

# MIXED EMOTIONS

Haifa Museum of Art

## **Haifa Museums, Haifa Museum of Art**

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### **Mixed Emotions**

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# Foreword

The exhibition “Mixed Emotions” is at the center of a new group of exhibitions opening at the Haifa Museum of Art. These exhibitions, which inaugurate a new period at the Museum, mark the emergence of a new artistic approach and curatorial concept, which have been formulated following Tami Katz-Freiman’s appointment as the Museum’s chief curator.

When these exhibitions are examined together, it is possible to see how the theme of “Mixed Emotions” resonates throughout the cluster, setting the tone with its examination of a range of human emotions. It includes different visual media, while paying special attention to young Israeli and international artists. Indeed, emotions have recently assumed a new status, which stems from changes in their social perception. Emotion has become a subject that is researched and studied, and it seems that the preoccupation with the ways in which it is expressed in contemporary art reflects an essential social change.

Indeed, the exhibition “Mixed Emotions” appears to succeed in triggering emotions and thoughts in viewers, who react to the wide range of sometimes contradictory emotional expressions in the artworks. In this way, the exhibition serves one of the Museum’s central goals – that is, encouraging meaningful reactions on the part of viewers, and enabling them to experience a high level of stimulation, involvement, and interest in the artworks.

In terms of this exhibition’s local context, it is important to note that it was conceived of following an emotionally charged period in Israeli society – the implementation of the disengagement from the Gaza Strip. The evacuation of settlers, which Israelis watched on television, demonstrated that there is no contradiction between determination and sensitivity, as the evacuating forces made clear.

“Mixed Emotions” constitutes a carefully integrated combination of cutting-edge Israeli art, which contains both local and universal allusions, and works by leading international artists, which similarly point towards variegated cultural and social contexts. These different components combine to create a fascinating range of works, which enable us to conduct a rich and comprehensive examination of this complex subject.

**Nissim Tal**  
Director General, Haifa Museums

## Acknowledgements

Many dedicated people assisted in producing this exhibition and the catalogue that accompanies it. First and foremost, our thanks go to the participating artists, collectors, and other lenders for their willingness to lend artworks to the Haifa Museum of Art. We also thank the contributors to the catalogue, Professor Aaron Ben-Ze'ev and Dr. Danielle Knafo, who enriched the catalogue and the related discourse on emotions by elaborating on the connections between art, philosophy, and psychoanalysis. Deep thanks go to Yaron David, who edited this catalogue, and to Talya Halkin, who translated it and edited it in English. Their engagement with the texts overtime contributed to the essays' contextual coherence, depth, and cohesiveness. In addition, we extend our thanks to Ruth Spira for her clear and fluent Hebrew translation of Danielle Knafo's essay. Thanks to Michal Sahar for designing and producing this rich catalogue, and giving stylistic coherence to the texts and visual images it contains. We would also like to thank the members of the Museum staff who participated in the production of this unique and complex exhibition, as well as the architect Ravit Yariv and the graphic designers Guy Sagee and Michal Amram, who entertained a productive dialogue with us in order to formulate a new graphic language for the Museum's exhibition galleries.

Special thanks go to the Interdisciplinary Center for the Study of Emotions at the University of Haifa for supporting the publication of this catalogue. We would also like to thank several other people who helped in every possible way to bring to fruition this complex endeavor: Gil Brandes, Tel Aviv; James and Jane Cohan, New York; Lazar Fruchter, Herzliya; Rebecca Reifschneider, Tel Aviv; Don and Mera Rubell, Miami; Fredric Snitzer and Tyler Emerson, Miami; Irit Sommer, Tel Aviv.

We hope all those who collaborated so productively on this project will continue to do so in the future, and wish Israeli art lovers a continuing and enriching engagement with new initiatives at the Haifa Museum of Art.

**Nissim Tal**  
Director General, Haifa Museums

**Tami Katz-Freiman**  
Chief Curator, Haifa Museum of Art

# The Industry of Emotions

## Or: I Feel, Therefore I Am

Tami Katz-Freiman

When I first spoke about my idea for the exhibition “Mixed Emotions” with a colleague in the Israeli art world, she responded with surprise: “But everything today is about emotions, isn’t it?” Indeed, in the age of a television industry that worships rating charts and celebrates reality TV, emotions have become a powerful marketing tool, and are produced for us everywhere we turn. Emotional messages are transmitted to us both on the evening news and during commercials; they inundate our consciousness and compete for our attention and money. “Emotional intelligence” and “emotional skills” have become key words for succeeding in today’s world. Terms such as “experience,” “experimentation,” or an “emotionally friendly” work environment have penetrated almost every domain of life and have become commonplace in educational theories, at work places, and in pop psychology. The international advertising firm Saatchi & Saatchi recently published a marketing and advertising manifesto for the 21<sup>st</sup> century titled “Lovemarks: The Future Beyond Brands”; its principle argument is that the winning brand is the one that manages to foster emotional loyalty among consumers. If in the previous century the medium was the message, today the emotional message is the medium.

In Israel, the recent spectacle of disengagement from the Gaza strip served as an edifying example of Israeli society’s changing attitudes towards emotions. In the context of a decades-old ethos that championed stoic behavioral codes, the summer of 2005 has been etched into Israeli collective consciousness as a steaming emotional furnace. The slogan “with sensitivity and determination,” which hovered in the air like an ethical code and dictated the behavior of the evacuating army, spurned countless addictive images of hugs and tears; male and female soldiers, members of the police force and settlers wept jointly or separately, as if a damn of withholding had broken down and a tremendous wave of distilled emotion inundated the entire country. There were those who called this state of emotional turbulence “a crying ritual,” “a festival of weeping,” or even “emotional blackmail.”<sup>1</sup> It seemed as if such manipulative scenes were competing for emotional rating – a fact that raised countless confessions, questions, arguments and debates concerning emotional states such as empathy, identification and repulsion.

Two weeks later, towards the end of August, the TV series “Betipul” (in therapy) – a groundbreaking program revolving around the weekly therapy sessions of the same five patients – debuted in Israel. Following the end of the disengagement process, Israelis thus turned, on a daily basis, to confront their mirror image on the therapist’s couch – prepared, in an unprecedented manner, to confront a range of psychological and

1. Doron Rosenblum, “Thirty Years of Emotional Blackmail,” *Ha’aretz*, August 20, 2005.

emotional complexities. Rami Heuberger, one of the program's stars, ironically described this change: "Today, if you're not in therapy, something's wrong with you. It used to be that if you went to therapy, you were considered to be a psycho; today, it means being in touch with yourself."

Beyond the emotionally intensive context of life in Israel, however, it seems that the discourse on emotions in the Western world has recently shifted in significant ways. This shift is discernible not only in cultural and sociopolitical terms, but also in the domain of scientific understanding. After years during which emotions were treated as psychological states independent of the brain's underlying mechanisms, the recognition that the soul is not merely an amalgam of cognitive processes is gaining scientific ground.<sup>2</sup> The advanced technologies developed in recent years have enabled neurologists to penetrate the hidden depths of human emotions and to examine their physical and biochemical aspects. Brain scientists now regard emotions in terms of neurological responses, as biological functions of the nervous system. A new multi-disciplinary academic field – the science of emotions – has recently been established, bringing together psychologists, neurologists and philosophers in order to study the physiology, background circumstances, expression, structure and meaning of emotions.

