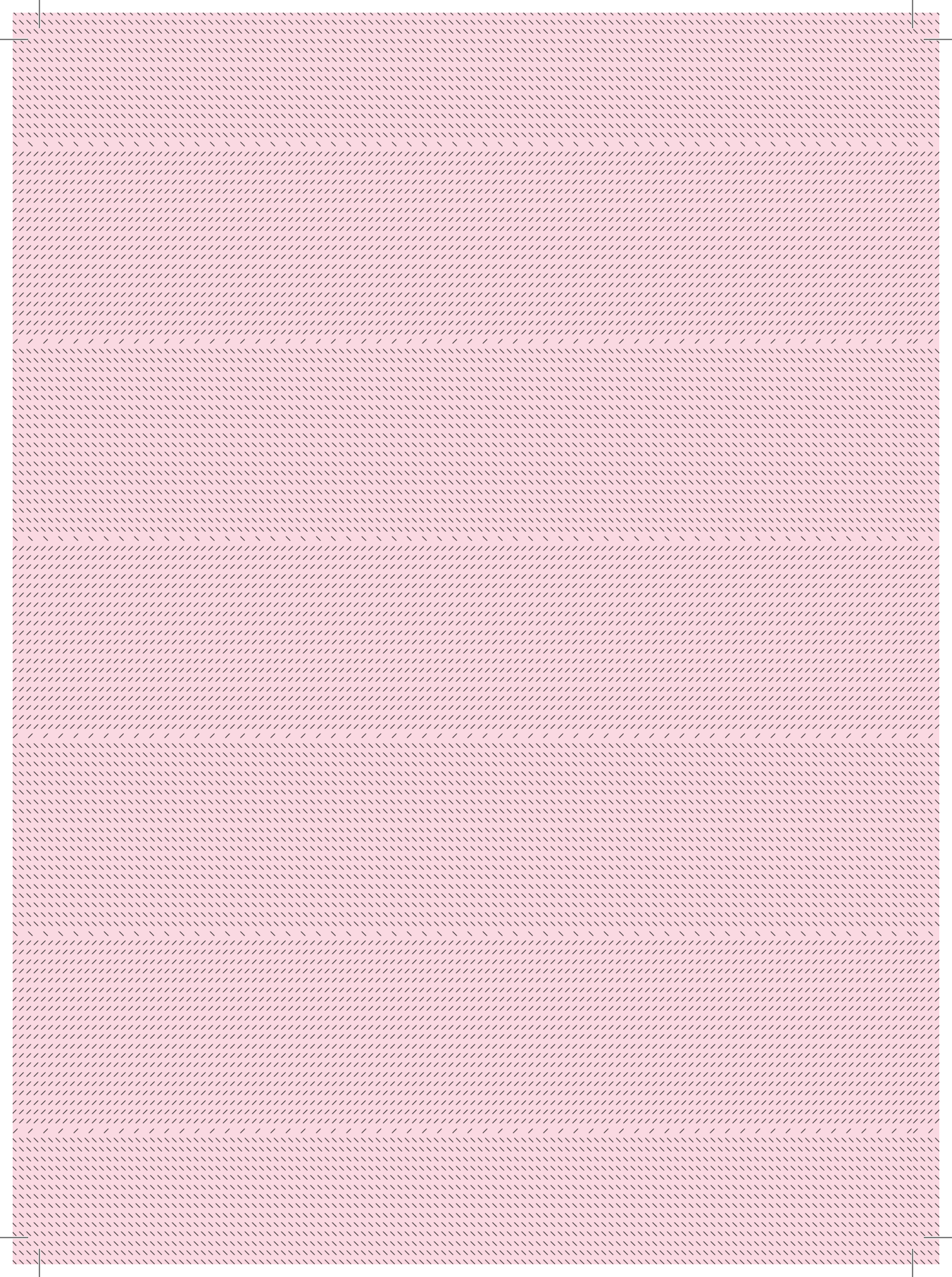


Catalogue



- > Jonathan Shilo
Born in Shavei Zion, Israel, 1977; lives and works in Tel Aviv
- **Untitled**, 2004
Quilting, fake leather
360 x 195
Courtesy of the artist
- **Untitled**, 2004–2005
Wall installation: quilting and painting on canvas and MDF
Variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist
-
- > Lior Shvil
Born in Tel Aviv, 1971
Lives and works in Tel Aviv
- **Rough Cut**, 2006–2007
Single-channel video
4:00 minutes, sound
Courtesy of the artist
- **Untitled**, 2007
Polyamide, 400 x 270
Courtesy of the artist
-
- > Daniel Silver
Born in London, 1972
Lives and works in London
- **Untitled (Screaming Man)**, 2003
Clay, Polyethylene, plaster, found wooden furniture, Kurd tapestry, 110 x 40 x 50
Collection of Freda and Izak Uziyel, Tel Aviv
- **Untitled**, 2002–2005
Wall installation:
14 tapestries,
variable dimensions
Courtesy the artist, Galleria Suzy Shammah, Milan and Givon Gallery, Tel Aviv
-
- > Goran Tomcic
Born in Split, Croatia, 1964
Lives and works in New York
- **Kairos (Lost You Somewhere)**, 1999–2007
Mobile installation: wire hanger, beaded flowers, silk, shells, buttons, found materials
Variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist
-
- > Shaul Tzemach
Born in Tel Aviv, 1971
Lives and works in Tel Aviv
- **The Legend of Species and Phenomena**, 2004–2005
Paper cut, 50 x 70
Courtesy of the artist
- **Concretion**, 2005–2007
Paper cut, 70 x 100
Courtesy of the artist
- **Interference Exercise**, 2006
Paper cut, 70 x 100
Courtesy of the artist
-
- > Francesco Vezzoli
Born in Brescia, Italy, 1971
Lives and works in Milan
- **OK, the Praz is Right!**, 1997 (from "An Embroidered Trilogy," 1997–1999) directed by John Maybury; with Iva Zanocchi
Video projection
5:10 minutes, sound
Courtesy of the artist and Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Rivoli-Turin, Italy; gift of the Piedmont Region
- **The Dream of Venus**, 1998 (from "An Embroidered Trilogy," 1997–1999) directed by Lina Wertmüller; with Franca Valeri
Video projection
4:27 minutes, sound
Courtesy of the artist and Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Rivoli-Turin, Italy; gift of the Piedmont Region
- **The End (Teletreatro)**, 1999 (from "An Embroidered Trilogy," 1997–1999) directed by Carlo Di Palma; with Valentina Cortese
Video projection
4:28 minutes, sound
Courtesy of the artist and Castello di Rivoli Museum of Contemporary Art, Rivoli-Turin, Italy; gift of the Piedmont Region
- **Cyd Charisse is an Embroider**, 2001
2 B/W laser prints on canvas with metallic embroidery and golden frame, 59 x 49 each
Courtesy of Doron Sebbag Art Collection, ORS Ltd., Tel Aviv
-
- > Gal Weinstein
Born in Ramat Gan, Israel, 1970
Lives and works in Tel Aviv
- **Huliot**, 2004
Perforated PVC pipe
Diameter: 15; height: 323
Courtesy of the artist
-
- > Gil Yefman
Born in Kiryat Tivon, Israel, 1979; lives and works in Har Adar, Israel
- **Untitled**, 2007
Knitting with wool and thread, fabric, lace, plastic, video animation (stop motion), miniature-screen projection
10:00 minutes, sound
Variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist
-
- > Guy Zagursky
Born in Tel Aviv, 1972
Lives and works in Tel Aviv
- **Fat Boy, the King is Dead**, 2007
Wood carving, 100 x 240 x 70
Courtesy of the artist and Sommer Contemporary Art Gallery, Tel Aviv

