The rising representation of non-traditional female roles, which stressed a greater degree of equality between the genders, acted to clarify retroactively the extent to which earlier Israeli culture was dominated by men.

Another subject that gained a greater degree of exposure during this time was artists' personal biographies, themes of migration, and personal-critical references to the experience of the Holocaust. Several artists (among them painters Meir Pichhadze, Nurit David and Yudith Levin, sculptors Itzhak Golombek, Nahum Tevet, Ido Bar-El and Drora Dominey, photographer Boaz Tal and film director Amos Gitai) shifted the theme of the “home” to express a perplexed local being through the use of highly personal narratives. Their autobiographical “stories” were instrumental in breaking the boundaries between media, between the different senses and different interpretive genres. Another important shift occurred in representations of the Holocaust: instead of depictions of the general-national level, some artists in this period focused on personal and familial representations. These included Moshe Gershuni, Haim Maor, Michael Sgan-Cohen and Yocheved Weinfeld. Some of their works referenced the experience of the “second generation” – the sons of the survivors.

Alongside the reception of the artists who participated in the Want of Matter exhibition as the ‘adequate’ representatives of Israeli art, ‘alternative’ powers in the art field tried to undermine this trend. The ‘return to painting’ (heavily influenced by New German Painting of the era) allowed artists such as Yitzhak Livneh and Larry Abramson to express critical, post-conceptual ideas. A further influence was the crisis of traditional signification systems and the waning faith in the ability of single systems to represent truth. This led to the development of hybrid visual idioms: during the 1980's, artists were more inclined to create multivalent images

that juxtaposed a multiplicity of contents and idioms. This is clearly manifest in the two-dimensional works of Pinchas Cohen Gan, Deganit Berest, Michal Na'aman, Tamar Getter, Bilu Blich and Neta Ziv and in the three-dimensional works of Uri Katzenstein, Zvika Kantor, Philip Rantzer and Gideon Gechtman.

Alongside the return to painting, photography was also asserting itself during this period as a valid artistic medium. The lively discourse on the medium led to the inauguration of the first international biennial of photography in the Museum of Art, Ein Harod, in 1986; and the curator of the Israeli pavilion at the 1988 biennial, Adam Baruch, was also one of the main contributors to the debate on the medium. Seen against the change in the medium's status at this period, it is interesting to note that the work of several of the photographers constituted in effect a sort of ‘meta-photography’: photography whose critical gaze was directed at the medium itself and its ideological underpinnings as an agent of representation. The works of Michal Heiman, Barry Frydlander, Äim Deüelle Luski, Moshe Ninio and Miri Nishri differ from the photographic works discussed above in their disbelief in photography's ability to act as evidence. These artists, on the contrary, point to the fact that the medium's significance is achieved through the tangle of cultural signs.

This rereading of this tumultuous decade is dictated by the great degree of similarity between the ideas that drove artists then and now. The artists of the 1980's acknowledged the fact that they were compelled to treat the world of the media and develop modes of expression conducive to ‘quick’ readings. However, while the artists of that decade dealt with this development with a certain degree of irony, it would seem that the generation of artists working today has brought the marketable aspects of art to their final conclusion. Most of the art produced in Israel today is uninformed by traditional definitions of medium. The subversion of the traditional status of singular media, a novel development in 1980's, has become ubiquitous, so much so that many artists today hybridize different media as a matter of course – and not as an artistic stance that requires elaboration. Finally, the radical transformations in the structure of the art world itself, beginning in the late 1970's and culminating in the 1980's, continue to exert their influence today. New directions formulated by Israeli theoreticians and based on new cultural knowledge have already become, in certain quarters, a new Canon. The main impact of new identity politics introduced in the 1980's was that the image of the ‘male/white/artist’ has lost its central position. To conclude, it would be fair to say that rather than a decade that saw this or that ‘transformation’, the 1980's saw a radical realignment of all systems: those of the art field itself as well as those of language, interpretation, and identity, of concepts of ‘locality’ and the ‘adequate’ identity of artists themselves.



‘The Want Of Matter’ Catalogue, published by the Tel-Aviv Museum of Art, 1986.

This text was initially published in the catalogue ‘Check-Post: Art in Israel in the 1980's’, published in 2008 by the Haifa Museum of Art.

“Having worked extensively with Israeli art over a long period, I intuitively came to the conclusion that a segment of our art had an inner code significantly different from that of European and American art. The phenomena were the same, but the inner essence unlike. The sensuality, that of the world of matter and that of artistic matter, was not to be found in the works. The well-known explanation – the unique quality of Israeli light – may still be valid; by no means does it suffice, nor does it explain the cleaving to the poor material look, the eschewal of colourfulness, and the consistent and stubborn refusal to paint seductive pictures. Many of the artists seemed to have a string of preferences and

eschewals in common. Completely different work seemed, to me, to be close in spirit, tone, and outlook. Privately, I called this the ‘poor quality’, in a positive sense. I saw in this quality a source of the works’ strength, and began to wonder about the preference which, to me, did not seem accidental. This exhibition is an attempt to give some answers. The choice of artists corresponds to my initial feeling that there is an affinity between the seemingly different artists, the feeling that gave rise to the subject of this exhibition.”

SARA BREITBERG-SEMEL

(FROM THE ‘WANT OF MATTER’ CATALOGUE)













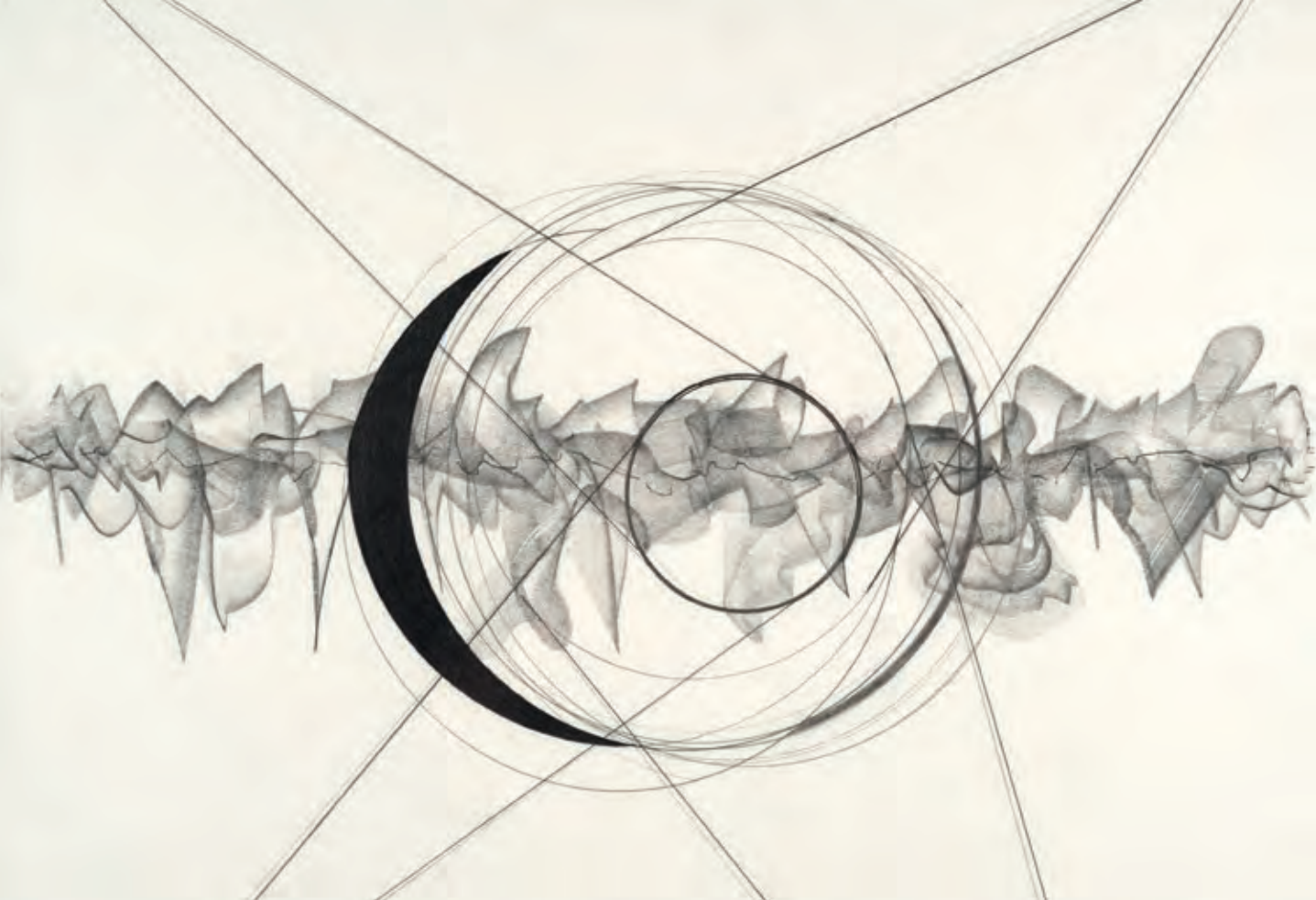


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You Never
Really Get Rid
Of Anything:
An Interview
with Moshe
Kupferman

Conducted by Stewart Klawans in 1995.

SK: *Since 1949, you've lived on a kibbutz in the Galilee – not exactly a center of the art world. How did your art evolve in this setting? What were the influences on your painting?*

MK: A general remark: this kind of question comes from someone whose life has run a more or less normal course, has not been cut and totally diverted at a crucial point. In my case, my human environment changed quickly at a time when I had not yet developed a grownup's mentality. At that point, I had to struggle just to survive, and there was no place for thoughts of art.

And yet you became an artist. How? Why?

People like me, refugees from Europe, put the very near past into storage when we came to Israel. With that came a longing, conscious or unconscious, for regenerative urges.

To make one's life whole again somehow?

It was more like a survival instinct. Intuitively, in my art, I found a way that was suitable for my life. I was a refugee; it's something I can't disconnect myself from, even today. As a refugee, I felt the values of having a family and a home were more important than making a career as a painter. But, slowly, I started to paint more and more. Once I started, I found out that I love it and can't do without it.

You spoke of the cut that occurred in your life. Before that cut, when you were a child in Poland, had you been interested in art?

From childhood, I knew I had the ability to draw and to paint. I was good at it. When I was in the second or third grade, I remember, a teacher put up one of my drawings with the drawings of students from the higher grades.

What kind of pictures did you make?

It's important to understand that in the environment in which I grew up, what people meant by a good drawing was one that looked as much as possible like the model. I could do portraits, though it wasn't in my nature to do them. I had to restrain myself to do them, but they were the sort of thing that was expected, and when I did one, my parents would be very proud of it. I didn't know it was permissible to do anything else.

So you didn't make pictures just for fun.

Some watercolors, landscapes. That was in my one year in high school, when I had a Polish painter as a teacher. I was among the best in that class. Then World War II began, and that was the end of my studies.

You sign your works in both Hebrew and Roman letters – sometimes in very large Hebrew and Roman letters – and you also practice a kind of automatic drawing that's like calligraphy. So, for people who want to understand your work, your schooldays are of interest in another way as well: that's when you were taught to write.

I write with my right hand, because when I was a child the teachers made me do it. But I paint with my left hand.

In which language were you taught?

The main languages were Polish and Hebrew. It was a private Jewish school, and not a very big one. There were about thirty students in my class, whereas in regular schools there would have been about forty. When I went back to Poland for an exhibition in 1993, I went back to the site of the school in Yaroslav. It's in poor shape now. But I remembered something that reflects the period. Each year, before the Polish national holidays, we would practice marching on the field outside the school. The school always had to struggle for recognition within the national system, because of anti-Semitism, so we wanted to put on a good show for the national holidays. The headmaster, Dr. Schlaff, would stand on the balcony overlooking the field and use his walking stick to pound out "left, right, left, right" for the marching.

Do you have direct memories of anti-Semitism from this period?

I remember this as a period of accepting what I was told and what I was told to do. Within that acceptance, I think I had enough imagination to do what I wanted. Although anti-Semitism in Poland was already strong, we lived peacefully within our world. We'd already felt the beginnings of Zionism; we participated in the youth movement. We were traditional in our religious observance, but not fanatical. There was a general suffering from anti-Semitism, certainly, but I myself did not experience it.

What was Yaroslav like?

It was a town of about 30,000 people, about a third of whom were Jews – a peaceful town, very clean, very orderly, not very strong financially. I don't recall there being very rich people in Yaroslav, and the Jewish community helped its poor. The surrounding area was agricultural, with a mixed population – Polish, Ukrainian, Jewish.

Weren't there any omens of trouble?

I do have memories of political conflict from this period. There was a farmers' party, which held a strike. They held back their produce and disrupted transportation to the city. The government, which was quasi-military, sent a special police squad to put down the farmers' demonstrations. This was in 1936 or '37, and I remember the sirens of these units, when they shot and killed some people. My father had a little store. I remember how a farmer came on a Saturday afternoon to buy a black suit for the funeral of someone who had been killed by that police squad. Yet my childhood was a happy one.

Until the war came. In the autumn of 1939, the German army occupied Yaroslav and forced your family east into Soviet-held territory. In 1940, you and your family were transported to a work camp in the Urals and then to another camp in Kazakhstan. The rest of your family perished, and you made your way back west, alone, after the war. When, in all this, did you start to make art again?

I started to draw again, a little, when I was in the transit camps in Germany, with the youth movement, in 1947. I didn't start to paint until I came here.

Biographies of you also say you saw your first high art at around that time, on a visit to the Alte Pinakothek's collection in the Haus der Kunst in Munich.

Yes; but art was not yet a main interest at that time, and certainly not a profession. I didn't make up my mind about that for a long time. In the end, I found myself being a painter; it wasn't a conscious decision.

But you did get some instruction.

I didn't have an academy. But I had the luck of studying with two great artists, Yosef Zaritsky and Avigdor Stematsky. They taught three summer courses at Kibbutz Na'an, in 1953, '54, and '55. I participated in the last two. The kibbutz movement, you see, wanted to let its members make some progress in whatever activity was important to them, including art. So, just as someone would be sent to another kibbutz for a month to learn to milk cows, I went to study painting.

And that was your first instruction in art since high school, before the war?

Even before that, I'd met the artist Haim Atar, who established the art pavilion at Ein Harod. That's where I'd been sent in 1948 to learn the construction trade, and where I'd met my wife, Mia. In 1953, before the summer course at Kibbutz Na'an, I went to Ein Harod and spent about a month painting with Atar.

What sort of instruction did he give you?

Atar didn't really instruct. But the experience was important to me, because it was contact with an artist. He was a difficult man – a Soutinist by nature, a painter of dramatic expressionism, full of suffering [laughs]. He was responsible for one side of my schizophrenia. It meant a lot to me that such a difficult man would like me and see my talent.

What kind of work did you do with Atar at Ein Harod?

Oil paintings, and drawings with whatever they had.

And did you, too, make Soutinist pictures?

Something like that. I can't say today that I have a very refined approach, but back then I was very primitive, primitive and naive in my way of thinking. With Expressionism, Soutine for example, you key yourself up to a certain level. But you can't maintain that all the time. I later came to feel you have to back off sometimes and not be so expressive. That's the other side of my schizophrenia, which comes from Zaritsky. Although you can't disconnect Zaritsky from Expressionism, he wanted to purge the dramatic elements from the painting. I'm a painter thanks to the influence of these two artists; but you'd also have to say, despite the influence of these two.

Since Zaritsky was the leading figure in the school of lyrical abstraction, which constituted the mainstream in Israeli art after World War II, he must have been a large influence either to absorb or to overcome. Tell us more about what he meant to you.

Zaritsky wasn't a theoretical man, a talkative man, but he connected me in a practical way to a more sophisticated way of thinking about painting. He didn't speak of a "picture"; he referred to it as a "square". He introduced me to the idea of covering the surface, of drawing, as an action. As time went by, I sought those elements as valuable in themselves within a work.

So that's one of the ways you went beyond Zaritsky's influence: by making the act of drawing autonomous, by treating the canvas more literally as a flat surface. How else does your art differ from his?

Zaritsky was a very optimistic man, with a positive outlook – like a pioneer who was building something new. One of the ways this expressed itself was in the way he claimed he didn't like to peel off a surface of paint. That was a contradiction, because you can see he did just that in his best paintings. But when he taught a



student, he'd say, "You've covered the surface enough. Don't touch it." It was a kind of hygiene in the painting process, which he maintained until a certain conclusion had been reached. Now, my generation as a whole is not the same as Zaritsky's. I can't progress without stumbling into something, stopping, falling back. It's never a direct progression for me. I acknowledge that those moments also contribute to building the painting.

Again, you're making a connection between the experiences of your life – of the lives of people of your generation, in fact – and the way you paint.

The reason these experiences make their way into the art is because in making the painting, I go through the same process I go through outside the painting. The sequence in which I perform the actions – such as drawing, covering up, peeling off, scraping – is a response to experience, both life experience and experience of the act of painting itself. For example, I start a picture by covering the surface with paint, and then I draw on it. The order comes from chaos. Most artists do it the other way around. They start with something ordered: a drawing. In my case, I don't even talk about planning ahead. That's the way to deal with contradictions: putting them next to each other. And the painting has to give proof of the co-existence of the contradictions.

Everybody accepts the idea that your art has a lot to do with your experience over the years as a construction worker. But when you work in construction, you always have to plan ahead, and always have a purpose.

[Laughs] I only did the labor, never the planning. But you're right. The whole thing is full of contradictions. For me, the art of painting is based on two things. First: art admits the confrontation of opposites and seeks their co-existence. Second: art is the place where you can't explain everything until you've reached the final point. If we try to do only what is understandable, then we do less than we can.

You've already talked about some of the inherent contradictions in your painting: putting down a layer of paint and scraping it off, making a drawing and then wiping paint over it. We could speak of chaos and order, expression and silence, remembering and forgetting. But what about some of the geometric forms that come into your work? Do they express contradictions?

The grid that you see in many of my works is a basic form for me. The horizontal lines are like horizons - different viewpoints on reality - and the vertical lines are like

human presences. So you could say the grid is a way of legitimizing differences. It shows that different elements – not only elements, but values – can co-exist, in multiple existences. The grid is a way of combining experiences rather than eliminating them.

And the X?

The X is one force and another force, an opposition. Very often you see one leg of the X crossed again and again. That's a way of defusing the symbol. When you see the same thing again and again, it loses some of its power.



Moshe Kupferman, Untitled, 1972, Oil on Canvas, 25 1/4 x 32 in.

So you assert the power of the X. but you simultaneously deny it—another contradiction. Among a lot of art critics in the United States in recent years, this sort of ambiguity has been unpopular. Many people – not all, but many – want a work of art to speak clearly, to make a statement.

As if art were in need of a detailed explanation. What's important to me is contributing, giving of oneself. I'll give an example. We don't have complete control over the information we work with; we're not computers. So when we do something in full mental control of our actions, that control can sometimes be more of a hindrance than a help. It stops things; it cuts them off. A thought runs a lot faster than any attempt to control it or interpret it. So if you stick to a specific plan, it's a limitation. You limit the possibility of something happening.

Is that the reason you became an abstract painter – to escape limitations?

Exactly. With sculpture, classical or not, the fact that the work has three dimensions limits its physical presence. Sculpture depends on that limitation. With installation art as well, the artist accepts the limitation of the space, right from the start. I happen to dislike installation art. I need an art you can take with you, that's portable. But, also, I acknowledge the spiritual need to portray more than you can. When you take a canvas, which is a limited area, and give it an autonomous life, the action you can do within it is infinite. You have something that allows you a distance from real life, something in which you can create a new world, in which the distances can be cosmic. The detachment from reality frees you from a dependence.

With some artists, this sort of talk might sound like escapism. With you, though, the connection between art and lived experience is too strong for that.

The distinction is that we're not able to live with contradictions in real life the same way we can in art. In real life, you can't destroy something just because it does not satisfy you as you go ahead. But in art, you can scrape something away or cover it up and then use that destruction on your way to the next stage. It's a paradox, one that enriches me. In real life, though, that paradox can drive you mad. The catastrophes that have happened in our century – the two world wars, the catastrophes that are still going on – are also bound up with great progress. They're connected; they're parallels. They're also one on top of the other.

When you talk about order in a painting co-existing with chaos, when you describe the act of working over a surface again and again, one artist who comes to mind is de Kooning. Did his painting have any influence on your work?



