

# Stopping Time, Molding Mold

Tami Katz-Freiman

Only through time time is conquered.

– T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*<sup>1</sup>

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T.S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, London:  
Faber and Faber, 1944, n.p.

The entrance to the ground floor of the Israeli Pavilion at the Venice Biennale provokes an immediate sense of astonishment, awakened by the transformation of the pristine exhibition space into an abandoned, mold-covered site. A second glance beyond the patches of mold, which expand from the center of the floor out towards the corners and up the walls and columns, reveals pale traces of ornament, vestiges of a long-gone human presence. Insight then arrives in a flash through bodily sensations – feet touching the roughly textured floor, the scent of coffee combined with the odor of mold wafting down from the intermediate level: we have entered a deserted building. Yet before we can determine whether we are surrounded by real mold or by an image of mold laboriously created by the artist, the following becomes clear: this mold tells a story about wear and neglect, about the passage of time or about a time following a calamity. Welcome to the Israeli Pavilion!

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"Sun Stand Still" (2017), Gal Weinstein's site-specific installation, structures the pavilion's internal space, which extends over three floors, into an ensemble shaped by a formal and thematic flow. Each part of the exhibition is directly related to works created by Weinstein over the past decade, so that his entire oeuvre seems to have been woven into a single, cohesive whole. This essay explores the conceptual connections between the different parts of this project, while examining them in relation to Weinstein's earlier works.

When seen against the background of his previous projects, "Sun Stand Still" is clearly Weinstein's darkest body of works to date. His earlier works, which were concerned with either iconic images and symbols or representations of disaster and catastrophe, were usually imbued with an explicit ironic dimension. Here, by contrast, if there is irony in the colonies of mold, the nocturnal landscape, the

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Artists from Israel had already participated in the 1948 Biennale, prior to the construction of a national pavilion. The dating of the pavilion's inauguration to 1952, which is different from the date provided in previous publications (such as Matanya Sack's article in the catalogue of the 2011 Biennale, pp. 170–171), is based on the general catalogue of the 1952 Biennale, where an Israeli Pavilion first appears on the map of the Giardini. It is situated in its current location in the vicinity of the American Pavilion, on the bank of the Rio del Giardini canal.

burning brain, and the burst of flames left by the departed missiles, it is implicit and indirect. It is concealed in the gaping cracks between the dramatic themes and the art-making process, between the intentional pathos and the materials devoid of an aura. Nevertheless, it is evident that Weinstein continues to explore the mythological and Romantic images of Zionism embedded in Israeli collective memory, while additionally engaging with a miracle rooted in the biblical ethos. The narrative strategies that appeared in his earlier works thus seem to have been distilled here into a new story that is at once personal and collective – a story about the fear of death and the desire to stop time.

### The Exhibition Space as Haunted Site

Weinstein's artistic strategy at the **Israeli Pavilion** begins with a subversion of the building's white architectural surfaces and their symbolic charge. The pavilion, which was designed by the architect Zeev Rechter in the spirit of the Bauhaus and of the International Style, was inaugurated at the Venice Biennale of 1952.<sup>2</sup> Rechter was the first Israeli architect to use the language of universal



The Israeli Pavilion in the Giardini della Bienalle, Venice, photo: Eyal Segal  
הביתן הישראלי בגני הביאנלה, ונציה, צילום: אייל סגל

modernism in pre-state and post-independence Israel. The International Style – the gospel of modernist architecture imported to the country by European-Jewish architects – was highly compatible with the simple, functional ethos of this period in Israeli history. The streamlined aesthetic of straight, unornamented lines went hand in hand with the vision of a Zionist utopia, the negation of the Diaspora, and the socialist ideals of that time. Seen against the backdrop of the surrounding national pavilions in the Giardini, the Israeli Pavilion is distinguished by its cubical form, whose outlines are reminiscent of a private residence – a three-level modernist villa with a large, blind façade that lends it a fortress-like quality. The bright white structure seems to echo the birth of the newly established national home, appearing as a blank page severed from the past and turned towards the future. Weinstein's strategy for activating this site counters the original narrative created by the architect and the Israeli state. The manifestation of time's vicissitudes (the various types of mold), which becomes palpable as soon as one enters the pavilion, disrupts the white architectural space representing the spirit of modernity and progress.

*Persistent, Durable, and Invisible*, the title of the first part of this project, which is located on the entrance floor,<sup>pp. X - X</sup> makes reference to the traits of poisonous mold spores.<sup>3</sup> The images of mold covering the floor and walls on this level are based on the appearance of real mold discovered by Weinstein in his studio in Tel Aviv, as he observed a cup where black coffee dregs had begun to sprout spores after remaining unwashed for several days. In a slow process that evolved over many months, the overall design of this exhibition space, which simulates the effect of mold as well as a partially effaced ornamental pattern, was created on hundreds of square panels. This process involved manually covering the panels with various types of metal wool in a carefully calculated, painstaking process, and treating some of them with various liquids to create different shades of rust. Both physically and metaphorically, Weinstein thus transformed the national pavilion (or home) into a desolate site; a mold-covered building whose days of glory have long passed, a ghostly space pervaded by signs of its imminent demise.

This is not the first time that Weinstein has undermined the ideal of the home as protective place by transforming it into an uncanny space. This motif already appeared in his first solo exhibition, "*Close to the Ground*" (1999),<sup>p. X</sup> and has repeatedly resurfaced over the past two decades. Located in an old bomb shelter that had been transformed into an art gallery, this early exhibition subverted the fantasy of suburban existence emblemized by the red tile roof, a symbol

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This title was borrowed from that of an article about poisonous mold spores that appeared in 2010, in Hebrew, on a popular Israeli news site: <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/29/ART2/161/717.html>

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Tali Tamir, "Roof (The space underneath)," in Gal Weinstein: *Roof, The 25th International Biennial of São Paulo, The Israeli Presentation* (exh. cat.), 2002, p. 10.

of the middle-class Israeli longing for a pastoral European existence. The sloping roof and undulating tiles, which stood out in contrast to the building's straight lines overtook the entire space, which seemed to have collapsed under the weight of the represented dream. The real-estate cliché of a "house with plot" was given an ironic visual twist as the roof was stripped of its function, becoming a dystopian object that threatened to overtake the room. In a second version of the work, which was exhibited three years later at the São Paulo Biennial (*Roof, 2002*),<sup>p. X</sup> the roof shattered the outlines of the transparent, spacious modernist building (designed by architect Oscar Niemeyer), disrupting its streamlined form and undermining its rationale of transparency. Interpreted as a reflection of "Zionist imperialism," the red roof, symbolic of the Zionist settlement project and of an escapist dream of prosperity, came to be more specifically associated with Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, a foreign architectural element at the heart of the Middle East.<sup>4</sup> When Weinstein subsequently exhibited additional architectural elements, such as a rustic brick wall made of rusted steel wool in *Huliot* (2004, Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art),<sup>p. X</sup> he doubly disrupted the sleek architectural lines of the exhibition space: once



*Huliot*, 2004, steel wool, 120x900, installation view  
Herzliya Museum for Contemporary Art  
חוליות, 2004, צמר פלדה על קיר, מראה הצבה  
מוזיאון הרצליה לאמנות עכשווית

by using seemingly inferior materials, and again by covering them with rust. In 2007–2008, Weinstein returned to the image of the roof in the work *Slope* (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem).<sup>p. X</sup> In this uncanny installation, parts of a dismantled tile roof surfaced out of what appeared to be coagulated black liquid, as if in the aftermath of a volcanic eruption that had buried an entire town.