- > Haim Maor
Born in Jaffa, 1951
Lives and works in Meitar,
Israel
- **Untitled, 1977-1978**
Six works: embroidery and
sewing on fabric, 24 x 30 each
Courtesy of the artist
- **A Perfect War, 1982**
Triptych: quilting on
camouflage fabric, textile
colors, Oriental rug, 148 x 427
Courtesy of the artist
- **Ich Bin Ein Araber (I am an Arab), 1989**
Quilting, gold fringe
208 x 152
Courtesy of the artist
- **78446 (Blind Test), 1994**
Quilting on camouflage fabric,
fringe, wooden rod, 130 x 200
Courtesy of the artist
- **Zum Gesund Und Zum Leben** (from
the series "Genie-ology"), 1995
Computerized embroidery on
tapestry, 32.5 x 64
Courtesy of the artist
- **Zion/Sign, 1995**
Embroidery and quilting on
African weave, 151 x 123
Courtesy of the artist
-
- > Ohad Meromi
Born on Kibbutz Mizra, Israel,
1967; lives and works in
New York
- Weaving, 2003**
Single-channel video
2:40 minutes, sound
Courtesy of the artist and
Harris Lieberman Gallery,
New York
- > Gean Moreno
Born in New York, 1972
Lives and works in Miami
- **Gardy Loo, 2006-2007**
Fabric, safety pins, key
chains, beaded Mardi Gras
necklaces, Halloween trinkets,
fake boa, basketball net, fake
hair, rock band patches, hair
clips, costume jewelry, plastic
purse, small flag, rearview
mirror dice, toy sword, car
deodorizer, CD, stained-glass
ornament, fishnet stockings,
combs, Afro pick, lighters,
bandanas, spray paint and paint
213 x 152 x 76
Courtesy of the artist
-
- > Izhar Patkin
Born in Haifa, 1955
Lives and works in New York
- **Ve-ahavta, 2001** (from the
series "Host Culture")
Oil and wax, aluminum screen,
velvet, 183 x 122
Collection of the Tel Aviv
Museum of Art; gift of the
Goren Family, New York
- **Shiviti, 2001** (from the
series "Host Culture")
Oil and wax, aluminum screen,
velvet, 183 x 122
Collection of the Tel Aviv
Museum of Art; gift of the
Soros Family, New York
-
- > Assaf Rahat
Born in Tel Aviv, 1970
Lives and works in Tel Aviv
- **Untitled, 2003**
Parcel twine, thread, glue
173 x 156
Courtesy of the artist and
Chelouche Gallery, Tel Aviv
- **Untitled, 2003**
Parcel twine, thread, glue
128 x 161
Courtesy of the artist and
Chelouche Gallery, Tel Aviv
- **Untitled, 2006**
Parcel twine, thread, glue,
newspaper, 295 x 298
Courtesy of the artist and
Chelouche Gallery, Tel Aviv
- **Untitled, 2006**
Parcel twine, thread, glue,
newspaper, 220 x 125
Courtesy of the artist and
Chelouche Gallery, Tel Aviv
-
- > Tomás Rivas
Born in Santiago, Chile, 1975
Lives and works in Washington,
D.C., and Santiago, Chile
- **Decay and Splendor, After Raphael, 2007**
Cutting and carving on drywall,
wallpaper, paint and fabric
320 x 869
Courtesy of the artist and
Douz & Mille, Washington, D.C.
-
- > Roe Rosen
Born in Rehovot, Israel, 1963
Lives and works in Bnei Zion,
Israel
- **The Architect: Order Against the Dangers of Nature, 1996,**
(from the series
"Professionals")
Oil on paper, 66 x 100
Doron Sebbag Art Collection,
ORS Ltd., Tel Aviv
- **Two Educational Carpets and a Stain, 1998**
Oil on canvas, 120 x 200
Courtesy of the artist and
Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv

- > Gil & Moti
Gil Nader born in Rishon Lezion, Israel, 1968; Moti Porat born in Ganey Yehuda, Israel, 1971; live and work in Rotterdam, Holland
- **The Look of Love**, 2003–2007
Embroidered garments (in collaboration with Rachel Nader), variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artists, De Praktijk, Amsterdam, Galerie Eric Dupont, Paris, and Layr: Wuestenhagen Contemporary Art, Vienna
-
- > Jonathan Gold
Born in Kibbutz Afek, 1972
Lives and works in Tel Aviv
- **Untitled**, 2005
Embroidery on canvas
144 x 188
Courtesy of Yaffa Braverman, Israel
-
- > Stephan Goldrajch
Born in Ramat Gan, Israel, 1985; lives and works in Brussels and Tel Aviv
- **20h52, 21h46, 22h38, 22h43, 23h11**, 2007
Five color prints
Edition 1/3,
70 X 70 each
Courtesy of the artist and Nogatsch Fine Art Gallery, Strasbourg, France
-
- > Guy Goldstein
Born in Haifa, 1974
Lives and works in Tel Aviv
- **Untitled (House)**, 2004
Print, embroidery and patchwork on fabric, 40 x 64
Courtesy of the artist
- **Guy Goldstein**, 2004
Embroidery on fabric, 90 x 64
Courtesy of the artist
- **Untitled (Bicycle)**, 2005
Embroidery on fabric, 83 x 96
Courtesy of the artist
- **Untitled (Shirt)**, 2006
Embroidery on cotton shirt
40 x 29 (folded)
Courtesy of the artist
- **Men's 10 Meter / Hundred Meter Thread**, 2007
Embroidery on plastic sheet
45 x 1000
Courtesy of the artist
-
- > Oliver Herring
Born in Heidelberg, Germany, 1964; lives and works in New York
- **Untitled (Flowers for Ethyl Eichelberger)**, 1993
Knit Mylar, variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist and Max Protetch Gallery, New York
-
- > Nicholas Hlobo
Born in Cape Town, 1975
Lives and works in Johannesburg, South Africa
- **Unogayindoda (One Who Almost Looks Like a Woman)**, 2005–2006
Installation: dress, handbag and boots, organza, rubber and ribbon, 260 x 600 x 330
Courtesy of Alexander Rhomberg Collection, Austria, and Michael Stevenson Gallery, Cape Town
- **Erez Israeli**
Born in Be'er Sheva, Israel, 1974; lives and works in Tel Aviv
- **For the Lady of the Flowers**, 2004
Interwoven glass beads
60 x 60 x 12
Haifa Museum of Art Collection
- **Fields of Flowers**, 2005
Glass beads threaded on plastic netting, 35 x 360 x 260
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Purchase, ARTVISION
Acquisitions Committee, Israel
-
- > Servet Kocvizit
Born in Kaman, Turkey, 1971
Lives and works in Amsterdam and Istanbul
- **Sometimes**, 2005
Crochet tapestry, polyester thread, textile hardener
11.5 x 673
Doron Sebbag Art Collection, ORS Ltd., Tel Aviv
-
- > Kristian Kožul
Born in Munich, 1975
Lives and works in New York
- **Wheelchair I**, 2003
(from the series "Discoware")
Wheelchair, chrome beads, mirrors, rhinestones, feathers, rotating platform
120 x 100 x 80
Courtesy of Filip Trade Collection, Croatia
- **Crutch**, 2003
(from the series "Discoware")
Crutch, chrome beads, mirrors, rhinestones
120 x 20 x 20
Courtesy of Filip Trade Collection, Croatia