Following the rediscovery of the importance of emotions in various domains of knowledge and research, there has been a significant change in social, cultural and scientific understandings of emotion. The new understandings stemming from these discoveries tend, for the most part, to undo the hierarchy between mind and body, and therefore to blur the binary contrast between cognition and emotion. Professor Aaron Ben-Ze'ev's research – a summary of which is included in this catalogue – centers upon creating a conceptual framework for understanding emotions, while methodically examining different emotions and their patterns of appearance. In another essay in this catalogue, the psychoanalyst Dr. Danielle Knafo analyzes the state of emotions in the postmodern age, and applies her insights to some of the artworks that appear in this exhibition.

This revolution cannot be taken for granted. The good "public relations" with which emotions are currently blessed, and the esteem in which they are held by society, are relatively new. Indeed, the positive attention emotions now receive, and the renaissance they are experiencing, seem to stem from the fact that they have burst back onto the stage after being excluded for many years. Emotions, which in the modern age of reason were perceived as the antithesis of logic, were denied a prestigious place in the public sphere. The common argument was that the human capacity for reasoning was imprinted in the brain, while emotion, a lowlier and more primitive element, was imprinted in the body. Emotions were thus perceived as a hindrance to rational thought – as a mysterious, largely unforeseeable phenomenon expressed in uncontrollable, childish, or stereotypically "feminine" ways that could not be reasoned with.

Indeed, since the advent of enlightenment thought in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, emotion has been viewed as the inferior opposite of logic. Rationality was the noble goal of enlightened man, while emotion expressed his primitive, inferior urges, which could be reined in with the reins of logic. Like other fixed equations in Western culture that have been proven wrong – for example, the Woman=Nature / Man=Culture equation – emotion was identified with femininity, while logic was identified with masculinity. In the 1994

2. See Joseph Ledoux's popular study *The Emotional Brain: The Mysterious Underpinnings of Emotional Life*, Touchstone, New York, 1998.



best-seller *Descartes' Error*, the neurologist Antonio Damasio, one of the world's leading brain scientists and a specialist in the neurology of emotion, challenged René Descartes' conclusive aphorism "I think, therefore I am." Damasio questioned this default option, which is so deeply engrained in Western culture, and scientifically proved that Descartes was simply wrong. According to Damasio, the dichotomy between body and soul, between emotion and the mind, is not compatible with the latest neurological studies. The same structures in the brain that are biologically responsible for emotional responses, Damasio argued, are also necessary for the existence of cognitive processes. Emotions, he concluded, are an inseparable part of our rational functioning. In other words, "gut feelings" have an enormous importance in decision making. When the part of our brain responsible for emotions is damaged, we are essentially deprived of the possibility to choose. The combination of logic and emotion thus reflects unity rather than a contrast or separation, and the two are in fact as connected as the body and the mind.

Philosophical evaluations of the status of emotions were also reflected over time in Western art, which has fluctuated between emotional expression and constraint. The expression of emotions in art, or the lack thereof, may point to the manner in which human beings, the body, and the essence of art itself were conceived of during different historical periods. Thus, for example, in Medieval art the depiction of emotions was regularly related to evil and sin, since the body was conceived of as a "clump of earth," the ephemeral companion of an immortal soul. Accordingly, the figure of Christ was always represented in a static pose and with a stoic facial expression. During the Renaissance, by contrast, the Humanistic approach characteristic of the time was expressed in art through a mimetic investigation of facial and bodily expressions, which stemmed from the belief that bodily movement reflected the movements of the soul.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, during this period artists fully explored the challenges inherent to translating human emotions into the language of visual art. In his book *On Painting*, Alberti urged artists to strive for precise forms of emotional expression. Since human beings identify with emotions, he argued, the heightened visibility of emotions in a given painting would arouse the viewer's identification with the represented emotion: "We weep with the weeping, laugh with the laughing, and grieve with the grieving. These movements of the soul are made known by the movements of the body."<sup>4</sup> This approach was taken to an extreme during the late Renaissance and Baroque periods, when the representation of expressions resulted in images laden with pathos and emotional turmoil.

Following Descartes' celebrated "Cogito," the age of enlightenment gave rise to movements that resisted extreme emotional expressiveness in art. The art historian Johann J. Winckelmann, the key thinker of the Neo-Classical movement, was opposed to the emotional excess of Baroque art. The model he built upon was Greek art, in which he discerned emotional constraint and expressive moderation. The defining feature of great art, he argued, was a noble simplicity and a combination of calm and greatness in posture and expression. Like a sea whose depths are calm even when its surface is stormy, he wrote, the expressions of Greek figures bespoke a noble and moderate soul, despite their emotional turmoil.<sup>5</sup>

3. Moshé Barash, *Introduction to Renaissance Art*, The Bialik Institute, Jerusalem, 1968, pp. 80-99 (Hebrew).

4. Leon Battista Alberti, *On Painting*, translated with introduction and notes by John R. Spencer, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1956, p. 77.

5. Johann Joachim Winckelmann, *Reflections on the Imitation of Greek Works in Painting and Sculpture*, German with translation by Elfriede Heyer and Roger C. Norton, La Salle, Ill: Open Court, 1987.

The pendulum of expression swung back again from restraint and moderation to intense emotional expression during the Romantic period, which in many ways formed an antithesis to Neo-Classicism. With the advent of modernism, the preoccupation with the expression of emotions by means of mimetic physical expressions gave way to their expression by means of the medium's essential qualities. The different strains of modernism, ranging from early 20<sup>th</sup> century Expressionism to the Abstract Expressionism of the 1940s and 1950s, gradually detached themselves from mimetic imagery, and exchanged it for emotional expression by means of color or brushstrokes. Clement Greenberg – one of the theoreticians most strongly associated with American abstraction – argued that “If the Poem, as Valéry claims, is a machine to produce the emotion of poetry, the painting and statue are machines to produce the emotion of ‘plastic sight.’”<sup>6</sup> At the same time, other modernist strains – ranging from Cubism to Minimalism and Conceptual art – shifted from thinking of art as a tool for emotional expression to a discussion of its conceptual and intellectual aspects.

Impregnated with cynicism and irony, postmodernism annulled the existence of a unique and authentic subject. Although it did allow for a preoccupation with beauty, figuration, narrative and biographical references to resurface at the heart of artistic discourse after a long absence, postmodernism “put to death” both the author and the subject, and gave birth to deconstruction. The theorist Frederic Jameson grimly diagnosed the postmodern state in the words “the waning of affect.”<sup>7</sup> He elaborated on his argument by comparing the different manners in which artists such as Andy Warhol and Edvard Munch treated the human figure. Jameson saw Munch's *The Scream* as a canonical expression of the great modernist themes of alienation, anomy, isolation, and social disintegration – as an almost programmatic symbol of what used to be termed “the age of anxiety.” Warhol's painting *Marilyn*, by contrast, exemplified for Jameson the superficial, commercialized, emotionally spent postmodern model. The modernist canon's idea of expressiveness, Jameson argued, was based upon a belief in a kind of schism within the subject; this schism entailed an entire metaphysics of interior and exterior – of silent pain and of the moment in which a given “emotion” is projected outward, for the most part in a cathartic manner, in the form of a gesture or a scream – becoming a kind of desperate exteriorization of an internal feeling. By contrast, the postmodern conception of expression, according to Jameson, underwent a fundamental mutation, becoming a collection of texts or of simulacra.<sup>8</sup>

Something has apparently shifted since Jameson gave his severe diagnosis. Human emotion itself has obviously not changed, but the ways of representing it in the world have changed in a fundamental way. Indeed, one may sum up the passage from modernism to postmodernism as a shift from a preoccupation with problems of language and representation (that is, of emotion) to a preoccupation with cultural materials (that are related to emotions). The exhibition “Mixed Emotions” attempts to create a resonating chamber for these and other changes pertinent to the post-9/11 age. The possibility that the cynicism and irony that characterized art and culture during the 1990s have come to an end comes up repeatedly in cultural and artistic discourses. It is indeed possible that the collapse of the Twin Towers marks a deeper change in

6. Clement Greenberg, “Towards a New Laocoon,” in *The Collected Essays and Criticism*, vol. 1: *Perceptions and Judgments*, edited by John O'Brian, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1955, p. 34.

7. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, Duke University Press, Chapel Hill, N.C., 1991, p. 11.

8. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

consciousness and culture, a trend that has yet to be named, and which may reveal itself to be a comforting return of sorts to humanistic values in which unique, purifying sentiments may find expression.

In recent years, one can also discern a preoccupation with extreme, or intense, emotional states in the realm of visual art. Three major contemporary artists – Marina Abramovic, Sam Taylor-Wood, and Bill Viola – have focused of late on the clearest, most quintessential and extreme form of emotional expression – the act of crying. In an age that announced the “death of the subject,” these three artists have been concerned with questions of emotional authenticity and intensity: can emotion be faked? Can it be consciously controlled? And what place may art, manipulation and emotion occupy in the postmodern age?

In 1995, Marina Abramovic created a video called *The Onion*, which constitutes a precise and meticulous documentation, of the artist eating a raw, unpeeled onion, a process which inevitably ends with the shedding of artificially manufactured. As the artist bites, swallows, spits out and spits up bits of onion, her expressions of pain and revulsion appear increasingly authentic. Against a background of sighs, lip smacking, and choking sounds, Abramovic’s monotonous voice can be heard complaining about the insipid quality of her life: “I’m tired of more career decisions, museum and gallery openings, endless receptions, standing around with a glass of plain water, pretending that I am interested in conversation. [...] I want not to want any more.”<sup>9</sup> The viewer becomes mesmerized by the compelling theatricality of crying, the masochistic attempt to control both body and emotions, and the strange inversion through which the artificial, yet real, tears decry the artificiality of life.

The question of whether shedding tears in front of a camera is necessarily a form of acting, or whether such tears may be real, led the artist Sam Taylor-Wood to go one step further in the recent series *Crying Men* (2003-2004). She hired iconic movie stars, and asked each of them to cry bitterly in front of the camera – a form of “commissioned” crying that was interpreted differently by each of the actors. This series, which seems to also contain a critique of sorts of the British “stiff upper lip,” makes evident the blurring of the gap between an actor’s representation of emotion and the presence of an authentic emotion. The artist’s choice of well-known symbols of manhood shifted the discourse from a discussion of stereotypical gender roles, to one concerning the manipulative power of the Hollywood illusion industry and its mass-produced emotions.

Yet it seems that **Bill Viola**, more than any other artist, has focused upon the challenge of expressing feelings without overlooking a single specimen in the human arsenal of emotions. In the works he has created in recent years, he has systematically researched the power and complexity of human emotions. Like Taylor-Wood, Viola too works with actors and directs every detail of their performance, yet the medium of video allows him to delve deeper into the human soul. Thanks to close-up effects and the use of extremely slow motion, the manner in which emotion is embedded and externalized in facial expressions and bodily gestures reveals itself in the clearest and purest manner. Viola is influenced by religious motifs in art, especially that of the late Medieval and Renaissance periods; he relies on the purifying power of art, and upon the empathy that the observation of suffering, and the emotional power transmitted by the actors, are supposed to awaken in the viewer. The painterly qualities of his works, which are achieved through the use of flat plasma screens, bring Viola even closer to the history of classical art.

9. This work was included in the exhibition “Getting Emotional”; the transcript of the video appears in Nicholas Baume, *Getting Emotional*, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 2005, p. 74.

Viola's range of emotions includes elusive passages between laughter and crying, sorrow, chagrin and shock, joy and anger, pain and fear. The waves of emotion seem to inundate the figures; they appear to exist simultaneously, to flow into one another and to echo one another in an emotionally dense manner – as a metaphor for human relations. "I realized that human emotions have infinite resolution – the more you magnify them the more they keep unfolding, infinitely," Viola said. "I began to sense that these feelings, or at least their residue, seem to exist outside of time, in some other eternal dimension."<sup>10</sup>

Several noteworthy exhibitions worldwide have recently taken upon themselves to summarize and reflect the nature of the cultural shift in the treatment of emotions. Among these exhibitions was the latest Sydney biennial (2004), titled "Reason/Emotion." Isabel Carlos, the biennial's curator, wished to reexamine the accepted dichotomy between emotion and reason. One can also point to the exhibition "Getting Emotional," which opened in May 2005 at the Institute of Contemporary Art in Boston. In his declaration of intentions, curator Nicholas Baume spoke of his desire to reexamine works of art, some of which were well known, through the prism of emotion. In the mega show "Ecstasy: In and About Altered States," which opened in October 2005 at MOCA in Los Angeles, curator Paul Schimmel chose the drug Ecstasy as a metaphor for a certain kind of heightened emotions, which stem from our desire to feel a deep closeness to people and to humanity in general. This desire was interpreted by Schimmel in the context of the alienation, emotional detachment, cynicism and materialism characteristic of contemporary life.

In Israel as well, it is increasingly possible to hear the voices of individuals, whose first-person narratives are concerned with their own vulnerable existence. These voices have appeared after several decades in which the preoccupation with the body and personal pain was pushed to the margins of Israeli art and repeatedly defined as "kitsch"; they end a long period of emotional anorexia, during which private suffering was channeled into the collective dimension – projected onto the metaphorical body of the nation, or onto sensual descriptions of the landscape. "Mixed Emotions" highlights representations of the human emotions that were long marginalized by the modernist ethos so strongly rooted in Israel; this exhibition is thus concerned with shifts that have taken place in art from the late 1980s to the present moment.

In "Mixed Emotions," I attempt to complete a move I began in 1993 with the exhibition "Antipathos," at the Israel Museum. In the exhibition catalogue, I wrote that, "The Greek term *pathia* denotes suffering, feeling, sensation. Hence, '*anti-pathia*' indicates contrariety to feeling, aversion." My use of the term "antipathos" was meant to designate one of the key characteristics of art in the 1990s – the evident preoccupation with emotion – yet not in its usual, expressive sense but rather as a ruse for creating an effect of emotion.<sup>11</sup> In 2004, I curated "Love is in the Air," which examined images of romantic love in Israeli art. I pointed to the paradoxical and impossible nature of the attempt to represent romantic love in visual art – in light of how this emotion is manipulated as a marketing tool in the leisure and culture industries.<sup>12</sup> "Mixed Emotions" moves on to explore a wider range of emotions; the effects of emotion have become the central theme,

10. This observation by Viola appears on the Internet site of the National Gallery in London, where his exhibition "The Passions" took place in 2003. See: [http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/bill\\_viola/acc\\_sixh4.htm](http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/exhibitions/bill_viola/acc_sixh4.htm)

11. See my article in *Antipathos: Black Humor, Irony and Cynicism in Contemporary Israeli Art*, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 1993, p. 50.

12. See my article "A Quick Introduction to Romantic Love," in *Love is in the Air: Images of Romantic Love in Contemporary Israeli Art*, Zman Le'Omanut, Tel Aviv, 2004, p. 68.

while the notion of “antipathos” has been transformed, in more than one instance, into pathos. To a large extent, this exhibition constitutes a retrospective gaze, a summary of the past decade.