I don't think de Kooning had a very big influence on me. I didn't see enough of his work, in the original, at the right time. I was fortunate to come under the influence of Mondrian at the right time. That started around 1962, during my first visit to Holland.

What did an acquaintance with Mondrian's work bring to your art?

When I went to Holland, especially to The Hague, I saw how Mondrian, in only two years, went from doing Symbolist work to abstraction by using very simple motifs such as the tree, and how from that his art deepened enormously in conception. That's when I came to love the right angle [laughs]. Though maybe that too has to do with my having worked in construction. It's morality at its purest.

In that sense, Barnett Newman also comes to mind.

[Laughs] You don't have to complicate things; they're complicated enough as they are. Sometimes, people come to me and complain that my paintings are too complicated. I say, "No, they're complex" [laughs]. They become more complex because there are Jewish elements involved. There are Jewish elements in the practice itself, in the basic curiosity of thinking "If I do this, what will happen? What if I do that?" It's something special in the Jewish way of thinking [laughs]. Although other people have it, too.

What's Jewish about it? The "what if?" attitude?

The dissatisfaction, the unwillingness to accept things just as they are. I am a Jewish painter; and generally speaking, Jewish people tend to be loyal to a basic scheme of values while also being skeptical, always searching. That confrontation in itself is the reward. The fact that out of this comes a painting that has some interest for other people is just a coincidence.

Now that we've started to talk about your being a Jewish painter, we also should talk about your being a painter on a kibbutz. The biographies say that it wasn't until 1960 that the kibbutz granted you three days a week to work in your studio, and that you didn't get to paint full-time until 1967.

This is a special situation, which you can't extend to the whole kibbutz movement. The group that formed this kibbutz was 90 percent refugees from Europe. They were people who had not had a chance to become educated but who had a very large experience of life. From the start, everyone could get what he wanted, if he was stubborn enough.

And you got what you wanted, which was to paint.

Not without a fight. But conflicts, disagreements, are part of any relationship. I never thought the time to paint was something I deserved, but it was something I wanted; so I got it.

Obviously, you weren't selling a lot of paintings before 1960. Your art wasn't bringing much money into the kibbutz back then.

The money came later.

So what did you say to the other members of the kibbutz, to convince them that it wasn't a waste of their resources to allow you to paint?

In those days, the kibbutz ideologically aspired to answer the needs of society as a whole – not only functionally, but spiritually too. So I argued that the kibbutz's ideology implied that you should do your creative work, as long as you did not disconnect it from the physical labor you were doing.

When did you first have a studio at Kibbutz Lohamei Ha-Getaot?

I got my first studio in 1955. It was where the entrance to the museum now stands.

Did you build it yourself?

In part [laughs]. If you want something that smells bad for your interview, I have a story about that studio. Our kibbutz was built on the site of a former British military camp. The latrines for the camp were just a deep hole in the ground, with a concrete construction and a wooden cover with six compartments. There were more of these latrines than we needed for the kibbutz. When I wanted to build a studio, I looked for a place that would be a little isolated, maybe 30 meters away from where I lived. There was a latrine that nobody used; the kibbutz gave it to me, and that was my first studio. We filled in the holes, made a concrete floor, put up a different roof to get in some light, and that was it. My first studio, 30 square meters.

And your second studio?

It's the one we're sitting in now. I built one room; then I added the bathroom; then I added a storage room; and so on. If I live long enough, I'll keep on adding.

Did you build the studios yourself?

I participated, especially with the first studio, but mostly I just organized the job. I didn't do a lot of the physical work. I was busy with other things, and anyway, I didn't have an ambition to build the place all by myself. I don't have any sentimental romance about hard labor as such. I wasn't an intellectual who became a worker

because of ideology. I was a worker just because of life. Although hard labor was never a big problem.

The fact that you've lived on a kibbutz all your adult life doesn't just mean that you've done a lot of physical labor. It also means that you've never been a slave of the art market, even after you began to paint full-time.

True. But the ability to do what I do as a profession, to make a living at it, was something I had always wanted to achieve. I didn't like it when the kibbutz granted me just three days a week to paint, putting limits on my work. But my life evolved in the kibbutz, and that left me independent of the market. What I understood was that I had to do my own art in the place that was right for me. I loved being in New York very much when I visited in the 1970s – I still love being there – but I never for a moment felt it was a place where I could make my art. It's an excellent place to absorb influences – but I couldn't clarify my thoughts and my work there.

What were your impressions of New York, during that first stay?

I spent four months there in 1975, at a moment when there was no dominant style. The galleries were all looking for the next trend. Photorealism was just getting started. Conceptualism was coming to an end. There was also pattern painting – though that didn't last very long. In general, it was a time when people were looking for the next thing. When it didn't come, they fabricated it; it was a phony change.

You sketched a lot during that stay in New York, and after your return to Israel you began to make more works on paper. Can you tell us something about the difference for you between painting and working on paper?

There's one basic difference between paper and canvas. You can relate to one part of the paper by folding it; you can also get to the surface from the other side of the sheet. I can explain the need to fold by speaking again of the desire for something that is portable. By folding the paper, you make it smaller. With the recent paintings, I've been making segments that function as if they had been folded, or gotten to from the back. Other artists might collage something onto the canvas. I don't feel the need to do that, because I feel good when a layer of paint functions in that way.

So you feel there's a relationship between your works on paper – perhaps the "Divided Pages" series in particular – and your recent paintings.

What exists in the works on paper also exists in the paintings. You probably understand already that I have a lot of things on top of things. The difference is that

today, I also have things beside things. If, generally speaking, my canvases are layer upon layer, a screen on top of a screen, in recent years you can also see parts of the painting that become autonomous. You can concentrate on a segment and let it function as if it were a whole.

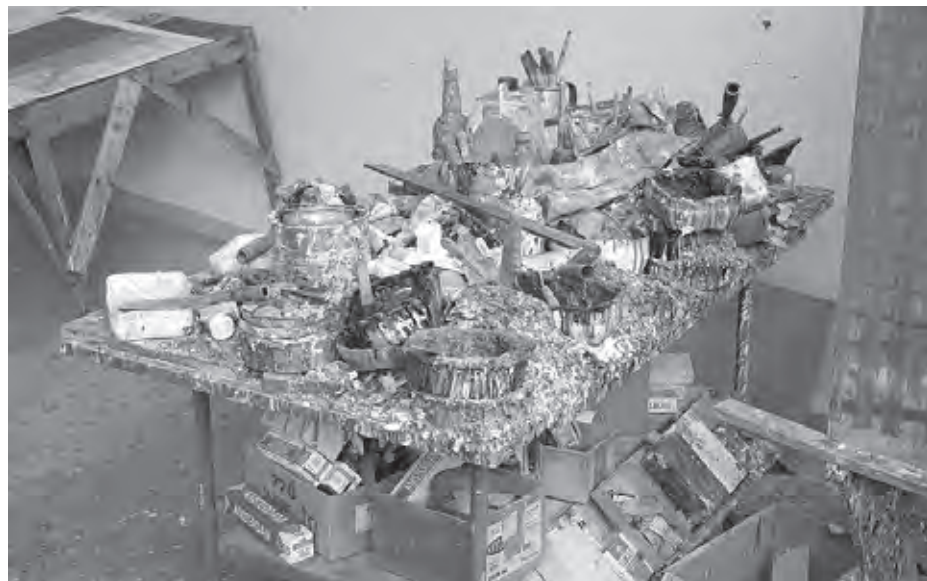
What's behind that change?

I'm not someone who works with great confidence. That's how it was years ago, anyway. Today, I have more confidence. The process within the work is something that is already routine. It's inside me now; I control it. That, combined with the feeling that time is getting shorter, makes me more free in the way I work. If, before, I went by the motto that less is more - not being a Minimalist, but trying to get to the essence of things - today I also feel I can examine different aspects of my own work from the past, along with new things that have evolved, and bring new meanings to the work. I used to have the feeling that you cannot discover the same thing twice. Today, I know that's true. But that doesn't mean that what you've already found you have to put away and forget. Besides, it's not in my character to shut things away. This doesn't have to do just with painting; but I feel my work is a proposition about how to paint today.

Could you define that proposition for us?

It's clear that people who try to paint today are not under any obligation to achieve a more naturalistic image than before - or a new kind of abstraction, either. My work proposes that you should act within an understanding of all these elements and take what applies to you, without feeling you have to be loyal to any one aspect of painting.

What about subject matter, though? For a lot of people in recent years, especially those who advocate political art, the subject matter has been more of a concern than formal issues.



I generally reject political art, because I don't think a person can choose his or her reaction to something. You can't take a picture of someone suffering, and that's it. The thing itself is greater and more complex. In my paintings, there is no subject. Or rather the subject is the time of making the painting. I can show you a canvas done a year ago, starting just before Purim. Last Purim was the time of the Hebron massacre. The massacre is not the subject of the painting; but if we're talking about time, that event probably had its effect on the work. So it's something complex. It's not as simple as "being about."

But there is one concrete, definable element that's become more and more important in your recent paintings: your signature.

There are paintings where I signed my name anywhere I felt, even for a moment, that my presence should be stated. It allows for something of an ironic relationship with the viewer: "You think I'm here? I'm also there." [Laughs]. Anyway, it's not like signing a check for a million dollars, where you have to examine if it's correct. The signature is a presence. So I'm simultaneously in many places in this painting. And still I see the painting as a whole entity. Something happens when it's together.

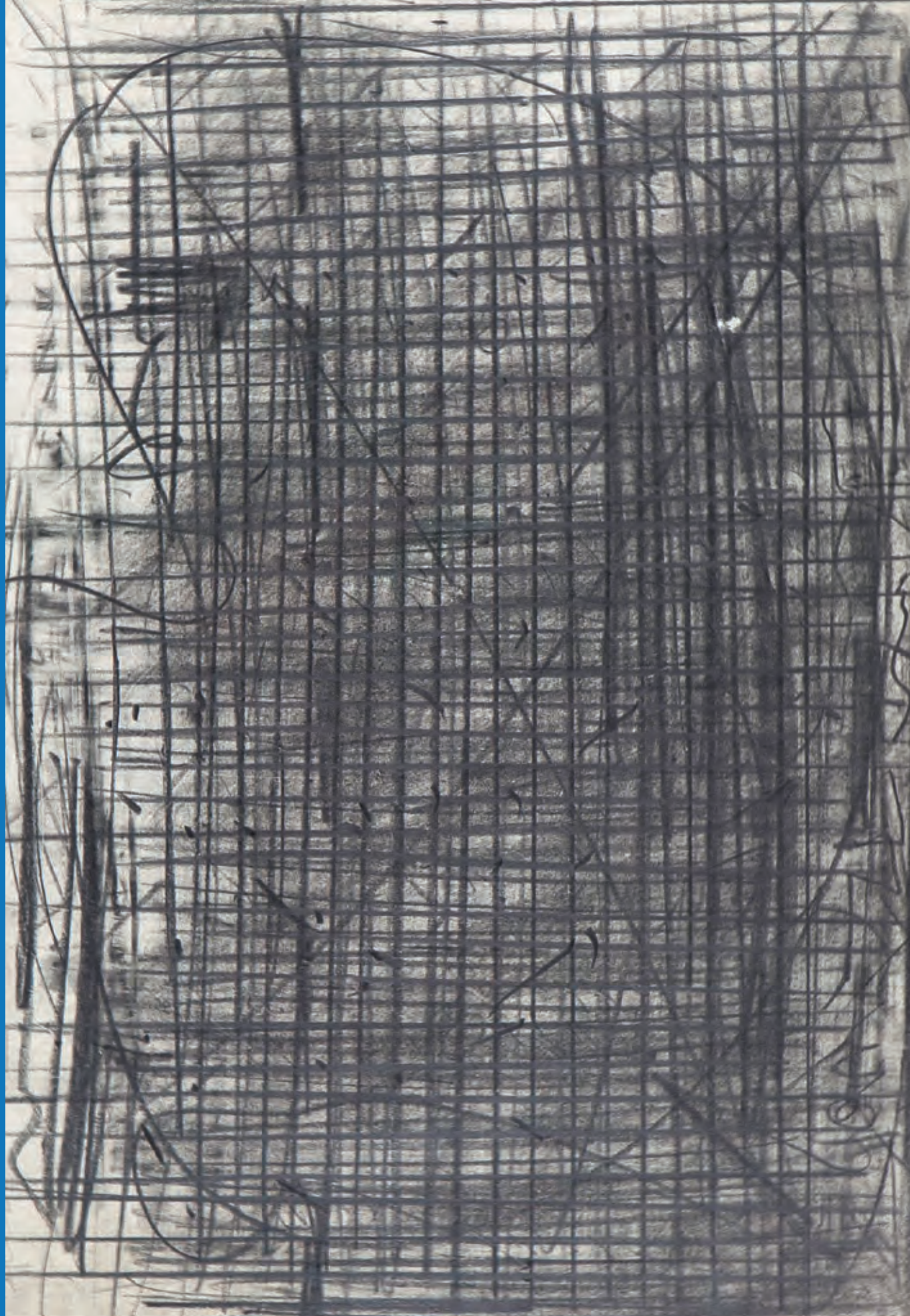
By signing it in different places, you also put the history of the making of the picture into the painting.

These elements have been in my work for a long time. You never really get rid of anything.



Moshe Kupferman, Untitled, 1994, Oil on Canvas, 51 x 77 in.

This interview was provided courtesy of the Kupferman family, originally published in 'Moshe Kupferman: In Addition to the Expected' edited by Galia Bar-Or, published by the Ein Harod Museum of Art, 2012.



“The grid that you see in many of my works is a basic form for me. The horizontal lines are like horizons - different viewpoints on reality - and the vertical lines are like human presences. So you could say the grid is a way of legitimizing differences. It shows that different elements – not only elements, but values – can co-exist, in multiple existences. The grid is a way of combining experiences rather than eliminating them.”









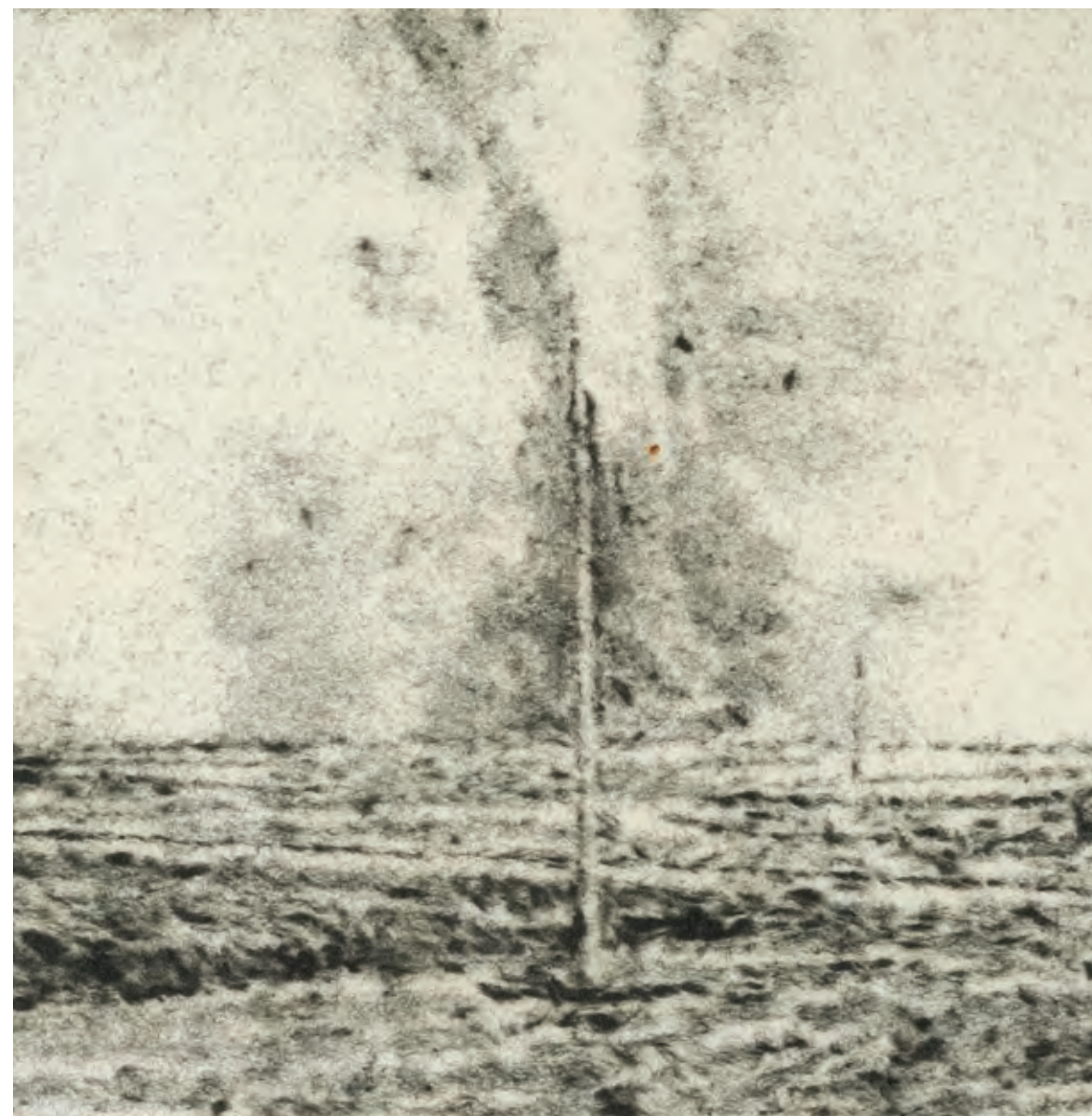






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Mother Tongue,
Father Tongue:
Following the
Death of the
Mother and the
Death of the
Father

108

Ariella Azoulay

A conversation with Ashkenazi Jews:

Why are you pretending? **Pretending what?** To be a Mizrachi Jew. **I'm not pretending, I am a Mizrachi Jew.** Oh, come on, you?! A Mizrachi Jew?

A conversation with Mizrachi Jews:

Why don't you write that you are a Mizrachi Jew? **It's inscribed in my name.** Well, then, why don't you write about Mizrachi Jews? **I do.** What? Where? **Yigal Amir, Carmela Buchbut.** Oh well, that doesn't count. Why don't you write about your own Mizrachi identity? →

The first series of questions is posed by a group of people who believe I am pretending to be something that I am not. The second group of people believes me to be concealing who I really am. From my own perspective, however, there is little difference between them. Both groups belong to the identity and language police, and both presume to know better than I do who I am and what I should be thinking and doing.¹

Every day, from first grade to the end of elementary school, my teacher would enter the classroom, open the attendance register, and read out our names. Azoulay was among the first ones; preceded by Abutbul, Abekasis and Abergil. These were the Mizrachi kids, the North Africans. I knew they were not liked from home. They were spoken of dismissively, and sometimes even called derisive names. They were inferior to us. My mother was a third-generation native of "the country" (Ha'aretz) which cannot be named with its name, for she was born in Palestine, a name that would eventually become forbidden and cursed for Israelis. My father immigrated from France. We had been made to feel that our family name, Azoulay, which followed immediately after those other names, was different from theirs.

When I was about twelve, the older of my two sisters suggested that we change our last name to a Hebrew one. This was how I discovered that our name wasn't quite right either. It disclosed something, and others might think that we were like "them," those with the other names. We were not like them. I understood, with a child's intuition, that I had to support this plan. Yet my sister's suggestion was rejected with the assertion that *"One doesn't change one's name."* And in any case, my father is from France. The subject of our last name was never raised again at home. As an adult, I attempted to reconstruct this event, but my mother denied that my sister ever suggested changing our name.

My father is from France. This is a fact. And so we, his daughters, are eligible for French passports. The passport would attest to its bearer's identity. Shortly before graduating from high school, I began preparing to realize my dream – that of studying in Paris. I began the procedure of applying for a French passport. My correspondence with French bureaucracy revealed to me in no uncertain terms that my father was an Algerian, a native of Algiers. I had already become aware of this detail when I was twelve, yet had never internalized it. To the best of my memory, my father never spoke of Algiers. In general, he managed to both speak rarely, and tell many stories. That was perhaps why I never asked about the gap between France and Algiers. My mother

¹ The original version of this text was written in 2003 and appeared in the anthology *Hazut Mizrachit* (ed. Yigal Nizri and Tal Ben Zvi), and later on the website readingmachine.co.il. I returned to this text in the days following the death of my father, about a year and four months after the death of my mother. Translated from Hebrew by Talyha Halkin, edited by Ian Sternthal.

explained that when my father arrived in Israel in 1949 (emphasizing that he came as a volunteer to enlist in the Israeli army), and was asked for his place of birth, he replied with great care: Oran, France.