- > Jonathan Callan
Born in Manchester, England, 1961; lives and works in London
- **Cut Mountain No. 2**, 1998
Cut photograph, 49 x 64
Courtesy of Loushy & Peter, Art & Projects, Tel Aviv
- **Lacuna**, 2001
Paper engraving, 28 x 51
Courtesy of Loushy & Peter, Art & Projects, Tel Aviv
- **Word Play**, 2002
Paper and silicon, 30 x 51 x 6
Courtesy of the Mey Eden Collection and Loushy & Peter, Art & Projects, Tel Aviv
-
- > Nick Cave
Born in Missouri, 1959
Lives and works in Chicago
- **Soundsuit**, 2006
Found fabric, beads, sequins, mirrors and thread
254 x 63 x 36
Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York
-
- > Dave Cole
Born in New Hampshire, 1975
Lives and works in Rhode Island
- **The Knitting Machine**
MASS MoCA, 2005
Video of installation at MASS MoCA, North Adams, Massachusetts (directed by Jack Criddle and produced by Larry Smallwood and MASS MoCA)
Installation: acrylic felt, two John Deere excavators, telephone poles
Courtesy of the artist and Judi Rotenberg Gallery, Boston
Crew: Dante Birch, Karen Neves, Dave Sharp, Howie Snieder, Clark Sopper, Joel Taplin Facilities; fabrication and technical support provided by The Steel Yard, Providence, RI (www.thesteelyard.org)
-
- > Tim Curtis
Born in San Diego, California, 1947; lives and works in Miami, Florida
- **Untitled 2**, 2005
(from the "Labor Series")
365 men's ties, wood
Variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist
-
- > Leon David
Born in Petach Tikva, Israel, 1977; lives and works in Tel Aviv
- **Wedding Dress**, 2005 (from the series "Hollow Beings")
3D digital animation
Screen projection, sound
Courtesy of the artist
- **Centilus Maximus**, 2005 (from the series "Hollow Beings")
3D digital animation
Screen projection, sound
Courtesy of the artist
-
- > Lionel Estève
Born in Lyon, France, 1967
Lives and works in Brussels
- **Pieces of Night Sky**, 2007
Floor installation: plastic string on pebbles
Variable dimensions
Courtesy of the artist and Galerie Emmanuel Perrotin, Paris/Miami
-
- > Ashraf Fawakhry
Born in Kfar Mazra'a, Israel, 1974; lives and works in Haifa
- **Ikhtilal (Unsteadiness)**, 2002
Embroidery threads, nails and acrylic on plywood, 100 x 200
Courtesy of the artist
-
- > Haimi Fenichel
Born in Givatayim, Israel, 1972; lives in Kiryat Ono, works in Ganey Tikva, Israel
- **Homebox**, 2004-2005
Carving, Ytong block
30 x 30 x 30
Courtesy of the artist
- **Passive Agressive**, 2007
Carving, Ytong block
30 x 5 x 5
Courtesy of the artist
-
- > Tom Gallant
Born in Surry, England, 1975
Lives and works in Brussels and London
- **The Collector II: Chrysanthemum**, 2005
Paper cut, glass and wood
50 x 120 x 3
Courtesy of Philippe and Bina von Stauffenberg, London
- **The Collector II: Acanthus**, 2005
Paper cut, glass and wood
84 x 116 x 3
Courtesy of the artist and Museum 52, London
-
- > Uri Gershuni
Born in Ra'anana, Israel, 1970
Lives and works in Tel Aviv
- **Altar**, 2007
Two color prints, 120 x 95 each
Courtesy of the artist
- **Rejuvenation**, 2007
Color print, 120 x 95
Courtesy of the artist

List of Works

Measurements are given in centimeters, height x width x depth

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- > Ron Aloni
Born in Ramt Gan, Israel, 1950
Lives and works in Tel Aviv
 - **Black Pillow**, 2006
Galvanized net, silicon,
asphalt lacquer, feathers
250 x 253
Courtesy of the artist
 - **Hidden Space**, 2006
Galvanized net
200 x 200
Courtesy of the artist
 - **Pillow of the Bride**, 2007
Galvanized net, silicon
182 x 182
Courtesy of the artist
 -
 - > El Anatsui
Born in Ghana, 1944
Lives and works in Nigeria
 - **Another Man's Cloth**, 2006
Found aluminum, copper wire
366 x 495
Courtesy of the Rubell Family
Collection, Miami, and Jack
Shainmam Gallery, New York
- > avaf (assume vivid astro focus)
 - **Butch Queen 4**, 2005
Wallpaper installation
402 x 1422
Courtesy of the artist, Peres
Projects, LA/Berlin,
and John Connelly Presents,
New York
 -
 - > Ramazan Bayrakoğlu
Born in Balıkesir, Turkey, 1966
Lives and works in Izmir,
Turkey
 - **Car**, 2005
Satin cloth, 135 x 315
Courtesy of the artist and
Dirimart Gallery, Istanbul
 -
 - > Ben Ben Ron
Born in Haifa, 1971
Lives and works in Tel Aviv,
India and England
 - **Ofek 1**, 2004
Paper cuttings and glue
235 x 575
Courtesy of the artist
 - **Rag Carpet 1**, 2007
Oil on recycled paper, 50 x 76
Courtesy of the artist
- **Rag Carpet 2**, 2007
Oil on recycled paper, 50 x 75
Courtesy of the artist
 - **Rag Carpet 3**, 2007
Oil on recycled paper, 50 x 75
Courtesy of the artist
 - **Rag Carpet 4**, 2007
Oil on recycled paper, 50 x 75
Courtesy of the artist
 - **Dream Catcher**, 2007
Oil on recycled paper, 50 x 75
Courtesy of the artist
 -
 - > Eliahou Eric Bokobza
Born in Paris, 1963
Lives and works in Tel Aviv
 - **Rachel's Tomb Rug**, 2006
Linoleum print, acrylic and
embroidery thread on paper
80 x 80
Courtesy of the artist and
Nelly Aman Gallery, Tel Aviv
 - **Rachel's Tomb Rug**, 2006
Linoleum print, Japanese ink,
acrylic and embroidery thread
on paper, 80 x 80
Courtesy of the artist and
Nelly Aman Gallery, Tel Aviv

