חיי מדף

Shelf Life

Haifa MUseum of Art

מוזיאון חיפה לאמנות

פתח דבר

אשכול התערוכות הנוכחי עוסק בפניה המבוזרות של הופעת האספנות, בהיותה אמצעי לזיכרון ולהנצחה, התרפוזה נוסטלגית, דחף ליצירה סדר וארגון, ביטוי של אובסיביות איפיון, ועוד. יש הראים בתופעה "אחיין" הטשקת המחברות בפיירים, יש המתפיצים אותה כמלאכה חפודיטיח, מעין ריפוי ביעוסן. בעיני רבים ביגוש האוספים נדמה להרבנה פאזל, שבו חסרונו של חלק אחד פוגש קשת אחמונה בספרם לעמים, כדי להשיג את המכלול הפלם, "הכמוריאל" מבין האספנים מוכנים אף לעמוע עד קצוח תבל.

אם במאות הקודמות הייתה האספנות נחלתם של בעלי אחוזות, הרי שאיכוסנו בא בגדר חוד הזהב של האספנים. בעידן הארטרנט המטחר המקוון רבים יכולים לעסוק באספנות, אפילו מבלי לקום מכיסא המחשב; בתקבול, כל אדם יכול להוציא לאמבוד אינטרנטי את אוצרות הא"בודעל" שבראוח בתקוח הלאיכם לפח האשפה. האמנם, יש אספנים אשר נוגים בהתמקד בעמבאה הפיסיוני, הפיסיוני והיחוטר של התפצים שברשותם. באופן אישי אכנה לכיוון, מטר שבגוב בתמלה האספנות, על הנאחי הרבה בעיקר בפעולות אלו. אבי מעדיף להמזיד לחיים את פריטי האוסף יותר מאשר לבצור אה אלו שניתן לרוכם בתבג בתן, בתחיר אלם, ולהעבירם מיד הצ'. יש

אשכול התערוכות הנוכחי מצביע על כך שהאמנים העכשוויים מרבים לעסוק באספנות באסטרטגיה אמנותית, בין אם מתוך רצייתם האספנית ובין אם מתוך ההיחסמוחם הרגיונית לנושא זה. הביטוי האמנותי באספנות בא לידי ביטוי בגוגון רחב של הקפדים, המתוקפים בתערוכה: הקרנים "חיי מדף", עיסוק בזיכרון הבכתבתה, ההיחסמוחיות לאופני מיון, ותעוגה בהקפים הרבותים בהקפים בגוגים. הטענה הרווחת בתערוכה, שלפיה אספנות הינה פעולה יצירתית, ניתן בו באשכול התערוכות הנוכחי ניתן לבא בדיאלוג עם תופעות אחדים מתוך אוספי מוזיאון חיפה לאמנות. כחלק מתערוכות אלו, אוצרים בפני הקהל. כל אלה יוצרים "חדרון חוויה מרובדת ומגוונת, המתבדת בין עבר והווה.

נעים אי
מנהל כללי
מוזיאוני חיפה

חיי מדף

מתי כץ-פרמן

"אספנות היא צורה של עקירה – מפגש בין אני לחפץ"

אספנות היא צורה של עקירה – מפגש בין אני לחפץ. אי אפשר לייחס לעונג זה גם את דחף הכביונ הנבעלות אבל אי אפשר לבטל אותו. אספנים בעלי אמצעים מרבים לרוכשם ומוכנים לשלם בכל מחיר אמנות, אבל אספנים בעלי אמצעים מוגבלים, אם הם מוכנים לוותר על כל דבר אחר, אם הם מוכנים לוותר על הנאות אחרות, אם הם מוכנים לוותר על הנאות אחרות, אם הם מוכנים לוותר על הנאות אחרות

Tami Katz-Freiman

Foreword

The current exhibition cluster is concerned with heterogeneous aspects of collecting as a way of remembering and commemorating, an expression of nostalgic longing or of an urge to create order, and a personal obsession. Some see collecting as a "disease" that reflects a compulsive addiction, while others consider it to be a therapeutic pursuit, a form of occupational therapy. Many compare collecting to putting together a puzzle, a process in which the absence of a single part prevents the image from becoming whole. At times, "die-hard" collectors are willing to go to the end of the world to find the missing piece.

If in earlier centuries collecting was the pursuit of the moneyed, our age is the golden age of collectors. With the rise of Internet commerce, anyone can auction off their old belongings online rather than disposing of them in the trash. Some collectors tend to focus on the process of renovating, restoring and preserving the objects they own. As one "infected" with the "disease of collecting," I can personally attest to the great pleasure I take in performing such actions. I would rather spend my time restoring objects to life than accumulating ones that may be bought in good shape, and traded for their full price.

This exhibition cluster points to the preoccupation of many contemporary artists with collecting as an artistic strategy – a preoccupation motivated either by a thrust to collect or by a theoretical concern with this subject. An artistic interest in collecting is given expression in a wide range of contexts, which are reflected in the central exhibition, "Shelf Life." They include an examination of remembering and commemorating, of systems of classification and display in various cultural and critical contexts, and more. The current exhibition cluster also explores several aspects of the Haifa Museum of Art's collections, with the aim of introducing them to the public. These exhibitions come together to offer a multilayered and rich experience, which brings together past and present.

Nissim Tal
Director General
Haifa Museums

"Collecting is a Form of Uprooting – An Encounter Between Self and Object"*

"Ownership is the most intimate relationship one can have with objects. Not that they can come alive in the owner; it is he who lives in them."

Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking my Library: A Talk About Collecting"**

Hunting, therapy, a lust for objects, desire, falling in love, an uncontrollable urge, a contagious disease, an addiction and an obsession – these are some of the metaphorical definitions given to various manifestations of the urge to collect. The name of the exhibition "Shelf Life" implicitly points to the paradox underlying the phenomenon of collecting – that is, the simultaneous preservation and expiration of life. Psychologists tend to define the urge to collect as an obsession whose clinical manifestations include piles of cardboard boxes and overcrowded storage rooms. Scholars who study this phenomenon agree that its pathological extreme is "compulsive hoarding" – the stashing of objects and an inability to dispose of them – a disability that stems, according to one interpretation, from the anal stage of separation from the mother. The compulsive characteristics of this disturbance are similar to those of bulimia, and are typical of people engaged in an endless pursuit of objects of desire. The process of searching for objects and collecting them is perceived as a therapeutic cure for the abyss lying deep within the psyche. According to some opinions, collecting is the malaise of the moneyed, an offshoot of the culture of leisure; others tie the love of collecting to the pleasures of ownership, which is associated – at least in the art world – with rewards such as social status, prestige, personal empowerment, patronage and a sense of power and control.

Endless interpretations of the thrust to collect have been offered in the fields of psychology, philosophy, anthropology and sociology. Most of these theories underscore a similar motive: the search for meaning and an urge to order the world. It has been argued that collections enrich the collector's life, while providing the illusion of control over a seemingly organized and secure world.[1] To this one must add the love of objects – that is, various types of fetishism – as well as the urge to preserve and give fixed form to memory. The most prevalent argument is that the appropriation, accumulation and ordering of objects alleviates existential anxieties and the fear of death – given expression in the form of *horror vacui* – a fear of empty spaces. Amassing objects, according to this argument, is a form of immortalization, and in extreme cases even a substitute for human relations and emotions. It is as if the collector were attempting to dispel his anxieties and sense of lack by creating a sense of purpose and experiences of conquest.