For years, I pictured that scene at the Ministry of the Interior, seeing it as vividly as if I had been there myself. My father leans towards the reception window. Facing him is the tired face of a bored clerk. My energetic, amused father utters a single word, “Bonjour,” in the hope that, as always, this greeting would open every door. The clerk seems less amused and asks him matter-of-factly for his place of birth. When he hears the answer, “Oran,” he pauses momentarily and asks with obvious disinterest, “Where is that?” My father repeats the name of the city and even doubles it – “Oran-Oran” – as if attempting to redraw the borders of the city. As he looks into the clerk’s eyes, the hint of a smile appears on my father’s dark face. He glances left and right, perhaps in order to reassure himself that no one is witnessing this case of geographical fraud, and then replies with great satisfaction: “*In France, of course.*” I liked telling this story every time I was asked about my family’s origins. It filled me with pride. I always emphasized how lucky my father had been to meet an ignorant or bored clerk. This was how I managed to ignore the deep significance of the fact that my father had invented his identity.

Several years ago, I wanted to anchor my version of the story in concrete fact, and mentioned it at my parents’ house. I probably dared to do so only when my father was out. My mother, at once offended and defensive of our family patrimony, responded by reproaching me: “*Why would you say such a thing?! Dad is French. Algiers was part of France, and the Jews were the first to receive French citizenship.*” This was the version told by my mother, a sabra as she called herself, a third-generation native. Words are commensurate with things and things commensurate with words. My mother couldn’t be lying. The truth, as far as she is concerned, is the proof that no lies were told. Truth is always conscripted in order to justify something else. The truth is frequently subordinated towards the attainment of other goals, even if acrobatic feats must be performed in the process. My father, however, showed no interest in truth. He didn’t feel compelled to prove to anyone that he spoke the truth. He simply enjoyed being French. It was a question of pure pleasure. Good wine, baguettes, Camembert and cold cuts. After you bury me, he used to say, play jazz and eat French food on my tomb. Had it been possible, I think he would just as eagerly have enjoyed becoming an American – they had, after all, landed on the moon, invented jazz and XXL living. He reserved the adjective ‘real’² for jazz and food, but never for identity. Not even for a split second was he bothered by the question of whether his identity was truly



French. In every encounter with officials, as he faced those who come to inquire about identities, papers, or taxes, he became incredibly creative. He reinvented himself over and over again, exploiting their weaknesses, their ignorance and narrow-mindedness, their one-dimensional outlook and their underlying motives. Regardless of whether he intentionally searched out this twilight zone or entered it by chance, he derived pleasure from being “there,” in a territory that was not clearly defined.

When I was twelve years old, my older sister came home with a booklet detailing the SHELI³ party’s platform. To this day I can feel the touch of that slim booklet against my hand; the soft cover, the staples that held it together, the simple black print. A block of text with no pictures. I think the cover bore a monochrome, grainy greenish image of a sabra, a prickly pear plant, printed so roughly that its outlying edges faded into the background. This booklet was where I first came upon the word “occupation.” It hit me with great force. It was unrelated to the little I knew about the place I grew up in, and about the deeds of the people who inhabited it. I remember several other harsh, violent words: expulsion, expropriation, theft and disenfranchisement. To this day, when I use these words, I feel in my mouth an effect similar to the one I felt the first time I pronounced them. Their foreignness in my mother tongue is given expression, above all, by the respect they demand. They cannot be camouflaged within language. As a child I felt that these words were too big for me to use, but also that I had the duty to pronounce them. The racist house in which I grew up amplified this sense of duty. I’m not certain about the memory of the prickly pear on the cover. It’s quite possible that I am imagining it now, creating a memory out of fear that the words I remember cannot aptly describe the shock I felt coursing through my body as I encountered this new vocabulary. The image of the perforated, punctured prickly pear fading into the green background was so much more fragile than the prickly pear whose image was reinforced by my mother’s words every time she proudly declared: “I am a sabra, a third-generation native.” Up to that moment, I also saw myself as a sabra. The fact that my father was an immigrant from Europe did not undermine the sense of being chosen to be a sabra that I inherited from my mother. She who was born in one of the colonies founded by the Baron de Rothschild, and her body, language and gestures embodied the sabra identity. She was a female sabra created out of the rib of a male sabra, and she brought her daughters into its covenant. My father always remained different, his distance at once foreign and elegant.

The discovery of both my father’s origins and of the acts committed by Zionism – which was in fact a discovery concerning my mother – took place around the same

² In Hebrew “real” (“amiti”) comes from true/truthful.

³ A left-wing political party in Israel formed prior to the 1977 elections by the merger of Meri, Moked, the Independent Socialist Faction and some members of the Black Panthers.

time, but they did not carry the same meaning. My mother's truth was stripped bare before me and revealed to be a lie, while I grew increasingly fond of my father's lie as a form of truth.

Despite the distinct nature of these two stories, the one about my father and the one about my mother, I held my mother responsible for both. My father's lie harmed no one; it did not attempt to control or conscript other subjectivities. My father lied because he took pleasure in the possibility of becoming French. He never experienced a similar pleasure vis-à-vis the possibility of assuming an Israeli identity. Although he was familiar with the culture, and adopted a patriotic political stance, he preferred the French Club of Netanya, the Quatorze Juillet (the Bastille Day) celebrations at the French ambassador's house, and le tricolor over the blue-and white Israeli flag. He did not attempt to rid himself of his heavy French accent, detested popular Israeli music, and rituals like cracking sunflower seeds, eating hummus, and grilling meat outdoors. He scolded customers who dragged their feet when entering his music and electronic store, which he treated like a palace, and never conceived of going out to wash his car in anything but a collared shirt and gabardine pants. My mother insisted on her truths concerning both my father and Zionism, and she derived pleasure from her righteousness.

Like every national discourse, my mother's syntax built upon a silent consensus among those who spoke it. Hers was the language of the occupiers, a language that could not afford to let uncultivated areas develop, from which alternative narratives might emerge. The fundamental agreements demanded by such a language preclude the possibility of breathing within it. Polemics are encouraged within preordained oppositions contained within the Zionist meta-narrative. For this reason, listening to external voices, let alone adopting them, constitutes a betrayal of one's mother's tongue; alternately, one can seal one's ears and exile oneself to distant lands or invented worlds. My mother was a native sabra. The fact that her beloved mother, my grandmother, was born in Bulgaria and came to Israel by chance, that she hardly spoke Hebrew until her last day and always remained somewhat distant, a foreigner, did not impact my mother's image of herself as a real sabra.



Around the time of this discovery, I turned twelve. Without being able to account for it verbally, my body was continually irritated by my encounters with the truth agents. Schoolteachers, youth movement counselors, politicians and neighbors were all contaminated by truths that can be recognized only by and amongst Jews. They all lied. "National home." "Ours." "We were persecuted." "All Arabs are murderers." "All they want is to drown us in the sea." "It's their fault." "They fled." "They have no problem killing one another." "They multiply like flies." "We fight for the life of every one of our soldiers." For the first time in my life, I began experiencing rage. Rage concerning the place I grew up in, the tragedies it produced and about which I still knew very little, the lies used to camouflage them. My rage was mixed with a sense of insult. Perhaps because I had been misled. I didn't know where to turn for solace. During that time, I was gathered up in the cold arms of an orthopedic posture corrector designed to straighten my back. This contraption, which was supposed to efface ancestral sins, condemned me to silence. A silent mouth and a silent body. In one instant, the "we" that I had been part of was transformed for me into "them." Years went by before I understood that the traces of my father's otherness – which was always there, omnipresent – had also been impressed upon me, giving me the power to see myself as distinct from them, even though they were different people, in a different time.

The journey I was forced to embark on, a journey outside the realm of "we," divested me of language. The orthopedic cast fitted onto my body in Dr. Barzilai's store on Tel Aviv's Sheinkin Street tightened its grip around me, surrounding the place from which words originated. I discovered that I knew how to remain silent. Silence revealed to me its rehabilitative potential. The metal poles, leather straps, and plastic pelvic mold rattled and clicked proudly – new, clean, technical syllables. These were the building blocks of a non-native language. With my mother's language, as with any mother tongue, a perception of history as reality, as a matter of fact, is given through its syntax and its organizing categories. My mother's own mother tongue was Ladino. She guarded it zealously, wishing to share it with no one. For years I underestimated the importance of this part of her life, and only years later I understood that Ladino was her nature reserve circumscribed within a quintessentially Israeli life. Years went by before I realized that what I had identified as my mother's sense of belonging to this



place was more precisely a response to a command, a pressing need, to being called to the Israeli flag, purely out of duty. As if on a mission, she sought to introduce us into the covenant of the sabra, while she herself did not entirely efface all traces of her own diasporic existence. On the day that her mother, my grandmother, passed away, the sounds of the Ladino I did not speak vanished, leaving behind nothing but my mother's unconcealed longing and several terms of endearment. For us, my mother sought to reserve the local, purely sabra mother tongue. She wanted our family to perform gloriously for the state of Israel. We were always being observed by an additional eye, the eye for which we ate, celebrated, dressed, went out, and hugged. For moments, we embodied the achievements of the Jewish state. This heavy burden was not merely a kyphosis within language. For us, daughters and sons of the second generation of expellers, it more closely resembled a skin disease or contaminated blood. We were not present at the time of the foundational crime, and did not launder our words. We inherited them as sparkling white and carefully starched. When I tried to purge this language, I discovered to my surprise that I was close to its bottom, wholly submerged in shallow waters.

My father's tongue was punctured. The stories that percolated within his Hebrew were intriguing in terms of their accentuation, yet his Hebrew lagged far behind. The richness of his imagery was not born in Hebrew. At the same time, his functional syntax and impoverished vocabulary did not impede his talent as a storyteller and his ability to pay attention to details, to the atmosphere, and to the characters by means of which he repeatedly reinvented himself. These orally transmitted stories glossed over his broken Hebrew. Nevertheless, every time he rose from his armchair and went out into the world, even if just a few meters away, he came back with new bounty. Reality never disappointed him, and he always found fragments to piece together. The fact that his tales transcended the listener's field of vision allowed him to gather materials whose authenticity remained unchecked. He had a penchant for details, and as incredible as his stories sounded, they were always somewhat based in reality.

I have a vague memory, I cannot pin it down with certainty. One day someone commented on my father's poor Hebrew. In retrospect, I realize that this was the moment when I began behaving as if the countdown had begun. I had to cater to my totally unfounded desire to read all the books. I was still just in my early teen years and had my own library card, but was only allowed to borrow three books a week. There were hardly any books in our house. I made a point of taking out books whose

opening sentence I failed to understand. I read them without really reading. I wanted those other words, the ones I did not know, to become mine. I enjoyed the fact that my sisters took pride in the books I read. I enjoyed the way those books kept me company, gradually drawing closer to me, or I to them. I liked their feel, their presence on my pillow, the sense of security they imparted. Much later, I came to understand that it was easier for me to read a book once it had spent some time in my company, and this has since become a habit. I purchase books knowing that it will take some time before I read them.

My mother tongue was contaminated. Words dulled the pain – all pain, including that of the mother herself. They clamped the pain's mouth shut. Rather than listening to the pain and engaging with it, my mother tongue argued with it, spoke in its place or for it. My mother tongue is contaminated. Hebrew is contaminated. The Hebrew mother tongue is contaminated. My Hebrew mother tongue is contaminated.

Both within and outside of language, I felt the same sense of helplessness. My attempts to extricate myself from my mother tongue failed, and my sense of unease would not abide. I was ready to bite into my mother tongue in order to then watch it collapse at my feet, defeated and humiliated after all it had instigated. Yet I loved the language, I loved the mother. I too began to use it to invent things, to tell the story of the past forwards and backwards, sideways and in a circular manner, until what had been buried awakened to life and what had been neglected became as central as the heart or the spine is to the body.

My father tongue was a gesture; of impersonation, otherness, foreignness, masquerading, multiplicity, practicality, acrobatics. This gesture repeated itself in every language my father could chat in, as he did with the various customers who came to his store. He took pleasure in his ability to register words in foreign languages and to behave as if he spoke them – Amharic, Russian, Arab, Spanish, and even Yiddish. I possessed no father tongue to immigrate to, but I possessed the gesture. At first it was bodily, and then gradually it became a written language, and only later a spoken language. My father's acts of fabrication were so powerful that even when it was clear that his life was not as colorful as his descriptions, they continued to exercise a certain



magic that instilled within us the power to extend their use even in his absence. His physical death will not take it away from us. We have internalized this imaginative faculty as if it were our own, in order to elude that which attempts to bind us. In addition to the gesture of speech, my father tongue also contains the gesture of silence. It is silently present like a scar. During the Second World War, my father joined the French army and left Algiers. When he immigrated to Israel he left Algiers a second time, and this departure was final. Today I see this act as an act of survival. Who could possibly have wanted to be an immigrant from North Africa in Israel in the late 1940s?! What sabra woman could have possibly wanted, at that time, after the expulsion of Arabs, to marry an immigrant from North Africa, especially if she herself, with her blond hair and green eyes, had successfully camouflaged her Sephardic origin? When he was referred to as an Algerian my father felt he was being taunted, whereas when he was referred to as French he felt he had received a complement. He avoided the friendship of other immigrants from North Africa, took care not to be identified with them, and insisted on marking the distance that lay between them. The price he paid for this insistence was loneliness. He was a foreigner, and this experience of foreignness remained a solitary one.

A decade or so ago, my parents presented me with a tape that had been recorded in 1972, in the course of a family car trip to Ashdod. I remember that trip. I was nine or ten years old. My father was driving, my mother sat beside him, and my youngest sister and I sat in the back seat with my maternal grandmother. As usual, I was the one holding the microphone. In contrast to other such tapes that vanished over time, this one was preserved because it had recorded the voice of my grandmother on the day preceding her death from a stroke. When I listened to it 30 years later, I could only guess that the woman with the heavy accent, which was likely Bulgarian, was my grandmother. That was not how I remembered her. Her china-white face and black hair have remained voiceless in my memory. Voices are fated to be erased from photo albums, and the same happened to my grandmother's voice. The other voices that emanated from that tape sounded equally unfamiliar. The little girl in the car – the girl who was me – implored the others: *"Talk to me."* It seemed to me, as I listened, that she repeated this request more than once. Listening to this imploration, the noises all got mixed in my head and I could no longer hear a thing. I have since held that tape in my hand and slipped it into the tape recorder several times, yet I never dared to hit the PLAY button. I was struck by the distillation of my entire life into those two words – *"Talk to me."* The little girl whose voice rang out on the tape, giggling and protesting, reminded me that my



intellectual interest in the drama of speech and silence – this never ending dialectic of ownership, belonging, responsiveness, apprenticeship, pronunciation, foreignness, loneliness, anxiety, disenfranchisement, betrayal, silencing, effacement, compatibility, and immigration – was preceded by an act written in the body.

The gesture of silence hid in my body like a genetic code even before I was cast out of, and fled from language. This gesture enabled me to reinvent myself. Many years went by before I realized that even my mother, whose speech embodied collective Israeli identity, who spoke for it and brandished its flag before us, also fled from it, to her own living room. There, as long as I did not provoke her, she forgot all about it and her duties towards it. Together with her husband – my father – she could, in her own living room, permit herself, for a limited period of time, to experience her own sense of estrangement from the others – the Israelis, to participate in his evening aperitif ceremony and in her own sewing-related mannerisms, to dream about her family's mansion in Sofia and to take refuge in the European rituals of courtship that my father undertook for her sake, masquerading as a Frenchman. Yet in her own living room, she would also occasionally use a colloquialism from the world of her childhood in Rishon LeZion, demonstrating to us that beneath this European sheen, was a "real" sabra.

When I began asking questions about the Palestinian washerwoman who had worked for my mother's parents in Rishon LeZion, and who must have taught my mother the impressive number of Arabic words she knew, I encountered a one-dimensional embodiment of a sabra. When I wondered what she thought when, one bright morning, my grandfather's Palestinian workmen did not show up for work in the orange grove, the voice of the nation emanated from her throat, replacing the woman who raised us most days of the year. Speaking in this national voice, she sought both to deny the fact that a crime had been committed and to set me back on the straight path, to redirect me to the vantage point from which I too would continue to ignore the crimes that had transpired.

The day I began inquiring about the past, and was branded by her a rebel, my mother could no longer speak to me as a mother to her daughter. It was forbidden to question the road that had been taken – the road she considered to be beyond questioning. My act of heresy opened up a great and painful abyss between us. Only after my mother's death did I come to realize that by responding exclusively to the figure of the sabra, I endowed her with more power than she really had. I could have possibly undermined her power, had I allowed my mother's own sense of estrangement from this place

to reveal the cracks in her figure. This sense of estrangement, I still feel, protected her from the abyss that must have opened up with the vanishing of her childhood landscape – of the characters, customs, forms of dress and flavors of life in her beloved Rishon LeZion – where, up until the foundation of the state, the lives of Jews and Arabs naturally intermingled. And from that moment onwards, a hollow language of independence and liberation took the place of the pain, loss, and destruction. Had I asked her about this sense of estrangement, her sabra self would probably have denied its existence; remaining silent about what she could not share with a traitor like me out of fear that I would turn her words into a testimony about what had been concealed. This sabra self would probably have denied the estrangement, as well as the meaning I ascribe to it today. It is possible that the noun “estrangement” does not adequately describe the thing I am attempting to capture, the inner lining, visible or invisible depending on the circumstances, of the sabra – who, rallying to the flag, denied its existence and trampled it with her own two feet. I am not imagining this sense of estrangement. It had obvious expressions, even if she denied their significance. By touching upon it, I am allowing for the possibility that my mother experienced a terrible sense of loss when the country, of which she so proudly declared herself to be a native, was suddenly transformed. I refuse to believe that my mother did not identify the catastrophe as such prior to adopting the hegemonic story that justified its occurrence and denied its meaning.

Had she not experienced an unspoken, painful, silenced loss, she – and other members of her generation – would not react so tensely, their speech tightening like a protective wall in an effort to conceal that sense of loss; readily denying its existence and replacing it with a false joy concerning the foundation of the state in a country taken from others. Had I not delineated the contours of this sense of estrangement, I would not have been able to imagine the possibility of a civil charter, the possibility of responding differently to the catastrophe that has also overtaken the lives of those who became the oppressors and their descendants, continuing to hold them in its clutches. Perhaps if I can reconstruct the seams of the lining I can also unravel them, rearrange the pieces of cloth to form a new pattern. Perhaps I can hear her speak to me, with me, hear her saying “*Yes, I miss the washerwoman’s gaze, her heavy accent, the special sound produced when she rolled my name – Zehava – on her tongue*”; and perhaps after a short pause she would add, “*Yes, and the feel of her hand when she would caress my golden curls and gather me up in her arms.*” From that point on, Mother, the conversation

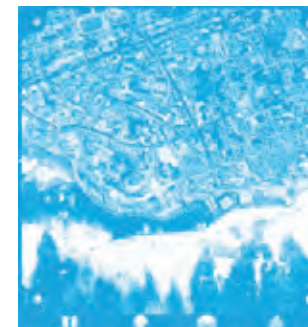
would start flowing and you would regain the vitality of one who is no longer exerting such an effort to conceal a buried secret.

When one is surrounded by a roaring silence as regards the past, the words “*Talk to me*” express a longing for speech. When one is surrounded by the rustle of speech, the words “*Talk to me*” overpower the existing discourse, exposing the fallacy of discourse that does not address ‘me’ but rather a candidate for military service. Speech uttered by someone whose voice has been assimilated into the voice of the nation, that does not address a recipient – is not speech at all. These three words simultaneously demand both an act of speech, and an act of silence.

As a child, I tried to assume the role of my father. I did not choose the role of the storyteller, but rather of the one who falls silent between stories. I had to overcome the tremendous urge to speak that had defined me since my youth, to choke back the overwhelming number of words that crowded in my mouth. I thought of silence as something beautiful. I considered it to be a sign of nobility and pride. I felt that distress, pain, sadness or longing were mitigated in its presence. I trusted it.

When I was 18, I began studying French. During my first two years as a student in Paris, life outside of language was no longer a metaphor. The new silence of an immigrant who had lost her tongue enabled me to rediscover myself in language, in a foreign language, which enabled me to reinscribe language into my body. The one who spoke French was different than the one who spoke Hebrew. Several years later, the distance between them was gradually reduced. French enabled me to return to Hebrew, yet the joy that spontaneously fills me the moment my lips prepare themselves to speak in French, infusing my speech with life, is a joy that rarely arises in Hebrew; and even more rarely does it arise spontaneously, of its own accord.