The common denominator of the works in “Mixed Emotions” is what distinguishes this exhibition from the ones that preceded it: with almost no exceptions, these works all represent emotions as a dominant theme or motif. The desire to give visual form, and sometimes also a physical texture – to longing, love, grace, pleasure, joy, desire, gratitude, respect, fear, hate, anger, contempt, anxiety, loneliness, alienation, despair, sadness, compassion, chagrin, regret, shame and frustration – is what weaves together the various narrative threads of the exhibition. The viewer is thus confronted with multiple representations of human emotions, ranging from the most positive to the most negative ones.

It is worth noting that the works included in “Mixed Emotions” were not chosen because they were motivated by emotional turmoil. Nor was the degree of emotion or shock these works may awaken a criteria for choosing them. The exhibition wishes to point to the central and important place emotions occupy in the art created over the past 15 years, and to highlight works which even if, at first glance, seem far from the subject of emotions, nevertheless take up emotion as their central subject. The preoccupation with emotion raises challenging questions concerning the acts of representation and interpretation: is it at all possible to represent emotions? Are works that deal with emotions necessarily emotional? Do conceptual approaches contradict a preoccupation with emotion? Is it possible to distinguish between emotion and authenticity?

In terms of its structure, the exhibition is divided into several tropes. While this thematic division allows the viewer to orient himself, the complexity of the subject leads to numerous cross-references. The five chapters of the exhibition are: “Emotion/Language: Words as Carriers of Emotion”; “The Body Language of Emotions”; “Adolescent Angst and Romantic Love”; “Emotions in Familial and Parental Relationships”; and “Collective Emotions in Israeli Political Reality.”

### **Emotion/Language: Words as Carriers of Emotion**

This part of the exhibition examines the affinity between emotion and language. The works of Jack Pierson, Guy Ben-Ner, David Ginton, Kate Gilmore and Eva Koch all relate to the schism that opens up between the emotional experience and its verbal translation – and examine the differences between emotional and conceptual forms of representation.

Jack Pierson’s work *FEELINGS* (1991) exemplifies the ways in which emotion is given form in language, and in which a word can serve as a visual tool for the expression of emotion. As he has done in other works composed of words (such as *STAY* or *PARADISE*), Pierson has chosen a word charged with meaning. In the spirit of the ready-made tradition, the word “feelings” is composed of tin letters of the kind that can be found in piles of debris, junkyards or garbage mounds. Putting together letters that each have their own history underscores the material dimension of the signifier, and hints at the nostalgic value of emotions. Pierson here plays with the word as a kind of sculpture which may be taken apart, cut up and recomposed, and he creates a kind of tautology between signifier and signified. Bearing a clear affinity to Pop art, this work raises a series of questions about the advertising and art worlds, which both market commodified emotions.

Like Jack Pierson’s work, Guy Ben-Ner’s early work *Death Carpet* (1994) is preoccupied with deconstructing language and increasing its emotional intensity. In a collage of photographed letters culled from various billboards, Ben-Ner recomposed Natan Zach’s chilling love poem “Death Carpet” – where the

poet describes two loving souls woven together into a carpet of death, in which their fates are intertwined. In this manner, Ben-Ner exposes the intimate relationship described in the poem in the public domain.

Another kind of affinity between emotion and language, expressed from a bodily perspective, can be found in **David Ginton's** conceptual works. In his photographs of bandaged body parts, the sensation of pain is signified by the word "pain," which is written in blood on a military bandage. This work is part of a group of works created in 1974-1975, and which were based on actions or physical experiences taking place at, or beyond, the threshold of pain. The bandages are wrapped around stigmata-like wounds, and hint at the fate of the artist as a victim of a past or future war. In fact, as Ginton has noted, what is at stake here is an attempt "to force the body to feel, or perhaps even to feel something beyond the body." Another photograph from the same period depicts a man whose head is bowed in a gesture of despair over a brick lying at the center of the table. This is a conceptual version of Goya's masterful etching *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*. The reference to Goya, together with the use of a quintessentially modernist approach that brings together minimalism and body art, is used here by Ginton to reflect on the manner in which rationalist thought is threatened by the awakening of the monsters of emotion.

**Kate Gilmore** is also preoccupied with the relations between emotion and language, which she explores in a humorous manner. In the three videos shown in the exhibition she translates figures of speech into visual puns. In the work *My Love is an Anchor* (2004), the artist is portrayed in a sexy getup, with one of her legs immobilized in a bucket full of plaster. Stubborn and determined, she tries in vain to extricate herself from the plaster trap. The Sisyphean effort, the pain, the frustration and the sense of defeat partake of the evident deterioration in the figure's psychological state. In the work *With Open Arms* (2005), the artist spreads her arms in the dramatic gesture of a welcoming hostess, and shows restraint time after time as she is bombarded with tomatoes. In her work *Heartbreaker* (2004), Gilmore stages a bloody attack with a hatchet on a series of wooden planks arranged on a wall in a heart shape. In her other works as well, the artist boldly uses her own figure to create narratives that expose the ridiculous nature of banal figures of speech or cultural symbols, for the most part ones related to obedient, "feminine" forms of behavior. With a touching sense of humor, Gilmore relates to the struggles, dramas and traumas of everyday life: in a refreshingly masochistic manner, she endangers herself and endures the pain and rituals of humiliation which we, as viewers, can enjoy.

The Danish artist **Eva Koch's** video *Approach* (2005) focuses on the emotions awakened during a moment of elation, and on the subjective inability to represent them. In this video, a group of deaf-mutes recites, in sign language, verses from Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Koch chose verses in which Dante related to the image of light as a metaphor for enlightenment and for those grace-filled moments of plenitude, for which we long all our lives. The recited verses contain Dante's prayer to Apollo to give him the power to describe the experience of paradise – that wondrous, shining light that cannot be rendered into words. In these lines, Dante touched upon the greatest paradox of poetry: the question of how one may render verbally those moments of wonderment, and express our subjective impressions of reality by means of thought and language. Eva Koch's work, then, is preoccupied with language's limited ability to describe emotionally powerful experiences and to translate emotion into words. Trapped between the two languages, the viewer is thus situated precisely in the enigmatic and incomprehensible gap between language (the soundtrack) and the mute longing to communicate (the projected image).

## The Body Language of Emotion

This part of the exhibition is concerned with the contradictory and complex ways in which emotions are externalized through body language, facial expressions, smiling and crying. A large number of these works transmit feelings of loneliness, sadness and melancholy. One may, for example, point to **Wolfgang Tillmans's** work, in which the actress Liv Tyler is portrayed sprawled out on the ground alongside a lake or a swimming pool; **Eli Petel's** painting, in which a pizza delivery man is huddled up facing the sea; and the two works by **Nan Goldin**, which radiate heart-rendering emotions of loneliness, intimacy and compassion. Goldin has referred more than once to the closeness she feels to Expressionist artists such as Edvard Munch, Otto Dix and Egon Schiele. Indeed, the emotional authenticity of her photographed subjects, who express a range of human emotions, is embodied in every detail of their facial expressions and bodily gestures.

A different kind of intimacy, portrayed from a more revealing and provocative perspective, is evident in the photographs of **Tami Amit**, which radiate sexual ecstasy. Nine portraits taken from video capture peak moments of bodily pleasure. The physical sensations seem to be engraved on the faces of the photographed women, producing a kind of tension between pleasure and torture. **Michal Heiman's** series of portraits *What's On Your Mind?* (1984-2005) also contains nine portraits of women; their expressionless faces, however, bespeak a state of total withdrawal. On each of the photographs, which were taken two decades ago, the artist recently stamped the same supremely intimate question – “what’s on your mind?” Photographed at a party, in a coffee shop or at a family event, the women look like strangers in social situations that have nothing to do with them. They are deep in thought, their gazes unfocused and dreamy; they do not communicate, and it is indeed difficult to know what is on their mind. It seems as if the later intervention in the photographs attempts to make up for the photographic act that initially exposed these women during private moments. Heiman, who for many years has been concerned with the relationship between art and psychoanalysis, essentially asks “what’s on your mind” in order to know “what are you feeling”; the question itself – the retroactive interest in the feelings and emotions of the women – thus charges the words with a sense of compassion, solidarity and empathy and brings to mind a kind of “therapy” in which the artist engages her “manipulated” subjects.