Sigmund Freud, who was himself an avid collector of ancient artifacts (his home is known to have owned approximately 1,900 objects), argued that collecting gives rise to erotic pleasure, and partakes of the ambivalent "pleasure principle" – the basic mechanism underlying human actions, which simultaneously gives rise to the death drive. The pleasure referred to by Freud is related to the repetitive nature of collecting – an act born of the drive for self-preservation: at the same time, this pleasure may also be seen as stemming from the drive to conquer and possess, and from the sensual enjoyment experienced by the collector vis-à-vis his objects of desire. The philosopher Manfred Sommer wrote about the treacherous nature of the urge to collect, which never enables one to stop.[2] The philosopher Jean Baudrillard argued that the purchase of an old piece of furniture, for instance, is akin to purchasing a piece of heritage. Such an object, according to Baudrillard, "is not useless or poorly decorative but plays a special role within a system, it is a sign of the time."[3] Susan Sontag similarly related to the magical power of objects, which seemingly enable one to experience life during other historical periods: she described the world of collectors as authenticating "the existence of other worlds, energies, domains, epochs, different from the one in which they live."[4] Similarly addressing the urge to preserve and the sanctification of the "origin," the philosopher Jacques Derrida wrote about "archive fever" (the title of his 1995 book) and the complex relations between the private functions of an archive and its public aspects – that is, its role as a representation of a collective history.[5]

Indeed, the tension between the private and public dimensions of collecting forms an important part of the history of collecting. Various types of collections have existed since the dawn of civilization, ranging from those discovered in pharaonic tombs to the Renaissance "cabinets of wonder" and today's museums. The birth of the museum is inextricably tied to those collectors of "curiosities" who gathered rare and exotic objects from around the world and displayed them together without any kind of underlying order or classifying principle. Such collections, which were visited only by members of the collector's own aristocratic circles, gave expression to a sense of curiosity and a desire to procure rare, exciting and wondrous natural and cultural artifacts. The "cabinet of wonder" was perceived as a rare repository of knowledge: it inspired numerous 20th century artists, especially ones associated with the Dada and Fluxus movements, while continuing – as this exhibition reflects – to influence contemporary artists, who are revealing a growing interest in this subject.

In the course of the 18th century, Enlightenment ideals gave rise to new, rational and didactic conventions of exhibition and classification. An encyclopedic logic shaped the development of various classificatory systems that divided knowledge into different fields – such as the natural sciences, art, archeology and history. In the 19th century, in the aftermath of both the French revolution and the industrial revolution, the rise of democratic ideals further influenced conventions of display in museums, which were now open to the public at large. The Louvre Museum was transformed into an art museum in 1793. In the 1820s, the first museum dedicated to art was founded in Berlin, constituting the first instance in which "art" was separated from artifacts associated with other fields of knowledge. The modern museum was characterized by a linear organizing principle and a chronological arrangement of artifacts, which underscored the historical continuum underlying the belief in progress. By contrast, museums in the postmodern age attempt to rupture this linear continuum and to return to thematic models of organization, thus doing away with the old modernist mechanisms of classification. So, for instance, the recent curatorial revolution at the Tate Modern has led to a fundamental change in its conventions of display, and has resulted in the creation of thematic exhibitions that undo the traditional chronological order.

The question of what defines an accumulation of objects as a "collection" is essential to a discussion of "Shelf Life." Gideon Ofrat aptly defined the difference between accumulating and collecting by noting that the owners of numerous houses or diamonds are not collectors. Even the gallery owner whose storage space is crowded with artworks is not an art collector. According to Ofrat, what defines a collection is not systematic ordering, since there are some collections that are unsystematic: it is neither an underlying classificatory principle – for some collections are governed by no principle – nor the act of displaying the collected objects or the noncommercial drive behind their accumulation. Instead, he has come up with the following tautological definition: "A collection is an assemblage of objects presented as a collection."[6] Another definition of collecting would describe it as the act of selecting, accumulating and preserving objects that have subjective value. This act is characterized by certain essential traits – such as the thrust to acquire knowledge, an interest in details, expertise and intention, alongside the non-functional status of the objects in the collection.

In this context, Baudrillard argued that once it enters a collection, "the strictly practical object acquires a social status (...). At the opposite extreme, the pure object, devoid of any function or completely abstracted from its use, takes on a strictly subjective status: it becomes part of a collection."[7] The objects are thus transformed from "things" in the world into "signs" whose meaning is based on their metaphorical relations with other objects in the collection. Although these objects may have no material worth, the moment a collector deems them worthy of being collected, his desire endows them with value. In this sense, it goes without saying that a "collection" is more than the sum of its parts: it is an active organism that is constantly coming into being, which requires ordering and interpretation and which reflects a sort of internal order in the collector's psyche. The owner of the collection is the one who determines the rules that govern it, its identity, context, internal hierarchy and symbolic value, as well as the meaning of the represented objects. One may thus conclude that every collection constitutes a story told by the collector, an endless narrative whose completion equals death.

It comes as no surprise, then, that a significant number of artists have gravitated to the trope of collecting as a central theme in their work, while creating narratives that endow their collections with meaning. Numerous artists are known to have been compulsive collectors: Rembrandt, Degas, Andy Warhol, Gerhard Richter and Damien Hirst are the most well-known among them. Many more artists are known to have contracted some form of "collecting fever," which also motivates them as an artistic strategy. "Shelf Life" attempts to examine the growing interest revealed by contemporary artists from the 1960s onwards in the concept of "collecting," which appears in a range of contexts – memory, nostalgia, commemoration, the fear of death, the relations between nature and culture, conventions of exhibition and display, and, of course, the social context of the collection as a status symbol. The preoccupation with collections and collecting reflects the interest of contemporary artists in offering alternatives to modern classificatory categories – an interest that constitutes a quintessential postmodern strategy: in addition, this preoccupation reflects a social critique of the world of consumption, while also touching upon the prevalent interest in identity that has characterized artmaking in recent years. The artists participating in this exhibition touch upon the idea of the "collection" through the exploration of terms such as gathering, hoarding, accumulating, classifying, cataloguing, endowing with meaning, ordering and excess. Their works reveal that actions which involve a system of classification – and which are perceived as compulsive and controlling – may also lead to the creation of new meanings.