Documenta XII in Kassel (2007) raised questions concerning the essence of “modernity,” and attempted to demonstrate that the avant-garde does not necessarily constitute the opposite of tradition. Bringing together creative ideas from different historical periods, the curators combined centuries-old manual crafts (kilims, carpets and embroidery) with contemporary art. Without judging this unusual curatorial act, it is possible to state that one of the outstanding experiences at Documenta was the overwhelming presence — and reevaluation of — manual crafts and skills. One of the artists, Danica Dakic, for instance, filmed her work in the city’s wallpaper museum, which was established in 1923 and was obviously never frequented by contemporary art connoisseurs. She also created a sound work that called attention to the ultimate decorative and labor-intensive craft tradition — wallpaper manufacturing. The templates used to produce the wallpaper; the multitude of colors; the precise and repetitive production process; the covering of large surface expanses; and the obsessive and decorative quality of this endeavor perfectly melded with the sounds and texts emanating from the loudspeakers, creating a unique and surprising experience.

The exhibition “BoysCraft” thus reflects the manner in which handicrafts have been integrated into the language of the artistic canon. Once associated with folk, functional and “outsider” art, and with women’s leisure activities and hobbies, such labor-intensive work processes have been transformed into fully accepted and highly valued contemporary art practices. Strategies that in previous decades were identified with women artists attempting to liberate themselves of the male hegemony have been integrated into contemporary artmaking as a legitimate form of self expression, a celebration of manual production in a world that has wildly over-computerized itself.

recent years. In this context, traditional handicraft techniques were engaged for the purpose of social criticism, and the intimate craft of lace making, which was once a private, domestic activity, was translated into monumental architectural installations.⁹

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The exhibition "The Height of the Popular," which was shown at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art in 2001 (curator: Ellen Ginton), was concerned with similar themes. One may also mention the 2001 solo exhibition of Elaine Reichek at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, which included embroidery works with feminist and anti-racist messages (curator: Edna Mosenson). Yinka Shonibare's 2002 solo exhibition at the Israel Museum also preceded "BoysCraft" in terms of its concern with the use of textile to examine themes related to postcolonialism, identity and otherness (curator: Suzanne Landau). Notwithstanding these affinities, however, "BoysCraft" is a direct and complementary sequel to the 2003 exhibition "OverCraft: Obsession, Decoration and Biting Beauty," which was shown at the Art Gallery of the University of Haifa and at the Tel Aviv Artists House.¹⁰ "OverCraft" was concerned with labor intensive processes in a feminist context. "BoysCraft," by contrast, focuses on the resonances of the sweeping change that has recently taken place in Western and in Israeli perceptions of masculinity. No longer a gruff, macho "sabro" whose life experience revolves around his military service, the Israeli man has been transformed into a self-aware metrosexual who is not afraid to express emotions or to groom his body. This exhibition may thus also reflect the gains of the feminist revolution, and the ways in which they have been integrated into the conflicted psyche of the new male with the gradual eclipse of the machoist age.

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9 > David McFadden, **Radical Lace, Subversive Knitting**, exh. catalogue, Museum of Arts & Design, New York, 2007.

10 > In addition to its dialogue with "OverCraft," "BoysCraft" also relates to a number of previous exhibitions I curated in Israel – including "Antipathos" (The Israel Museum, 1993) and "Metasex" (Ein Harod Museum of Art, 1994) – and which similarly examined the non-canonical margins of local art.

The Relations Between “High” and “Low”:

The Collapse of Hierarchical Categories

Over the past two decades, numerous exhibitions have been concerned with the blurring of distinctions between “high” (elitist) and “low” (popular) art, and have revealed the complex relations that exist between these different categories. The most important of these exhibitions was the 1992 “High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture,” which was exhibited at MoMA in New York, and which summed up the dialogue between these two categories.⁶ Another exhibition that took place two years later, and which focused on the influence of outsider art on modern art, was “Parallel Visions: Modernist Artists and Outsider Art,” which was exhibited at the Los Angeles County Museum in 1992.⁷ The exhibition closest in spirit to “BoysCraft,” however, was “A Labor of Love,” which was exhibited at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York in 1996. This exhibition, which focused on the adoption of labor-intensive crafts and folk art traditions by contemporary artists, examined the complex reciprocal relations between these different categories.⁸

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The most recent exhibition that touched upon related issues was “Radical Lace, Subversive Knitting,” which opened at the Museum of Arts & Design in New York in February 2007. Focusing on the domains of craft and design, this exhibition drew attention to the pervasive use of handicrafts, and further blurred the validity of norms distinguishing art from craft. Curator David McFadden attempted to show that fiber-based handicrafts such as lace and knitting could be charged with radical content. This exhibition essentially celebrated the collapse of categorical boundaries between various arts and between art and design, which has taken place in

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- 6 > Kirk Varnedoe and Adam Gopnik, **High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture**, exh. catalogue, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1990.
- 7 > Maurice Tuchman and Carol S. Eliel, **Parallel Visions: Modern Artists and Outsider Art**, exh. catalogue, Los Angeles County Museum of Art, 1992.
- 8 > Marcia Tucker, **A Labor of Love**, exh. catalogue, The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1996.

Gal Weinstein, Ron Aloni, Haimi Fenichel and Lionel Estève, in which a rigid material mass (such as barbed wire, stone, etc.) is destabilized or metaphorically undermined so that it comes to radiate fragility and softness. Alongside these works, the exhibition also includes new media works that document the practice of particular handicraft processes, or which create digital simulations charged with symbolic meaning: digital “lace” as a metaphor for cyberspace (Leon David); the knitting of the American flag as a symbol of patriotic allegiance (Dave Cole); or embroidery as a metaphor for obsession (Francesco Vezzoli).