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*ibid.*, p. 17.

The coating of architectural elements with a roughly textured, fuzzy surface may also be related to Weinstein's first sculptures, exhibited at the *Artists' Studios in Tel Aviv* (1998) and later interpreted as an expression of the Freudian uncanny.<sup>5</sup> The rectangular sculptural units, which resembled small buildings, furniture items, or refrigerators, were loosely wrapped in rolls of wallpaper and tied with black plastic cable ties.<sup>p. X</sup> These prickly units undermined the modernist cliché of geometric, minimalist sculpture associated with male artists such as Donald Judd or Richard Serra, and subverted the conventional affinity between object and body. As Tali Tamir wrote, "This infiltration of the psychological into the architectural is further elaborated in a set of works that form an organic link between architectural elements and bodily conditions. Concurrent to the first roof work and shortly thereafter, Weinstein covered wall

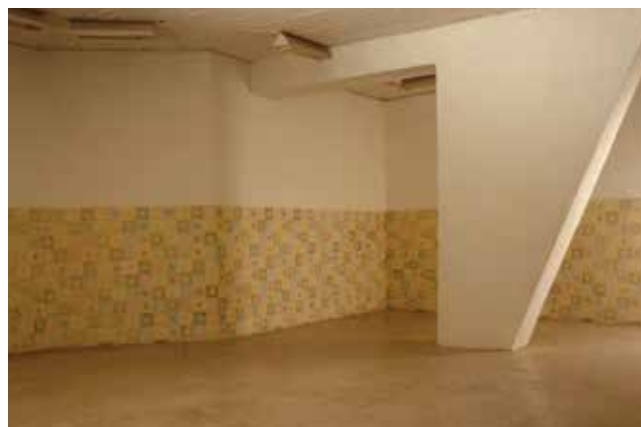


Installation view, The Artists' Studios Gallery, Tel Aviv, 1998  
מראה הצבה בתערוכה בסדנאות האמנים, תל אביב, 1998

6  
*Ibid.*

surfaces with marble-like wallpaper netted with bluish veins, thereon attaching a thin layer of either gray steel wool or white cotton wool. As in sophisticated transplant surgery, the flat geometrical surface of the wall had grown a hairy, cutaneous bodily tissue, spawning an architectural entity that embraced the rhythmic breathing of physical intimacy.<sup>n6</sup> A similar process of hybridization took place in the installation *Balloons* (as part of the exhibition "Havana Nagila," 2000, Chelouche Gallery, Tel Aviv),<sup>p. X</sup> where Weinstein coated the white gallery walls with a surface resembling wallpaper or, perhaps, soft down. This time, he used cotton makeup-removal balls in a range of saccharine pastels to create a pattern of stars like those on national flags. That same year and in that same gallery (as part of "Passage 5," in collaboration with Pedro Cabrita Rice), Weinstein bisected the space by hanging a curtain made of serpentine, sticky silicone strings, which resembled bodily excretions coagulated between ceiling and floor.<sup>p. X</sup>

In *Persistent, Durable, and Invisible* (2017), Weinstein thus continues to blur the boundaries between the distinct categories of architecture and the body, the artificial and the organic, order and arbitrariness, purity and pollution. The streamlined modernist interior is transformed into a material and sensual



*Balloons*, 2000, cotton wool, steel wool, and double-sided adhesive tape on wall, 120x800, installation view, Chelouche Gallery, Tel Aviv  
בלונים, 2000, צמר גפן, צמר פלדה ודבק דו-צדדי על קיר, 120x800  
מראה הצבה, גלריה שלוש, תל אביב

surface as the steel wool – a material associated with the sanitary aspects of the domestic sphere – sullies the clean walls and blurs the rigid lines of the white cube. Here, however, Weinstein takes one step further in fusing organic and artificial forms – as the numerous layers, overworked surfaces, and sense of excess pervading the empty, seemingly abandoned space produce an image of actual life (the patches of mold). Significantly, these mold spores are not just infesting a neutral domestic environment or exhibition space, but are growing rampant in Israel's national pavilion in Venice, thus giving rise to the following question: What does it mean when a pavilion representing a state becomes a mold-covered space, where the danger of toxicity might pose a health hazard?

#### An Unconscious Interaction

In *Jezreel Valley in the Dark* (2017) – a floor installation on the pavilion's intermediate floor (which is also visible from the observation point on the top floor) – the mold is transported from the sphere of representation to the sphere of the real.<sup>pp. X</sup> Here, actual spores grow and multiply in Polyurethane trays shaped like the parts of a puzzle, which are filled with a mixture of black coffee dregs and sugar (used to make what is colloquially known in Israel as "mud coffee"). This work is based on an image that appeared in the floor installation *Jezreel Valley* (2002, Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, Israel).<sup>p. X</sup> In this earlier work, the landscape appeared as a puzzle composed of synthetic office carpeting, representing agricultural fields seen from an aerial perspective. At the Israeli Pavilion, the agricultural "plots" are composed of coffee dregs covered with colonies of real mold at different stages of growth. The ethereal network of fine filaments, called "mycelium," has acquired dark murky shades of green, brown, gray, and black. Its appearance is directly impacted by the surrounding environmental conditions: heat, light and humidity, as well as by the organisms present in the air and by the micro-organisms emitted by the bodies of the exhibition visitors, thus creating an invisible process of interaction. Like the steel wool rusting over time on the ground floor, this work too will be transformed in the course of the exhibition as the coffee mixture thickens in the trays, and as the character, color, and form of the spore colonies growing upon this mixture continue to change. The visitors are thus allotted a role of which they are unaware, and which they cannot control. This strategy can also be interpreted as an ironic realization of the concept of "chance," and as a witty

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A wide expanse of land located in the north of Israel, the Jezreel Valley, is circumscribed by the Nazareth Mountains to the north, the Gilboa Mountains to the south, and the Carmel Mountains to the west. Weinstein's strategy of presenting a bird's-eye view of the valley echoes the numerous observatories located on the surrounding mountaintops, from which generations of Israelis have admired the beauty of the landscape. The decision to represent the valley by dismantling it into the form of a puzzle reflects Weinstein's ironic take on the shattering of the Zionist dream.

take on the trendy experimental, performative, and participatory projects prevalent today on the contemporary art scene.