The orthopedic body was locked in a state of silence. The demand “*Talk to me*” belonged to it as well. It too attempted to enter language. To be spoken to, even when it faltered, even if it did not respond immediately. It demanded time, it asked not to be abandoned, to be spoken to until it caught up, closing the gap between word and body. It did not attempt to efface the signifier impressed upon the body, but only to expose it to the air, centimeter by centimeter, through speech, direct speech, speech directed at me, directed at the body, reinstating it by means of the tongue so that word and body could be reconnected on a scale of one to one.



An aerial photograph of Jaffa taken in 1963.

The sign impressed upon the body cannot be removed. One can refuse the signifiers that are being offered, and say “No thank you” and search for an alternative signified. “No thank you, I am not interested in writing about Mizrahi identity, I have no idea what identity means.” “No thank you, I am not interested in forgetting that I am a Mizrahi woman.”

The sign impressed upon the body is devoid of content. In my case, it is rooted in language and in the linguistic gesture. Hebrew will not let this sign rest in peace. It awakens from its place of rest, as if it cannot rest under such conditions. The sign entertains the process of negotiation with language; a process that will continue as long as the sign's foreignness is preserved, persisting despite the constant and pervasive threats and demands to assimilate, to conform to the existing covenant, the one that exclusively binds those who are not foreigners, whose closeness is a function of the divide established between them and the others, enabling and justifying small and large acts of theft and expulsion.

In contrast to a large number of Mizrahi boys and girls, I suffered little because of my origins. The few insults directed at me were revealed to me retroactively, when I understood that the dismissive attitudes my parents directed towards other Mizrahi Jews whom they perceived as ‘backwards.’ On the day I experienced the meaning of these insults, they stung with the immediacy of the present. At the same time, they imbued me with a clear perspective, a power born from searing pain. Being Mizrahi as it was impressed upon me by my parents had no content; yet its encounter with the outside world forged a clearly defined stance, and an inscription in the body which combined with certain choices, determined my place in the world. These choices expressed the desire to resist preordained fate. Fiction and the imagination, foreignness and immigration, the intentional blurring of their traces and the silent and silenced presence of their signs played a decisive role in determining that a contingent definition – the daughter of Mizrahi parents – began to exist as a juncture of intentional choices. These choices created an arena of negotiation in which what could have been preserved as a birthmark, a cultural disability or a form of civil distortion, became an asset. I would grow over time to see this asset as a gift, as what saved my life, extricated it from the slot allotted to me by the ‘melting pot mentality’ which continues to view the place where I grew up as multiculturally open, and not as the space of segregation that it is. This gift resembled a smoke detector, a warning device that alerts the body – at times even prior to the formulation of a verbal statement – to the fact that this is not a place where exiled communities come together, but rather one



A photograph of a settlement in the occupied West Bank taken by Efrat Shvily.

where those whose outlook is incompatible with the collective mentality are excluded or exiled. A place where responsibility for the act of exiling is denied, and where the gaps through which one may catch a glimpse of another form of existence, or an object of longing, are inaccessible.

The detector did not operate of its own accord. Its familiarity with the injustices suffered by those around me, of those impressed into the skin, did not ensure its response in those times and moments where it should have wailed like a siren. It required me to work for it, it demanded bits of information, facts, pictures, artifacts. Every time I managed to retell a story that was seemingly familiar, to rearrange its different parts so that what had been denied or concealed was reintegrated into it, I felt like a person whose life was saved. Saved from collaborating in the carrying out of a crime. I could not feel this threat in real time, because its essence centered on the concealment of its nature. The understanding that without the painstaking labor of storytelling I would not know what had transpired in the place where I grew up, came in waves. With delays, and often retroactively, I understood that I had become a partner in the denial of a great catastrophe that had taken place before I was born. This catastrophe was distinguished by the sudden and unexpected impact it had on its direct victims, and by the lens it implanted in the eyes of those responsible for it and their descendants. This special lens does not easily shatter. It can be cracked by experiences of foreignness and estrangement, which allow for an examination of the hegemonic narrative that comes from the outside. It results from one's recognition of the shrill notes, seams and gaps that remain invisible to the perpetrators. In a society where acts of expulsion, exiling, and occupation are defining patterns, the sense of estrangement that surrounded me while growing up served as a key for imagining a different model of citizenship, a covenant between strangers and estrangement. My mother died and now my father is also dead. I will introduce them into this covenant in my imagination.

When the mother tongue is contaminated, when the father tongue is punctured, one can imagine a civil charter only if one recognizes that this is the hour of what has been erased as a viable possibility, the hour of what is now becoming possible.



Roi Kuper, From Necropolis, 1996-2000, black and white photo.

“Like every national discourse,
my mother’s syntax is built on a silent
consensus among those who spoke it.

**Hers was the language of the occupiers,
a language that could not afford to
let uncultivated areas from which
alternative narratives will emerge.**

The fundamental agreements demanded
by such a language preclude the
possibility of breathing within. **Polemics
are encouraged within preordained
oppositions contained within the
zionist meta-narrative.** For this reason,
listening to external voices let alone
adopting them, couldn’t be but a betrayal
of one’s mother’s tongue; alternately, one
can seal one’s ears and exile oneself to
distant lands or invented worlds.”

ARIELLA AZOULAY



Arabs worked in the citrus grove that my grandfather owned in Rishon LeZion. One day the workers disappeared and Jaffa oranges became a Jewish Israeli brand, from which the richly fruitful cooperation of Jews and Arabs was erased. For promoting this brand as Jewish, girls were costumed by their parents as the trunk of a citrus tree on which Jewish oranges grew, called - Jaffa, sounding like an ancient name of a Hebrew product. Photographed in Rishon LeZion in the early, 1950s, Photo Levanta.



249 רחובות יחד תל אביב יפו
475 לוד יוד תל אביב
476 שוהם
423
577
947 ירושלים יד הנצי"ג

58 85

זוהרים



רחוקים













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The Political
Potential
of Art:
An Excerpt
from ‘The Huleh
Project’

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Ian Sternthal

This text is an excerpt from 'The Huleh Project', an upcoming book about Art and Cultural memory in Israel.

When I was seventeen, during a visit to the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh, I wandered into an artist's talk that was being given by Mona Hatoum, a contemporary Palestinian artist. I had never heard of her before.

Hatoum began her lecture with slides of an installation from 1988 titled 'A Thousand Bullets for a Stone.' Rocks were placed on the floor, in front of an image from the first intifada that was projected onto the corner of two walls. My Zionist upbringing led me to close myself off from her critique before the work's message could begin to act within me. As I wandered through the retrospective, my reluctance to listen was overpowered by Hatoum's later pieces, which appeal to the physical senses – playing with temperature, texture, and shadow. In 'Light at the End' (2002) an iron metal frame and five electric elements were installed at the end of a room. From far, the warmth seemed inviting but, as I approached the lights, I felt

the danger of the electricity and the heat. Physically experiencing displacement and alienation communicated emotional states of fear and distress that I viscerally connected to. Her work broke down psychological barriers that I was previously unaware of. Hers was the first Palestinian voice that I was able to hear.

The experience transformed my understanding of how art could be used to change popular perceptions of truth. When we read



Mona Hatoum,
Light At the End,
2002.

words or absorb images, we are presented with information that we have the option of accepting or rejecting. When information is presented to us as a predetermined conclusion, it will usually play second fiddle to our existing ideological convictions. We believe what we want to far more easily than we believe what is true. Figurative messages that convey a subjective experience are less threatening to our pre-existing conceptions of reality. It is because ambiguous images are absorbed without the interference of our defenses that they are capable of challenging dogmatic belief systems. These are the messages that resonate. Their political currency is derived from their ability to covertly challenge our preconceived notions without our conscious awareness.

I started creating my own artworks soon after that trip. I turned to representation out of a political necessity that I recognized in Hatoum's work. As an awkward acne-ridden gay teenager living in a homophobic community, I was mute and invisible. Beneath the opacity of my seemingly average exterior, however, a wild storm of emotion was brewing. I remember one day sitting in my suburban Montreal bedroom ruminating upon my own political impotencies. I picked up a pair of scissors and began cutting

apart images from my sister's fashion magazines as well as my own photographs, reconfiguring the fragments into new collages. The collages depict the forbidden things I longed for, and I would frantically hide them under my bed each time someone knocked on my door. Through montage I could be whomever I wanted. Me, prancing down a catwalk, screaming, with Kate Moss's decapitated head dangling from my arm while a variety of famous faces look on with envy. In another collage I stand screaming, half naked, wearing female legs and a large piece of phallic jewelry glued over my crotch. A bevy of bodiless legs scurry around me while a 40's film star looks coyly in my direction.



Ian Sternthal,
Untitled Collage,
2002.



Ian Sternthal,
Untitled Collage,
2002.

Creating the collages allowed me to transform myself. It wasn't that I actually became my fantasy; it was that I dared to express it. Artistic representation offered a space free of repression where I could take control of who I wanted to be and how I wanted to be seen. Through the articulation of a life and identity I longed for, I accrued a confidence that transformed me from a passive shadow of a person into an active agent. I used art to explode stifling social conventions because I had no other tools at my disposal.

This experience opened my eyes to the political function of making artworks in a way that has forever changed the way I look at art. Artistic expression allows disenfranchised people to transform their identities. The politically incapacitated can never be completely silenced. Oppression and poverty may reduce our chances of being seen and heard, but people find ways of articulating their fantasies and, when they do, a seed is planted that has very powerful implications.

When I was twenty-five I moved to Tel Aviv with vague ideas of working on a book about Israel as an actualized utopia. I began

collecting images from archives that imagined Israel before it existed. I quickly noticed how closely Israel's development mirrored my own. The images I had begun to collect reminded me of the self-portraits I made as a teenager.

Before Israel was a place it was a fantasy. Social utopian fictions from the late 19th century, such as 'Journey to Israel in 2020', 'The Love of Zion' by Avraham Mapu, and 'Altneuland' by Theodore Herzl, imagined a new society in Palestine before it physically existed. Visions of strong young men and women, cutting edge architectural schemes, and courageous tales of heroism and sacrifice were presented as promised futures that



'Altneuland', written by Theodore Herzl, 1902.

would accompany the Jewish resettlement of Palestine. Israel is distinguished from the many utopian dream worlds of early modernity in that it was not left to languish as a fiction: It was transformed from a fantasy into a real place, populated by Jewish refugees from around the world.

Zionism's founding wish-images were created by a generation of alienated Jews who dreamt of transforming their identity. When Herzl's attempts at persuading world leaders to establish a Jewish State failed, he sat down to write 'Altneuland', a fictional novel that describes a futuristic metropolis that sprouts from the Palestinian sands. Unable to affect change in the real world, Herzl countered his political impotencies through the creation of wish images that represented the world he aspired to. Wish images express collective desires for future forms that are not yet technologically possible as a means of achieving them. When dreams for the future emerge as representations, they bear powerfully upon the future. In 1902 'Altneuland' was translated into Hebrew as Tel-Aviv. In 1909 a new settlement was created on the dunes North of Jaffa. The city was named after the novel, appropriating the fictional city's identity as a modernist metropolis teeming with dynamism.

The story of Israel's creation exposes the powerful role that art and fantasy play in transforming political realities. The contextual differences between Herzl's grand national fantasies and my lewd and perverse dream-world are vast, but the process that underpins them is very similar: we both used art in order to provide ourselves with political power at a time when we had little other recourse.

Like my collages, 'Altneuland' bore powerfully upon Israel's political trajectory. So powerfully, in fact, that the very myths which brought about sweeping emancipatory changes for Jewish refugees, have today become widely accepted as incontestable truths. These myths constitute a paralyzing hair shirt that continues to cripple personal agency in Israel. As stated by Susan Buck Morss in 'The Dialectics of Seeing', "Dreamworlds become dangerous when their enormous energy is used instrumentally

by structures of power, mobilized as an instrument of force that turns against the very masses that were supposed to benefit.”

As I began doing research on Israeli art and iconography I noticed that whereas images from Israel’s early years were marked by utopian projections for the future, more recent artworks express a sense of warning, rupture, and impending catastrophe. Take for instance the following two representations of Jerusalem and its landscape. The first image, ‘The Road to Jerusalem, Ein Karem’ (Fig #1), was painted by Reuven Rubin in 1925. The second painting, titled ‘Landscape and Jerusalem’ (Fig #2), was painted by Eliezer Sonnenschein, an artist with three works in The Rothfeld Collection, in 2007.

Fig. #2
Eliezer Sonnenschein
‘Landscape and
Jerusalem’
Oil on Canvas,
2007.



While both images represent the same landscape, the way the city is viewed today differs greatly from the way it was perceived during Rubin’s time. Rubin’s painting shows a traditional utopian representation of the city: The cultivated fields and stone buildings blend seamlessly with the landscape, showing a civilization in peaceful harmony with nature. Sonnenschein’s depiction transforms the landscape into an apocalyptic version of its former self; natural forces are wildly let loose in a cacophony of colorful explosions and supernatural creatures. Jerusalem is at war. The Zionist analogy between the Palestinian landscape and the Jewish body, a leitmotif in early Zionist mythology, is now the most visible element of the

Fig. #1
Reuven Rubin
‘The Road to Jerusalem,
Ein Karem’
Oil on Canvas,
1925.



painting. Rivers flow with blood, and mountains contain human lungs beneath their surface. The sky is a dark shade of black. A freakishly oversized human wades his deformed arms in a river while a horse with octopus-like tentacles that burst through its chest jumps across a stream of blood. In the background colorful explosions of fire shoot out of Jerusalem’s holy sites towards the heavens. The painting suggests that an over-valuation of mythology¹ has transformed the place as it was in 1925 into a psychotic and hellish environment that is on the verge of exploding. In lieu of heralding the power of human agency to inhabit utopia, as seen in Rubin’s representation, Sonnenschein depicts the landscape and its inhabitants as headed on an unstoppable path towards disaster. Early Zionism’s blind

belief in agency has given way to a dystopian preoccupation with death. Sonnenschein does not let the palpable fanaticism of contemporary Jerusalem linger as an invisible energy. He materializes it, and it looks like Armageddon.

Israel today looks very different than it did even ten years ago. There are over 50,000 foreign workers from various Asian and African countries and 1.5 million Israeli Arabs currently living in Israel. These groups remain alienated from contemporary Israeli society.² Power in Israel is also growing increasingly centralized, where the majority of wealth lies in the hands of 18 politically and economically influential families.

People in Israel are very cynical about politics, and there is a rampant feeling that individual efforts at affecting change are a worthless cause.

1 - Mythologies traditionally employ supernatural literary devices in the explanation of natural phenomena, portraying occurrences as resulting from mysterious and natural forces, not as the result of human ingenuity and choice. When events are explained mythologically, they are presented as inevitable in a way that wrongly relieves men of responsibility for the way that things have turned out. Naturalizing events as ‘inevitable’ removes action from the possibility of critique.

2 - The government of Israel is currently trying to get rid of the large population of Eritrean refugees and various other foreign workers that have settled in Tel-Aviv’s southern districts by making life intolerable for them. They are constantly represented in the media as criminal dangers to society, and government officials regularly denigrate and malign them in public. In July 2013, Police burst into many restaurants run by refugees and poured bleach into the food, soddering the business shut. New interdictions against their activities are announced daily, and while for the moment they can remain in Israel, they are not permitted to live like human beings.

The palpable level of fatalist paranoia in Israeli culture is further compounded by the legacy of the Holocaust, Israel's isolation from her immediate surroundings, environmental concerns of over-development, the infringement upon public space of private interests, and the emergence of 'intifada' in Arab culture. For too long this paranoia has conditioned Israeli political policies that aim to ensure that the state maintains its Jewish majority above all else. If these policies continue uninterrupted, they could transform fear into a self-fulfilling prophecy. Survival can no longer be conceived as the staving off of an enemy perceived as inherently and primordially hostile.

Although Israel's contemporary identity has deviated almost entirely from how it was imagined, it remains a place that was born from a dream, and as such, new imaginings for the future are an essential component for any political change in direction. If Zionism is going to survive without the threat of violence, it will have to return to its origins in order to conceive itself anew, as a movement that provides agency for all peoples in Israel, regardless of race or religion.

“When we read words or absorb images, we are presented with information that we have the option of accepting or rejecting. When information is presented to us as a predetermined conclusion, it will usually play second fiddle to our existing ideological convictions. We believe what we want to far more easily than we believe what is true. Figurative messages that convey a subjective experience are less threatening to our pre-existing conceptions of reality. It is because ambiguous images are absorbed without the interference of our defenses that they are capable of challenging dogmatic belief systems. These are the messages that resonate. Their political currency is derived from their ability to covertly challenge our preconceived notions without our conscious awareness.”

IAN STERNTHAL

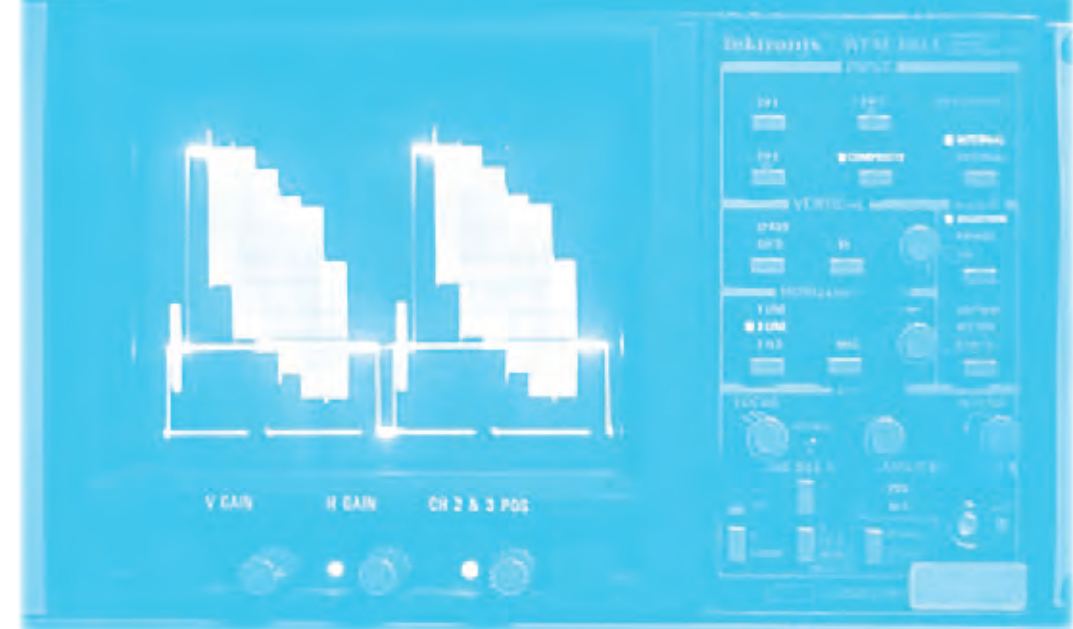
The Flickering Decade

150

Nissan Shor

A cognitive experiment: let us invoke the most prevalent, predominant Israeli image in our collective memory. The result is bound to be quintessentially state-minded and representative, since our subconscious is governed by Zionism. Its colors? Black-and-white. Not necessarily due to sheer nostalgia. Naturally, and by virtue of technology, this is exactly what a fragment of local, patriotic visuality looks like. What emerges before our eyes is a detail from the official photographic history. It is hard to imagine Ben-Gurion in Technicolor. It seems as though he was born colorless. The same applies to Moshe Dayan, the Independence celebrations, the Eichmann Trial, the capture of the Temple Mount or singer Ilanit at the 1973 Eurovision Song Contest with the song Ey Sham ('Somewhere'). Their representations have been etched in our memory forever black-and-white.

