PHOTOGRAPHY AND MEMORY

MOSHE GERSHUNI (b. 1936, Tel Aviv) and YOCHÈVÉD WEinfeld (b. 1947, Lignica, Poland) are two leading Israeli artists, who incorporated photographs in their conceptual art projects since the early 1970s. Both artists introduced expressive and autobiographical elements in their work in ways considered innovative and bold within the avant-garde art world in Israel. They were among the first artists to explore previously suppressed issues related to Jewish identity, the Diaspora, and sexual taboos, in their path-breaking art, which has become increasingly influential in later years. In the works on display, Gershuni and Weinfeld revisit their early work, reconfiguring family photographs in ways that examine the fragmentary and elusive texture of memory and its “re-collection.” While Gershuni stresses his forefathers, Weinfeld follows a matrilineal “family line.”

In the early 1970s, Moshe Gershuni exhibited several conceptual works based on old family photographs, including a studio photograph of his father’s family in Poland. Circling his great-grandfather, his grandfather, and his father, Gershuni reimagined the photograph that documents the presence of the author in the library. The title of the series quotes King David’s words following the death of Bathsheba’s first son (1 Samuel 12:23), expressing the artist’s grief and yearning for those who are no longer with us.


In the early 1970s, YOCHÈVÉD WEinfeld created conceptual artworks that incorporated family photographs, stitched photographs and additional multimedia components. She was one of the first Israeli artists to address issues of memory, gender, religion and the trauma of children of Holocaust survivors. The tri-part series “Family Line” was made after the death of the artist’s mother. Based on photographs of Weinfeld’s mother with her closest kin - her own mother, her husband and her daughter (the artist as a child) - these composite photographs attempt to grasp the passing away - or “disappearance” - of a loved one and the traces left behind. “Family Line” presents a politics of intersections between photography and memory, and between language, visual imagery, and genealogy.

Yuval Yairi (b. 1961, Tel Aviv) reconstructs sites of memory (lieux de mémoire) with an artistic practice that deliberately emulates the process of recollection. He photographs small sections of a photograph on the wall, accentuating the disintegration of the whole into its parts. The title of the series quotes King David’s words following the death of Bathsheba’s first son (1 Samuel 12:23), expressing the artist’s grief and yearning for those who are no longer with us.

Yuvval Yairi’s series captures the insular world of little girls from the ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Mea She’arim.

PEOPLE

Israeli artists have always been fascinated by this diverse and multicultural population of the country. Artists have been seeking to occupy a central place in contemporary photography. LEORA LACO’S series captures the insular world of little girls from the ultra-Orthodox Jewish neighborhood of Mea She’arim.


OTHER WORKS ON DISPLAY

REUVEN RUBIN (1893-1974) proclaimed: “I paint what I love: my people, my family, my country.” Near Jerusalem, painted shortly after the artist immigrated to Palestine, accentuates the pristine beauty of the land and its Arab inhabitants. The naïve painterly style adopted by Rubin has been linked by the artist himself to his sense of childlike awe upon his “rebirth” as an artist in Israel.

“Cutting of the ribbon” ceremony, as well as a celebratory gesture of gratitude for the gift of art. An exhibition of three video works and several “embroidery” pieces by Agassí will also be showcased at the center.


In honor of the inauguration of the new home of the Schusterman Center and the establishment of a chair in Israeli art on November 10th, 2019, award-winning artist NELLY AGASSI (b. 1973, Tel Aviv), assisted by Brandeis students, will create a site-specific installation composed of red satin ribbons. The installation and a related performance, offers an artistic alternative to the traditional "cutting of the ribbon" ceremony.
“Small though it is, Israel has been providing more than its share of artistic talent to the global art circuit, especially where video and performance art are concerned…”

—Roberta Smith, New York Times, August 11, 2010

The Schusterman Center for Israel Studies, located on the third floor of the Mandel Center for the Humanities at Brandeis University, strives to promote the critical study of Israeli art through rigorous academic scholarship, teaching, artist residencies, and the exhibition of contemporary art. The center will provide an inclusive venue for the display of art, photography and videos by Israeli artists from diverse ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds. Art@SCIS will be integrated into the teaching curriculum, providing primary visual sources for the study of Israeli art, society and culture.

Acknowledgments

We are deeply grateful to the Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation for its generosity to the Center and for the gift of Israel-related artworks to create the exhibition. This exhibition was curated with Rivka Saker and Marge Goldsweaver Special thanks to Moche Gershuni, Yocheved Westfeld, Nelly Agassi, Sigalit Landau, Doron Solomons, Yael Bartana and Guy Ben-Ner for their generosity. We are grateful to Sergio Edelstein of the Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv; Yael Reiter of Arts New York; our colleagues at Fine Arts and the Rose Art Museum; and to the students of Brandeis University.