One of the striking aspects of this use of traditional handicrafts is the excessive, decorative quality of the works, whose ornamental complexity affords an experience of pure pleasure. The excess that characterizes some of the works exhibited in “BoysCraft” does indeed imbue them with a pleasurable sensual quality, and re-evokes concepts related to beauty that were excluded from the modernist discourse. At the same time, these works provoke thoughts about the relations between ornament, eroticism and fetishism — and between decorativeness, disintegration and sickness. Research shows that the visual examination of a richly colored and textured ornament provokes a pleasurable stimulus in the brain; the beauty embedded in a crowded weave of different colors causes the viewer sensual excitement that cannot be verbally described. Such is the case with the wallpaper works of avaf, which resemble psychedelic and kaleidoscopic collages; with the breathtaking assemblages by El Anatsui and Kristian Kožul; with Nick Cave’s work, which combines a range of exotic materials into a densely decorated ritual costume; and with Gean Moreno’s work, which creates an effect of excess based on the visual cacophony of flea markets and on a street aesthetic.

crafts project, which fused authentic Yemenite crafts with modern chic; Tim Curtis' work is a homage to the inventive imagination and talent for improvisation that characterize the works of third-world artisan-vendors; Nick Cave enhances a ritual costume in order to create a magical effect, which relates it to conflicts concerning identity, gender and race; and Nicholas Hlobo's installation and sculptures combine queer themes with postcolonial cultural criticism, and with a focus on social rituals and norms related to his South African roots. In all of these works, the use of "authentic" materials and obsessive, labor-intensive processes sheds light on the problematic and on the disruptions that characterize contemporary cultures and identities.

Excess and the Pleasures of Ornament

The manual, labor-intensive investment evident in a large number of the works included in this exhibition naturally results in a wide-ranging emphasis on the work's material qualities and texture. Most of the artists make use of cheap, recycled and unglamorous materials — which are sometimes surprisingly simple — in order to create the illusion of rich, glamorous and luxurious surfaces and thus to redefine their meaning. Iron threads, concrete blocks, plastic sewage tubes, fabrics, tire rubber, various sewing notions, wallpaper, galvanized netting, aluminum plates, stones, thread, fabric, paper cutouts, plastic sheeting, nylon, wood, glass beads and mirrors — all serve as the basis or support for time-consuming, repetitive actions that enhance the work's tactile qualities. The commitment to a long and exhausting work process, and the ability to surprisingly transform materials in unfamiliar ways, characterize the work of many of the participating artists.

The sculptural works in the exhibition fit the definition of "soft sculpture," and undermine the traditional definition of sculpture as a solid, heavy mass. Their presence in space bespeaks a fragile, tentative and ephemeral existence. These qualities are given expression, for instance, in the works of Goran Tomcic,

the viewer a sense of discomfort, a sudden loss of equilibrium. Formal and narrative labyrinths lure the eye into a complex trap, a deluge of images that floods the paper and creates a tension-filled fusion between imagination and reality.”⁴

4 < Historically, Western culture treated various expressions of otherness — ranging from the work of outsider artists to that of non-western artists — with a colonialist, exoticizing approach rife with contradictions: enthusiastic consumption to the point of overwhelming acceptance went hand in hand with a dismissive attitude, and with a lack of understanding concerning the cultural context of these works. At the basis of this sweeping interest in outsider and non-Western art was the value of “authenticity,” which postmodernism has denied to the point of making it nearly extinct.⁵

5 < The preoccupation with “otherness,” and the postcolonial approaches that have developed in the course of recent decades, finally led to an assimilation of this subject into the iconography of contemporary art. Third-world art has become increasingly appealing to a satiated Western world, and the contemporary art market has been flooded with African, Asian and Latin-American artists. A number of the artists participating in the exhibition treat this exoticized perception of authenticity with a great degree of irony: El Anatsui, for instance, does so by means of a rich tapestry of corks and labels collected from alcohol bottles. His work relates to the historical, ritual dimensions these materials have had in an African context, as well as to their modern, commercial aspects; Ohad Meromi uses weaving in order to reexamine the “authentic” Zionist-Israeli identity forged in the context of the “Maskit” arts and

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4 > Meir Agassi, "Hotel Utopia-Dystopia," *Studio* 89, January 1998, p. 6 [Hebrew].

5 > The two key exhibitions that have examined the notion of otherness were "Primitivism in 20th Century Art," MoMA, New York, 1984 (curators: William Rubin and Kirk Varnedoe), which examined this subject from a modernist point of view; and "Les Magiciens de la Terre" at the Centre Pompidou, Paris, 1989 (curator: Jean-Hubert Martin), which examined this subject from a postmodern perspective.

to the artistic discourse. The very existence of an exhibition based on “gender-related discrimination,” moreover, could only take place from the point of view of a postfeminist “achievement” or “victory.” Several of the works included in the exhibition (such as those by Roe Rosen, Daniel Silver, Izhar Patkin, Jonathan Shilo, Servet Koçyiğit and Eliahou Eric Bokobza) involve (or represent in painting) a range of understated “feminine” practices such as weaving, sewing, knitting and quilting. These craft practices undermine familiar hierarchies between “high” and “low,” and undo hegemonic relationships in the field of artmaking.

The prominent influence of feminist strategies may also be detected in the widespread use of handicrafts in community-related contexts, where they appear as an expression of loss and healing. During the 1980s, the AIDS crisis shaped a social and cultural sphere in which a growing number of artists experienced profound solitude and pain. Collective knitting, quilting or embroidery projects came to constitute rituals of mourning and expressions of grief, as well as tools for commemoration, for protest and for raising public awareness. In this context, the engagement with labor-intensive handicrafts was related to their process-oriented, time-consuming and meditative qualities, which were seen as therapeutic. Indeed, in recent decades a growing number of social and community-related projects have centered upon craft works created in a chain process that cuts across national, religious and geographical boundaries, and which emblemizes the ideals of human solidarity and social awareness. In the aftermath of the events of September 11, this trend became even more widespread. It continued to evolve in the context of a growing need for community-based action and for various kinds of support groups, and of a desire to reconnect to the past. Dave Cole’s knitting machine installation — whose documentation is included in this exhibition — was created for the first anniversary commemorating the attack on the Twin Towers, and touches directly upon these events. In other works, the labor-intensive actions of knitting and beading are given expression in the context of loss and healing connected to the AIDS epidemic (Oliver Herring); in relation to nursing, paralysis,

used in a manner no longer considered to be inferior. Beginning in the 1980s, the use of craft techniques became an increasingly legitimate part of the artistic canon. Women artists such as Rosemarie Trockel, and later Ann Hamilton, gave new meaning to the term “labor intensive.” During the 1990s, male artists such as Mike Kelly, Lucas Samaras and Jim Hodges adopted similar strategies, and began using craft techniques in order to destabilize the modernist canon.