"Shelf Life" thus attempts to show how both Israeli and international contemporary artists relate in their works to the complexities and various aspects of collecting, while analyzing the aesthetic syntax of different kinds of collections and the psychological aspects of this phenomenon and of the artist-collector's obsessions. The common denominator linking the range of artists featured in this exhibition is the use of collections as an artistic strategy. Above all, "Shelf Life" examines what artists collect, and how the nature of their collections is related to the act of artmaking itself. The works featured in this exhibition reflect the aesthetic of a "collection," as well as the abundance and pleasure related to the satisfaction of the drive to possess. The tangle of themes that emerge from these works contains threads that lead in various directions: one central theme is the affinity between the idea of collecting and practices of commemoration, remembering and preservation. **Gideon Gechtman**, for instance, relates in the work Archive to the typology of tombstones and graves. **Damien Hirst** collects the wings of dead butterflies, an interest similarly alluding to death, memory and eternal life. **Erez Israeli** collects Holocaust-related "souvenirs" and photographs of sailors on eBay, and thus represents a new type of Internet-based collector while highlighting the two contrasting elements of "desire" and "death" typical of collecting. **Ronit Shany** also examines the affinity between collecting, memory and death by means of a typology of objects kept by her parents in her childhood home.

The affinity between commemoration and the world of museums is given expression in the photographs of **Tali Amitai-Tabib**, which focus on a private collection transformed into a museum. Another examination of museum collections is undertaken by **Dana Levy**, who photographs art and natural history museums and reveals the paradox inherent to their collections: the artifacts acquire a seemingly eternal existence, yet are simultaneously "buried" in a museum storage room. The tension between nature and culture is similarly reflected in the work of **Tomer Sapir**, which undermines familiar systems of classification and highlights the twilight zone between these two categories. The appropriation and domestication of nature is also given expression in the work of **Irit Hemmo**, who collects gardening magazines and creates contemporary still lifes out of magazine clippings. **Michal Shamir**, by contrast, gathers bits of natural materials, dries them and delicately forms them into wreaths and various other arrangements on a digital scanner. **Gili Avissar** has created a stuffed teddy bear collection reminiscent of a display of deer heads or other animal trophies. **Esther Knobel** also works with images related to childhood and to her toy collections, which inspire her work as a jewelry designer.

The term "typology," which refers to a process of classification into different types, and which is part of an encyclopedic approach, is also closely related to the act of collecting. **Robert Kuśnierowski** documented tens of thousands of objects, whose endless accumulation functions as a metaphor for the artist-collector's emotional state: his work represents such a typological approach, which has a symbolic political charge in a Polish context. Another typological perspective is explored in an additional body of works by Irit Hemmo, who creates typologies of various "things" in an attempt to examine their differences and similarities.

Acts of collecting and ordering may also function as analytic and critical tools for the examination of existing systems of classification and of their philosophical underpinnings. **Michal Heiman**, for instance, collects the boxes used for psychological projection tests, as well as images from family albums, while **Ido Michaeli**'s collections include stamps and military insignia that he manipulates and transforms in subversive ways. The collection of African figurines photographed by **David Adika** contains an implicit critique of themes including colonialism, social stereotypes, belonging and identity.

A more ironic concern with collecting in a domestic context is given expression in the works of **Doron Solomons**, who presents an inventory of his assets as a collection of sorts – while also exploring the pleasures of ownership. In a different vein, **Amnon David Ar** also examines the relationship between collecting and the pleasures of ownership: he does so by reconstructing his own crowded living space, which includes both paintings of interiors and various collections. Finally, special attention is devoted to the eccentric figure of the collector and to the place he occupies in the contemporary art world in the parodic work created by **Elmgreen & Dragset**, which exaggerates the obsessive qualities of art collectors.

It is possible that collectors become attached to objects because they long for that "aura" which, as Walter Benjamin argued, has been depleted in the age of mechanical reproduction. If this is indeed the case, then "Shelf Life" strives to amplify the aura of those items cherished by collectors, whose symbolic value becomes more important than their functional value. If a collection is a plot of sorts, then an exhibition of and about collections is a multivocal plot with numerous acts, a homage to the creative act of preserving visual memories related to images and objects.

* Quoted from the epilogue written by Lilach Lachman for Avot Yeshurun's book of poems Milvadata, Tel Aviv: Siman Kri'a Books, Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2009, p. 115 (Hebrew).
** Walter Benjamin, Illuminations, with an introduction by Hannah Arendt (ed.), New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968, p. 487.

1 For an in-depth discussion of the drive to collect and a historical overview of various types of collecting, see Galia Bar Or's comprehensive article, "On Collecting and Collectors," in A Selection of Israeli Art from the Collection of Gabu and Ami Brosh, Museum of Art, Ein Harod, 2009, pp. 240-264.
2 See Manfred Sommer, Sammeln: Ein Philosophischer Versuch, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2002.
3 Jean Baudrillard quoted by Olivier Coron, "The Collector and His Passion," in Flowers of Our Lives (exh. cat.), Toruń, Poland: Znaki Czasu, 2008, p. 46.
4 Susan Sontag, The Volcano Lover, New York: Anchor Books, 1993, p. 82.
5 For a comprehensive discussion of the concept of the archive as examined in contemporary art and critical thought, see Charles Merewether (ed.), The Archive: Documents of Contemporary Art, Cambridge, Mass: Whitechapel and MIT Press, 2006.
6 Gideon Ofrat, "Collect or Die," in Washington Crosses the Jordan, Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 2008, p. 120 (Hebrew).
7 Jean, Baudrillard, "The System of Collecting," in John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (eds.), The Cultures of Collecting, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 23.

גדעון בכסון

מבנים מן בחלה האמצעים הטכנולוגיים מיכאל אלמגרון ואינגבר דראאסון מפותח באמצעות יצירתם הרלקטיבית ובעיקר האמנות האינפורמטיבית. "הבר" הוא לידיד ביטוי באמרות המבנים ומתפרים מאלה מגוונים בדרום הלל אבים - אזור הנגב הגבוה בהר הנגב. "הבר" הוא לידיד ביטוי באמרות המבנים ובאיתור הנמצאר דרומה. בעמדה הנוכחית מדגיש מדעי של פרויקט שחפיים הבנה הבלתי-אמנותית

Haifa Museums, Haifa Museum of Art
Director General, Haifa Museums: Nissim Tal
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Shelf Life
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Exhibition
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תודות

לכל האמנים המשתתפים ולמשאילים: אוסף אלן פרטנברג, אוסף אבי וצביה אבן, אוסף הפנס הקסום, אוסף דפנה בר-רוזמן, מל אבנון, דוד וסיגה גבע, אוריה, אוסף דני פיינ, מל אבנון, עדי מרגוב מיזוג ואוויר SIT-ART, רמי גלריה בהוניטן, מל אבנון, גלריה בגוש לאמנות, מל אבנון, גלריה ויקטוריה פרוק, הלוגלן, גלריה דוד אמצע, עמנואל מל אבנון, גלריה מל אבנון, גלריה רוזנבלום, מל אבנון, גלריה אלוש לאמנות עכשווית, מל אבנון, גוטקר שטיקן, קרקוב, מאכ לאמנות, עין חרוד, מוזאון מאמן בקיבוץ עין חרוד, גלריה בגוש לאמנות בתל אביב, גלריה בגוש לאמנות בתל אביב, גלריה בגוש לאמנות בתל אביב

David Adika

David Adika's photographs are often imbued by a poetic, melancholic atmosphere. Mahogany (2003) - one of his most important series - is part of a body of staged works characterized by elegant sensuality and stunning beauty. This series includes 11 photographs of carved African figurines: displayed in many Israeli homes during the 1960s, such figurines served as souvenirs from what was perceived to be a region of quintessential otherness. Each one of the photographs features a single figurine - an elephant, giraffe, deer, African woman carrying a jug on her head and so forth - folkloric objects that Adika's father brought home from his trips to Africa. Adika's mother lovingly assembled them into a "collection," which was displayed in the living room glass cabinet as a representation of an exotic, faraway world. The figurines were photographed with dramatic lighting against a black ground, enlarged to iconic dimensions and mounted on a laminated surface that endows them with a glamorous, rarefied quality. Exposed in this manner, which underscores their beauty, they form a shiny black panorama. In this work, Adika undermines the common division between art and craft and endows cheap tourist clichés, which were painstakingly carved by anonymous hands, with a new aura and context. The artist's postcolonial gaze examines the sweeping assimilation of African folk objects into Israeli visual and material culture, and contains an implicit critique of imperialism, social stereotypes, belonging and identity in an Orientalist sphere.