Over the years the absence of color came in handy for the Israeli leadership. In a place requiring a single, supreme ethos, one would expect to read reality in two colors only. Nationality is not a multi-colored condition. Until the 1980s the news pages in the Israeli daily press were largely monochromatic. The events featured in them appeared detached, archival, even in real-time. Thus the need was spared to confront the present. B&W is the color of the past, which cannot be influenced. In 1969 Israeli television



shifted to a full broadcasting week. During the ensuing decade its directors decided to erase color synchronization by means of a special technology, mehikon ("color block" or "eraser"), thus forcing the entire Israeli public to watch broadcasts only in black-and-white. The pretext was socialist: unification of the visual element broadcast on television was an attempt to reduce the purchase of expensive color television sets which were perceived as a luxury, thus equating the consumerist capabilities of all citizens. The truth, however, was that life in black-and-white is controllable, joyless, and above all—isolated from the colored world outside. The invention of the pirate "anti-mehikon" (color block neutralizer) in the late 1970s was intended to reinstate television with that which the establishment had denied it, expressing a thirst for polychrome. One of the only official broadcasts in color during the 1970s occurred in November 1977, during the historical visit of Egyptian President, Anwar Sadat. It was thus made clear that peace and hope appear in all colors of the spectrum.

In 1981 Yoram Aridor, a Minister of Finance in Menachem Begin's government, reduced the tax on color TV sets and canceled the color block, and Israeli television began a gradual transition to color broadcasting. Taxes on travel abroad and consumer goods were also canceled. The 1980s were the age of innocence in private consumerism, the beginning of the fast takeover of American Capitalism on the last remnants of Zionist collectivism, the accel-

eration of the digital era, the initial thrill with the penetration of personal computers, home videos, and game consoles, and above all—the emergence of new, bright neon colors in popular culture and fashion...

With the arrival of the 1990s the revolution was completed. Black-and-white disappeared, pretty much without a trace. Israel started marching ahead, toward the rest of the world, never again to look back. In 1990 the cable companies started operating in Israel. A year later, the Gulf War broke out, and the CNN news channel began flooding the screen with moving images of blood, fire, and smoke, unprecedented in scope. Over the course of six weeks viewers were exposed to live broadcasts of massive bombardments by air force planes and state-of-the-art cruise missiles, via round the clock reports. At the end of the war demand grew for information independent of the local media and unrestricted by the military censor. The popularity of cable TV soared. Viewers throughout Israel began watching scores of foreign channels, primarily—the American music channel MTV, which had already operated for approximately ten years at the time. The flux of music video clips from overseas marked, among others, the breaching of the information dams and the end of dependence on anachronistic information mediators. Music and lifestyle now made their appearance here concurrent with the rest of the world.

The turning point in Israeli input was reinforced when the commercial Channel 2 went on the air in November 1993. Apart from the inferior programming, the significance of this development was an oversized portion of “clip-rhythm” commercials created by “hip” advertisers. This was the visual embodiment of the New Israeli who had become, under the auspices of a gradually improving standard of living, a compulsive consumer. The billboards, which culminated with multi-story posters along the Ayalon freeway, took over the public space, transforming it from a grayish lump into branded gibberish... This is Israeli Society of the Spectacle at its false zenith, trapped in a blinding giant mall coaxing it to buy, upgrade, hoard.

Vis-à-vis such ostensible abundance there was no time to falter. This was the time to catch as catch can. The personal computer

was equipped with a 265 color SVGA screen, as opposed to a mere 4 or 16 only a decade earlier. At the end of 1994 Sony released the PlayStation, a revolutionary home gaming console with intricate 3D graphics. Nintendo launched its N64 and Color Game Boy gadgets, and Sega—its Sega Mega Drive.

The cinematic opus most representative of the visual flurry of the 1990s is probably *Trainspotting* (1996) by British director Danny Boyle—a film which translated the fidgety values of MTV into a suicidal portrait of chemical-dependent youngsters in the perplexing 1990s—the bridge between the naïve pre-Futurism of the 1980s and the 21st century.

The film's opening scene, consisting of a dialogue narrated by the protagonist, Renton (Ewan McGregor), mocks the bourgeois lifestyle prevalent in the postmodern era. The very bourgeoisie which the *Trainspotting* characters fled became the greatest nightmare of many young Israelis who had only just completed their compulsory military service. They too tried to rise above it with the aid of chemicals and music. This all-engulfing attack on the senses occurred in the territory of mass trance parties, which since the early 1990s, were held in public parks, forests, and valleys throughout the country. Against this natural backdrop, the formative moment of trance came to be associated with extensive use of Ecstasy and LSD (acid in its tabloid name). This hallucinatory drug opened the gates of the psychedelic mind to the average Israeli and became a refuge from workaday Israeli existence, bringing about the recognition that the state of dream may be stretched into one's waking hours. The aesthetics that accompanied the sounds and illusions were coiled and fluorescent, with a hypnotizing presence: giant sheets of canvas were imprinted with fractals, cliché Buddhist symbols, and figures of aliens with elliptical heads in radiant colors, smoking joints the size of high-rises.

Electronic music of a different type continued to beat inside urban venues, in dark clubs: techno, house, drum & bass, jungle, breakbeat. The spotlights flashed, the strobe throbbed, lending every movement robotic qualities. “No, no limits, we'll reach for the sky!” sings Eurodance duo 2 Unlimited in their 1993 *No Limit*,

“No valley too deep, no mountain too high. No no limits, won’t give up the fight. We do what we want, and we do it with pride.” This was, in fact, an apt description of the sense of euphoria which electronic dance music inspired on its listeners. The “beat” was the pulse and equator by which the new reality was set up in the club, a light-box of ecstasy.

Simultaneously, outside, the same rhythmic flickering typical of leisure culture, emerged in the battlefield as well. Battle-ground technology, in the Occupied Territories and in Southern Lebanon, created light-filled jitters, and the reports about them were absorbed into the audiovisual bubble which enwrapped us like a snug placenta. Moral vision became blurred with the incessant flickering attack on a gradually Westernizing life. The civil spectacle blended with the military spectacle to form a mush of national and personal. The 1993 Oslo Accords signed by Israel and the PLO furnished the public with a sense of hope, but in effect only increased the alienation from reality, which remained a mere image. The frequent sights of death in suicide attacks, and repeated militaristic retaliations, appeared and disappeared in newsflashes, which flickered on and off as indicated by their name. In Hollywood blood is played by ketchup, and in Israel too—apathy is the favored means to deal with the chaos. Suffering is but another detail, another drama in the visual sphere. The response to it, regardless of its nature, may be turned on and off, as if it were any odd electric appliance.

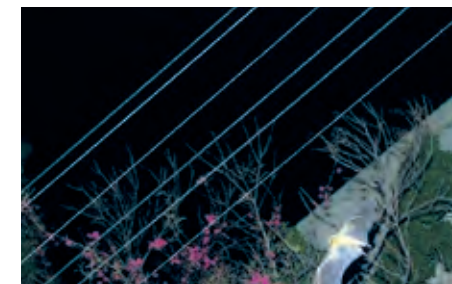
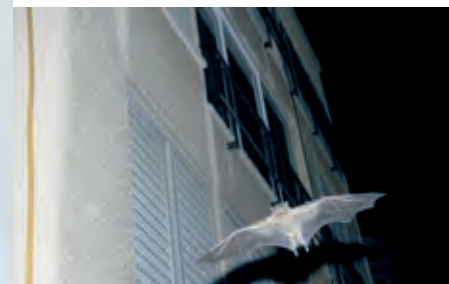
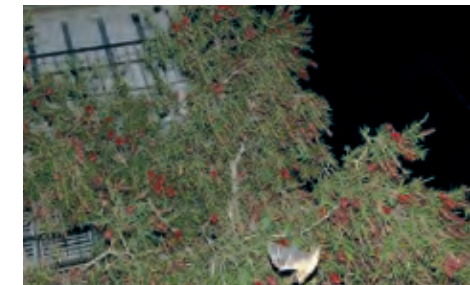
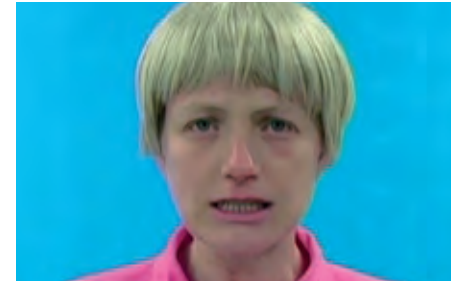
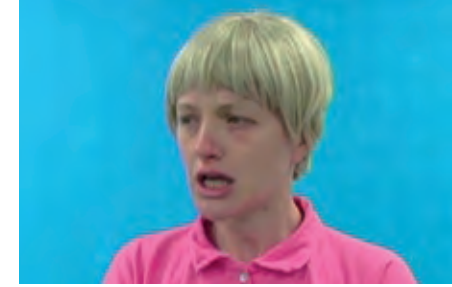
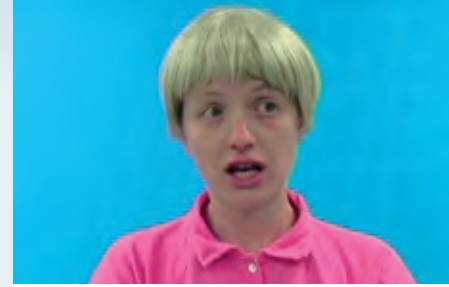
This is, however, an over-somber, largely righteous, ending for a description of the fun 1990s. You often had to blink to realize what was standing before you. The decade progressed at 150 BPM (beats-per-minute) speed throughout, as lights and colors embarked on an electronic dance with epileptic bodily movements, to the sounds of 3D video game figures.

While the above is indeed a partial profile, that is how the decade was perceived by many: scrambled, slanting, often blinding, bleeding, flickering, fragmented, non-linear.













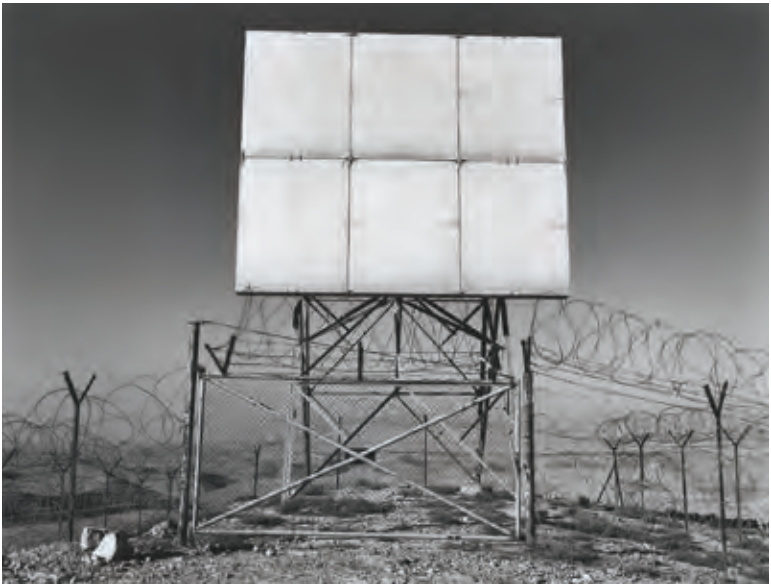


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Performing
the Other,
Re-Forming
One's Self:
Rona Yefman,
Yael Bartana, &
Tamy Ben-Tor

Noah Simblist

The history of Diaspora Jewry is one of either passing¹, where Jews assimilate into their adopted homelands, or difference, where they are singled out as 'foreign elements' within the body politic.¹ Once the State of Israel was established under the pretense of establishing a Jewish homeland, one might have imagined a space where this dual condition of passing or difference would disappear. Jews found that their fabled return not only produced further alienation - being either European Jews in an Arab land, or Arab Jews in a Euro-centric State - but also a Palestinian Diaspora, an Arab otherness in a newly declared Jewish state.² Thus the performance and representation of difference tells the story of both Jewish and Israeli existence.

Three pieces in the Rothfeld Collection speak to this phenomenon: Rona Yefman's 'Martha Double Jew' (2008) - a photograph of a cross dressing Holocaust survivor; Yael Bartana's 'The Missing Negatives of the Sonnenfeld Collection' (2008), which uses Jewish and Palestinian Israeli models to reproduce Zionist propaganda images; and Tamy Ben Tor's 'Yid' (2010), which is a performance video featuring a caricatured self-hating Jewish intellectual.



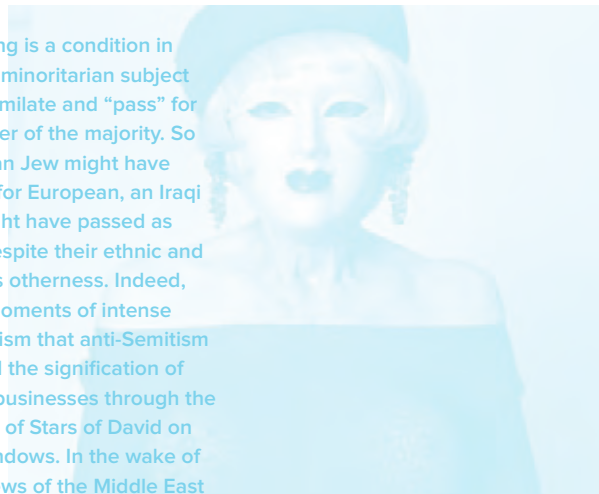
*Martha Double Jew,
Rona Yefman, 2012,
16 X 24 inches.*

Yefman's 'Martha Double Jew' (2008) is part of a ten-year collaboration between the artist and a cross dressing man's persona named Martha. In hundreds of photographs and videos, Martha wears an expressionless mask to hide her face, a blonde wig, fake breasts, with tight sweaters, short skirts and heels. She claims to be a lesbian since she desires other women and self identifies as a free spirit. In a related video, Yefman asks her about her experience of the Holocaust in Poland and Martha resists, insisting on her desire for sexual liberation from her traumatic past.

'Martha Double Jew' is a photo-collage in which a number of dualities are at play. We see two Marthas, each dressed in a bright red sweater and knit cap, a black miniskirt, sheer pantyhose and black pumps.

1 Passing is a condition in which a minoritarian subject can assimilate and "pass" for a member of the majority. So a German Jew might have passed for European, an Iraqi Jew might have passed as Arab, despite their ethnic and religious otherness. Indeed, it is in moments of intense nationalism that anti-Semitism involved the signification of Jewish businesses through the painting of Stars of David on their windows. In the wake of 1948, Jews of the Middle East and North Africa were expelled in retaliation for the Nakba and the establishment of the state of Israel. See Sander Gilman, *The Jew's Body* (New York and London: Routledge, 1991) for a discussion of the ways in which Jews could "pass" for white if they assimilated into their European homes or on the other hand were stigmatized as being essentially different based on a number of racial stereotypes.

2 See the famous 1949 novella that makes this point immediately after the war of 1948: S. Yizhar Khirbet Khizheh (Jerusalem: Ibis Editions, 2008)



Both images of Martha depict her in the same mask, which leaves her face frozen in a red lipsticked smile. In both images, her sweater is pulled down just below her shoulders and in both bodies, she has her hands placed in front of her crotch making the sign of a triangle. The only difference is that one Martha has a yellow Star of David pinned on her and a set of four gold stars adorning her head. The other Martha has no stars and instead wears a bluish kerchief over the mask on her face.

Martha is man and woman, an elderly war survivor and a young sex kitten, a native Jewish Israeli and a Polish Immigrant, an objectified model and artistic collaborator. Martha's multiplied dualities queer any quick binary, especially when we see Martha Double Jew in the context of the larger project that Martha has collaborated on with Yefman.

Yael Bartana's series 'The Missing Negatives of the Sonnenfeld Collection' was originally made for an exhibition at Beit Hatfutsot [The Diaspora Museum] in Tel Aviv. The exhibition, 'Never Looked Better' was curated by Galit Eilat and Eyal Danon and displayed the photo collection of Leni and Herbert Sonnenfeld, who fled Nazi Germany for the US. The Sonnenfeld collection is comprised of about 100,000 documentary photos from the 1930s-80s, depicting early pioneers in Palestine and Jewish communities around the world. The exhibition presented these photos as well as works by contemporary artists that interpreted the collection, including Michael Blum, Yossi Atia and Itamar Rose, Yochai Avrahami, Ilia Rabinovich and Yael Bartana.

Bartana chose a series of photographs that were emblematic of Zionist propaganda in the 1930s, and made twenty-two new photographs based upon the original compositions: she re-staged them by using contemporary Jews and Palestinians who were residing in Israel at the time to replicate the original photographs. In all of these images, Bartana focuses on the image of the new Jew that was crucial to



The Missing Negatives of the Sonnenfeld Collection [13]
Yael Bartana, 2012.



The Missing Negatives of the Sonnenfeld Collection [2]
Yael Bartana 2012.

the Zionist enterprise – a strong, bronzed, socialist who worked with his or her hands in the ancient Land of Israel. This was in stark contrast to the pasty white intellectual weakling that characterized the Diasporic European Jew. Each of these images of the Jew's body is, of course, a cultural construction and Bartana used the process of performative trompe l'oeil to reveal the artifice of any fixed notion of what Israeli bodies should look like. Furthermore, by using Palestinian models who are Israeli citizens, she revealed the problem of a national mythology predicated on a Jewish Zionist history for an Arab citizenry that makes up twenty percent of its population.³

The Rothfeld collection has two images from Bartana's series: One [#2] depicts a smiling young woman who is sitting, perhaps resting, on a wooden crate of oranges that she has presumably been picking. She is wearing a cotton shirt and shorts to keep her cool, work boots, and a head covering to protect her against the sun. Oranges are particularly symbolic for the mythology that surrounds Israel/Palestine. Long before 1948, Jaffa was well known as a Palestinian center for orange export but Israel rebranded them as a product of Zionist agriculture.⁴ The other [#13] shows a strapping young man with a hoe sung over his shoulder. He is wearing a white shirt with his sleeves rolled up. His legs are spread apart in a standing position that communicates a body language of athletic readiness. His furrowed brow, shadowed by the brim of his hat, shows a steely resolve, ready to work.

Herbert Sonnenfeld worked for the Jewish National Fund (JNF), which sought to change the geography of Palestine by "turning deserts into farmland, swamps into gardens, hillsides into forests."⁵ David Ben Gurion, the first prime minister of Israel, believed that the JNF should develop the villages that were abandoned by Palestinians who fled from the violence of the 1948 and 1967 wars; as such, they would never be subject to claims by returning Palestinian refugees. The JNF had an

3

See As'ad Ghanem, *The Palestinian-Arab Minority in Israel, 1948-2000: A Political Study* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2001) and Meirav Arlosorov, "The Majority in Israel is Steadily Becoming a Minority" *Haaretz*, June 21, 2013.

4

See Eyal Sivan's 2010 documentary *Jaffa, The Orange's Clockwork*

5

Walter Lehn and Uri Davis, *The National Jewish Fund*, (London: Routledge, 1988) P 81.

explicit mission to serve only the Jewish people.⁶ Given that agriculture in Israel/Palestine was always a highly politicized practice, Bartana's photographs of Jewish agricultural workers, played by Palestinian models, tell a complex story in which the bright transcendental charm of work, in and with nature, begins to tarnish.

The implicit critique of Zionism and Israeli policies toward Palestinians is the subject of a work by Tamy Ben-Tor. Her video 'Yid' (2010) shows Ben-Tor dressed up in a characteristically DIY costume: she wears a dark brown wig, a moustache, a goatee, and prosthetics to indicate an oversized 'Jewish' nose. The resultant character is a stereotypically religious Jewish man with a heavy Yiddish accent who is critical of the occupation. As he speaks, klezmer music plays softly in the background.

He says: "the state of Israel shouldn't exist." He "won a big prize" for saying that in Berlin. He gave a big speech entitled "Israel – Stop it!" He states that it's a continuation of his book, "Jew, Keep a Low Profile." We see the satire at play. This character is critical of Israel because he believes that Jews should stay quiet and assimilate. His wife is "a goya, a shiksa,"⁷ and tells him that she doesn't mind Jews as long as they are not too proud. He gave a speech in Denmark and all over Europe and "they love it. Israel is just evil." He says that these European fans of his are not anti-Jewish just anti-Israel. This statement is made in a mocking way, but it is a position that, as Ben-Tor knows, has been argued for by Jewish post Zionists such as Judith Butler, Udi Aloni, or Jeff Halper.

Ben-Tor uses camp performance as a way to critique what she sees as a ridiculous political position.⁸ By underlining the lavish praise that this Jew gets from non-Jews who are implicitly anti-Semitic, she is saying that he is only helping those who use human rights as the pretext for an old brand of racist discrimination.

6

ibid, p. 275

7

Yiddish for female non-Jew.