Two small, intimate video works by **Nelly Agassi** face one another and welcome the viewers like a pair of enigmatic sphinxes: in one of them, she buries her face in her hands, while in the other she forces an expressionless smile. The complexity of human expression, and the related attempts to camouflage it, are revealed with utmost simplicity and precision: the act of withdrawing inward exposes feelings of pain, shame, fear and worry, while the smile discloses embarrassment and longing. These works are part of a larger series that Agassi created in the years 1999-2002, and which include video documentation of ritualized, disciplined bodily actions. In a restricted, frugal language, Agassi aims in these works to touch that almost invisible pulse of distilled emotional experience – that internal transmission that is translated into movement, gesture or action. By means of simple, everyday bodily actions, she manages to precisely touch the nerve endings of pain, to expose the fragility of both body and soul. In this context, curator Hadas Maor has illuminated the affinity between action and emotion: “One may regard Agassi’s work as one that attempts to discharge emotional baggage, as if it were a sensitive explosive; to throw up, release and embody it via implied representative metaphors or actual repetitive rituals.”<sup>13</sup>

Nurit David's four self-portraits also conceal more than they reveal. The artist's elongated facial features are revealed with straightforward simplicity while her hand, which grazes her face, separates her from the world. The dreamy and pensive emotional state portrayed in these images raises the question of the affinity between thoughts and emotions. Thoughts are conceived of by Nurit David as "dissecting the female body and marring the skin that covers it. Thoughts wrinkle and scar the skin. A lack of consciousness is associated with beauty."<sup>14</sup> In **Netally Schlosser's** monochromatic, materially rich portraits, this distortion is made even more obvious. Thoughts and emotions do not only wrinkle the skin, they distort the appearance of the face to a grotesquely ridiculous extent. In the painting *Train* (2005), Francis-Bacon-like portraits of four frightened women stare out of the train cars; their faces, which appear to have been carved out of the black background, wear terrifying, demented expressions. Schlosser here intensifies the affinity between "femininity" and psychological concepts such as "hysteria" and "madness" – which were applied specifically to women for many years.

### Adolescent Angst and Romantic Love

In "Love is in the Air," I referred to the dearth of representations of romantic love in visual art; I associated this state with the way in which such images inundate the media, advertising, and film. My argument was that it is almost impossible to refer to a subject as charged as love – one of the last havens of authenticity – without taking into account the fact that it has been recycled to such an extent in popular culture.<sup>15</sup> Sociologist Eva Illouz's essay, a summary of which was included in the exhibition catalogue, focused on the relation between romantic emotions, culture, and economy. Her conclusions were that the powerful advertising industry and the Hollywood dream industry are the forces that enabled consumer capitalism to intensify – perhaps even to reinvent – the cultural ideal of romantic love. According to Illouz, the longing for utopia, which is at the heart of romantic love, has replaced religious experience; in a postmodern age in which the boundary between culture and consumerism has been blurred, she argued, the state of romantic love reflects contemporary values.<sup>16</sup>

In "Mixed Emotions," this critical approach is evident in the works of Nir Hod and Davina Feinberg. Both these artists are concerned with extreme and ridiculous images and clichés of romantic love, as it is mediated by the dream industry. **Nir Hod** created a painting printed on a mirror, which depicts a hand-held knife carving the words "I love" into an inner arm. The mirror is thus endowed with a metaphorical significance related to self-reflection and to narcissistic self-examination. **Davina Feinberg** stages fictive couples in scenes that appear to have been taken from the world of advertising or from an imaginary telenovela. The joys of love that are performed in front of the camera, the unconvincing intimacy and the cheap romantic atmosphere are evident in the postures, smiles, flowers and in the bright, colorful background. Romantic emotion is depicted here as a series of empty gestures, a package of happiness gift-wrapped in shiny paper.

13. Hadas Maor, "Dreaming is Also Work," in *Nelly Agassi: Borrowed Scenery*, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv, 2004, p. 43.

14. See Penina Bat-Tzvi, "Thoughts Make You Ugly, They Wrinkle Your Skin," an interview with Nurit David, *Ma'ariv*, "Sofshavua," June 12, 1998, p. 61 (Hebrew).

15. See my article "A Quick Introduction to Romantic Love," in *Love is in the Air*, *ibid*, pp. 5-7.

16. Eva Illouz, "Passions on the Market: How Capitalism has Transformed the Meaning of Love," *ibid*, pp. 58-50.



A different approach, which is devoid of irony, characterizes the works of **Rita Ackerman** and **Shahryar Nashat**, who both touch upon the pain of love. In Ackerman's painting *Don't Leave Me Alone* (1995), one woman sits with a frozen expression on her face, while another woman lies on a bed. The intensity of emotions compressed in the space between the two women is externalized by the hand prints that seem to be scratching the canvas in despair. The bodily traces, which are at once concrete and metaphorical, bring to mind the concentric circles of sound in Munch's *The Scream*. Here too, there is a combination of figurative painting and the concrete imprint of emotion, and an evident tension between interiority and the external world. In Nashat's video *154 Days* (2002), deep intimate feelings of loneliness and longing are translated by means of text and images. Fragments of black-and-white images are projected onto the screen as if they were part of a stream of consciousness composed of thoughts and fantasies – arms hugging an imaginary body, a man kissing a woman in a gray, alienating industrial space – hesitant attempts to make contact and partial gazes. In the background, a man is heard reading a letter written in prison to a loved one. In terse, yet lyrical prose, the letter relates the man's arrest, the conditions in which he is held, his relationship with his fellow prisoners and his plans for escape. The monotonous count of 154 days dictates the work's internal rhythm, which is similar to the rhythm of a beating heart. The ghost romance which emerges out of this mysterious atmosphere, impregnated with fragmented images, points to the gap between the palpable body and the imagination, and also to the power of language to evoke images and sensations.

**Ofir Dor's** works also focus upon emotional states and conflicts. By means of monumental oil and spray compositions, which are covered with dynamic and highly expressive brushstrokes, he distills a series of unique emotions – intimacy, fear, jealousy, love or the pain of parting. Dor resuscitates a traditional genre that has become almost obsolete – allegorical, figurative paintings, whose dramatic contents can be deciphered by means of their titles. These paintings, in which allegory is embodied in personified concepts and emotions, were inspired, according to Dor, by his dreams. The charged human interactions depicted on canvas are therefore dramatic reconstructions of dreams, hallucinations, or nightmares – a fact that further magnifies their psychological intensity.

The dream-like scenes in Dor's paintings take place in unidentified interiors with diagonal windows and openings. In *Intimacy* (2005), a woman is seen trapped in a pink room, sitting on a red single bed. Ghostly figures look at her from the open door and the two windows. In *The Farewell* (2005), a reclining woman and a standing woman gaze at one another, creating a diagonal line that charges the painting with raw emotional pain. In the painting *The Hangman, Fear and a Lady* (2005), three figures are seated in a waiting room of sorts. The figure of Fear wears a monstrous mask, and its body language communicates the repulsion it feels towards the arrogant figure of the Hangman. The allegorical dimension is especially evident here, in what the artist has described as “giving a form and a face to mental terrains.” In *Jealousy* (2005), a man and woman who are alienated from one another appear against the background of a billboard inscribed with the word “Jealousy.” In the painting called *Love* (2005), a couple is seen seated at a candlelit table in a room with red walls, against the backdrop of a glacial landscape seen through a large window. In another painting, *Kiss* (2005), a woman with a hollow expression is dragged away by two strange figures (perhaps a doctor and a nurse), while a man in a black suit kisses her hand.