This trend may also be related to the development of queer theories — which followed in the wake of the feminist discourse that undermined preexisting gender categories and offered alternative, flexible and liberating ways of thinking about gender. The emergence of queer theories in the late 1980s and early 1990s is also related to the AIDS crisis, which played a significant role in postmodern developments. This crisis led to a substantial change in social attitudes towards homosexuality, which paradoxically enhanced the visibility of this form of otherness. The culture of drag and camp, and its relation to queer and alternative practices, gradually filtered into art. The transmutation of kitsch into high art, and the charging of mass imagery with subversive and critical meanings that allowed it to penetrate into an elitist discourse, both characterize the art of recent years. In the context of “BoysCraft,” this homosexual discourse is given expression in the installation of embroidered laundry by Gil & Moti, which relates homoeroticism to multicultural political contexts; in Gil Yefman’s bizarre knit dolls, whose touching character manages to ridicule our ideas of normalcy; in the photographs by Uri Gershuni, who compassionately and devotedly knit a woolen cape for the photographed figure; in the work of Stephan Goldrajch, who created meticulously knit masks of grotesque creatures; and in the wild camp movies by Francesco Vezzoli, in which he embroiders nonchalantly beside a well known Italian diva.

“BoysCraft” thus reflects the fact that more and more male artists today are adopting traditional handicrafts and using them in a new, refreshing and thought-provoking manner. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine someone today relating to this preoccupation as marginal

the artwork, and to blur the relations between center and margins, between major and subordinate elements and between foreground and background.¹

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Indeed, many of the skills required to manually produce richly detailed works were traditionally perceived as quintessentially female; they supposedly required — in addition to ample leisure time — developed motoric skills, a high level of concentration, meditative qualities, patience and a good eye. The products of these craft processes were looked down upon as decorative, mindless and devoid of content. Embroidery, for instance, was considered lowlier than other handicrafts, because it was historically identified as a quintessential form of women's work. In her important 1984 article "The Subversive Stitch," Rozsika Parker paralleled the construction of conceptions of femininity with the separation between "fine art" and "craft" that occurred with the advent of the Renaissance. During the 18th century, these constructions were reflected in the changes that took place in art education — with the transition from apprenticing in artist's workshops to the academic study of art, and the regendering of craft traditions.

A substantial change in this conception occurred with the first feminist wave of the late 1960s and early 1970s, when radical women artists attempted to restore the culture of traditional female crafts as part of their effort to define what is often referred to as female "essentialism." Artists such as Harmony Hammond, Faith Wilding, Judy Chicago, Miriam Shapiro and others turned to manual crafts as a political act that challenged the modernist hierarchy.² This feminist contribution was essential to the launching of a wide-ranging postmodernist strategy, which enabled handicrafts to be

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1 > Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine*, Routledge, New York and London, 1989, pp. 4, 15.

2 > For a comprehensive discussion of the issue of essentialism and of the use of handicrafts in this context, see also: Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, "Crafty Women and the Hierarchy of the Arts," in *Old Mistress: Women, Art and Ideology*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1981.

These efforts, however, failed to endow manual crafts with significant prestige; to this day, hierarchical distinctions between crafts regarded as “folk art,” “outsider art” or “women’s art” and between “high,” elitist art continue to shape the field of contemporary art. Above all, the perpetuation of these hierarchies has to do with the fact that manual crafts came to be seen as functional, decorative and resolutely old fashioned by the modernist movement, which zealously guarded against them. Their multiplicity of mesmerizing detail; their labor-intensive production process, which is associated with physical exertion and with materiality; their visually accessible quality; their seductive and pleasure-inducing aspects; and their lack of intellectual sophistication — all these led manual crafts to be marginalized outside of the modernist cannon.

The Feminist Revolution:

Subversion and Activism as Tools for Social Healing

The painstakingly slow process of composing works based on small details and “ignoble” materials, which transforms each artwork into a labor of love, embodies the exact opposite of the modernist (male) approach to artmaking as a process based on large, assertive gestures and on a combination of sublime emotion and analytical thinking.

Modern art, and especially conceptual art, disregarded the time-consuming dimension of artmaking — attributing the work’s value to its conceptual makeup and devaluing the process of its execution. In recent years, it seems that this dimension of creative processes, which is related to a penchant for details, is once again in vogue; indeed, one is frequently tempted to evaluate the final product based on the amount of work that was invested in its creation. Yet as the feminist critic Naomi Shor has noted, details and embellishments were long viewed by society as an excessive, decadent and tiresome form of expression, as: “women’s matters.” Art similarly reflected the male view that a penchant for small details amounted to a subversion of ideal, sublime or classical forms. Details were seen as threatening to undermine the internal hierarchical order of

The search for a unique, “authentic” source that could serve as the basis for a community or family-based visual genealogy was one of the factors that has led to the resuscitation of craft traditions. This trend is also characterized by a deep yearning for a unique artistic signature — for artworks that bespeak a personal and direct form of individual expression and a significant investment on the part of the artist. Indeed, over the last decade handicrafts have assuredly entered the canonical field of contemporary art, and leading artists are using traditional crafts in order to create socially engaged works.

The works assembled in this exhibition respond to the longing for manually created works produced with the artist’s own hands. Such works are perceived to be imbued with a sensual quality that is provided by the artist’s unique touch, and which adds a tactile dimension to the clinical, alienated world represented in the images that surround us — many of which originate in the sphere of digital technologies. In an age in which almost every boundary has been transgressed, and in which the uniform and anonymous colors of the global village dominate everything we see, it seems at times that art itself strives to conform to a uniform model shaped by market demands. These works, by contrast, point to a clear emphasis on uniqueness and individuality.

The historical parallel to this contemporary trend is the social agenda of the late 19th century Arts and Crafts Movement, which propagated anti-modern and conservative values and saw labor-intensive, manual crafts as a therapeutic catalyst for inner renewal. This English-born movement was led by John Ruskin and William Morris, who supported the revival of medieval arts and crafts — and of related techniques and skills that were seen as a miracle cure for the ills of mass production and of industrial capitalism. In this context, one must recall that prior to the industrial revolution, the range of crafts that later came to be associated with women’s work were dominated by male guilds (such, for instance, as the first knitting guild founded in Paris in 1527).

of expression. This disruption undermines stereotypical gender divisions and dismantles old-fashioned dichotomies, charging them with new meanings.