The Valley of Jezreel – one of the emblems of the agricultural settlements founded by Zionist pioneers – has acquired the status of a mythological landscape in Israeli collective memory.<sup>7</sup> Since it is also the subject of the earlier work discussed above, its presence conflates the realms of both personal and collective memory. The use of coffee dregs additionally alludes to the history of Venice, where the first café in Europe opened in 1645. Weinstein created an "agricultural laboratory" – an experiment in "mold agriculture" that grows on the black coffee fields of the Jezreel Valley, with spores nourished by the local Venetian organisms in the air. The synthetic carpets used in his earlier work, which formed a stunning patchwork in vivid shades of green, yellow, and brown, are replaced here by organic carpets whose palette is dark and murky. The result is an ironic inversion of agricultural processes, as actions related to order, cultivation, and maintenance are replaced by inaction and neglect. Paradoxically, the mold, symbolic of desolation and dissolution, is the very element that infuses this iconic image of the valley with a sense of life and temporal duration. The mythological valley associated with the golden age of Zionism, the Israeli brand-name synonymous with the miraculous revival of a seemingly barren landscape thanks to the wonders of modern agriculture, is transformed in this work into *Jezreel Valley in the Dark* – a wet, mold-covered puzzle that may even pose a health hazard.

Like the roof in *Close to the Ground*, which represents a house (as well as the fantasy of a house), for Weinstein the valley represents a cultivated form of nature (as well as a national vision) that is subject to deconstruction and destruction. His artistic action redefines these charged concepts: just as the house in the earlier work was dismantled and transformed into an uncontrollably expanding architectural structure, so the fertile natural expanse in the pavilion is transformed into a puzzle whose parts support a process of decomposition. Yet **mold** is not simply a direct metaphor for destruction or catastrophe. Rather, both real, organic mold and the artificial mold created by the artist have a post-apocalyptic quality, which seems to point to the beginning of a new form of life.

Indeed, contemporary researchers and thinkers view mold as holding a potential promise in the context of an uncertain future. The anthropologist Anna Tsing, for instance, notes that following the American bombing of Hiroshima, the first form of life to emerge upon the scorched earth was the matsutake



mushroom.<sup>8</sup> In recent years, terms from the field of molecular biology, as well as mushrooms, spores, insects, taxidermy, and mold, have penetrated the discourse of contemporary art in post-apocalyptic contexts. They also appear as part of the discourse on "microbiopolitics," which is concerned with life in the aftermath of an ecological disaster caused by industrial pollution and global warming. Artistic and scholarly explorations of "biocultural hope" rely on evolutionary theories pertaining to the microbial world as a metaphor for destruction and construction, as well as for human socialization and symbiosis.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, the mold spores in the Israeli Pavilion enfold the past, present, and future, evolving silently like a riddle searching for an answer: What has happened here? What past do these vestiges belong to? At the same time, the liquid black support, which calls to mind the mystical practice of telling fortunes in the patterns of coffee residue, seems to allude to the future – perhaps, indeed, to a form of biocultural hope.

#### Miracle or Megalomania?

Then Joshua addressed the Lord ... in the presence of the Israelites: "Stand still O sun at Gibeon, O moon in the Valley of Ayalon!" And the sun stopped and moon stood, while a nation wreaked judgment on its foes ... Thus the sun halted in mid-heaven and did not press on to set, for a whole day; neither before nor since has there ever been such a day, when the Lord acted on words spoken by a man, for the Lord fought for Israel (Joshua 10, 12–14).

The concern with time is expressed even more clearly in the monumental landscape work *Moon over Ayalon Valley* (2017), which extends across the large wall of windows in the back of the pavilion, rising from the ground floor to the ceiling of the top floor.<sup>pp. X</sup> This seemingly innocent nocturnal "landscape," with yellowish and brown clods of earth in the foreground and a large, rocky valley in the middle ground, is illuminated by the light of a full moon that shines at the center of a clouded sky. In actuality, however, this image is neither a painting nor an innocent scene. It is a relief composed of steel wool and colored felt representing a battlefield, and its meaning may shed light on the themes of the project as a whole: this work refers to the biblical miracle that took place during the conquest of Canaan by Joshua Bin-Nun. Seeking to win the battle against the Canaanite kings before darkness fell, Joshua commanded the Earth to stop turning in order to arrest the passage of time: "Stand still O sun at Gibeon, O moon in the Valley of Ayalon!"

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Anna Tsing, *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruin*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015.

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Eben Kirksey, Nicholas Shapiro, and Maria Brodine, "Hope in Blasted Landscapes," in Eben Kirksey (ed.), *The Multispecies Salon*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014.

According to the biblical story, God granted him his request, and the sun stopped in its tracks. In Israel's current political climate, this miracle of faith, which seemingly triumphed over the laws of physics, may be interpreted as a distorted perception of reality – one that vacillates between megalomania and denial on the one hand, and a determined belief in the impossible on the other. This perception, moreover, reflects the universal human desire to suspend time.

The visual origin of Weinstein's landscape is a photograph of the Ayalon Valley from the album *In the Footsteps of Moses*, which was published in English (in Israel, the United States, and Canada) in 1973. The album describes the return of the Jewish people to the Promised Land, accompanied by photographs of landscapes and archeological finds that seemingly support the biblical mythology. The book was produced in collaboration with the Israeli Ministry of Education and Culture's Department of Antiquities and Museums, and belongs to the genre of pseudo-archeological and pseudo-scientific literature that uses biblical stories as historical proof of the Jewish-Israeli connection to the land. An entire chapter in this album is devoted to the conquest of the land by Joshua Bin-Nun.<sup>10</sup> Weinstein expropriated this ancient symbolic landscape from the book, and recreated the image using a laborious manual technique that involved gluing colored felt and steel wool on wood panels to form a monumental image.

The Book of Joshua, which chronicles the Israelite conquest of the country, tells how the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon struck a covenant (The Covenant of the South) and declared war on Gibeon, an ally of the Israelites. Led by Joshua, the Israelites came to the assistance of the Gibeonites, defeated the armies of the south, and killed their kings. The miracle mentioned above occurred during the pursuit of the retreating armies. As the day drew to an end, Joshua feared he would be unable to win the battle before nighttime, and that the Amorite soldiers, who were familiar with the terrain, would flee under the cover of darkness. Joshua thus commanded the sun to stop in its orbit and the Earth to cease turning, so that the Israelites could finalize their victory by killing the fleeing soldiers. Interpreters are divided concerning the nature of this sensational and unusual miracle, which is considered one of the greatest (and cruelest) of all biblical miracles – one that underscores the existence of God outside of human time.