Mahogany, 2003
Seven digital color prints, Perspex, PVC and aluminum
From a series of 11, 165 x 120 each.
Yaffa Braverman Collection, Tel Aviv

Tali Amitai-Tabib

Tali Amitai-Tabib's photographs examine spaces that she describes as "cultural stations": libraries, concert halls and museums - sites of knowledge, enlightenment and status. These vast, empty, majestic spaces are ornately decorated and replete with details - conveying a sense of sublimity and mystery related to the seeming arrest of time. The photographic gaze characteristic of her work combines an analytic, typological approach with a formalist emphasis on composition, color, materiality, light and form. In the series of photographs taken at the Nissim de Camondo Museum in Paris, these characteristics are accompanied by an emotionally charged narrative related to the history of the estate and its owners. The museum is housed in a mansion built in 1911 for Count Moïse de Camondo, a Jewish banker of Turkish origin. The building, which was designed by the architect René Sergent, was meant to contain the count's collections of furniture and art. Following the death of his son, Nissim, in the First World War, the count bequeathed the house and collection to the Museum of Decorative Arts in Paris. The Nissim de Camondo Museum opened to the public in 1935, about a year after the count died of heartbreak. His daughter, her husband and their children later perished in the Nazi concentration camps). Amitai-Tabib's photographs capture the tragic quality of this site. What seems to be a convictional display - lines upon lines of orderly plates, a bowl on a polished chest, sculptures and oil paintings - are charged with additional meaning through their juxtaposition with the photograph of the son who did not return from the war. Detached from their functional context, the objects attest to a life that no longer is. Amitai-Tabib's special use of lighting underscores the dramatic quality of this underlying narrative, and calls attention to those who are absent. The tragic story of this mansion thus underscores the connection between museums and mausoleums, as will in the function of collections as a means of preserving bygone lives.

Untitled, 2009 (from the series "Camondo")
Eight color prints, 80 x 100 each
Courtesy of the artist

Amnon David Ar

The painter Amnon David Ar presents a reconstruction of sorts of his crowded living space in the south of Tel Aviv, in which details from his collections are displayed alongside paintings of interiors and nudes. These collections contain vintage Israeli advertising artifacts such as old signs for Coca Cola, Martini and the postal service: 20th-century street signs; retro designer furniture: helmets, busts, copies of Renaissance sculptures, embalmed birds, telescopes and measuring instruments; various flea market finds, camel skulls and an old birdcage. This model of an artist-collector reflects how the obsessive process of collecting is integrated into the framework of artmaking. Ar is known for his rich, brightly lit, realist portraits, some of which feature mirror reflections of his crowded studio and living spaces. Reminiscent of the "cabinets of wonder" created by Renaissance aristocrats, Ar's displays contain manmade artifacts (*artificialia*) alongside natural specimens (*naturalia*). The Painting Interior (2007), for instance, captures a large Coca Cola advertising sign, a microscope, lamps, busts and a birdcage. Ar's studio apartment thus functions as the site of surreal cross-cultural dialogues, and of encounters between elitist, high culture and everyday, once-functional objects. Ar does not differentiate between natural specimens and cultural artifacts, and provides a sampling of the material culture characteristic of early Zionism and the industrial, pre-digital age.

Samples, 2010
Room installation for Corner Specific: dental oven, printing press, plaster underwear advertisement, drum pedal, French fireman helmet, cook hat, plate with image of Moshe Dayan, beer advertisement, doctor's plaque, tin advertisement, pilot's helmet, shoe stretcher, poster for public smoking, Wassily Chair by Breuer, lamp, tin sign, cigarette advertisement, brass symbol of Israel, enamel enema can, bust of Hermes, shell beads, baccalite telephone, Eames couch, variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist

Nude, 1997
Oil on canvas, 50 x 80
Courtesy of the artist

Interior, 2007
Oil on canvas, 50 x 60, private collection

Self Portrait in Convex Mirror, 2008
Oil on canvas, 94 x 89
Dubi Shiff Art Collection, Tel Aviv

Gili Avissar

Gili Avissar's studio, which resembles a sewing workshop, contains a plethora of fabrics, objects and various other materials that surround him as an extension of the "self." His drive to collect is expressed through the accumulation of things he finds in his neighborhood in the south of Tel Aviv - an area filled with carpentry and metal welding workshops and furniture stores. These materials are recycled in his work and in his imagery, which focuses on childhood memories and imaginary, ceremonial worlds. Avissar's installation Gizella (2003-2010) features a collection of plush dolls displayed across a wall: teddy bears, rabbits and other animals of the kind used by children as transitional objects. Some of these animals are stuffed, while others seem empty and deflated: their used, raggedy appearance offers a touching reminder of a lost childhood world. Although they look like painstakingly refurbished old dolls, they were in fact all created by the artist with recycled materials from his "collection" of fabrics. This project began as a business venture, when Avissar - who began his career as a fashion designer - tried to market the dolls under the brand name "Gizella," which was his grandmother's name. Their production was soon transformed into a form of artmaking: instead of selling the dolls, he began collecting them and integrating them into his body of works. The display of the dolls underscores both their differences and their common traits. Their imperfect appearance, meanwhile, highlights the fact that they were sewn by hand rather than produced on an assembly line, and contributes a homage to traditional women's crafts. The installation includes a shopping cart placed beside the wall like a horse-drawn carriage. Piled high with fabrics, dolls and materials at various stages of the work process, it attests to the artist's passion for collecting and to his need to recycle everything rather than throw things away.