So, for instance, qualities and behavioral patterns that are identified as quintessentially “masculine” — such as violence and the abuse of power, physical strength, competitiveness and the consumption of pornography — are related in a number of works to traditional weaving, beading or paper cutting techniques (Assaf Rahat, Guy Goldstein, Ashraf Fawakhry, Ben Ben Ron and Tom Gallant); in addition, the exhibition includes quintessentially male symbols such as an American car and a Harley Davidson motorcycle, which are represented by means of laborious manual craft processes (Ramazan Bayrakoğlu and Guy Zagursky); several works include allusions to patriotic or military subjects whose meaning is subverted or ironically examined through the use of handicrafts such as sewing and quilting (Lior Shvil, Haim Maor and Dave Cole); a number of other works transform hegemonic male domains identified with the shaping of the cultural sphere — such as textual, scientific and architectural bodies of knowledge — through delicate handicrafts such as embroidery, carving and cutting (Shaul Tzemach, Jonathan Gold, Jonathan Callan and Tomás Rivas). These creative strategies — together with a wide range of expressive means and related themes that shall be explored below — stem from a cultural nostalgia for the predigital age; they are related to the sweeping social and gender-related changes that have taken place in recent decades, and especially over the past ten years.

The Return to Manual Crafts: A Longing for a Pre-industrial Past

Manual crafts and folk art are related in the Western worldview to the pre-industrialized, premodern world. The contemporary preoccupation with, and reevaluation of, these traditions are part of a global trend that reflects a longing for a simpler life that stands out in contrast to today’s global, commercialized artworld — and which involves a great deal of nostalgia and ecological idealization.

to become good wives who could skillfully thread a needle and darn socks. The “crafts for boys,” by contrast, were dedicated to the acquisition of “male” skills such as working with wood and metal, so that they could eventually become accomplished workers both at home and in the outside world.

What this exhibition focuses upon, however, is not the skills acquired in those decades-old craft classes, but rather the ability of male artists to excel at handicrafts traditionally associated with women. The 41 artists participating in this exhibition create their works using techniques of embroidery, weaving, knitting, spinning yarn, beading, sewing, quilting, cutting and pasting. Until recently, such handicrafts were still associated with strictly feminine practices, with “folk art” and with functional art. “BoysCraft,” by contrast, brings together works by contemporary male artists who share a preoccupation with labor-intensive work processes and with the sensual experience of excess, materiality and multiple details. This exhibition thus reflects some of the complex processes that have taken place in the artworld in the wake of the feminist revolution — and presents a new generation of Israeli and international artists whose works are informed by feminist, gender and postcolonial theories. These artists all make unconventional use of various materials in order to transform traditional craft techniques into key artistic strategies. In this case, for a change, it is the men who engage in social criticism — and raise gender-related questions from a male point of view.

The range of voices that are given expression in this exhibition creates a rich tapestry, a patchwork that slowly comes together to form a sensual and complex panoply of different cultures, styles and skills. The works of each of these artists are characterized by time-consuming, labor-intensive processes that involve repetitive and monotonous actions, based on age-old traditions of manual craft. Most of the works are centered upon a world of images based on “male” or “macho” stereotypes, yet their creation involves techniques that are culturally associated with “female” or “childlike” forms

Craftsmen in the Factory of Images

Tami Katz-Freiman

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Twice a week, on Mondays and Thursdays, the classes at the PIKA elementary school in Petach Tikva were divided in two during the sixth period: the girls walked up to the second floor for two hours of “crafts for girls,” while the boys went down to the basement for “crafts for boys.” We learned how to sew, embroider, bead and knit; it never crossed our minds to object to this gendered division, and to march down the two flights of stairs leading to the basement. The sound of sawing and the smells of sawdust and sweat that wafted up the stairs filled us with endless curiosity about the masculine enigma. Once every few months, while we were hard at work deciphering the secret of the hidden stitch, the boys completed one of their (entirely impractical) “projects” and came back upstairs proudly carrying some carved camel or donkey that made us green with envy.

“BoysCraft,” the title of this exhibition, alludes to the implications of this gendered division, which characterized the Zionist education system of the 1950s and 1960s. Back then “the girls” were taught skills that were gendered as female, and which were related to housekeeping (sewing, weaving, knitting, home economics and cooking). “The boys,” meanwhile, were taught skills gendered as male — such as carving, using a screwdriver, cutting, sawing and building. The “crafts for girls” were designed to prepare the female pupils for life, and to supply them with the knowledge necessary

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This catalogue is dedicated to Marcia Tucker,
a dear friend and exceptional woman,
who was a constant source of
support and inspiration.