The debates over whether the sun and moon indeed stopped in their orbit, and if so, for how long, range from literal interpretations to homiletic exegesis: whereas the ancient rabbinic scholars interpreted the miracle literally, arguing that the sun stopped in its course until the battle ended, others did not accept this

literal interpretation<sup>11</sup>. How, they argued, could Joshua's miracle have possibly surpassed the miracles performed by Moses, of whom it was said: "And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses"? These later interpreters focused on the implicit, hidden dimension of the story, and preferred to see the Israelite victory itself as a miracle (arguing that the soldiers were so excited that they lost their sense of time). The influential medieval scholar Maimonides, for instance, reduced the miracle to the appearance of the "light of the sun," which he believed was seen exclusively by the fighters on the battlefield. Others interpreted the miracle as a heroic attempt on Joshua's part to prevent the desecration of the Sabbath.<sup>12</sup> The heart of the debate is thus concerned with the paradox of suspending time and with Joshua's ability to control the forces of nature in order to win the battle. This point has given rise to endless hermeneutic subtleties: How could time have stopped in its tracks while it is clearly stated that the war lasted at least two days (according to verse 32, Joshua took Lachish "on the second day")?

The myth of arresting time and the subversion of its teleological movement towards an inevitable end are not unique to the Bible. This theme appears in different variations in a range of ancient cultures, and is often associated with megalomania and hubris (the sin of arrogance). The human reluctance to accept the limitations imposed by the passage of time, and to recognize its utter finality, gave rise to numerous myths concerning the arbitrary operation of time and the constraints it imposes. In the Mesopotamian *Epic of Gilgamesh*, for instance, the desire to arrest time is represented as a quest for lost youth and eternal life (paradoxically, Gilgamesh is willing to pay for its retrieval with his life). Saturn (Cronus), the Greco-Roman god of time, swallows his children in order to prevent the birth of future generations, thus seemingly eternalizing the present and annulling the future. Moreover, art-making is one of the most prominent manifestations of the pervasive desire to stop time, if only to eternalize a certain state, experience, or vision. In this sense, "Sun Stand Still" is an installation concerned with the vicissitudes of time and the desire to arrest it.

A concern with the tyranny of time and the human attempt to control the forces of nature for the purpose of conquest (hubris) already surfaced in earlier works by Weinstein, and especially in the exhibition "[Huleh Valley](#)" (2005, Helena Rubinstein Pavilion of Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv Museum of Art).<sup>pp. X</sup> This exhibition was based on Peter Merom's photography album [The Death of the Lake](#) (1960), whose iconic black-and-white images documented Lake Huleh as it was being dried out in the early 1950s. Weinstein carved MDF panels to create a

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According to a recent Israeli news report, Israeli scientists at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev seem to have found an astronomical explanation for the biblical miracle. This collaborative study, which was conducted by a physicist, a biblical scholar, and an archeologist, relied on NASA data to show that the miracle described in the Book of Joshua was a natural phenomenon – a full solar eclipse that led to the sun's concealment by the moon for several minutes. The precise time and location of this eclipse might, according to these scientists, accord with the details of the biblical story. (Ido Efrati, "Israeli Scientists Found Astronomical Explanation to Sun Stand Still at Gibeon," *Haaretz*, January 16, 2017).

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For more on the general perception of biblical miracles, and the specific meaning of the miracle at Gibeon as part of the struggle to subject the sun to the monotheistic code in the Mesopotamian cultural sphere, see Yair Zakovitch article in this catalogue, pp. [??-??](#).

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The effect of cracked clay in *Huleh Valley* is also reminiscent of the images that often appeared in the early posters published by the Jewish National Fund and the Jewish Agency during the 1960s.

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Mordechai Omer, "Returning to the Scene of the Crime: Gal Weinstein's 'Huleh Valley' after Peter Merom's *The Death of the Lake*, in *Gal Weinstein: Huleh Valley* (exh. cat.), Tel Aviv: Helena Rubinstein Pavilion, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2005, p. 133.

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Ellen Ginton, "Huleh Valley: An Opera in Three Acts," in *ibid.*, p. 145.

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Gal Weinstein, "Timetables", in *Artluk*, Warsaw (trans. Tamar Margalit), March 2009.

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Mircea Eliade, *The Myth of the Eternal Return: Cosmos and History* (trans. Willard R. Trask), Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

monumental floor work resembling cracked clay, which he exhibited alongside large steel-wool reliefs that reconstructed six elegiac photographs from Merom's book.<sup>13</sup> The ambitious national project of drying out Lake Huleh in order to transform it into agricultural terrain was part of early Zionism's ideal of "the reclamation of the desert" – that is, of nature's subjection by a nascent society that believed it could change the primordial laws of nature.<sup>14</sup> At the same time, this national project also marked the end of the Zionist enterprise's age of innocence, since it was later understood as a miscalculated decision that disrupted the area's natural equilibrium and resulted in an ecological disaster.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, 40 years later, in the early 1990s, an inverse process was undertaken. In what amounted to an admission of failure, the area was re-flooded in order to reconstruct the lake and its fauna and flora, transforming it into a nature reserve. Weinstein treated this effort to right an ecological wrong as an attempt to turn back the clock, describing the paradoxical efforts to dry and then re-flood the area as "absurd actions that arbitrarily and artificially attempted to create a particular type of landscape: agricultural land in the 1950s, and a nature reserve in the 1990s."<sup>16</sup> Weinstein's own attempt to replace natural processes with systematic production processes (sculpting earth out of an industrial material rather than wetting and drying actual earth) echoed the megalomaniac attempt to control time and turn the clock back by restoring the lake. At the same time, he also deconstructed the aesthetic eroticism of the original photographs and undermined the poetic and nostalgic enchantment with the dying natural environment.

The anthropologist and scholar of religion Mircea Eliade, who studied myths and their anthropological, psychological and philosophical significance, distinguished between secular time, which belongs to human beings and is inseparable from death, and sacred, mythical time – the time of the immortal gods. The transition from secular time to mythical time, according to Eliade, takes place by means of cyclical rituals that unfold at primal moments related to nourishment, birth, marriage, war, death, and the need to contend with natural forces: myths about a flood or another cosmic catastrophe give expression to a perception of humankind's cyclical disappearance and reappearance, and are represented by lunar rituals that center on the moon's cycle of waxing and waning. In this context, according to Eliade, the death of the moon and the death of humanity are both understood as necessary for their renewal.<sup>17</sup> The presence of the moon and the sun in Weinstein's project underscores the mythical aspect of the Israeli historical-chronological narrative, which is represented through the concepts of death

and resurrection, Holocaust and revival, drying and flooding. At the same time, the treatment of the materials and the artistic rhetoric strip these themes of the accrued layers of nostalgia, touching upon the core of Israeli national identity.