Gizella, 2003-2010
Fabric, shopping cart, wood, variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist

Elmgreen & Dragset

The reflexive works created by the Scandinavian artists Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset focus on the art world itself - on its mechanisms of power and on the functioning of the art market. This exhibition features documentation of a project presented by the two at the 53rd Venice Biennale (2009), which took place in the shadow of the global economic crisis. Elmgreen & Dragset offered a parodic take on collecting, and transformed the adjacent Danish and Nordic Pavilions into collectors' homes: the house of a troubled family, and that of an eccentric collector. Visitors to the Danish Pavilion were greeted by a "For Sale" sign; during the Vernissage of the Biennale, tours of the house were offered by an energetic real estate agent. Furniture presented is as a desirable property located in the exclusive area of the Giardini. The agent catered to the visitors' voyeuristic impulse by providing bits of gossip about the dramas plaguing the owners' family. The artists essentially took on the role of curators, populating the two "houses" with their own works and those of 23 other artists and designers. Works by leading international artists including Maurizio Cattelan, Wolfgang Tillmans, Terence Koh, Jonathan Monk, Hernan Bas and Nina Saunders were displayed alongside an insect collection, Polynesian sculptures, furniture and design items and a stunning collection of ornamental chinaware. The result recalled museums such as the Frick Collection in New York, which were founded in the early 20th century to display private collections and which combine artworks with "exotic" furniture and design items. The home of the neighboring Danish in the Nordic Pavilion - a hedonistic bachelor known as "Mr. B" - was designed as a characteristically modern "open space." His collections are filled with homoerotic artworks, and include, among other things, a collection of his former lovers' bathing suits. The open space alludes to a lack of boundaries, ostentatious behavior and exhibitionism, and exposes the details of the owner's private life for all to see. The prize paid for this decadent lifestyle is revealed as one exits the house and discovers Mr. B's body floating in the swimming pool - in the aftermath of a suicidal act or perhaps a murder. By means of these fictional biographies, Elmgreen & Dragset attempt to analyze the psychological motives underlying the urge to collect, and to decipher the "gene" responsible for the desire to possess.

It seems as if the ostentatious, fashionable mannerisms characteristic of many contemporary collectors represent, for these artists, a form of gluttony and spiritual weakness which inevitably leads to decline.

Documentation from The Collectors, 2009
Nordic and Danish Pavilions, 53rd Venice Biennale, 2009
PPT projection and collection of works commissioned by Elmgreen & Dragset from artists and writers for the "Bagalogue" project
Courtesy of the artists and Victoria Miro Gallery, London

Before and After (Nordic Pavilion, Venice), 2009
Two c-prints, 29.7 x 36.7 each
Courtesy of the artists and Victoria Miro Gallery, London

Michal Heiman

The concepts "archive" and "collection" form the underlying basis of Michal Heiman's multilayered works. Her studio constitutes an archive filled with boxes, envelopes, drawers, closets and shelves: they contain photographs taken by her and photographs from family albums, as well as documents, films, diaries, books, clinical studies and psychoanalytic texts. A fundamental aspect of Heiman's work concerns the affinity between psychic reality and between photography, its origins, various manifestations and repercussions. She is consistently interested in the nature of the human psyche and in expanding the boundaries of art. As part of her research, she has gathered boxes containing psychological projection tests used by psychoanalysts, such as the Thematic Apperception Test. These boxes contain a variety of images that enable the patient to give expression to a wide range of associations, based on the assumption that he is unconsciously projecting his emotions and urges onto the images by sharing a confession, constituting a narrative or offering an interpretation. Based on such tests, Heiman created her own box: Michal Heiman Test No. 1 (M.H.T.) (1997). The images in this box, which are related to the Israeli geopolitical sphere, were culled from family albums, public archives and books. They were presented to visitors at Documenta X in Kassel, Germany (1997), in the format of a personal interview conducted by "testers." A selection from the documentation of these "tests" is presented for the first time in this exhibition. For Michal Heiman Test No. 2 (M.H.T.): Test for Women (1998), the artist created an additional box with photographs of her former mother-in-law, who would inadvertently pose for photographs against backgrounds that matched her outfits. The photographs are reminiscent of Cindy Sherman's staged works, in which the artist impersonated different women in order to analyze female stereotypes. However, the resemblance of such stereotypes is not consciously planned. For this test, which was the first enacted at Le Quartier, a contemporary art center in Quimper, France (1998), female visitors to the exhibition space were asked to lie down on a couch and discuss some of the images in this box. A separate display cabinet contains a collection of projection tests that are usually kept at analysts' clinics, and which Heiman has accumulated over the years.

Michal Heiman Test No. 1 (M.H.T.), 1997
Blue box, 32 plates (31 photographs and one blank card), instruction manual, 29 x 25 x 2
Courtesy of the artist

Michal Heiman Test No. 2 (M.H.T.): My Mother-in-Law - Test for Women, 1998
Enactment: Le Quartier, Centre d'Art Contemporain, Quimper, France, 1998; Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, 2000; Museum of Modern Art, Saitama City, Japan, 2001
Green box, 72 plates (71 photographs and one blank card), instruction manual, 24.5 x 17.5 x 4.5
Courtesy of the artist

Documentation of Enacting Michal Heiman Test No. 1 (M.H.T.), Documenta X, Germany, 1997, 2009
Installation: 6 videos, 6 screens, approx. 30 minutes each
Courtesy of the artist

Michal Heiman Test No. 2 (M.H.T.): My Mother-in-Law - Test for Women, 1998, 2009
Installation: 72 plates (71 photographs and one blank card, 23.5 x 16.5 each); five shelves (6 x 380 x 3 each; green wall (100 x 420)
Courtesy of the artist

Psychological Tests Collection: Diagnostic Evaluation Tools, Projection Tests, Questionnaires and Books), 1985-2009
Glass-fronted display cabinet, 85 x 200 x 75
Courtesy of the artist

Gideon Gechtman

Gideon Gechtman's works are concerned with death, memory and commemoration, and are framed by the "Mausoleum" project he began developing in the 1970s in order to preserve his body of works. Gechtman's mausoleum functioned simultaneously as a sort of "collection" that grew over time, a work of art that captured the artist and his family members, and a symbolic site in which to preserve it. This long-term project combined various systems of collecting, classifying, cataloguing and archiving alongside conceptual strategies based on the elusive borderline between truth and fiction, authenticity and forgery. The typological principle is especially prominent in the work Archive (2003), where it is given expression both in the work's title and in the installation of the objects in niches - an arrangement typical of collections. The archive constitutes a reconstruction of the multilevel associations, based on the assumption that he is unconsciously projecting his emotions and urges onto the images by sharing a confession, constituting a narrative or offering an interpretation. Based on such tests, Heiman created her own box: Michal Heiman Test No. 1 (M.H.T.) (1997). The images in this box, which are related to the Israeli geopolitical sphere, were culled from family albums, public archives and books. They were presented to visitors at Documenta X in Kassel, Germany (1997), in the format of a personal interview conducted by "testers." A selection from the documentation of these "tests" is presented for the first time in this exhibition. For Michal Heiman Test No. 2 (M.H.T.): Test for Women (1998), the artist created an additional box with photographs of her former mother-in-law, who would inadvertently pose for photographs against backgrounds that matched her outfits. The photographs are reminiscent of Cindy Sherman's staged works, in which the artist impersonated different women in order to analyze female stereotypes. However, the resemblance of such stereotypes is not consciously planned. For this test, which was the first enacted at Le Quartier, a contemporary art center in Quimper, France (1998), female visitors to the exhibition space were asked to lie down on a couch and discuss some of the images in this box. A separate display cabinet contains a collection of projection tests that are usually kept at analysts' clinics, and which Heiman has accumulated over the years.