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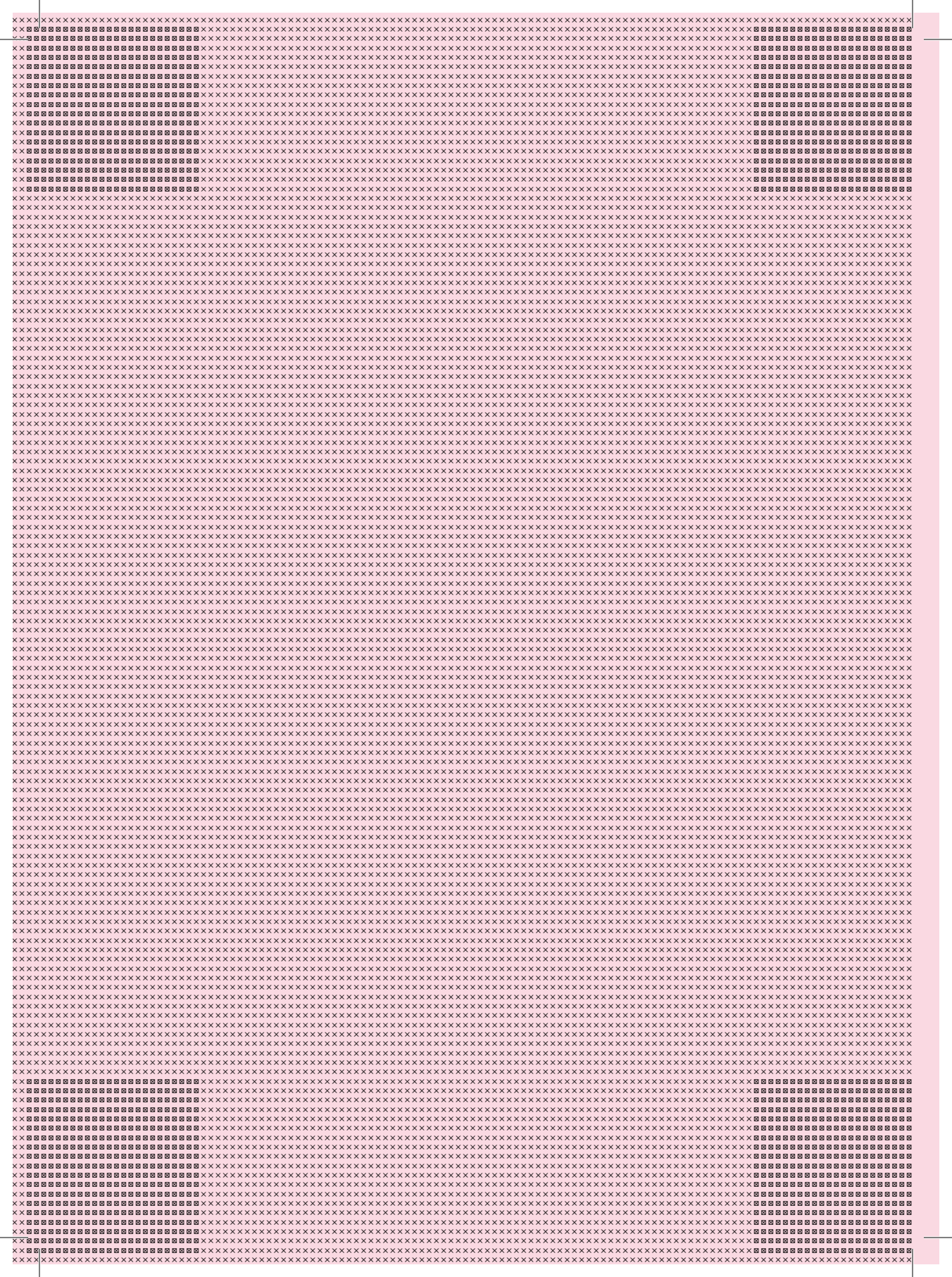
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Nissim Tal
Director General
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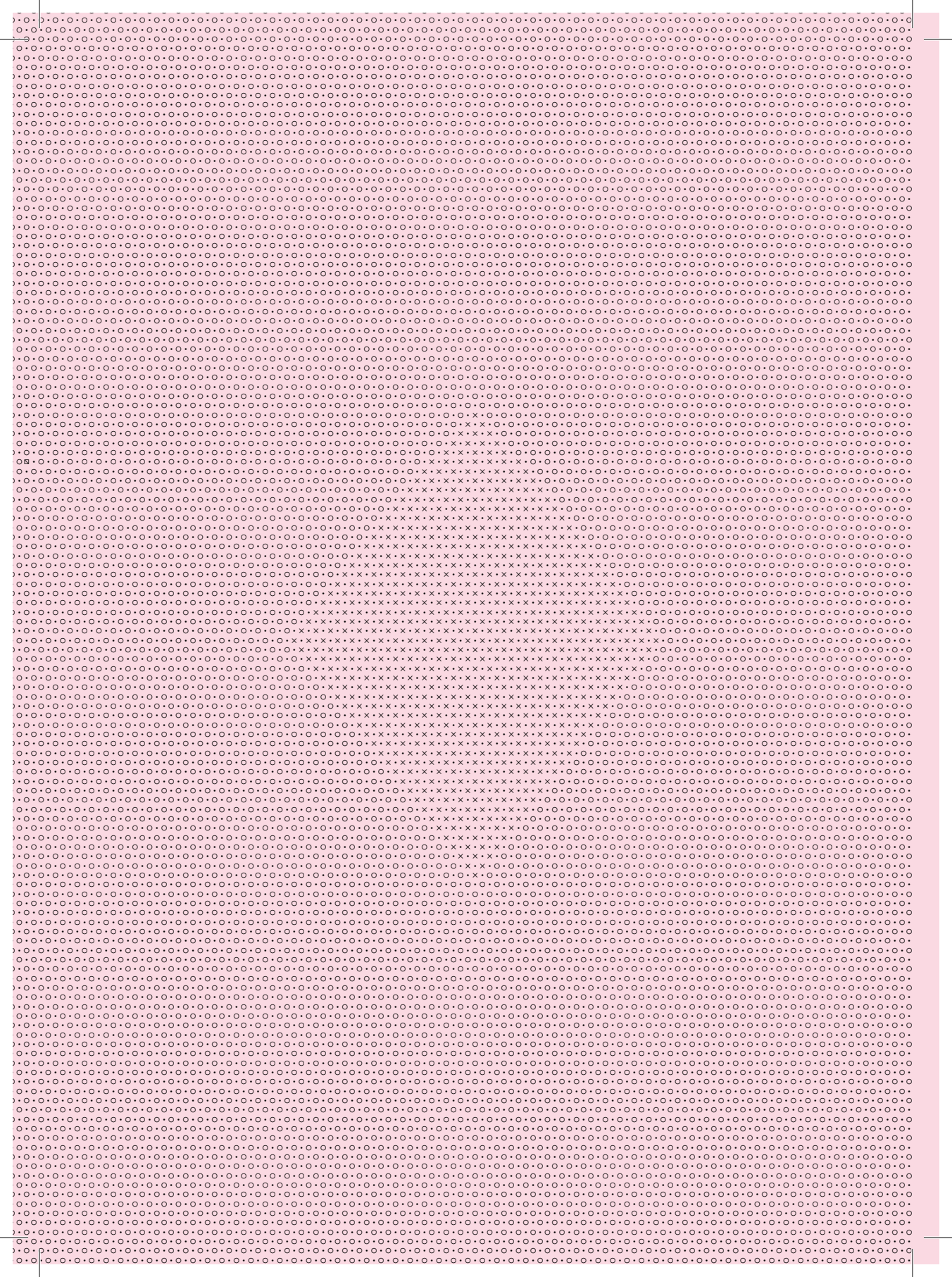
Foreword

The exhibition “BoysCraft” examines a wide-ranging artistic trend indicative of a fundamental cultural shift – the engagement of male artists with various handicraft traditions identified with “women’s work.” “BoysCraft” is the third in a trilogy of exhibitions curated by Tami Katz-Freiman, Chief Curator of the Haifa Museum of Art, which is centered upon key aspects of contemporary local and international art. “Mixed Emotions” was concerned with the emotional narratives at the heart of contemporary artmaking; “FATAMORGANA” focused on the sense of sight – on the optical and cognitive experience of perceiving contemporary artworks; “BoysCraft” is concerned with laborious manual processes, with the range of artistic contexts in which they appear and with their multilayered meanings.

This exhibition, which includes works by 41 Israeli and international artists, aims to shed light on the engagement with manual crafts as a cultural and sociopolitical practice. These numerous forms of artmaking examine the meaning of labor-intensive work processes through the prism of postfeminist and queer theories, of postcolonial critiques and of social activism. The decorative, ornamental and sometimes obsessive aspects of such forms of artmaking allow for a discussion of the changing values attached to the concepts of masculinity and beauty, and to the relations between art and craft.

“BoysCraft” makes evident how work processes identified with traditional artmaking, which were excluded from the field of canonical art in previous decades, now occupy the center of the contemporary art field. A significant number of prominent artists choose to undermine the conventional boundaries between these different fields; in doing so, they reflect a new cultural nostalgia for the predigital age and for the notion of authenticity. This exhibition thus partakes of the Haifa Museum of Art’s ongoing mission – to underscore the connection of contemporary art to contemporary life, and to fundamental questions that concern the public at large.

Nissim Tal
Director General
Haifa Museums



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BoysCraft

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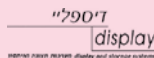
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