### Landscape as Shattered Utopia

*Marble Sun* (2014), the third landscape piece included in this project, is located in the pavilion's interior courtyard.<sup>pp. X</sup> It too is a later version of an early work by Weinstein – pointing to a process of "self-recycling" that is characteristic of his practice, and which involves a change of materials and exhibition context that infuse the work with new meaning.<sup>18</sup> This floor installation, which was created following *Jezreel Valley* (2002)<sup>pp. X</sup> and *Nahalal, Partly Cloudy* (2005, Haifa Museum of Art),<sup>p. X</sup> is concerned with Nahalal, the first socialist village established by Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe during the first two decades of the 20th century. The circular design of the village planned by the architect Richard Kaufmann reflected a utopian, egalitarian ideology. The outer ring was divided into agricultural plots; the inner ring was designated for the farmers' shacks;

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*Marble Sun* was produced in Italy and included in Weinstein's solo exhibition at Galleria Riccardo Crespi in Milan in 2014. This strategy of "self-recycling" was further developed in the exhibition "Backwards," Gordon Gallery, Tel Aviv, 2016.



*Marble Sun*, 2014, marble, diameter: 500, installation view, Galleria Riccardo Crespi, Milan, courtesy Collezione Patrizia Dal Re, Ravenna  
שמש שיש, 2014, שיש, קוטר: 500, מראה הצבה, גלריה ריקארדו קרספי, מילנו, באדיבות אוסף פטריציה דל ריי, ראוונה

and the center of the circle housed public buildings and the residences of village functionaries. In modern Israeli mythology, Nahalal is synonymous with Jewish agricultural labor and an authentic, rural lifestyle, yet is paradoxically also viewed as the birthplace of a new Israeli elite. Weinstein's original puzzle was made of synthetic strips of artificial grass and cheap office carpeting in numerous shades of green, yellow, and brown. In the courtyard of the pavilion in Venice, meanwhile, the puzzle has been adjusted to the Italian environment. It is composed of Carrara marble and other stones in a range of grays, browns, greens, and yellowish-beiges, whose contrasting hues give off the effect of light radiating out from its center. As a material associated with memorials and commemoration, marble raises questions about the birth and death of social and political ideals. Weinstein's strategy of representing this mythological settlement as a children's puzzle – first out of carpets and then again out of marble used for kitchen counters – raises social and political questions that undermine the immediate context of his imagery, which is intimately familiar to Israeli viewers. The fertile, life-filled village is transformed into a barren, synthetic, domesticated expanse that can be disassembled and reassembled anywhere out of changing local materials.



*Nahalal, Partly Cloudy* (detail), 2005, carpets, MDF, Acrilan fiber, and Perspex, installation view, Haifa Museum of Art  
נהלל, מעונן חלקית (פרט), 2005, שטיחים, MDF, אקרילן  
ופרספקס מראה הצבה, מוזיאון חיפה לאמנות

Throughout the history of art, landscape imagery has reflected humanity's relationship to nature, with examples ranging from Romantic conceptions to various expressions of ecological and earth art. In a contemporary Israeli context, the landscape cannot be detached from politics, and is always scorched by the fire of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and by the internal Israeli debate about it. Unlike American earth art and its British counterpart, which are concerned with utopian, cosmic, and metaphysical ideals as part of the struggle to circumscribe alternative exhibition spaces outside of the museum establishment, the concern with landscape imagery in Israel – a country where the earth itself has been appropriated and subjected to conflicting historical narratives and to political, religious, and national goals – is always contaminated by national myths. This concern can be divorced neither from a belief that our roots are embedded deep within the land, nor from the questioning of this belief, which has come to be increasingly prominent in recent decades.

The short history of Israeli art is thus marked by landscape images that give expression to both sociopolitical values and to the vicissitudes of time.<sup>19</sup> In this context, Weinstein's works reflect the complex contemporary Israeli conception of the landscape, as well as the painful recognition that political forces have symbolically erected strongholds on every hill and valley. Moreover, the sources of inspiration for his landscape works are usually found not in nature itself, but in books or on the Internet – that is, in previously mediated images of natural expanses. These are always processed landscapes – ones that have already been experienced, conquered, and fixed in collective awareness. Weinstein revives sentimental iconic images of the Israeli landscape, while replacing the sentiments related to collective memory with elements that provoke curiosity and a desire to physically engage with the works. The valley's cultivated fields – regardless of whether their removable parts are made of office carpeting, marble, steel wool, or real mold – thus contain no traces of nostalgic or Romantic longing. The dream landscapes of the past, which once provoked a sense of yearning, have been transformed into a shattered utopia, a nightmarish present and future.

#### Can One Lie Through the Truth of the Material?<sup>20</sup>

The idea of controlling time and the illusion of patina are superbly expressed by Weinstein's choice of materials. As already mentioned, over the past decade Weinstein has frequently used steel wool to simulate "drawing," and has also

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The use of modern agriculture in order to cultivate the barren land was a primary value for the "New Jew." Up until the 1970s, Israeli artists promoted this ideal both consciously and unconsciously, reflecting the collective sense of awe experienced vis-à-vis the local landscape. Cracks in this unified façade first appeared in the 1970s following the Six Day War, and even more so in the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, and continued to grow during the 1980s. For the post-Zionist generation of artists that came of age during this period, "landscape," "territory," and "earth" became charged political terms. For further discussion, see Tami Katz-Freiman, "LandEscapes: Mysteries of the [Holy] Land," a text written to accompany the exhibition "LandEscapes: A Multi-Site Exhibition of Contemporary Israeli Art," co-curated with Cheryl Harper, Gershman Y, Philadelphia, 2002.

20

This question echoes Slavoj Žižek's discussion of the terms (subjective) "truth" and (objective) "knowledge," which are central to Lacanian psychoanalysis. One "lies in the guise of truth," and "tells the truth in the guise of a lie." See Slavoj Žižek, "Desire: Drive = Truth: Knowledge" at: <http://www.lacan.com/zizek-desire.htm>

21

Gal Weinstein, "Timetables," *ibid.*

22

Hadas Maor, "Untitled (*Huliot*)," in *Embroidered Action* (exh. cat.), Herzliya, Israel: Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004.

used colored felt to create works that simulate "painting." Various types of steel and bronze wool, unraveled felt, Acrilan pillow stuffing, and real mold were the materials used to create this project. Steel wool – a strong, rough industrial material that is usually concealed under the kitchen sink together with various detergents – has become a signature element in Weinstein's works. Over the years, he has perfected his control of this wiry material and developed technical skills that enable him to "tame" it, transforming it into "painting" or an illusory "drawing" tool with a soft, downy effect oscillating between two and three dimensions. The unraveling of the wool skein and the slow and laborious process of gluing the bits onto a sticky (paper or wood) support is, as the artist describes it, similar to the process used to remove hair from the body, only in reverse. The glue becomes the surface to which the material adheres. The presence of the steel wool on the support provokes the sensation that the image grew organically over time out of the surface, like stubble or grass.<sup>21</sup>

In general, the principles underlying Weinstein's choice of different materials in accordance with his thematic concerns reflect one of the quintessential modernist paradigms concerning the sensitivity and "truth" of the material. The materials used in Weinstein's works all share the following characteristics: (1) Everyday, familiar materials devoid of an aura, identified with the real world, and essentially functional: cotton wool, synthetic carpets, steel wool, felt, sewage pipes, roof tiles, MDF boards; (2) "Superficial" materials "devoid of secrets" (depth or essence), which form a pure surface/skin unmarked by the traces of time, thus precluding the need to cover them with paint or any other coating that will change their appearance; (3) Materials defined by an industrial logic of cheap mass production, which are simple and easy to use; (4) Industrially processed and condensed materials that maintain an affinity with their natural source, yet have lost their original function, such as MDF boards made of wood fibers, or steel wool whose production process undermines the strength, solidity, and power of steel; (5) Materials that give rise to a paradoxical gap between their appearance and essence, such as the soft, almost downy appearance of metal shavings, or what curator Hadas Maor describes as: "an educated conceptual use of the immanent gap between surface and essence, as appearance becomes void, drawing the entire work towards Baudrillard's concept of simulacra."<sup>22</sup> In this context, the addition of mold, which is both organic and mineral, and the use of live spores as an experimental material, undermine the concept of the simulacrum and efface the line between signifier and signified by focusing on the material's absolute, natural truth – the thing in itself.