Archive, 2003
Metal, marble, plastic flowers, ceramics, wood, formica, sponge, stone, gold, 292 x 900 x 30
Courtesy of the artist's family

Bon Voyage, 2004-2005
Copy paper on paper, 15 units, 57.7 x 40.4 each
Courtesy of the artist

Untitled, 2009
Collage on Formica, 150 x 225 x 10
Collection of Ziv and Fiona Gani, Switzerland

Untitled, 2009
Collage on Formica, 150 x 200 x 10
Courtesy of the artist

Irit Hemmo

Irit Hemmo's series of detail-filled collages is composed of thousands of clippings from photographs of various plants. The artist cut each of these images out separately, pasted them onto white formica surfaces, and wove them into synthetic-looking floral reliefs. Composed of black-and-white and colored components, these images are reminiscent of old-fashioned greeting cards. This body of works bespeaks the obsessive dimension of collecting: a mixture of elements culled from catalogues, gardening and botanical magazines and advertisements containing plant motifs. Her labor-intensive, meticulous work process transforms these crude images into carpets of lush plants imbued with a colorful, "natural" and irrepressible quality. The appropriation and domestication of nature presented here is double - taking place first in the magazine image and later in the act of disassembling and reassembling the images into contemporary still lifes. What is preserved here is not nature itself but rather images of nature - a strategy that reflects Hemmo's interest in the tension between life and still life. The artist seems to "pick" the plants out of the photographs, ironically eternalizing them as museum artifacts. In a body of drawings on copy paper, Hemmo presents typologies of different "things": animals (cows, polar bears), vehicles (cars, caravans, trucks, ships), buildings (high-rises, cottages) and ground plans (of buildings and ships). Like an industrious clerk, she "gathers" and classifies pragmatic, technical diagrams of similar things in an attempt to compare their visual details. Operating according to an internal logic based on the relations between nature and culture, life and still life, Hemmo seemingly restores these "things" to their original state, as if returning life to the stage of a blueprint, while addressing issues concerning generalizations and definitions.

Bon Voyage, 2004-2005
Copy paper on paper, 15 units, 57.7 x 40.4 each
Courtesy of the artist

Untitled, 2009
Collage on Formica, 150 x 225 x 10
Collection of Ziv and Fiona Gani, Switzerland

Untitled, 2009
Collage on Formica, 150 x 200 x 10
Courtesy of the artist

Damien Hirst

Damien Hirst's works, which are concerned with life processes and the cycle of creation and destruction, resemble scientific studies. His ideas about cycles of life and death and about survival are given expression in images of medicine cabinets, display cases containing skeletons, surgical tools and glass containers in which dissected animals float in formaldehyde - signature artifacts that have come to emblematize his provocative work. Butterflies have also appeared as a central motif in Hirst's work. Their short life span and beauty have endowed them with special meaning in many cultural contexts, especially as a symbol of life after death. In ancient Greece, they were perceived as a personification of the human soul; in Christian art, they appear as a symbol of human vanity, death, or resurrection. The butterfly is also a symbol of creativity, desire and imagination - of youth, ephemeral beauty and the fragility of life. In 1991, Hirst first made use of live butterflies in his exhibition "In and Out of Love" at the Woodstock Gallery in London: thousands of Malaysian butterflies were affixed to monochromatic canvases coated with sugar water; the moment the butterflies broke out, they flew around the small gallery space, drank the sugar water, mated, laid eggs, and finally died and stuck to the glossy surfaces of the canvases. Their short life span was lived out in an artificial environment reminiscent of a tropical rain forest, whose pastoral beauty became a death trap. In 2001, Hirst once again used butterflies in his works. Yet this time, chance was replaced by a meticulous and calculated work process, which seemed like an attempt to impose order on a chaotic world: since then, the butterflies appear as symmetrical compositions with symbolic associations and patterns resembling the domes of famous cathedrals. In the work Serenity (2007), different-sizes butterflies with white or transparent wings were affixed to the round canvas in patterns, as if fossilized in a state of solitude. Here and there, a flash of bold color endows the work with a sense of vitality, harmony and equilibrium.

Serenity, 2007
Butterflies and household gloss on canvas
Diameter (round): 223.5
Courtesy of The Collection of Art Partners, the Angel Collection (Contemporary Art and private collection

Erez Israeli

Erez Israeli represents a new type of enthusiastic collector who purchases his collections online. In the context of his concern with identity, bereavement, heroism, kitsch, death, symbolization and representation, Israeli obsessively collects Holocaust memorabilia. In Mu eBay Collection #1 (2009), he displays the collection of Holocaust souvenirs he purchased on eBay in glass cabinets, alongside Internet documentation that seemingly confirms their authenticity: various versions of the yellow star, old dishes used at Auschwitz, photographs from the ghetto, a doll that belonged to a girl in a concentration camp and Judenrat stamps. Some of these objects are authentic, others are fakes produced to be sold online. Israeli's interest in commodifying this art, they appear as a symbol of human vanity, death, or resurrection. The butterfly is also a symbol of creativity, desire and imagination - of youth, ephemeral beauty and the fragility of life. In 1991, Hirst first made use of live butterflies in his exhibition "In and Out of Love" at the Woodstock Gallery in London: thousands of Malaysian butterflies were affixed to monochromatic canvases coated with sugar water; the moment the butterflies broke out, they flew around the small gallery space, drank the sugar water, mated, laid eggs, and finally died and stuck to the glossy surfaces of the canvases. Their short life span was lived out in an artificial environment reminiscent of a tropical rain forest, whose pastoral beauty became a death trap. In 2001, Hirst once again used butterflies in his works. Yet this time, chance was replaced by a meticulous and calculated work process, which seemed like an attempt to impose order on a chaotic world: since then, the butterflies appear as symmetrical compositions with symbolic associations and patterns resembling the domes of famous cathedrals. In the work Serenity (2007), different-sizes butterflies with white or transparent wings were affixed to the round canvas in patterns, as if fossilized in a state of solitude. Here and there, a flash of bold color endows the work with a sense of vitality, harmony and equilibrium.

Mu eBay Collection # 1, 2009
Readymade, two display tables, 100 x 200 x 90 each
Courtesy of the artist and Givon Gallery, Tel Aviv

Mu eBay Collection # 2 (Fat Guerelle), 2010
Framed old photographs, variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist and Givon Gallery, Tel Aviv

Esther Knobel

Esther Knobel and her husband, Alex Ward, have spent many years collecting small objects and toys made of tin and other simple materials. Following the birth of their son, they began collecting in various places around the world. Their initial fascination with each object is reminiscent of a child's excitement with a new toy, as simple as it may be. As is the case with every collection, here too the objects are accompanied by a narrative composed of personal memories. Certain details mark significant turning points in the course of the collectors' life, and the collection's expansion may be likened to the addition of new branches to the family geneaology. The affinity between the collection and the jewelry pieces created by Knobel is surprisingly direct. Her works, especially the earlier ones, appear to be nourished by her family's toy collection, and vice versa. They are characterized by the same naïve, defiant spirit and shining, seductive beauty typical of the anachronistic tin toys – an antithesis to the 21st century's plastic gadgets. Knobel's works, which tread the thin line between art and craft, expand and challenge the definition of jewelry. They are strategically composed, in part, of "cheap" readymades and crude, simple materials. In contrast to traditional conceptions of jewelry making, Knobel takes an ironic, light-hearted approach, which is also given expression in her decision to present her works alongside her toy collection in this exhibition. The result is a deceptive symbiosis between highly valued works and everyday objects that have no real value. Displayed alongside one another, they resemble a collection of colorful, seductive miniatures, and offer a fresh perspective on concepts such as inspiration, objectification and ownership.