8

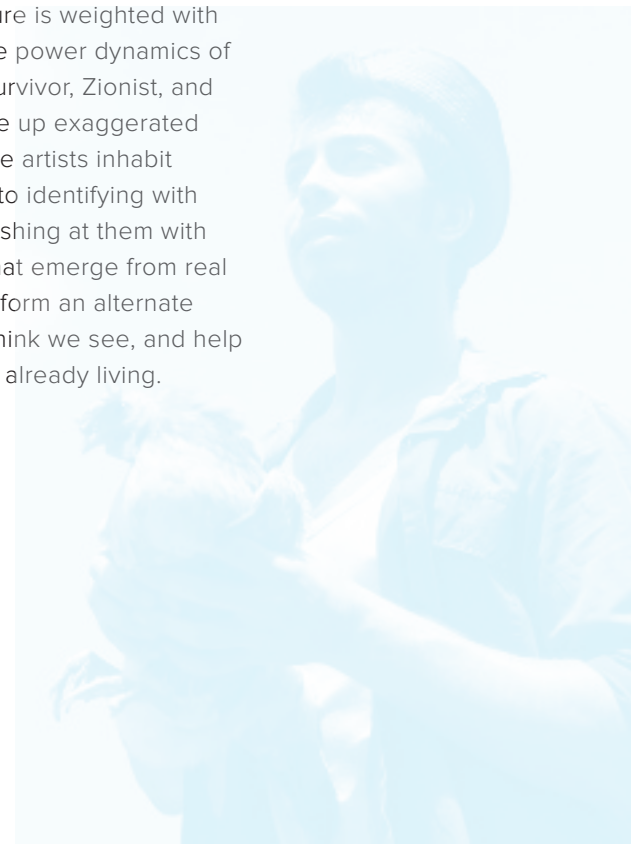
Based on a conversation with the artist.



*Yid
Tamy Ben-Tor, 2010,
Video.*

In all of these works, Yefman, Ben-Tor and Bartana use performativity as a politically provocative space of inquiry. Jose Esteban Muñoz has called this ‘disidentification’, which is “about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning.”⁹ It is often practiced as an act by marginalized identities, which in the case of these artists includes transsexuals, Palestinian Israelis and Diasporic Jews. Disidentification lies in the space between identification with the majority position, which is a form of assimilation, and counter-identification, which is its opposite, anti-assimilationist and separatist. This strategy “exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recruits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification goes a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture.”¹⁰

These three artists have used artworks not only to represent reality, they seek to intervene in a reality that is far more complicated and nuanced than it might seem. Israeli culture is weighted with an imperative connected to the power dynamics of identities such as Holocaust Survivor, Zionist, and Leftist - archetypes that conjure up exaggerated one-dimensional images. These artists inhabit these positions, coming close to identifying with them, twisting them slightly, pushing at them with the inevitable contradictions that emerge from real life. Their disidentifications perform an alternate narrative to the ones that we think we see, and help us to reimagine the life we are already living.

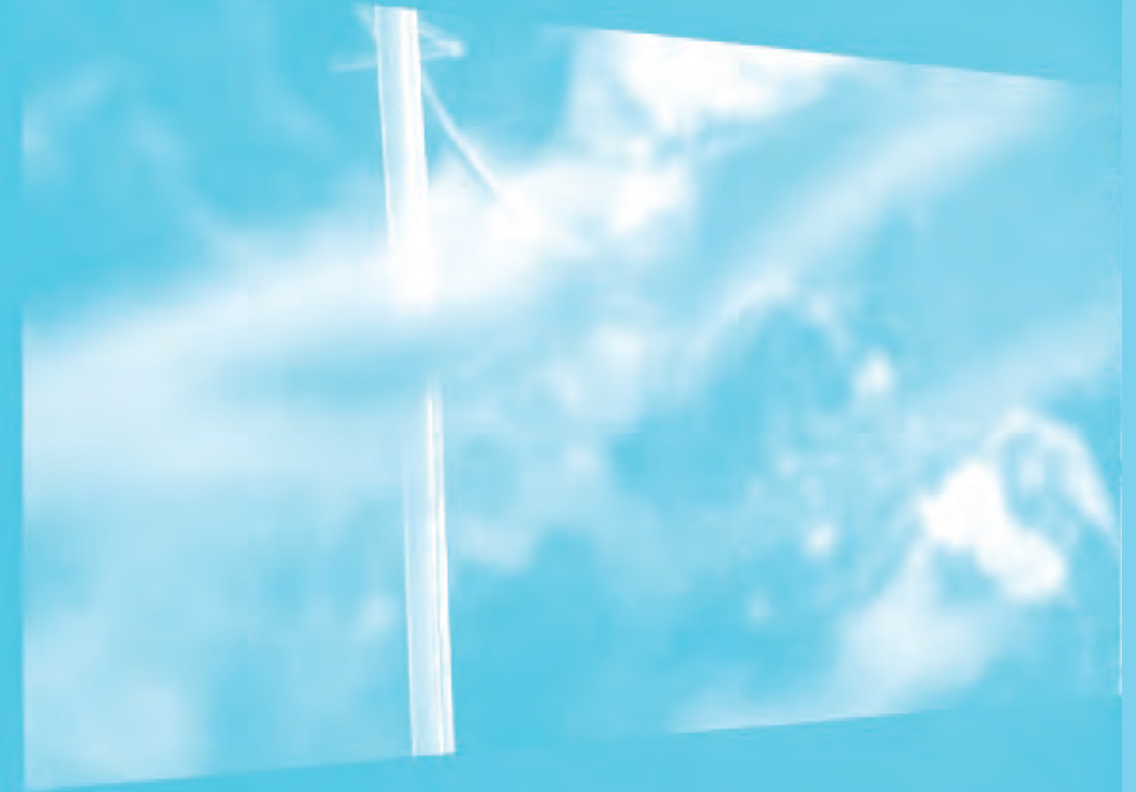


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José Esteban Muñoz,
*Disidentifications: Queers of
Color and the Performance
of Politics* (Minneapolis: Uni-
versity of Minnesota Press,
1999) p 31.

10

ibid





The Monster
is difference
made flesh,
come to dwell
among us:
Regarding the
Grotesque in
Gilad Ratman's
Work

Ilana Tenenbaum



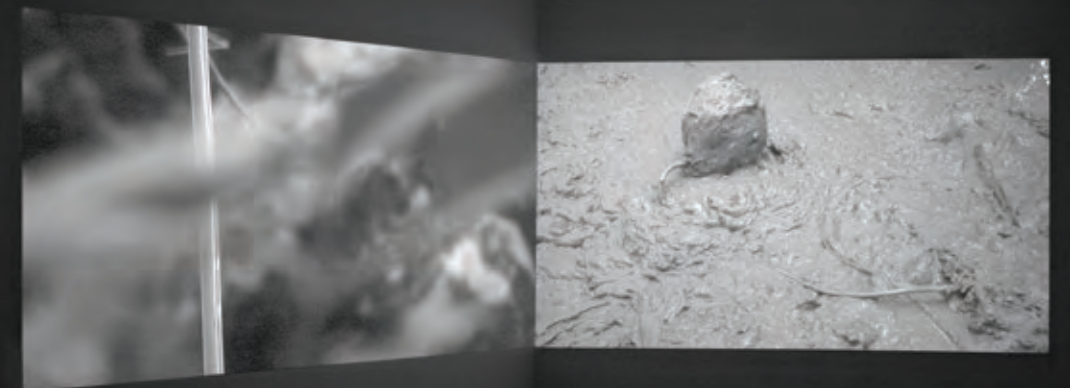
1 The two most typical binary concepts redeemed / revisited by 19th century Romanticism are the Sublime on the one hand, and the grotesque on the other. The Sublime is the absence of external boundaries, a state of an infinite expansion of materiality which is supposed to be experienced by one in view of Nature / Art, after his reason was overcome by the "size" and "grandeur" of the sublime image. In comparison, the grotesque is the lack of internal borderlines which enables constant change, transgression, perversion or error. It is closer in essence to the physical and is shaped in relation to it. The grotesque has continued to influence later movement in European Art and it may be found in the works of the Symbolists, Expressionists and Surrealists. To a certain degree the grotesque may also be traced in Cubism and in some genres of abstraction which turn to primitive expression and the search for essential realities. See: Frances S. Connelly, "Introduction," in *Modern Art And The Grotesque*, Frances S. Connelly, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 1.

2 Ibid

Gilad Ratman's work relates to the concept of the Grotesque and, in particular, to the preliminary etymology of this term. The grotesque originated from the name given to the frescoes uncovered in the fifteenth century in what was once the personal estate of the Roman emperor Nero. The paintings on the walls and ceiling of the villa, depicting fantastic figures, were mistakenly dubbed grotto – meaning a cave, a hidden place – since they were buried in the ground and exposed during excavation works.

Ratman produces grotesque situations which revolve around struggle, loss and survival. His scenes seem incomprehensible at first and provoke a sense of unrest, eeriness and repulsion. All of these characteristics instill in the spectator a sense of being in a terra incognita, an unknown territory made up of familiar elements.

The backdrop for Ratman's work draws upon the Romantic conception of Man's struggle with the forces of nature, where he measures himself in relation to the Sublime and the infinite. Ratman's work diverts Romanticism's occupation with the Sublime, and redirects it to the grotesque. Similarly, Romanticism is also related to the grotesque, the Sublime's crippled and delinquent twin brother.¹ One can characterize the grotesque through three different actions which are both constructive and disruptive: the creation of unexpected combinations that challenge common perceptions of reality; deformations in the shape of things, and metamorphous actions which alter both form and identity in a fundamental manner.² These elements are what make the grotesque's modes of appearance alternate between the wondrous, the hideous and the ludicrous.³



3 Ibid. Two concepts which share the grotesque's resistance to coherent conceptualization of reality are the Abject and the Unform (l'unformal), which are tangent to it. These forms through which the grotesque re-emerged in Western culture in art, literature and later on film, allow us to describe the grotesque as an influential force in the modernist visual space and its later derivatives – both post modern and contemporary.

The fundamental tension between opposites paves the way for Ratman's use of bi-polar mechanisms in the process of constructing his works: Fragmentation and repetition, the externalization of human emotion, expressions of un-verbal animalism, etc. Ratman creates the conditions for emotional zeniths or symbolic redemptions without delivering true catharsis. As a result of these tactics, his work sways between an epic, heroic description – and a grotesque parody of it.

In *Project 588*, a part of The Rothfeld Collection, Ratman installs a two-split screen video installation that sways between two polarities, moving our attention from one screen to the other. In the work, human heads immerge and submerge from a mud pool, breathing through pipes which are connected to flutes. The idyllic landscape, combined with the sounds of flutes and nature, imbue the work with sexual overtones as well as a survivalist urgency. The key to understanding this duality may be found in Ratman's use of the grotesque and in the way he continuously weaves it together with the epic and the mythological. In the opening scene of his video *Che Che the Gorgeous*, 2005, the bodies and voices of the humanoid cocoons generate a duality which is difficult to resolve: They are simultaneously both monstrous hybrids taken from some sort of primordial (mythological) scene and human actors representing those beings. The means of representation within the scene encourage the audience to experience it both as a heroic struggle of some sort and a grotesque parody. The un-specificity of the location (some desert gorge) likens the video to a kind of generic post-apocalyptic saga. The temporal structure of the piece follows suit; since the plot is stuck much in the same way its

protagonists are, one can experience it as a fragment of mythological time, “a time beyond time” – or at least, a parody of such a time.

The common denominator for Ratman’s works lie within the movement between binary poles: Inside / Outside, Up / Down, Human / Animal, Hope / Death, Theatrical / Documentary, Sublime / Grotesque. Another expression of this polarity is the arousal of the spectator’s voyeuristic gaze. Ratman’s use of this cinematic device encourages the viewer to immerse him/herself in scene, while simultaneously refuting this reality and breaking it down before their eyes. The transition between different voices within the work is derived from this tactic. Ratman alternates between the rhetoric of an epic narrative and a drama which revolves around pointing out the occurrences within the film; the cocoon scene is interspersed with shots of the dubbing crew sitting recording in a studio. Both groups engage with various performative actions, but the contrasting mis-en-scenes cast each action in a different light. The opening scene is at first perceived as “authentic,” while the second is a false or a “dubbed” version of the first.⁴ Ratman crates a treacherous terrain in which the very ability to preserve a coherent narrative sinks into the quicksand of his filmic structures.

“The Monster is difference made flesh, come to dwell among us”⁵

Anthropomorphic animals occupy an important role in Ratman’s films. In *Che Che the Gorgeous* they appear as hybrid beings made from human heads and black larvae; in *Give Her Back or Take Me Too*, 2005, the animalistic emerges as a crossbreed between a giant Anteater and a teddy bear, and in *Boggyman*, 2008, a work leading up to *Project 588*, an amorphous creature emerges from a pond of thick, dark mud. The animal figure is otherness incarnated. It is an attempt to grasp that which is outside, which comes from places that are perceived as different and far away, but which in fact originate from within.⁶ The animal body consists of fear and desire, anxiety and fantasy, and gives appearance to the inside and outside that embody opposite forces wrapped within one another. In this manner the grotesque transforms the human body and makes it abnormal. Joining the monstrous, the odd and the bestial, the human body forms a grotesque hybrid of man-beast. However, in each of Ratman’s videos the parodist depiction unveils “the man hiding inside the fleece,” the illusion that we are watching an alien from outer-space or a real animal is shattered as we recognize the beast as a costumed actor.

The movement back and forth along a structural timeline in Ratman’s work and the crossing of its boundaries is equated with the violation of physical borders. Both forms of digression are reflected in the grotesque characters Ratman creates and maneuvers, as well as through the performative element in each of his works. The grotesque appears both through the deformed and fluid body (the larvae, the hairy beast, the monster) and the absurd conditions in which it is entrapped. The struggling human character in *Give Her Back or Take Me Too*

4

The soundtrack of another work – *Give Her Back or Take Me Too* – is yet another example of the way a soundtrack fulfills a fundamental schism. A “classical” Turkish love and longing song gives it a sense of enhanced sentimentality which casts its spell on us directly. However, the foreign language and the text, incomprehensible to non-Turkish speakers, excludes us from its meaning, not allowing us to be submerged in the poetic and emotional realm it offers. The name of the song (which coincidentally is sung by a transvestite) is also the work’s title.

5

Cohen, Jeffrey Jerome, “Monster Culture (Seven Theses),” in *Monster Culture*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis and London, 1996.

6

Ibid



All images are from Gilad Ratman’s 588 Project, courtesy of The Braverman Gallery.

and both groups in *Che Che the Gorgeous* are instances of these set of affairs. The larvae in the opening scene of the latter embody the grotesque: hybrid creatures trapped by helplessness along an equator drawn between animal and human. The desperate bleats they utter to the void of an empty world are the quintessence of the blurry borderline separating man and animal.⁷

Fundamentally, the grotesque ignores the internal borders and all hierarchy that distinguishes bodily organs. It also ignores the smooth impenetrable surface of the body and thus relates to its excesses and openings. Ratman films his works in environments filled with refuse, stale waters and sludge, impure substances that resist clear borderlines and comprehensible categorization. The mud in *Boggyman* and in *Project 588* functions both as a containing substance and a second “skin” wrapping the characters and unifying their physicality with the surface. The scene touches upon the most primary mythology of the human emerging out of the earth, but does so in a “delinquent” manner, using material he downloaded from the internet. By disrupting conventional representation, the grotesque blends together several cultural categories which are impure in relation to the body and the world. Accordingly, fragmentation, marginality and obscure identities co-exist in Ratman’s works, both through the imagery presented and the internal structuring of the works. Ratman uses narrative components of cause and effect / time and space, and by disrupting them he creates a structural expression of the trauma of representation.

In conversation, Ratman has mentioned his preoccupation with extreme circumstances where, much like in performance art, the participants act within the situation rather than merely playing a dramatic part. One can therefore frame scenes from *Che Che the Gorgeous*, *Give Her Back or Take Me Too* and

7

Surprisingly enough, the “unnatural” bleats uttered by the human larvae overcome the viewer with a haunting intensity, as they continue to resonate as “real” voices even when we discover their supposedly true origin – the artist and a group of his friends who are dubbing the video we are watching. The exposure of the backstage of this allegedly “mythical,” primeval and wild world as a mere dubbed fantasy does not soften our initial encounter with the real, whose voice sounds as if it came from within the intestines of some animal.

Project 588 as performances or performative actions that the artist sets up, documents and later on incorporates into a cinematic array.⁸

The peculiarity of these scenes stems not only from their failure to create a coherent continuity with one another, but also because they often stress the performative dimension over the verbal one: This quality brings Ratman's videos closer in spirit to the Carnival, one of the most characteristic appearances of the grotesque preserved in Western culture. The carnival, too, blurs the distinctions between actors and audience, and its participants experience a direct existential state. This is the place where the grotesque and the mythical meet in Ratman's films, and the place where the humane re-emerges. Through the presentation of the mythical character and the grotesque sub-human – both without a clear time or place to personify them, both forever in the grip of an endless struggle with the oddities of an amorphous nature – the artist invokes something very familiar within viewers.

What is that familiar something that flashes through the mechanisms of defamiliarization Ratman creates in his works? The answer brings us back to the borderline between the grotesque and the humane. The grotesque, representing deviation and the abandonment of internal borderlines that separate the human and the animal, brings the essence of the human into presence through representing its complete opposite. Ratman's beast-like larvae cry out with such terrifying effect because, after all, they are human beings whose lower bodies are folded at the knees wrapped with black vinyl. Even after the illusion dissolves and we face the artificiality of the scene, its initial "bestial" strength refuses to loosen its grip on us. Neither can the parodical twist of the dubbing crew revoke the sense of discomfort we experience when we listen to those voices. They possess something alien and far-off, yet eerily familiar. This is Ratman's proposition for a human condition salvaged from the very last borderline, an instance before it converges with the animal, with a primordial and contaminated Nature.

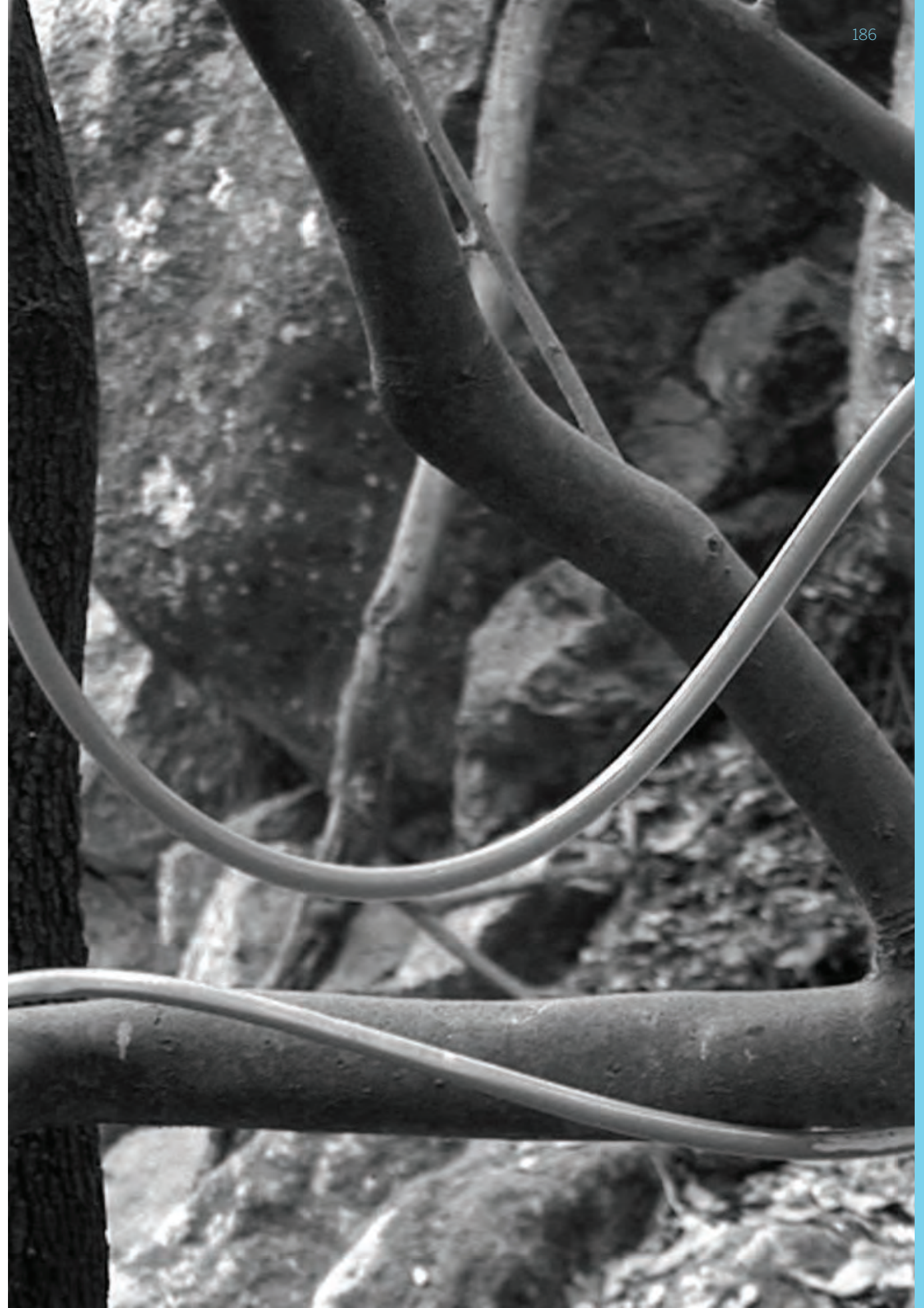
The grotesque, the parody, and the tragic come together in Ratman's works to express a human condition void of any sacred order that counters the splits and fragments. Through gaps of information, the works demonstrate an experience of disoriented roving and bewilderment. Their grotesque aspects not only point to the existence of an evasive world full of contradictions, they coerce an experience of dis-orientation. This feeling is derived both from the events depicted in the works, as well as from the viewer's attempts at deciphering their meaning.⁹ By placing human figures in desperate situations in relation to Earth's crust – a dry and scorched desert, swamps, and pools of mud, torn bubbling surfaces akin to the body's internal and forbidden substances – Ratman produces an extremely poetic existential moment full of grace.