Dor's emotion-filled paintings allude to the “return to painting” that characterized the Italian “Trans-avantgarde” and the German Neo-Expressionism movements that exploded during the 1980s. There too,

a mixture of violence and sexuality erupted alongside feelings of pain and loneliness. Yet in Dor's work, it seems as if painting itself is an allegory for the multilayered structure of dreams, in which relationships, urges and internal conflicts are camouflaged by what appears to be civilized behavior.

In recent years, it has become possible to point to a noticeable trend among certain young artists, whose work centers upon the experience of adolescence and upon related emotions of angst and suffering. In "Mixed Emotions," artists such as Naomi Fisher, Hernan Bas, and the Muntean/Rosenblum duo, engage in a form of art making that may be compared to 17<sup>th</sup> century Dutch genre painting. The 21<sup>st</sup> century version of genre painting reports on the sorrows of youth, the pains of love, fantasies, loneliness, hedonism and romance.

**Naomi Fisher's** expressive ink drawings appear like quick sketches made during intimate adolescent moments, and each contain a young girl. The artist refers to these girls collectively as "Ladies," a term meant to imply that they have already become part of adult society, internalized feminine cultural conventions, and been transformed from girls into women. A glance at the girls in the drawings, however, quickly reveals that something has gone awry in their transition to mature womanhood, related to an eruption of perverse violence. In this artist's drawings, as in her photographs (which are not included in the exhibition), the protagonists are situated in exotic landscapes in ways that undermine the historical equation between Woman and Nature. On the one hand, the female body and attire blend into the landscape, and into the patterns of leaves and tree trunks; on the other hand, the resulting images are disturbing and violent. The autumn colors that dominate the paintings and that are related to the cycles of nature (as well as to the female menstrual cycle), are transformed into the colors of an infernal fire.

Within the intense palette one may detect traces of horrifying violence (murder, eye gouging, perhaps even rape), yet it remains unclear whether the "Lady" at the center of each composition is being pursued or whether she is the mistress of a violent ritual ceremony. Fisher's emotionally and sexually charged works operate within a maze of contradictory images – between the seductive and the threatening, between fragility and strength, between masochism and ecstasy. The images are intentionally ambivalent, and the narrative is fragmented and open ended. At the same time, she weaves in historical allusions that add additional layers of meaning to her paintings. In the drawing *Ladies 7.29.2003* (2003), for example, a severed head appears beneath the bloodied knife held by the girl – an image that alludes to the story of Judith and Holofernes (a story about female valiance) or the story of Salome and John the Baptist (a story about female revenge).

In all of Fisher's drawings, the girls' eyes have been gouged out, and they are represented as balls of blood. Since two of the girls hold a bloodied knife, one may interpret the scene as one of self-mutilation in the spirit of Oedipus. Freud interpreted Oedipus's act as a substitute for the castration punishment appropriate for his sins, and therefore related anxiety about one's eyes to castration anxiety. The gouging of eyes may indeed be interpreted as a form of marking one's own abnormal sexuality, yet in Western culture, the blind man is also seen as a seer – a theme that underscores the mystic, ritualistic quality that pervades Fisher's works. These charged subjects appear in her paintings in a visual language that vacillates between the graphic and the decorative on the one hand, and the expressive and agitated on the other. They are inspired by numerous sources, ranging from horror movies and fashion illustrations (within

the dramatic excess, the girls are always dressed in interesting clothing) to Art Nouveau and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Expressionism in the style of Klimt and Schiele.

**Hernan Bas's** fragile, lyrical, obsessive and sensual paintings transmit a dream-like sensation. These paintings, which are suffused with unrestrained sexuality, mythological narratives and adventures, do not easily lend themselves to being interpreted; as one does with a dream, one can extricate from them fragments of meaning that may relate to childhood fantasies, coming-of-age rituals, virginal anxiety, memories of vulnerability and adolescent love. His small-scale compositions are elegant and expressive, in a manner that covers up for dark urges. These oil paintings, which resemble watercolors, are suffused with romantic themes that have decadent, homoerotic overtones. They are all dominated by the painfully beautiful figures of androgynous boys, which appear against a theatrical ground in the midst of dream-like, dramatic scenes that are sometimes suffused with lust. Lost, disempowered, carried along in a state of turbulence and flow, Bas's protagonists seem to almost always be emotionally overwhelmed.

In the painting *The Leader of the Pack* (2004), three partially naked boys are seen seated next to three black panthers in a room overflowing with colorful fabrics. In *The Swan Prince* (2004), a dreamy boy reclines in a chariot made of a shell, which is carried over the waves by three swans; in *Untitled* (2004), a terrified boy is attacked by a flock of geese that peck at his exposed flesh, while in the work *The Trouble with Paul* (2004), a boy sits on a crimson sofa with his legs spread out, and hugs himself in a gesture of heart-breaking loneliness. The paintings are composed of agitated, intensely colored brushstrokes, so that the rich palette intensifies the restrained eroticism. The dramatic excess in Bas's paintings produces a kind of dark grandeur and magical atmosphere, which goes hand in hand with their sentimental tone.

The duo **Marcus Muntean and Adi Rosenblum** also focuses on emotions and intimate situations typical of adolescence – the sentimental nature of young people, their loves, longings, and desires in the context of global consumer culture. Their paintings all star young men and women that seem to have grown up prematurely. Despite the relatively large size of the figures, their presence does not transmit a sense of individuality. They appear bored, isolated and spent; dressed in fashionable brands, they pose in urban and domestic spaces. The images and lifestyles they depict are copied from typical fashion magazine layouts. Their poses appear artificial, and they seem constrained to confirm to the dictates of fashion.

One of the signature characteristics of Muntean/Rosenblum's work is the line of text that is handwritten under each painting, in a manner reminiscent of cartoons. For the most part, these are clichés that have a confessional tone, and that are culled from tabloids, soap operas, and pulp fiction. These sentences do not interpret the images, but charge the scenes with a kind of pathos, a dramatization of emptiness and of everyday life. Thus, for instance, at the bottom of a painting depicting a girl in a bathing suit, there appears the sentence: "She was left with pure consciousness, a pure kernel of being. A desire to be loved for the simple fact she existed"; at the bottom of another painting, the inscription reads: "Suddenly, she felt the terrible desire to be someone else." These generalized and vague statements, which seem to say everything, in fact say nothing at all.

Muntean/Rosenblum are influenced by the masters of European painting. Heroic, pathos-infused figures, which were depicted during fateful and decisive moments in Western history, are translated in their work into empty figures, which move through space in a futile effort to recreate a certain image. This duo's works underscore the impossibility of developing an individualistic, authentic identity. In an age in

which everyone is influenced by the same magazines and wears the same brands, the reflexive gaze these artists direct at the longing for brand names is related to their critique of the alienation and estrangement typical of our objectified world, in which emotion is marketed in gift-wrapped packages. The loneliness and despair may be softened by the pastel colors, yet it appears that beyond the carefully constructed façade, the effort to look “cool” leaves the young people in these works looking like the brainwashed victims of the contemporary apotheosis of youth, which markets itself to death.