Weinstein's correspondence with the artist Jerzy Michalowicz, which took place prior to the exhibition "Huleh Valley," centered on the liminal space between image and material. "How," Weinstein asked, "can one lie through the truth (of the material)? . . . and what does the material surface reveal about its interior (essence)?"<sup>23</sup> The use of steel wool enables Weinstein to create associations to dust, granular photography, rapid drawing, and even sprouting mold – that is, representations of spontaneous or organic actions – an effect that is in fact achieved in a painstaking artificial process. The steel wool also enables him to create an effect of fuzziness and fragmentation, or of what Weinstein calls "unshaven painting," which Michalowicz associates with that "large part in the history of modern art: molecularization, or atomization of the image – a process that began with the Impressionists and their concern with reflected light and its dispersion on different surfaces, continuing all the way to our age of pixels."<sup>24</sup> In the current project, this "atomization" of the image acquires additional significance, since in the organic process of decomposition, the spore colonies themselves construct the image. In other words, the mold is both the material and the embodiment of its decomposition.

#### The Thinking / Burning Man

The video work *Enlightenment* (2017),<sup>pp. X</sup> which is exhibited as part of this project, may shed light on some of the intentions and meanings embedded in the landscape *Moon over Ayalon Valley*, as well as on the entirety of Weinstein's project. This video focuses on an image of a human brain made of cotton wool – a schematic, horizontal section reminiscent of a spider web. Weinstein set fire to the cotton wool, which burns without being consumed as the flames spread to the lobes of the brain and lick its membranes. The work's title, which refers to an unexpectedly revealed insight, further engages with the miraculous disruption of the laws of nature. The fire transforms the brain into a painterly image in motion, calling to mind processes of rational cognition as well as of organic disruption and dissolution (for instance, in the case of Alzheimer's disease).

This image of the human brain on fire can also be interpreted as a formal expression of *Homo Sapiens Combustans*, or "Burning Man" – a term coined by the anthropologist Dan Rabinowitz. This term suggests a new sub-category of *homo sapiens* developed in the course of the Anthropocene (Epoch of Man), beginning with the Industrial Revolution. This term, Rabinowitz writes, "highlights the fact

23  
Gal Weinstein and Jerzy Michalowicz, "Weinstein & Michalowicz Building Materials: An E-Mail Conversation," in *Gal Weinstein: Huleh Valley* (exh. cat.), Tel Aviv: Helena Rubinstein Pavilion of Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2005, p. 125.

24  
*Ibid.*, p. 108.

25

For further discussion, see Prof. Dan Rabinowitz's blog "Homo Sapiens Combustans": <https://homocombustans.com/2009/10/19/homocombustans/>

that the Industrial Revolution was premised on a dramatic transformation of fire and its usage. After millennia of sporadic use of mainly living wood for fire, industrial civilization switched to the systematic, large-scale combustion of fossil fuel – coal, oil, gas. This change can no longer be described as a technical detail of the modern era. It is the technological practice that, more than any other, constructed the essence of modernity. And, as we are painfully discovering with our enhanced understanding of the climate crisis, it continues to define the interface between humanity and the life-supporting systems which it relies on, and which it so stubbornly attempts to annihilate.<sup>25</sup> In the current context, then, *Homo Sapiens Combustans* is not only depleting the Earth's reserves of fossil fuels, but is also involved in a continual process of self-destruction as he engages in a meaningless conflict over territory.

Gal Weinstein is not a video artist, but rather an artist whose point of departure is matter and its support. His few video works are thus an extension of his physical, stationary works, infused with the additional elements of movement and temporal duration. Much like the underlying principle in *Enlightenment*, the work *Ignition* (2008)<sup>pp. X</sup> is a video documentation of a forest fire moving through



*Ignition*, 2008, still from video (3:00 min.)  
הצתה, 2008, תצלום סטיל מתוך מתוך וידיאו (3:00 דק')

a crowded, granular drawing of a pine forest made of steel wool. This actual fire does not scorch the support or consume the paper, but rather spreads across its surface. In *Yafit and Snow* (2005),<sup>pp. X</sup> he introduced live dogs into the installation *Huleh Valley*, alluding to Joseph Beuys' well-known work *I Like America and America Likes Me* (1974); in *Vacuuming* (2002),<sup>pp. X</sup> Weinstein documented himself vacuuming dust from the carpets representing agricultural plots in *Jezreel Valley*; and in *Twister* (2013),<sup>pp. X</sup> he captured a tornado storm that he created in his studio using an electric screwdriver, which caused a cloud of wool to rise upwards in a circular motion, gradually detaching itself from the surface to which it was glued. In all of these works, including *Enlightenment*, the temporal action is assimilated into an existing work, so that the gap between reality and art, nature and artifice, the real and the imagined, is once again blurred.

26  
Weinstein and Michalowicz,  
p. 120.

#### Between Decoration and Nostalgia: The Backwards Tactic

Visible beneath the patches of mold in *Persistent, Durable, and Invisible*, especially on the right wall,<sup>pp. X</sup> are vestiges of ornamental decoration resembling the remains of a fresco, which are reminiscent of the decorative elements in Weinstein's early window work *Untitled* (2001, San Francisco Institute of Art).<sup>pp. X</sup> Ornamentation, or what Weinstein prefers to call "decoration," plays a central role in his work, since "the term 'decoration' encompasses ornament as well as curtains, wallpaper, posters that double as wallpaper, carpets, parquet floors, porcelain dolls, linoleum, or sloping red roofs (which have no functional purpose in the hot, dry Israeli climate). These materials all serve as different coverings or coatings, each constituting a kind of architectural attire with low self-esteem ('cheap' would be a more exact term)."<sup>26</sup> In this context, one should note that questions concerning ornamentation and beauty were never central to Israeli society, which upheld the values of austerity and restraint and celebrated the use of simple, humble materials. The legacy of the pioneering generations shaped an ethical-cultural code that promoted modesty and visual poverty over bourgeois opulence. In this context, it is interesting to note the affinity that Weinstein draws between nostalgia and decoration: "Both try to create to beauty vis-à-vis something called 'reality': the former by shaping memory, the latter through the design of external space. Nostalgia designs the past, while decoration designs the surfaces. Yet both are facades: the rational for their presence is the need to render something bearable. And just as in

27  
*Ibid.*, p. 119.