8

In the video *The Way We Did Che Che* (2005) Ratman's friends, who played the larvae figures in *Che Che the Gorgeous*, complain that he enjoys the situation, he has set up, in a sadistic way. This aspect is related to Ratman's concern with the physical action in relation to the set of conditions he creates in the work.

9

In her book Yael Renan demonstrates how the mechanism of the grotesque influences the reader's sense of disorientation through texts by Kafka, Beckett and others. Yael Renan, *Laughter in the Dark: Modern Versions of the Comic*, Adam Publishers, Tel Aviv, 1986, pp. 69-96 [Hebrew].



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2 Untitled (52), Ed. 1/5, 2009.
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3 At the Appearance of Things, 2011.
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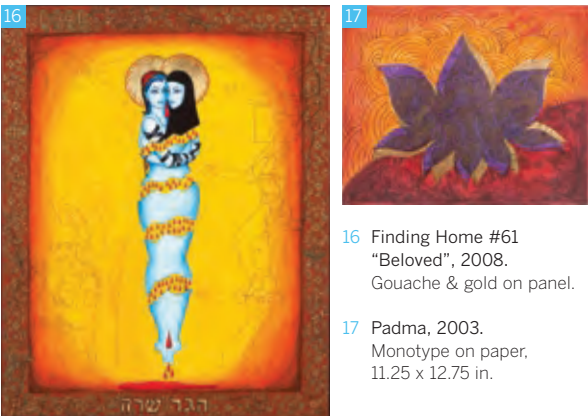
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14 The Missing Negative of the Sonnenfeld Collection (2), 2008.
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15 The Missing Negative of the Sonnenfeld Collection (13), 2008.
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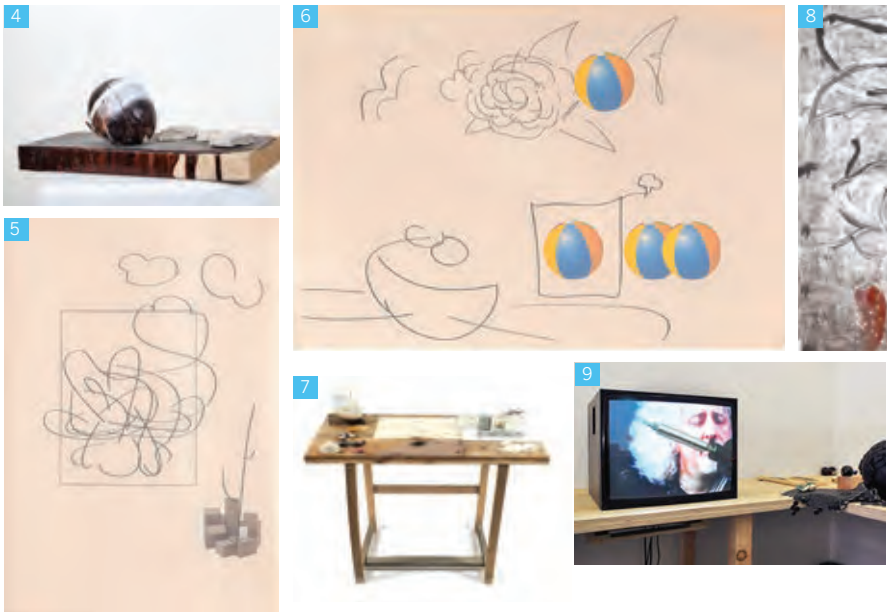
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16 Finding Home #61 "Beloved", 2008.
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17 Padma, 2003.
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4 Untitled (Coconut), 2010.
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6 Untitled, 2010.
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7 Untitled, 2012.
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8 Untitled, 2010.
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9 From A to Q, 2010.
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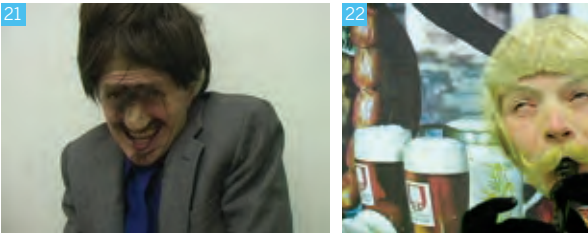
18 Berkeley's Island, 1995.
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19 Intoxicating Sovereignty (Jerusalem Fall Afternoon), 1998.
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21 Yid, 2008.
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22 Baby Eichmann, 2003.
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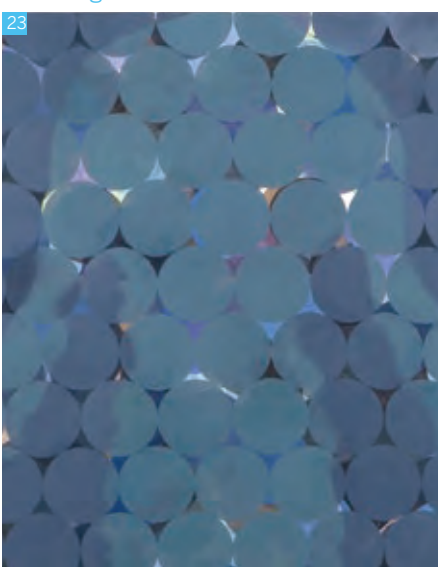
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11 Linienstrasse 137, Berlin, 1991.
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12 Joachimstrasse 20, Berlin, 1991.
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13 On Column in foreground: Menorah from Brick to Brick, 1995.
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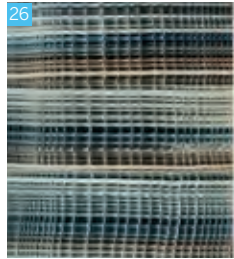
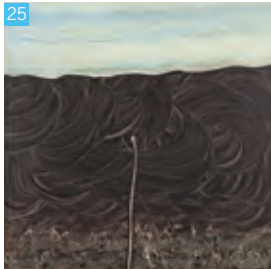
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24 Untitled, 2008.
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- 25 Untitled, 1996.
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- 26 Untitled MC 139, 2010.
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- 27 Love?, 2005.
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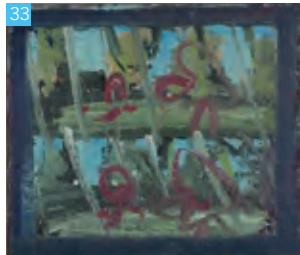
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Untitled, 1973,
Four Studies.
- Sheets of newsprint; folded,
torn and stained.
11 1/2 X 16 3/4 In.

Diti Almog



- 32 AA, 1995.
Acrylic on wood, 24 x 28 in.

Ofir Dor



- 33 Oh Camera, 2010.
Oil on Canvas.

Karni Dorell



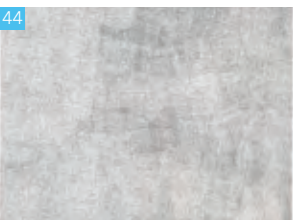
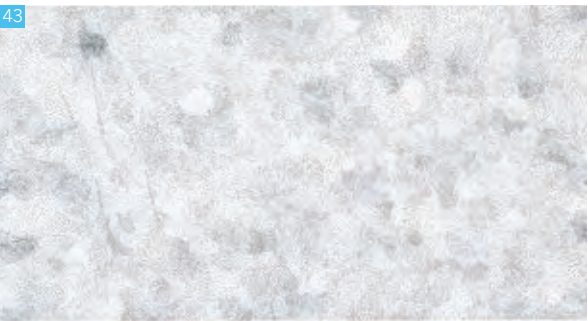
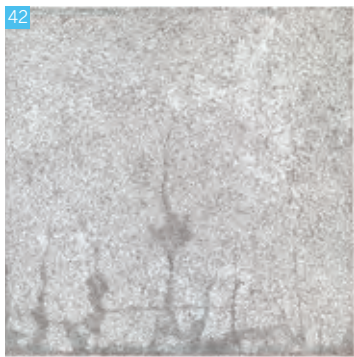
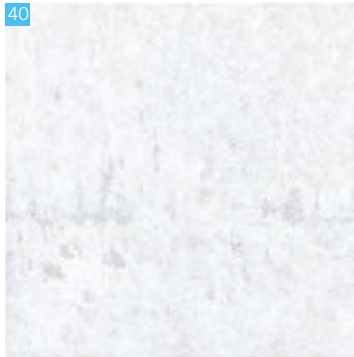
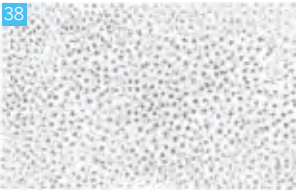
- 34 Forward March, 2008.
Inkjet print on rag paper,
10 x 15 in.

Tomer Ganihar



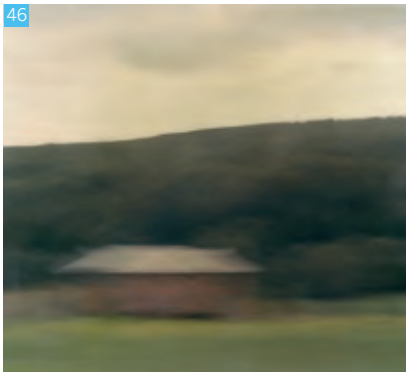
- 35 No End, 2007.
C-Print, 41 x 60 in.
- 36 G-d is in Our Club
C-Print, 19.75 x 30.25 in.
- 37 Blue Trance, 2002.
C-Print, 51 x 76 in.

Jacob El-Hanani



- 38 Signature Star, 2008
Ink on paper
14 X 10 1/4 inches
- 39 Aleph Beth, 2004
Ink on paper,
4 x 4 in.
- 40 NOF Scenery, 1997
Ink on paper, 19 x 19 in.
- 41 From the signature Series,
2011.
Ink on paper
19 1/4 x 19 1/4 in.
- 42 Cross Signature (from the
signature series), 1995.
Ink on paper, 27.5 x 27.5 in.
- 43 Aleph Beth, 2002.
Ink on paper
12 X 20 inches
- 44 Alef-Beth Gauze,
2002-2003
Ink on paper,
15 in. x 12 in.

Ori Gersht



- 46 Trace 1, 2005.
C-Print mounted on aluminum
31 1/2 X 39 1/4 in.
- 47 Olive Tree 17, 2004
C-Print photograph
100 X 80 cm.

Tamara Gayer



- 45 Yankee Stadium, 2002.
Gouache on vellum in light,
12 in. x 16 in.

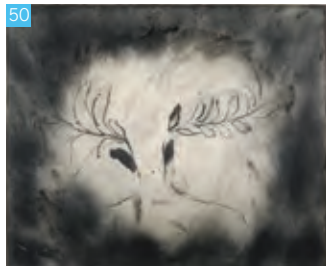
Moshe Gershuni



48



49



50

48 Untitled, 1987.
Oil, oil stick, tape, charcoal,
and glas paint on an opened
shoebox, 19.88 x 19.63 in.

49 Shalom Hayal, 1980-1987.
Mixed media on paper,
19.75 in. x 27.25 in.

50 Untitled, 1990.
Mixed media on paper,
48 in. x 48 in

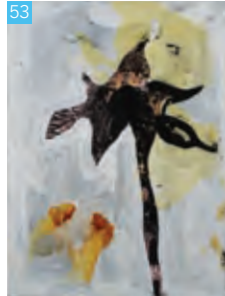
Tsibi Geva



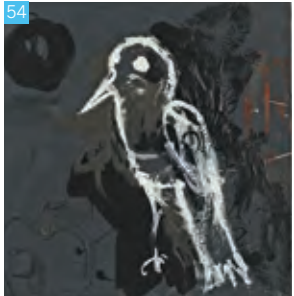
51



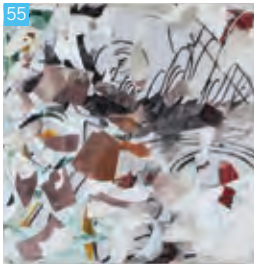
52



53



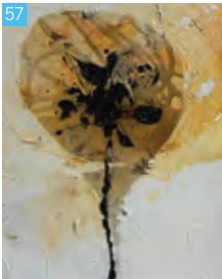
54



55



56



57

51 Keffiyeh, 1994.
Acrylic and oil on canvas,
18 in. x 18 in.

52 Flower, 2007.
Oil and paper.
29.92 in. x 22.44 in.

53 Flower, 2004.
Mixed media on canvas
16.5 x 14 in.

54 Bird, 2001.
Mixed media on canvas
15.75 x 15.75 in.

55 Untitled, 2004.
Acrylic and oil on canvas.
35.4 in. x 35.4 in.

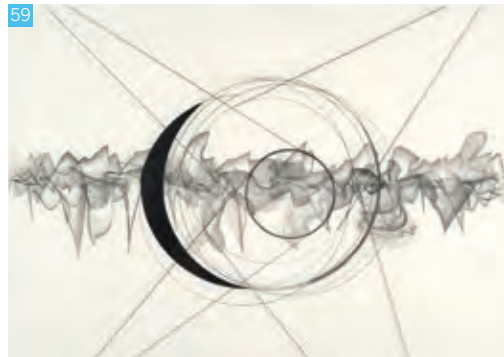
56 Keffiyeh, 1994.
Acrylic and oil on canvas,
72 in. x 60 in.

57 Flower, 2003.
Mixed media on Canvas
16 x 12 in.

Guy Goldstein



58



59



60

58 From Sound on Paper,
2011-2012.
Graphite on paper,
42 x 60 cm.

59 From Sound on Paper,
2011-2012.
Graphite on paper,
42 x 60 cm.

60 Eid ist Eid, 2008.
Sound work and tapestry
on a loudspeaker,
150 x 50 x 50 cm.

Leor Grady



61



62



63



64

61 Untitled (Dead Sea
No. 14), 2009.
Thread on paper, 12 x 9 in.

62 Untitled (Dead Sea
No. 16), 2008.
Thread on paper, 12 x 9 in.

63 Untitled (Dead Sea
No. 19), 2008.
Thread on paper, 12 x 9 in.

64 Melech, 2009.
Glitter on paper, 17 in. x 13 in.

Tamar Halpern



65

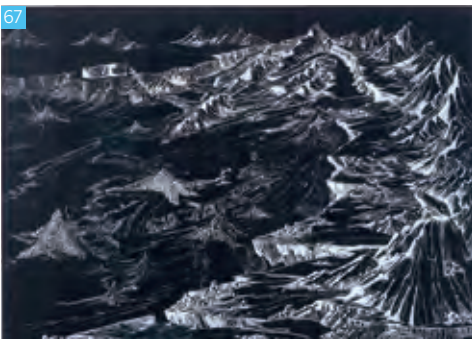


66

65 Learn your Appliance, 2010.
Ultrachrome ink on paper, 71 x 51 in.

66 Florida, 2008.
C-Print 2/3, 40 x 30 in.

Michal Helfman



67

67 Mitzpe Ramon, 2005.
Ink marker on paper,
23.5 x 31.5 in. in.

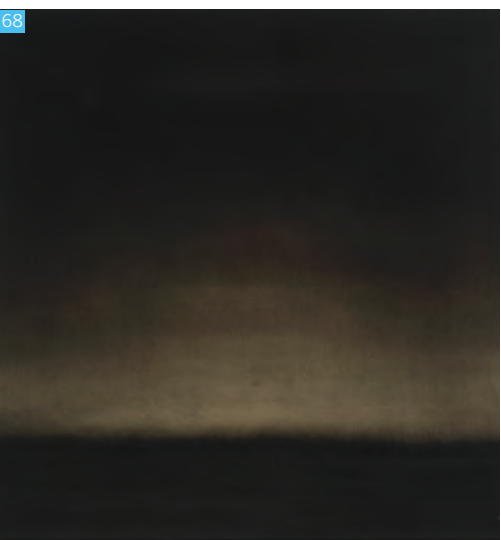
Natan Kaczmar



69

69 Untitled, 24.75 x 10.25 in.

Moshi Kash



68

68 Cronos, 2006.
Oil on Canvas, 27 X 27 in.

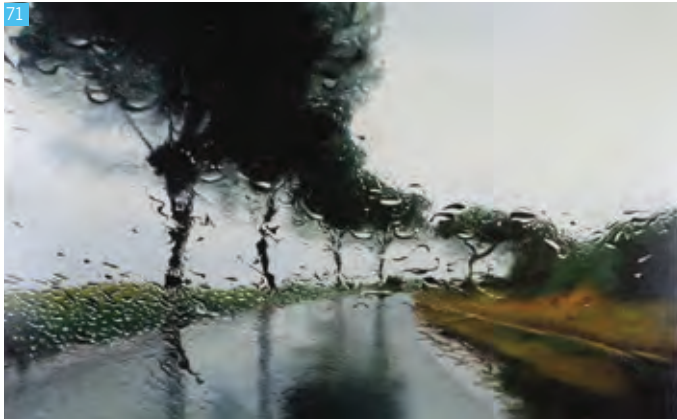
Shai Kremer



70

70 Burned Field after a Missile
Attack on Maghar , 2006.
Chromogenic print,
22 x 28 in.

Shay Kun

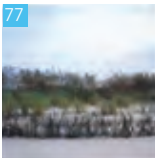
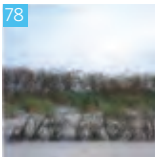
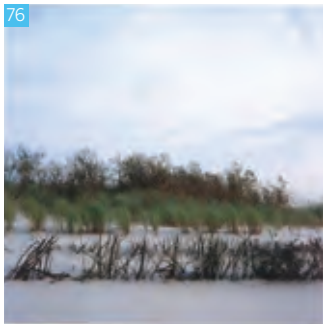


71 Dark Ages, 2010-2011.
Oil on Canvas, 56 in. x 38 in.

72 It's Not the Size of
the Dog, but the Size of
the Fight, 2009.
Oil on Canvas, 24 x 36 in.

73 Sole Survivor, 2008.
Oil on Canvas, 60 in. x 60 in.

Roi Kuper



74 Untitled, 2003.
Color Photograph II/V
31.5 x 31.5 in.

75 Untitled, 2003.
Color Photograph II/V
31.5 x 31.5 in.

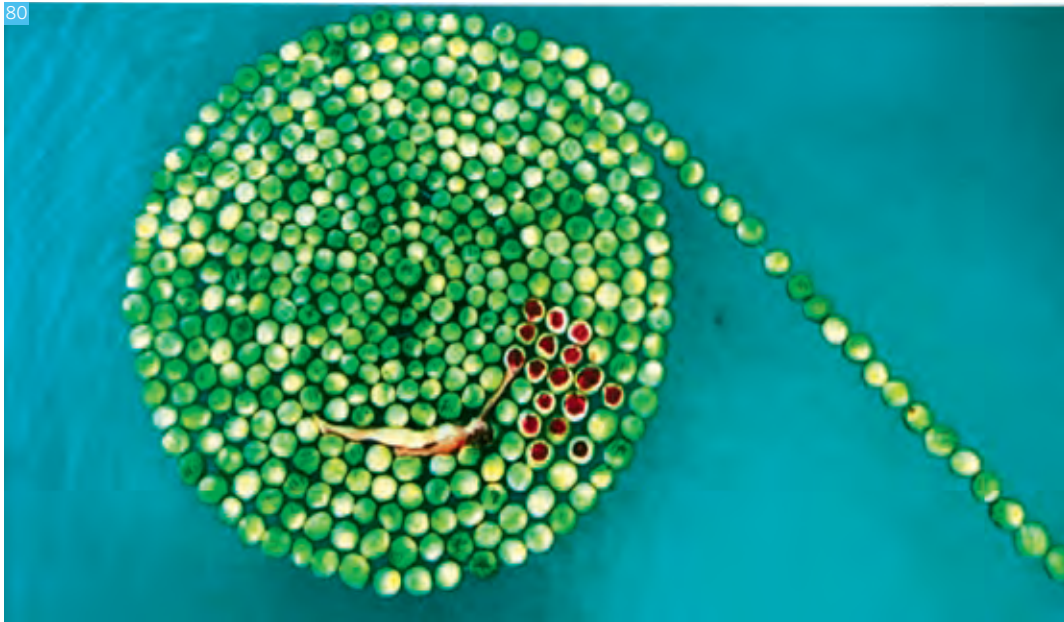
76 'Untitled' The Poland Series,
Color Photograph, 2003.
5.25 in. x 5.25