VIDEO ART

Sigalit Landau, Cypress (Dead Sea), 2007, 51:19 minutes

SIGALIT LANDAU (b. 1969, Jerusalem) creates poigniant videos in which her body interacts with the Israeli landscape in poetic and symbolic ways. Dead Sea (2007) offers a lyrical image of Landau floating in the Dead Sea, enconced in a slowly unraveling spiral of green watermelons. The work conjures up a dialogue with Robert Smithson’s iconic Spiral Jetty (1970), but also with Jungian notions of the Self, spiraling inward introspectively and outward, opening up to embrace the world. The artist described the work as: “a cord of two hundred and fifty meters penetrates five layers between the center and the periphery of the sweet raft. I am floating locked inside the spiral salt waters of the Dead Sea… I am like the animal. The video seems to poke at conventional ideas of familial relationships and how they are socially perceived and dictated. At the same time, the work attempts to resolve the frictions within the family unit, much as children do through play.”

*Courtesy of the artists and the Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv.

Guy Ben-Ner: Elia—A Story of an Ostrich Chick (1970), but also in Tel Aviv as the sirens marking the start of Ramadan—2009-March 2010.

Doron Solomons, Trembling Time, 2006, 6:20 minutes

DORON SOLOMONS (b. 1969, London) is a video artist whose artistic practice in the last decade has been inextricably connected to his experience as a professional news editor, the materials to which he is exposed in this capacity, and the ethical problems posed by this practice. In Shopping Day (2006), Solomons directly addresses the languages of advertising and its limited filmic lexicon. Using his editorial skill and editing language, he manages to subvert the message and undermine consumerism.*

* from Doron Solomons, Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, 2006.

In Elia—A Story of an Ostrich Chick, Guy BEN-NER (b. 1969, Ramat Gan), his wife, Nava, and his two young children, Elia and Amir, play the parts of a family of ostriches migrating to find better feeding grounds. (Ben-Ner had recently brought his family from Tel Aviv to New York to attend the M.F.A. program at Columbia University.) The video follows the family, dressed in ostrich costumes, as they wander through Manhattan’s Riverside Park. Mimicking the formal of nature documentaries, the video features a voice-over narrative which translates the emotions and movements of the family for the audience. Like the narrator, who anthropomorphizes the creatures with his descriptions, Ben-Ner also collapses human and animal. The video seems to poke fun at conventional ideas of familial relationships and how they are socially perceived and dictated. At the same time, the work attempts to resolve the frictions within the family unit, much as children do through play.*

* Courtesy of the artists and the Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv.

Yael Bartana, Trembling Time, 2001, 6:20 minutes

YAEI BARTANA (b. 1970, Afula) filmed Trembling Time (2001) from a bridge over the Ayalon Highway in Tel Aviv as the sirens marking Israel’s National Memorial Day sounded. She captures the eerie moments when everything comes to a tense stand still and quotidian time seems to be suspended. In a recent interview Bartana elaborates: “What I was most interested in was the actual moment in which everything stops. There is a large system behind this moment of stopping. That’s why there’s also a feeling of stretching time. And that slowly, slowly, slowly everything comes to a halt. It’s very monumental in a way.”*

* Courtesy of the artists and the Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv.

Doron Solomons, Shopping Day, 2006, 5 minutes

In the last decade, Doron Solomons has been working primarily on video installations, creating works that explore the language of advertising. In Shopping Day, he uses the imagery of the ruins of Lydd (the Arab name for the town of Lod) to resolve the frictions within the family unit, much as children do through play.*


Remote Landscapes

Photographs often reflect the complex, sometimes contradictory, tales imbedded in the local landscapes. YOSSI BREEDER (b. 1960, Montr{e}al Sous Bois, France) presents a nostalgic image of the Yarkon River in Tel Aviv that suggests a yearning for green, water-abundant faraway lands. DOR GUEZ (b. Jerusalem) creates a series of nocturnal images of the ruins of Lydd (the Arab name for the town of Lod). The beauty of the photograph, simultaneously hides and exposes the remnants of a Palestinian home destroyed and despopulated in 1948. EFRAT SHALEM (b. 1971) displays a compelling juxtaposition of organic and geometric shapes, revealing the presence of beauty even in this mundane urban setting.


Photographs: Yocheved Westfeld, Dor Guez, Yossi Breger, Doron Solomons, Dor Guez, The Yarkon River, 2001, 35x44 in.

Yocheved Westfeld, Dor Guez, Yossi Breger, Doron Solomons, Unidentified, 1999, 40x48 in.