Collection Display Cabinet, 1980–2006
Toys, various materials
Collection of Esther Knobel and Alex Ward

Group of works, 1980–2006
Anodized titanium, recycled tin cans, copper, nickel silver, silver, gold, candy wrappings, gold leaf, silver leaf, gems, enamel on copper, fabric, paint and chewing gum
Courtesy of the artist

Robert Kuśmirowski

Robert Kuśmirowski, one of Poland's leading artists, is known for his rich, highly detailed installations. These works have a multilayered, historical character and capture the atmosphere of a particular time and place. His work focuses on the affinity between his personal past and his country's collective past, while uncovering forgotten historical layers and subverting the canonical status of Polish cultural memory. His environmental installations combine authentic objects with ones he produced himself, which appear similarly obsolete. The work featured here is a video documentation of his exhibition "The Collector's Massif," which was presented in 2009 at the Krakov art gallery Bunkier Sztuki. This exhibition revolved around the reconstruction, recycling and mixture of new and familiar themes from his own body of work, which includes tens of thousands of objects. Unlike his earlier works, which reconstructed the aura of traditional handicrafts by combining them with artificial simulations, here Kuśmirowski chose to reconstruct the artist-collector's "emotional state." To this end, he brought together all of the objects used in his earlier installations, and stored all over Poland: he displayed them alongside the numerous collections of the Sosenko family, which mainly collected toys. The gallery space was crowded with shelves, chests and closets filled with dolls, airplanes, cars, clocks, children's books, organs, TV sets, postcards, furniture, buttons, medals, jewelry, glasses, fans, posters, records, maps, globes and bottles. The exhibition spread out over two floors: the first floor featured numerous objects in a dreamlike installation, while the well-lit space and sense of order contributed to an optimistic atmosphere: the second floor featured a disorderly, oppressive accumulation of objects imbued with a dark, threatening quality. This video functions as a virtual tour of the exhibition, which reveals how the functional value of the objects is transformed from that of historical signs associated with a given material culture into emotional symptoms. According to Kuśmirovski, they function as an environmental metaphor for the depths of the artist-collector's inner world, which is revealed to the viewer in what seems like an attempt to purge oneself of the desire to collect.

The Collector's Massif, from the Collections of Robert Kuśmirowski and the Sosenko Family, 2009
Video, single-channel projection, 10:26 minutes, sound
Courtesy of the artist and Bunkier Sztuki Contemporary Art Gallery, Krakow. The original project was subsidized by the Polish Ministry of Cultural and National Heritage.

Dana Levy

Mechanisms of classification, cataloguing and preservation are a central preoccupation in the majority of Dana Levy's works. Levy is fascinated by the mechanism of neutralizing desire – the manner in which an entire life is decontextualized and isolated on display shelves or museum walls. In the video work The Museum (2009), she used a static camera to document exhibition spaces in old Italian and German museums. She composed a panoramic continuum made of processed images of Renaissance and Baroque masterpieces, creating an imaginary and deceptive photographic collage that focuses on works concerned with war and disaster. Biblical stories about events that supposedly took place in the ancient Near East appear as European fantasies of the Holy Land. Their frozen, silent presence at the heart of Europe seems to neutralize the emotional turmoil they represent. The flow of majestic images – marble sculptures, paintings in ornate, gilded frames and ornamental floor designs – appear in this video as a mausoleum of Western culture. Levy's interest in the question of representing reality, and her efforts to reorder the images at stake, is evident in the panoramic photographs taken at the Specola Museum in Florence. The embalmed mammals and fish displayed in glass cabinets are classified according to their species and the biological relations between them, as a visual memory of life itself. In the video work Silence Among Us (2008), death – confronted with life – is strikingly present: the silence of the embalmed birds in the glass cages of the Beit Sturman natural history museum, on Kibbutz Ein Hanna, is disturbed by an invading flock of white pigeons. These works question the conceptual and institutional procedures concerned with ordering knowledge, classifying nature and crowding it into display cases.

Fish, 2008
Lambda print, 40 x 166
Courtesy of the artist and Tavi Dresdner Gallery, Tel Aviv

Mammals, 2008
Lambda print, 40 x 188
Courtesy of Hades Shapira, Tel Aviv

Silence Among Us, 2008
Video, single-channel projection, 5 minutes, sound
Courtesy of the artist and Tavi Dresdner Gallery, Tel Aviv

The Museum, 2009
Video, single-channel projection, 6 minutes, sound
Courtesy of the artist and Tavi Dresdner Gallery, Tel Aviv

Ido Michaeli

Ido Michaeli's collections – featuring stamps, military insignia, army unit badges and more – serve to create subversive manipulations and transformations. Especially notable is Michaeli's interest in the aesthetics of institutional and national authorities and in the Israeli army's military symbols. By imitating the graphic language used by institutions of power, the artist disrupts visual patterns and images that are deeply rooted in collective awareness as signs of governance. The serial nature of his works enables him to operate like a parasite penetrating into the core of this system of logos and symbols – components of an indexical system in which every image has a defined role – and to disassemble and reassemble them. Humor and irony, he undermines accepted hierarchies and the patriotic spirit that shaped these signs, and empties them of meaning. His parodic approach to the overwhelming presence of the military in Israeli public life is given expression in a creative, ludic manner, which stands out in contrast to his subject of interest – a rigid world devoid of possibilities for personal expression. This exhibition features three related works: the first is Flight Squadrons (2008), a series of 18 air-force-squadron symbols resembling military plaques of appreciation. Their amusing names, such as, "The Freedom Suckers Squadron," "Homeland Quacks Squadron," "Thunderchirp Squadron," or "Vipers Hasid Squadron" – ridicule military patterns of speech and underscore the unrealistic character of the series. The second work is Givati Tree (2008) – an image that is similarly composed, like an imaginary geneaological tree, of a set of military insignia reminiscent of the elite Givati Division's real badge. The badge's components – a fox, a sword and a prickly pear bush – are ironically depicted here in a parodic, cartoon-like manner. An additional work, Track and Trace (2009–2010), is named after the Israeli Post Office's tracking service, and features a series of ten stamps created by the artist in 2005 around various urban myths. The evolution of these stamps from sketches into a finished product is parodically displayed as a didactic presentation, of the kind customary in iconographical analyses of artworks. Michaeli reveals the various stages of his work process – from the creation of sketches to the consolidation of the final product. The "leftovers" and byproducts are carefully kept as a mixture of collections on his studio walls. This network of associations, references and links delineates tactics of mapping and conceptual development, and produces a deceptive geneaological logic that vacillates between mechanisms of artistic power and military explanatory strategies.