77 'Untitled' The Poland Series,
Color Photograph, 2003.
5.25 in. x 5.25

78 'Untitled' The Poland Series,
Color Photograph, 2003.
5.25 in. x 5.25

79 No Escape from the Past
Series 2002.
Color Photograph I/V
50 x 50 in.

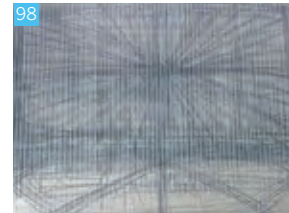
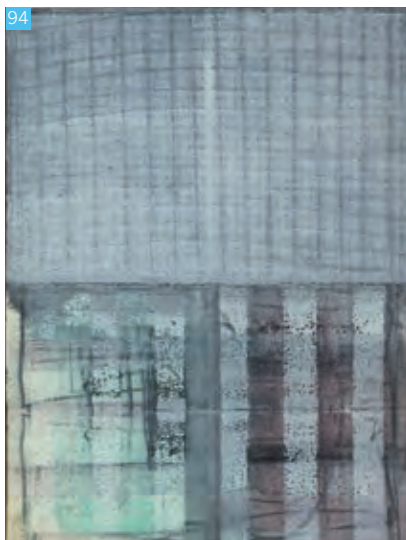
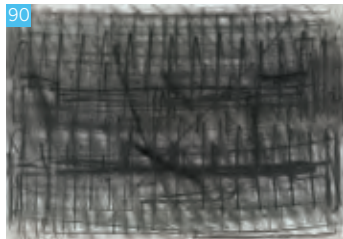
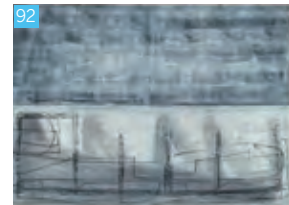
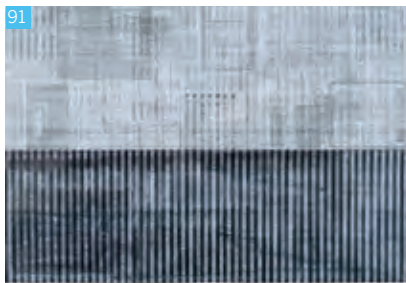
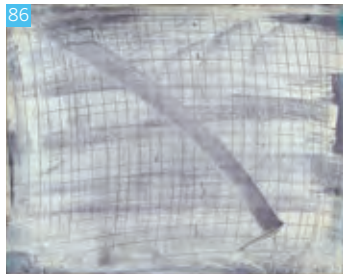
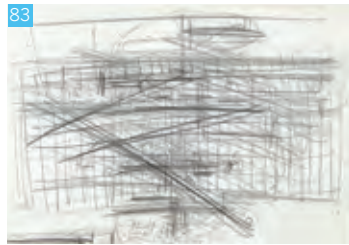
Sigalit Landau



80 Dead See Tif 21, 2005.
Video Still, 22 x 39 in.

81 Dead See Tif 5, 2004.
Video Still, 22 x 39 in.

Moshe Kupferman



82 Untitled, 1972
Pencil on paper,
13.75 x 19.75 in.

83 Untitled, 1972
Pencil on paper
13.75 x 19.75 in.

84 Untitled, 1979
Mixed media on paper
27.5 in. x 39 in.

85 Untitled, 1994
Oil on Canvas
51 x 77 in.

86 Untitled, 1972
Oil on Canvas
25 1/4 x 32 in.

87 Untitled, 1993
Mixed media on paper
22.5 in. x 30.25 in.

88 Untitled, 1999
Mixed media on paper
8 x 12 in.

89 Untitled, 1973
Acrylic and graphite on paper,
17.72 x 15.75 in.

90 Untitled, 1973
Graphite on paper,
17.72 x 15.75 in.

91 Untitled, 1990
Mixed media on paper
29 in. x 21 in.

92 Untitled, 1986.
Watercolor and Graphite
on paper
29 x 41 in.

93 Untitled, 1986
Oil on Canvas,
45.67 in. 51.18 in.

94 Untitled, 1990
Mixed media on paper
16.5 in x 17.5 in.

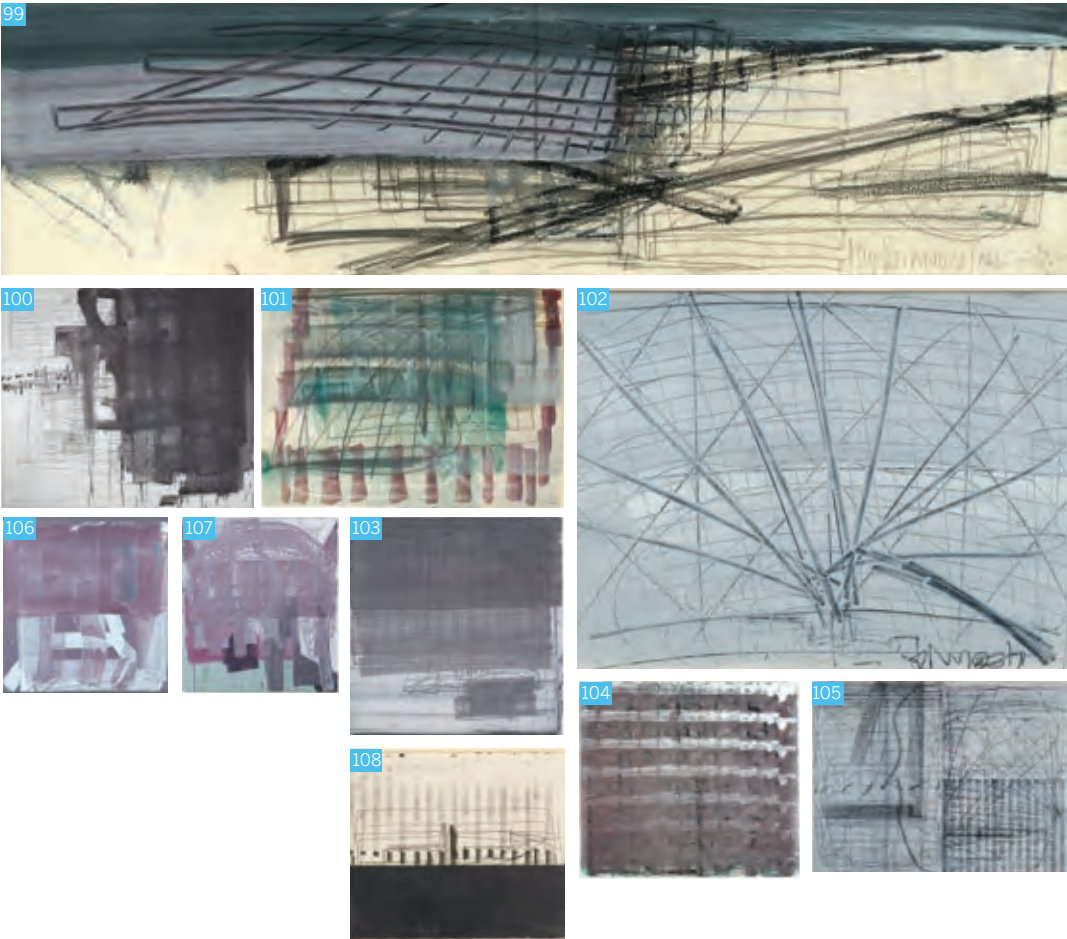
95 Untitled, 1966
Oil on Canvas,
6.38 x 9.06 in.

96 Untitled, 1966
Oil on Canvas,
6.38 x 9.06 in.

97 Untitled, 1991
Mixed media on paper
31.5 in. x 48 in.

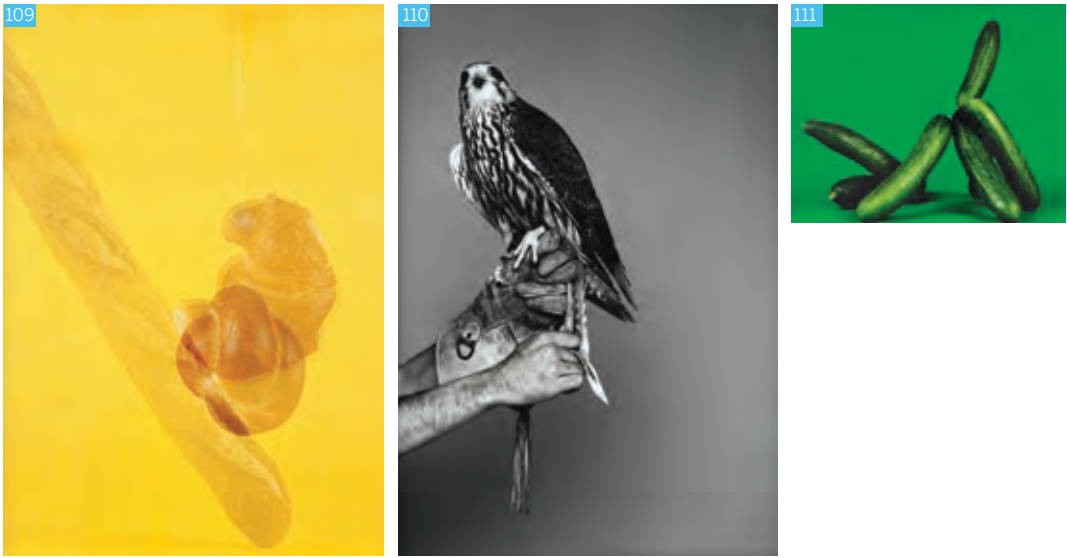
98 Untitled, 2001
Mixed media on paper
24 x 6 in.

Moshe Kupferman



- 99 Untitled, 2001
Mixed media on paper
24 in. x 6 in.
- 100 Untitled, 1980
Oil on Canvas
37.5 x 42.25 in.
- 101 Untitled, 1980
Mixed media on paper
15 x 11 in.
- 102 Untitled, 1972
Acrylic and Graphite
on paper, 17 x 15 in.
- 103 Untitled, 1982
Oil on Canvas
32 in. x 32 in.
- 104 Untitled, 1987
Oil on Canvas
46 in. x 51 in.
- 105 Untitled, 1984
Water color and
graphite on paper
22.5 in. x 30 in.
- 106 Untitled, 1997
Oil on Canvas
17.5 x 17.5 in.
- 107 Untitled, 1979
Oil on Canvas
100 x 90 cm.
- 108 Untitled, 1990
Mixed media on paper
27.56 in. x 39.37

Elad Lassry



- 109 Untitled (Baguette, Challah, Croissant), 2008.
C-print photograph
14.5 x 11.5 in.
- 110 Eagle, Glove, Falcon, 2008.
Silver gelatin Print
14.5 x 11.5 in.
- 111 Persian Cucumbers, Shuk HaKarmel 2008.
C-print photograph
9.5 x 11 in.

Raffie Lavie



- 112 Untitled, 1967.
Oil and graphite on canvas,
21.75 x 18.25 in.

Tal Matzliah



- 117 I almost came out a Monkey, 1994.
Oil on Wood, 26 x 14 in.

Jan Menses



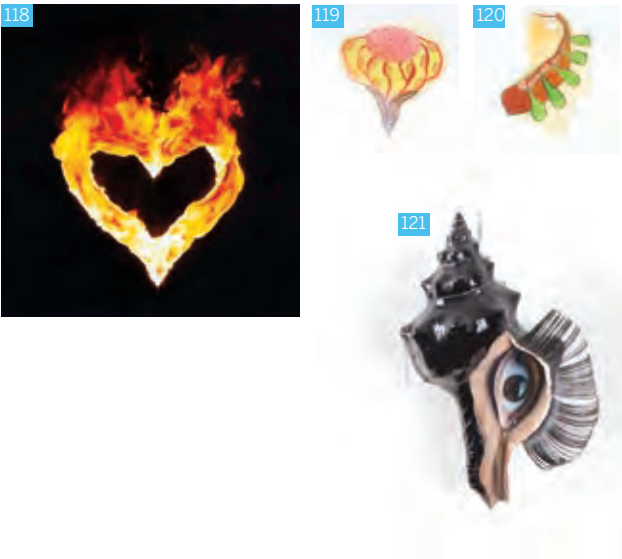
- 122 Metamorphosis Series #1878, 1962.
Egg Tempera on Paper, 11 x 17 in.

Dana Levy



- 113 Jerusalem Ed. 1/3, 2010.
C-print photograph,
- 114 Proud Land, 2010.
C-print photograph
- 115 Forget-Me-Not, 2010.
C-print photograph
- 116 Departures/50 ways to
leave your lover, 2009.
Video, DVD 4/5.

Hila Lulu Lin



- 118 Burning Heart Special Edition for Mole, 2004.
Video Film Still,
12.5 x 12.5 in.
- 119 Untitled, 1998.
Mixed media on paper,
4 x 4 in.
- 120 Untitled, 1998.
Mixed media on paper,
4 x 4 in.
- 121 Miles I would go, 1998.
Mixed Media Sculpture
15 x 3 x 3 in.

Arik Miranda



- 123 Untitled, from the series 'Drops of Light', 2009.
India ink on paper
13.75 in. x 19 in.
- 124 Untitled, from the series 'Drops of Light', 2009.
India ink on paper
13.75 in. x 19 in.
- 125 Untitled, from the series 'Bright Days are Here,' 2008.
Oil and acrylic on canvas,
31.5 in. x 26.75 in.
- 126 Untitled, 2011.
Oil on canvas,
30 x 40 cm.

Michal Na'aman



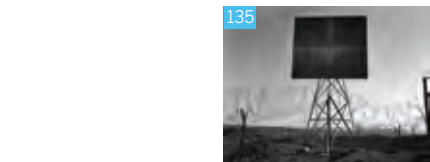
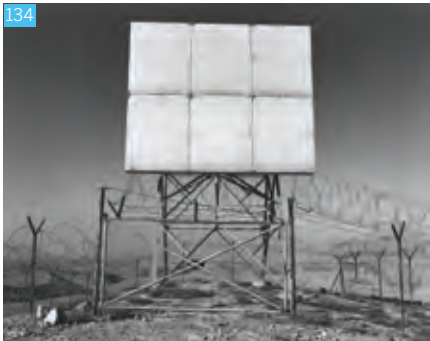
127 The Golden Fleece, 2005.
Masked tape and oil on canvas
35.43 in. x 47.24 in.

Ilana Salama Ortar

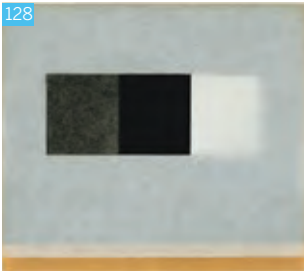


133 Untitled, from the series
"Urban Traces", 2005.
Felt pen, white gouache and
turpentine on paper, 39 x 27 in.

Gilad Ophir



Joshua Neustein



128 Carbon Series, "MCM", 1990.
Carbon copy paper gouged
and scoured.
6 in. x 8 in.

129 Carbon Series, "Levels of
Grammar", 1990-1991.
Carbon copy paper gouged
and scoured.
6 in. x 8 in.

130 "H" October, 2001.
India Ink on Paper
18 in. x 24 in.

131 Two Hues of H, 2001.
India Ink on Paper
18 in. x 24 in.

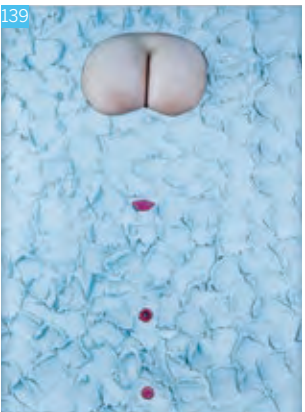
132 Capillary Action, 2002.
India Ink on Paper
18 in. x 24 in.

Gilad Ratman



137 The 588 Project, 2009.
Video, HDV Two Channel and Full Mac
Mini System.

Mika Rottenberg



138 Study with Pony Tail, Bun
and Butt Cheeks, 2009.
C-Print
11 in. x 14 in.

139 Study with Butt Cheeks,
Tongue and Mouths, 2009.
C-Print
11 in. x 14 in.

Michal Rovner



140 Untitled #12 from the series
'Outside 1990'
C-Print, 1990.
29 in. x 28 in.

141 The Space Between
C-Print, 2003.
29.5 in. x 43.88 in.

Yehudit Sasportas



142 Double Scissors 1995.
Three layers of drawing; india ink on
translucent paper, adhesive paper
4.5 x 4.5 in.

Tal Shochat



143 Crazy Tree, 2005.
Photograph.
43.7 x 43.7 in.

Eldad Shatiel



144 Glass Bunker, 1990.
Oil on Glass
24 in. x 17.5 in. x 4 in.

Pesach Slabosky



145 Untitled, 1997.
Oil on canvas
27.5 in. x 19.75 in.

Eliezer Sonnenschein



Nahum Tevet



Jan Tichy



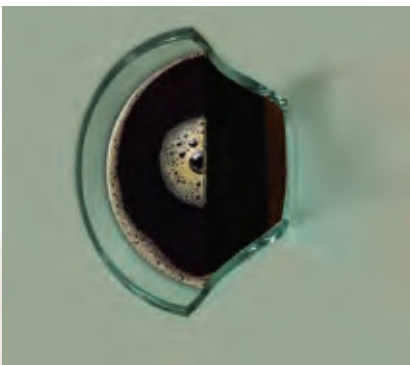
Micha Ullman



- 146 Untitled, 2002.
Lambda Print 5/5+2AP.
60 X 120 cm.
- 147 Untitled, 2002.
Lambda Print 5/5+2AP.
60 X 120 cm.
- 148 Untitled, 2002.
Lambda Print 5/5+2AP.
60 X 120 cm.

- 149 Still Life with White, 1991.
Acrylic on Wood.
- 150 Bats, 2002-2007.
Two Channel Projection of
80 35 MM slides onto
adjacent walls.
- 151 The Bunker, 1986.
Pencil and water on paper
27 x 39 in.

Gal Weinstein



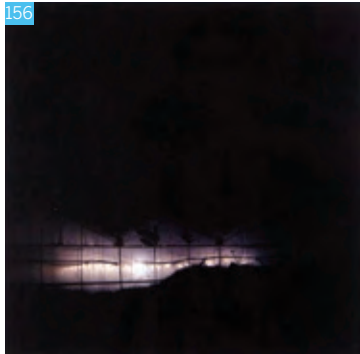
- 152 Untitled, 2006.
Steel Wool on Paper,
14 x 14 in.
- 153 Untitled, 2012.
Glass and polymers,
4.25 x 1.4 in, Ed. of two.

Pavel Wolberg



- 154 Untitled, 2010.
C-Print, 23 x 31 in.
- 155 Untitled, 2010.
C-Print, 23 x 31 in.

Shahar Yahalom



- 155 Untitled, 2009.
Photograph, 12.75 x 12.75 in.

Amnon Yariv



- 157 Olives and Almonds, 2007.
Lambda Print, 19 x 15 in.

Ronit Yedaya



- 158 Untitled, 1989.
Mixed Media on Paper, 27 x 39 in.

Rona Yefman



- 159 2 Flags, 2006.
Video 1/5 +2 AP.
- 160 Martha Double Jew, 2008.
C-Print, 43 x 35 in.

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