The complicated and ambivalent lives of young people today are expressed in different manners in “Mixed Emotions”: thus, for instance, dark emotions and the atmosphere of an exorcism characterize **Aída Ruilova’s** video *It Had No Feelings* (2003). The 20-second-long loop is based upon flickering images that flash in the dark in a manner reminiscent of horror movies, creating mysterious relationships between figures, objects and sounds. Since the artist is also a musician and a member of an experimental rock band, the soundtrack is a dominant element in her works, and it shapes their clipped, fragmented editing. The text describes (in the first person singular and plural), a traumatic and violent experience suffused with feelings of fear, humiliation, anger, revenge and resentment. Two female figures repeat the same sentences over and over again in a hollow, monotonous tone; they perform a magic punishment ritual upon a mysterious figure, devoid of emotions or of a heart (“it”), which embodies the source of evil in the recited text. The women, who remain rooted in one place, are alternately photographed from above and from the side in a manner that renders them anonymous. The spotlight that inundates their faces lends them a mask-like appearance, an effect that heightens the feelings of horror and alienation. The more one looks at this work, the more abstract it becomes – experienced increasingly as an ecstatic emotional state, an internal battle against the forces of evil.

In **Boyan’s** seemingly innocent paintings, dark urges similarly team beneath the surface. Boyan is interested in sexual stigmas, extreme perversions, social inhibitions and taboos, which he externalizes expressively in his work. He charts, upon the map of human emotions, situations related to violence, loneliness, misery, and longing, which he depicts from a male perspective. These extreme emotions, which are usually repressed and hidden, form a repulsive model of maleness that is both pathetic and kinky. For the most part, Boyan’s works are based on trashy images taken from *Playboy* and other porn magazines.

In Boyan’s painting *Terry* (2005), a naked male figure reclines in a masturbatory pose; it is based on the figure of Terry Richardson – a notorious fashion photographer whose provocative and scandalous photographs depicted young women in a crude, pornographic manner. Another, similarly pathetic male figure appears in *Trotsky* (2003), where it is shown eavesdropping at a wall. Yet the most perverse character in this series of paintings is the figure in *Man with Three Legs* (2005) – a nondescript person depicted sitting down with the lower part of his body exposed, a prosthetic women’s leg shoved between his thighs. According to the artist, “this is the lowest you can go, the most despised place on the margins of society.” The male figure in the Pieta-like image *The Last Temptation of Christ* (2005) appears similarly abandoned, wretched and in dire need of help.

By contrast, the women in Boyan’s paintings all appear simple-minded and cheap, and are almost always presented as victims. The painting of Christina (*Sketch for Christina #2*, 2005), which is based on Annie Leibowitz’s portrait of Christina Ricci, depicts her lying on her side in a pose that shows off her voluptuous figure, like countless odalisques in the history of art. Her blue face and the cigarette dangling

between her fingers endow her with a melancholic quality. Boyan's sober gaze, which is directed at the dark side of contemporary culture, is emblematic of a growing trend among young artists, who depict the emotionally dark and disturbed world associated with "Goth" culture.

### Emotions in Familial and Parental Relations

Charged parental relations and familial emotions have always provided a fertile ground for self-expression. It seems impossible to conceive of more intensely sentimental subjects than motherhood, parenthood, family and death. Most of the works in "Mixed Emotions" that treat these subjects bypass their sentimental qualities, and approach them in a critical manner that is entertaining in some instances and cruel in others.

In her short experimental film *My Grandmother Loves Me* (2005), **Dana Tal** included a painfully touching scene in which the artist attempts to coax a few words of affection out of her ailing grandmother. The question "Shula, do you love me?" echoes repeatedly throughout the film, while the grandmother's barrage of witty answers solicits a compassionate smile. In one cruel close-up, the camera is immobilized upon the face of the elderly woman lying on her side, her tired skin hanging limply over her once-pretty features. What initially seems like a futile search for love opens up onto the complex relationship between the artist and her grandmother; the work exposes the kind of emotional aridity that is characteristic of Israel's founding generation, and which has come to be critically examined.

Facing Dana Tal's work is **Keren Gueller's** video *Kisses*, which documents 24 hours of hug-and-kiss-filled encounters between family members at the home of the artist's parents. In contrast to the emotional anorexia revealed in the laconic answers of Grandma Shula in Tal's work, Gueller's video reveals a hyperactive family in a state of emotional bulimia, which from the artist's point of view appears exaggerated and grotesque.

Another perspective on physical intimacy in familial relations is expressed in **Amy Jenkins's** video *The Audrey Samsara* (2004), in which the artist's 18-month-old daughter is shown nursing, sleeping, waking up and falling again into a deep sleep in her mother's arms. The child, who is naked except for an oversize pair of red shoes, gives herself over to being nurtured by her mother as she is cradled in her protective embrace. The only sounds heard throughout the video are the suckling and grunting of the infant. The baby being held by the mother, whose face remains invisible, may allude to images of the Pieta and to Renaissance depictions of the Madonna and Child. In a dramatic, yet precise and understated manner, the work manages to represent the emotion of motherly love without becoming sentimental. The word "Samsara," in the Buddhist tradition, means the cycle of death and rebirth; indeed, the image of the baby suckling at the source of life radiates a powerful sense of vitality and emotional intensity that go far beyond this particular moment of intimacy between mother and daughter.

The two video works by **Erez Israeli** also allude to the Christian image of the Pieta (especially as represented by Michelangelo at the Vatican) – yet endow it with local meanings related to the death of soldiers, to sacrifice and to war. In the chilling work *El Maleh Rahamim* (God Full of Mercy), the artist is seen collapsing again and again in his mother's arms, holding on to her in an endless loop. The mother, in turn, tries to hold on to him with all her might, while his body drops out of her grasp. The moment of death is prolonged to infinity to the sound of the prayer "El Maleh Rahamim," which is slowed down to the point of

becoming meaningless. Israeli's intention here was to create the effect of a dying battery: "God is a bit tired of being compassionate, and soon his compassion will die out, like a spent battery."

The preoccupation with death has become more extreme and even more horrifying in his new work *Untitled* (2006), which constitutes a direct sequel to *El Maleh Rahamim*. The warm, throaty voice of singer Shoshana Damari is heard in the background as the artist's mother employs obsessive, pain-filled movements to pluck the feathers stuck with wax to Israeli's body. Like the body of Christ in the classical pose of the Pieta, the son's body is laid out across her lap. The monotonous act of plucking the feathers seems to indicate that the mother has come to terms with the son's death, yet refuses to part with him. In order to stay close to him, she must consume him; only in this manner will his body be assimilated back into her own body, into her womb. Israeli alludes in this work to two canonical myths – the myth of Icarus (as if after being pulled from the sea, his mother cleans his feathers) and the myth of the Sacrifice of Isaac; here, however, the mother offers her son to herself, thus denying God the sacrifice.

### Collective Emotions in Israeli Political Reality

Patriotic emotions, feelings of belonging, solidarity and national rituals of mourning all depend upon collective experience. Without entering into a detailed discussion of the Israeli ethos of "togetherness," I would like to point out that such collective feelings are a widely acknowledged component of Israeli reality. In this exhibition, artists Doron Solomons, Nir Hod, Eli Petel and Pavel Wolberg all touch upon such collective feelings in their works.

One quintessential moment of collectively experienced emotion in Israel is the minute of silence when the siren sounds on Memorial Day – a day to which Israelis channel all their emotions of sadness and grief. In his video *Still Life* (2003), **Doron Solomons** has created a metaphorical patchwork quilt of mourning, using segments of films taken from the archives of Memorial Day news broadcasts. The minute of silence is prolonged here to nine interminable minutes, during which the camera focuses on the faces of citizens whom the siren "caught" in different areas of the country. It seems as if the entire range of emotions – sadness, grief, embarrassment and despondency – are distilled in this moment of collective remembering orchestrated by the state.