Flight Squadrons, 2008
Digitally processed manual drawing, laser-cut MDF and poplar wood, Polyurethane lacquer finish
and gold-plated plaque, 18 units, 33 x 28 each
Courtesy of the artist, Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv and Serge Tirosche, ST-ART Collection, Jaffa

Givati Tree, 2008
Digitally processed manual drawing, cutout silk print sewn on vinyl, hooks on plywood, 127 x 100
Courtesy of the artist and Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv

Track and Trace, 2009–2010
Digital prints, photographs, colored pencils, markers, masking tape, variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist and Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv

Tomer Sapir

Tomer Sapir's collections constitute a kind of creative incubator, crowding his studio like a metaphorical subconscious or lexicon of images. These collections undermine familiar systems of classification that distinguish between nature and culture. His work Research for the full Crypto-Taxidermical Index (2010) highlights the twilight zone between these two categories: fosters ambiguity and questions other prevalent dichotomies such as those between good and evil, male and female, life and death. The hybrids that fill the display and deceive in this work, just as they fill the shelves in Sapir's studio, are mutations suspended between the organic and the artificial, the seductive and the threatening. Alongside strange hybrids composed of plant-like substances are fossils, silkworm chrysalises, porcupine quills, stones and rotten, cracked fruit pits. It is impossible to know whether these artifacts were gathered in nature, or whether they are bodily organs or painstakingly created artificial imitations. Like an alchemist in his lab, Sapir examines the overlapping of biological and synthetic elements and attempts to come up with the chemical formula for combining them. His collecting revolves around the gathering of various types of objects that are integrated into his sculptural works, while undermining nature and melding life and still life, reality and imagination. The arrangement of his "collection" in drawers and cabinets is reminiscent of natural history, pre-history or archeology museum displays, yet the absence of a classificatory principle and the intentional deceptiveness undermine any attempt at coherence or order. The term "crypto-taxidermy" alludes to the embalming of animals that do not actually exist, such as a cross between a rabbit and an antelope: it further underscores the suspension of Sapir's work in the twilight zone between nature and artifice – the habitat of mythological, imaginary and cloned creatures.

Research for the full Crypto-Taxidermical Index, 2010
Concrete, wax, latex, cotton wool, fruit of white Silk Floss tree, dry grass, soil, salt, wood, glass, metal, fluorescent lightbulb, dry coral, crab arm, porcupine quill, dry seaweed, avocado pits, cement, dry beetroot, empty silkworm chrysalis, resin, acrylic, pigments, dry leaves, aquarium, water, oxygen stone, Acrilan and Plasticine
Variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist

Michal Shamir

Michal Shamir's collections include leaves, thorns, flowers, birds, insects, cobwebs, mold, stamens, earth and ashes. Acts of gathering, classifying, drying and scanning characterize her compassionate treatment of these vestiges of life. The artist gathers and orders them delicately in a scanner, arranging them into garlands or scattering them across the surface. The scanned images call attention to the astonishingly real-looking details, to which the artist sometimes adds watercolor and pencil drawings based on plant and insect handbooks. They are transformed into large, stunning digital prints, reminiscent of flowers dried among the pages of a book or of 17th-century Dutch still-lifes. Here and there, the spaces between the natural vestiges and their painted representations are filled with insect joints, cobwebs or grains of sand. As "nature" is transformed into "culture," the vitality of the represented specimens is diminished, and death shines powerfully upon the white photographic paper. In these works, Shamir continues to probe the memento tradition, which countered human vanity with reminders of the ephemerality of life. The beauty and freshness of the flowers contains their future dissolution, and their detailed, pseudoscientific display underscores their withering, rotting and dissolution. Shamir walks the thin line between attraction and repulsion, confronts living beauty with its fragile and ephemeral essence, and highlights the romantic quality of death and the melancholy of dissolution.

Shana Tova, 2008
Scanning of dry flowers and insects, watercolor drawing, 160 x 125, courtesy of the artist and Chelouche Gallery for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

Untitled, 2008
Scanning of dry flowers and insects, watercolor drawing, 167 x 126, courtesy of the artist and Chelouche Gallery for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

Untitled, 2008
Scanning of dry flowers and insects, watercolor drawing, 124 x 150, courtesy of the artist and Chelouche Gallery for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

Ronit Shany

Ronit Shany's parents never threw out a single thing, hoarding objects in a manner that may be defined as obsessive collecting. Due to their frugality, no new purchase led to the disposal of its previous incarnations, even if they were old or broken: as her father used to say, "who knows how they might be of use." Their standard two-bedroom apartment, at 23 Moriah Avenue in Haifa, thus gradually became an impressive cache of quotidian objects, which reflect the historical transformation of local material culture: chairs and stools, decorative pillows, reproductions of paintings, needlepoint images, alarm clocks, transistor radios, pajamas, powder compacts, handkerchiefs, hats, trays and decorated plates. Only following her parents' death (her father died at age 91, while her mother died four years later at age 95), could the artist notice the numerous "inventories" accumulated in the apartment. Her photographs, which are devoid of pathos, reveal the intimate reality of the home in which she grew up, while carefully disconnecting it from a particular time and place. Like an industrious archival clerk, she documented one object after another, using a white tablecloth as a uniform background. She chose to adopt a typological strategy and a frontal gaze devoid of emotion, which clearly communicates the visual information concerning every object. These bare images are displayed as modestly-sized prints, affixed to the wall with pins and arranged into groups according to their type. In addition to their social and familial associations, their accumulation forms a touching, poetic narrative about longing for a lost past.

23 Moriah Avenue, 2008–2009
Color photographs, variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist and Museum of Art, Ein Harod

Doron Solomons

In his work Inventory (2001), Doron Solomons ridicules the materialistic, possessive urges that characterize the bourgeois family. This video, part of a body of works in which he examines his own behavior as an artist and father, reveals his critical approach to the power relations between men and women. Solomons ironically conducts a four-minute-long inventory of all of his worldly assets – ranging from dishes, CDs, TV sets, books, video and DVD players, clothes and shoes to his wife, two daughters this youngest son had not yet been born), dog and so forth – without any hierarchical distinctions. He reads the viewers a list of every one of his possessions, thus defining his habitat and his identity. This act of cataloging and classifying is delivered in an objective manner devoid of emotion, and is amplified by his dry archival tone. When the inventory is complete, Solomons once again shows viewers his possessions, this time without a soundtrack – as if engaging in a desperate or ironical attempt to bolster his identity by means of his belongings. The video work functions as the artist's certificate of ownership for all the banal and lackluster "things" he possesses, while the viewer peers into his intimate world and wonders whether a person can be broken down into the sum of objects in his possession.

Inventory, 2001
Video, single-channel projection, 4 minutes, sound
Courtesy of the artist and Sommer Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

Shelf Life

Artists

David Adika
Michal Helman
Dana Levy
Tali Amitai-Tabib
Irit Hemmo
Ido Michaeli
Amnon David Ar
Damien Hirst
Tomer Sapir
Gili Avissar
Erez Israeli
Michal Shamir
Elmgreen & Dragset
Esther Knobel
Ronit Shany
Gideon Gechtman
Robert Kuśmirowski
Doron Solomons