28  
For further discussion of the affinity between collective nostalgia and national identity, see Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, New York: Basic Books, 2002.

design, so in nostalgia: there are simplistic (easily recognizable) strategies, and there are more sophisticated ones.<sup>27</sup>

This link between decoration and nostalgia is also present in the current project, where the traces of ornamentation on the entrance floor can be related to the landscapes etched into Israeli consciousness. Both *Jezreel Valley in the Dark* and *Marble Sun* explore the idea of nostalgia (the decoration of the past) and the longing for "those good old days." In this context, the most readily available solution for contending with the tyranny of time and with thoughts about the future appears to be wallowing in the swamp of nostalgia, which is always fed by the past. This cultural obsession with nostalgia is rampant in Israeli society, bespeaking anxiety about a hopeless future.<sup>28</sup>

The concern with this notion of an ornamental façade was further distilled in Weinstein's latest exhibition, "Backwards" (2016, Gordon Gallery, Tel Aviv), pp. X-X where he engaged with the commercial aesthetic of the carpet and home-design stores located in the vicinity of the gallery. This exhibition was based on images and materials from Weinstein's artistic biography. The items on display echoed earlier carpet works and floor installations, exhibited this time as samples and



*Untitled* (details), 2001, steel wool on glass (right), silicon (left), 400x250, San Francisco Art Institute  
ללא כותרת (פרטים), 2001, צמר פלדה על זכוכית (מימין), סיליקון (משמאל), 400x250, המכון לאמנות סן פרנסיסקו

catalogues available for client selection, and thus emphasizing critical clichés such as "self-recycling." Engaging in a so-called "backwards" strategy, Weinstein restored these cheap materials to their original function, thus underscoring their commercial aspects and the "commercial" dimension of his oeuvre: The landscape in *Jezreel Valley*, whose puzzle-like pieces were originally composed of cheap office carpeting, was recreated in this exhibition in a bold palette on entire carpets, which were rolled and piled up in a "stock room" in the gallery's basement, or hung as samples to be leafed through like those in a home-design catalogue. In another gallery space, the MDF surfaces previously used to simulate the cracked surface of the Huleh Valley were restored to their original function as carpentry material for stylized kitchen cabinets.

#### An Indifferent Rhetoric of Self-Destruction

Located on the top floor of the pavilion, from which one can observe the landscape of *Jezreel Valley in the Dark*, is the sculptural work *EIAI*.<sup>pp.X-X</sup> We seem to have arrived at a missile or satellite launch pad moments after takeoff. The bursts of fire and smoke made of ethereal Acrilan and bits of felt envelop a diagonal construction that rises upwards. This work builds directly on Weinstein's wax and Acrilan installation *Fire Tire* (2011, Kunsthalle Basel and the Thessaloniki Biennale),<sup>pp.X-X</sup> and may similarly be interpreted along two parallel axes: a local one and a universal one. In an Israeli context, the burning tire was read as a symbol of the Intifada, whereas in a global context it appeared as a symbol of social protest. In the same manner, the trail left by the soaring missiles can be interpreted in an Israeli context as an aggressive expression reflective of the political conflict in the Middle East, while in a universal context it may be read as a general expression of military violence and of the destructive potential of human actions anywhere upon the Earth. Nevertheless, the specific location and concreteness of this sculptural image positions this part of the installation as an implicit answer to the series of questions provoked by one's experience on the two lower levels: what is the nature of the catastrophe that led to the abandonment of this site? Is there a connection between the mold and putrefaction pervading the lower levels and the presence of the missiles on the upper level? The work does not offer explicit answers, yet it is obvious that the destructive process in question is manmade.

The pavilion's upper level thus underscores Weinstein's ongoing preoccupation with freezing time, representing a material, sculptural attempt to arrest time in

the aftermath of a physical event characterized by rapid movement and change (columns of fire and smoke). As in earlier works, where Weinstein gave material form to formless images (fire, clouds of dust, a tornado storm), here too he stretches an event that took place in the flash of a second into the slow tempo of a work that extends over many days and months. Moreover, the use of simple materials lacking any unique expressive characteristics, and the powerful erection created by the departing missiles (which contrasts with the signs of destruction on the ground), enhance the gap between the dramatically charged image and the emotionally barren, Sisyphean process of executing the work. By means of this strategy, Weinstein works to divert attention from the symbolic political meaning of the image to its visual presence, tactility, and material sensuality, or, as he puts it, "to convert the symbolic into the concrete."

For Weinstein, the essence of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be metaphorically read through the distinction between the organic and the artificial, since the core of this conflict revolves around the question of authentic belonging: which of the two peoples is organically rooted in the land, and which is the foreign implant? In this sense, the entire project "Sun Stand Still" may be read as a metaphor for this core question, due to its concern with the deceptive vacillation between organic and artificial elements, the real and its simulacra – real mold growing in real time and artificial, cultivated, domesticated mold that was glued to panels and flown from Tel Aviv to Venice, where it takes on the false appearance of real mold.

Like this project in its entirety, *EI AI* is related to Weinstein's ongoing preoccupation with the representation of both natural and manmade disasters – dramatic and chaotic phenomena that unfold rapidly in time. The post-apocalyptic mold and the columns of fire and smoke following the launch join a long series of natural phenomena and catastrophes to which Weinstein has attended in the past: tsunami waves, explosions, fires, tornadoes, earthquakes. These works all manifest Weinstein's strategy of distancing, which expresses irony concerning the artistic attempt to domesticate and engineer nature, and thus to project a sense of feigned objectivity or indifference in relation to such a charged subject. This strategy is realized in two ways: through the choice to represent schematic-scientific images of disasters (diagrams, graphs, and sections), and through an obsessive, labor-intensive process.

In early works such as *Blaster*<sup>pp. X-X</sup> or *Space Harrier* (2002, Ostia excavations, Rome),<sup>pp. X-X</sup> for instance, Weinstein transformed the dramatic moment of the explosion into a schematic, pop-inspired image in the style of Roy Lichtenstein,

which appeared on flat, colorful ceramic tiles partially sunk into the earth. *Tsunami and Koh Phi Phi* (2006, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem)<sup>pp. X-X</sup> was based on a diagram published in a newspaper following the lethal tsunami that hit the shores of Thailand in 2004: a wave made of bluish Perspex crashed on land made of MDF sheets and decorated with four green plastic palm trees. *Examples of Fractures* (2006, Petach Tikva Museum of Art, Israel)<sup>pp. X-X</sup> was based on the diagram of an elevation from a didactic textbook featuring different types of fissures in the Earth's crust following an earthquake. In this work, Weinstein placed the figure of a golf player on a synthetic lawn above fissured geological layers of rock, which were translated into a minimalist sculptural language by using various types of industrial wood. Finally, *Tremors* (2007, Huarte Contemporary Art Center, Spain)<sup>pp. X-X</sup> was a representation of a seismographic diagram made of PVC that extended over 40 meters – a hybrid conflation of an earthquake and the tsunami in Thailand.