In the painting *Lost Youth* (2002), **Nir Hod** describes a military funeral. Although this painting belongs to a body of paintings that examines the triad youth-love-death, this monumental work stands out in Hod's oeuvre because it is based on a newspaper photograph, rather than on a photograph directed and produced by the artist. The scene, which captures this event with uncanny precision and formal restraint, is revealed from within an enormous wreath, and unfolds before the viewer's eyes in larger-than-life dimensions. On the left, two soldiers shown in profile salute the center of the composition. On the right stand four women soldiers, whose gestures and pained expressions articulate various degrees of heart-breaking torment and restraint. The body of the deceased and his family are not depicted in the painting. In the background, Hod inserted his own figure as a soldier in the Army of Peace. His frozen facial expression marks him as an outsider, an onlooker who is not quite there. In this image, Hod has masterfully encapsulated the body language of human pain, whose universal aspects extend far beyond the painting's local context.<sup>17</sup>

**Eli Petel's** diptych of mourners (*Untitled*, 2004) is also based on local news images. Here, however, the artist has created a painted collage of images chosen from among numerous photographs of dramatically

gesturing women, taken during funerals of Intifada victims on both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The act of “cutting” and “pasting” lends this work a social-realist appearance, while creating an almost surreal visual tapestry. The diptych is not divided into separate areas designating “us” and “them”; rather, the female figures woven together are victims whose cries and gestures resemble one another, as they all share the same feelings of suffering and grief. Nevertheless, it seems that despite the desire to weld the figures to one another, they do not form a unified surface, and the tapestry of mourning remains artificial and filled with conflict. The transformation of newspaper snapshots into a meticulously and painstakingly created painting amounted, according to Petel, to “a waste of energy through art making”<sup>18</sup>; yet there is an apparent feeling of respect, generosity and compassion towards the photographed figures, which seem to have been redeemed from their lowly status as objects viewed by a voyeuristic public. The artist’s act of “dubbing” seems to give these grieving women the historical respect they deserve.

**Pavel Wolberg’s** news photographs also underwent an “artistic” transformation when they were printed, in series of three which he calls “contact sheets.” In a conversation we held while looking at photographs of the Intifada and the disengagement, Wolberg commented: “In Israeli politics, everything is emotions.” Elsewhere, he has confessed: “I would like to photograph a conflict that has nothing do with me, in which I’m not personally involved.”<sup>19</sup> Indeed, Wolberg’s photographs make it clear that he is the kind of photographer who identifies and responds immediately to emotionally intense situations. His photographs are direct, powerful, extreme renderings of the scenes they capture. Most of Wolberg’s photographs in “Mixed Emotions” document dramatic scenes from the evacuation of Gush Katif in August 2005. In this context, one may evoke the political columnist Doron Rosenblum’s comments on such scenes as they were broadcast on television, and which he called a “mass spectacle” of “emotional blackmail.” The settlers, he wrote, “demonstrated the entire array of emotions in the human arsenal – weeping, anger, scolding, hysteria, lunacy, humiliation, pathos...”<sup>20</sup>

Yet unlike Rosenblum, whose political stance took the form of an ironic critique, Wolberg does not intend to express a clear-cut ideological agenda in his photographs; rather, he assumes the position of the witness that “was there.” The settlers’ wrath about their evacuation, the soldiers’ solidarity, and the Palestinian tragedy are all experienced in his photographs with the same degree of emotional intensity. As a photojournalist, Wolberg mercilessly confronts the facts on the ground; rather than distinguishing between different kinds of suffering, however, his lens captures people carried away by wrath, chagrin and loss on both sides of the conflict. In some of his photographs, it is possible to identify “emotional structures” related to collective experience. Thus, for instance, in the trio of images depicting different groups of people raising their arms to the heavens (settlers, Palestinians and Christian women praying in a church), Wolberg seems to have distilled peak moments of an ecstatic, collective experience. For one instant, it seems as if the individuals in the crowd blend into a single organic weave, in which there are

17. See my discussion of this work in my article “Nir Hod: An Acrobat of Emotion in the Circus of Illusions,” in *Nir Hod: Forever*, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv, 2005, p. 21.

18. Eli Petel in a conversation with Yael Bergstein, “Letters to the Editor,” *Studio*, vol. 162, October – November 2005, p. 38 (Hebrew).

19. Pavel Wolberg in an interview with Moshe Ninio, in *Point-Blank (Israel): Pavel Wolberg, Photographs of the Recent Time*, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv, 2002, n. p.

20. Doron Rosenblum, “Thirty Years of Emotional Blackmail,” *ibid.*

no differences between religions, races and nations. The recognition of how absurd the conflict is, is also expressed through unifying elements – composition, color, refracted light and bodily gestures; these formal elements unify the expressive human powers that exceed the limits of any given ideological conflict.

To conclude, **Keren Gueller's** video *Happy Holidays 2* (2005-2006) – which is physically situated at the exhibition's entry and exit point – is conceptually located at one end of the spectrum of mixed emotions; it provides a ridiculous and grotesque image of the manner in which one Israeli family behaves during a series of joyous, happy moments. The scenes in this video installation were all filmed during family celebrations – holidays and birthday parties – on the artificial lawn in the back yard of the artist's childhood home. This back yard, which is situated in the Tel Aviv suburb of Holon, also functions as the yard of the private childcare center run by Gueller's mother. A series of scenes which recur in an endless loop are projected onto 14 screens; in each scene, the dominant and industrious mother is seen "activating" a multitude of children and adults during different events. The family members are seen fooling around, hopping up and down, waving, dancing, eating and playing music as part of a family holiday routine. Gueller's scrutinizing gaze poignantly reveals how joyous celebrations are conducted in Israel. She intentionally unravels the seam between the artificially staged and the documentary, and intensifies the dream-like, synthetic feeling that characterizes familial demonstrations of happiness. The manner in which the autobiographical contents of this work merge with a larger collective experience calls for a critical examination of contemporary Israeli society, of its celebrations and moments of joy.

## Epilogue

Even if the works in this exhibition express "artificial" feelings that are calculated, intensified, and reshaped through conscious representational strategies, they seem to awaken strong emotional responses among viewers – responses which doubtless constitute an "authentic" experience. Indeed, psychologists and scholars of emotion do not know what comes first: the emotion or its expression. Dr. Dylan Evans, a British psychologist who specializes in the study of emotions, has determined that, "It seems in some cases that feelings lie at the origin of the bodily expression of emotion; in others it is vice versa." This view opposes the Freudian understanding of emotions, which has dominated psychology and psychotherapy for the past century. According to Evans, "Freud had a rather hydraulic view of emotions. He saw them almost as fluids which, if you didn't let them out, would build up pressure, and you would get neurotic symptoms."<sup>21</sup>

Such studies contain groundbreaking discoveries that contradict the manner in which emotions were regarded in the past (for instance, the recent discovery of a fear gene in mice). There is one point concerning the affinity between emotion and expression that psychologists and scholars of emotions are in agreement about – that is, the contagious ability of externalized emotions to awaken compassion, empathy, revulsion or disgust. Paradoxically, then, even a random and technical expression of emotion by a stranger can connect us directly to a real and authentic emotion; all the more so, when such an expression of emotion occurs in the realm of art. The exhibition "Mixed Emotions" inundates us with a wide range of human emotions; does it really matter, after all, whether the tears are real?

21. Dr. Dylan Evans is quoted in an article written about an exhibition of works by Sam Taylor-Wood, which was published on the Internet. See "World of Wellbeing", *Independent Newspapers UK*, November 22, 2004.