The second tactic of distancing in "Sun Stand Still" is the obsessive-laborious work process. As previously noted, in this project, the surfaces and underground layers present in earlier works have been supplemented by the steel-wool



*Space Harrier*, 2002, ceramic tiles, 250x230, Ostia excavations, Rome  
*Space Harrier*, 2002, אריחי קרמיקה, 250x230, חפירות אוסטיה, רומא

29

Sigmund Freud, "Obsessive Acts and Religious Practices" (1907), in *Collected Papers*, New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1959, Vol. 3. 21. For a clinical definition from the field of psychotherapy, see also Harold I. Kaplan and Benjamin J. Sadock, *Synopsis of Psychiatry: Behavioral Sciences, Clinical Psychiatry*, Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1998, Chapter 18.5: "Anxiety Disorders," pp. 326–327.

coating, which was manually glued over hundreds of panels to simulate patches of mold. As was the case in the series "Dust Clouds" and "Typhoon" (2007),<sup>pp. X-X</sup> here too the labor-intensive process creates an illusion of control over a chaotic situation. In his article "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices," Sigmund Freud argued that such actions were designed to diminish the anxiety provoked by the obsession, and that they reveal a desperate attempt to achieve even a semblance of control over an uncontrollable world.<sup>29</sup> In the case of the typhoons and clouds of dust, the speed of the event as experienced in nature was replaced by a slow, laborious process in an absurd tribute to the human effort to gain understanding and control. On the ground level of the pavilion in Venice, meanwhile, the slow process of gluing the steel wool seems to compete with the slow growth process of the mold spores. This tension between chaos and order, which is achieved through the drama-avoiding detour created by Weinstein, casts an ironic light on the familiar Romantic discourse concerning the relations between humanity, culture, and nature.

Images of disaster and catastrophe are prevalent in contemporary art. The best-known precedent to such images is Andy Warhol's "Disasters" series from



*Tremors*, 2007, PVC, 35x600, Huarte Contemporary Art Center, Spain  
רעידות, 2007, PVC, 35x600, המרכז לאמנות עכשווית חוארטה, ספרד



the 1960s, which captured the mutation in media representations of death during that time. "Sun Stand Still" calls to mind other mega-projects that dealt with apocalyptic images of destruction and mourning. The transformation of a national pavilion and the undermining of its neutrality as an exhibition space may be related to Hans Haacke's work *Germania* (1993), for which he uprooted the marble floor of the German Pavilion at the Venice Biennale – pointing back to the Nazi history of the building, which was erected in 1938 under the command of Joseph Goebbels. Both Weinstein and Haacke's works are pervaded by a deep sense of destruction, while framing the exhibition space as a symbolic site whose history becomes inseparable from the artwork. Joseph Beuys' *The End of the Twentieth Century* (1983–1985), an installation composed of 44 marked basalt rocks, which was first installed at the National Gallery of Modern Art in Munich, is also relevant to Weinstein's work. This work grew out of Beuys' obsessive concern with disasters and images of death following his survival of a plane crash while serving in Crimea during the Second World War. The basalt rocks scattered throughout the museum space resembled the archeological findings of a post-apocalyptic culture, and the work's title led



From the series "Typhoon," 2007, steel wool on paper, 60x60 each  
מתוך הסדרה "טייפון", 2007, צמר פלדה על נייר, 60x60 ב"א

30

It seems to be no coincidence that these historical precedents all refer back to Germany and to the Holocaust, giving expression to themes pervading Israeli culture's collective unconscious.

31

Sigmund Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (trans. and ed. James Strachey), London: The Hogarth Press, Vol. 14, p. 243–246.

the viewer on a journey between past and future. Anselm Kiefer's *Painting of the Scorched Earth* (1974) – vast images of burnt forests and desert expanses – may also call to mind, if only superficially, certain parts of "Sun Stand Still." The scorched clods of earth, the felled trees, and the murky, furnace-like palette of Kiefer's work are pervaded by an atmosphere of lamentation following destruction by a massive fire, volcanic eruption, or nuclear explosion.<sup>30</sup> Yet the fundamental difference between these works and "Sun Stand Still" lies in Weinstein's rhetoric of indifference – in the total absence of any expressive tremor, which in this sense places him closer to Warhol.

### Melancholy, or an Ecological-Apocalyptic Vision

Weinstein's works refuse to succumb to a narrow political interpretation, and what may initially appear as political is not always meant to be so. Yet in the context of representing Israel at the Venice Biennale, and in the political climate created by 50 years of Israeli occupation, it seems impossible to ignore this project's political resonance. The aggressive, anxiety-provoking presence of the missiles, the colonies of mold, and the images of decline and neglect may all be read as metaphors for the melancholy of a shattered vision and of missed opportunities, the anxiety of the end, and premonitions of disaster and destruction. "Sun Stand Still" may also be interpreted as a response to the pervasive sense of uncertainty and crisis experienced by the entire world in recent years: a war-torn Middle East, waves of immigration that threaten the unity of Europe, the Brexit in Britain, and the rise of extreme right-wing parties in many countries.

In his article "Mourning and Melancholia," Freud distinguished between the states of melancholia and mourning, which both involve deep sorrow and a turning away from reality. Mourning, however, is a conscious response to something, whereas melancholia is defined by a loss that cannot be physically perceived, and by a lowering of self-regard that may lead to self-destruction.<sup>31</sup> "Sun Stand Still" seems to be a combination of both states. The project's extension over the pavilion's three levels creates a narrative that may be interpreted as a melancholic-poetic allegory of the Israeli story – one composed of miraculous acts and moments of enlightenment as well as neglect and destruction; a story vacillating between a megalomaniac soaring to great heights and a resounding crash. The divine miracle in the Ayalon Valley – a mythical, grandiose act resulting in cruelty – is related here to the Zionist project of conquering a

seemingly barren wilderness, alongside expressions of technological progress (missiles) and the consumption of an organic substance (mold agriculture). The protagonist of this story is time, engaged in a battle to defeat itself.

\* \* \*

What begins as an expression of hubris through omnipotent fantasies to control the world order and master natural forces ends with anxiety and an existential threat; in between these fantasies and their demise lies the "mold agriculture" nourished by the micro-organisms of Venice, which continue to grow slowly and persistently. These tiny organisms, which exist far from the greatness of the biblical miracle or the destructive power of missile technology, will end by consuming everything. In this spirit, the installation as a whole may be severed from its ties to the Middle East and read as an ecological-apocalyptic vision, challenging the limits of human hubris in the enterprise of civilization.