Bypassing Abstraction:

Hidden Gems from the Yossi and Daniela Lipschitz Collection

THE OPEN UNIVERSITY OF ISRAEL

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From Private to Public Space:
Hidden Gems from Four Private Collections of Israeli Art[1]

In 1948, art critic Eugene Kolb described the Israeli public's attitude towards art:

> The active role that the public takes in all that is emerging in the [Israeli] artistic circles is comparatively small and weak. It seems that the general public lacks a broad base for the arts and so do the main national institutions. This is what I have observed: the most diligent attendees at art exhibitions are the artists themselves! [...] There are many people [...] are they withdrawn from the living art?[2]

He later described the status of artists in Israeli society:

> Those [within Israeli society] do not view the plastic arts as an essential factor, such as, for example, literature, theater or music, and do not attempt to bring the two fronts closer: that of the artist and that of the audience [...] and in this atmosphere the 'snobbery', from which artists can generate economic or commercial profit, does not occur. Additionally, artists do not receive the respect they deserve. At any rate, in this country I have never seen that a certain painter, for example, was invited to an official reception.[3]

The field of Israeli art has undergone many changes since Kolb publicized his thoughts, which reflected his socialist view that the acquisition and collection of artwork was "snobbery." But the derogatory term also reflects his discernment that without the economic aspect, art cannot exist. Purchasing and collecting artwork nowadays may reflect prestige, but it is no longer viewed as "snobbery," as it was in the late 1940s.

Since the 1930s, several prominent collectors whose collections have included international art, have resided in Israel. Dr. Karl Schwarz, an expert in prints, and the first director of the

1 With thanks to Inbal Zultan=Mishory for the English translation of the title.
2 Eugene Kolb, "Heychan anu omdim" (Where do we stand), *Itim*, 14.9.1947, 6.
3 Ibid.

Tel Aviv Museum, possessed a vast collection of expressionist paintings and prints, which he brought to Jewish Palestine from Germany and ultimately sold to the museum. Paintings and sculptures representing the best of twentieth-century modern art were owned by private collectors in Jerusalem, Haifa and Tel Aviv. The art collection of Oscar Fisher, for example, boasted paintings by James Ensor, van Donegen, Vlaminq, Alfred Sissley, Renoir, Chagall, Reuven Rubin, Zadkine, Signac, Rodin, Meunier, and others. Gustav Schocken, a Jerusalemite, was a well-known collector, as was Dr. Hamitzer in Haifa. One of the innovations introduced by Mordechai Narkiss, director of the Bezalel Museum in Jerusalem in the 1940s was the "exhibit of the month": Private collectors would lend the museum a painting or sculpture from their collections, to be displayed in the museum for a month, alongside explanatory texts. Over the years, collectors of international art were joined by those dedicating their collections to Israeli art. These were mostly businessmen with personal tastes, often assisted by professional consultants who made recommendations as to which works to acquire.

By viewing the diversity of Israeli collections from their early stages to later years, one can see how the development of the collections mirrored the history of Israeli art. There is no doubt that the lens through which collectors view the works they have acquired is subjective. Their view is personal, discriminating, and full of subtleties. In many ways, these same qualities also define museum curators, since the latter also form their collections by way of discerning subtleties, and they are also never entirely objective. However, whereas museum curators are influenced by political considerations, pressure from museum trustees, and financial limitations, private collectors may choose and purchase artwork based on personal considerations alone.

The Yossi and Daniela Lipschitz Collection

Yossi Lipschitz, a Tel Aviv-born Israeli art collector, was introduced to the realm of art collecting through his business as an importer of aircraft and vehicle refueling equipment. Upon establishing his first office in Tel Aviv, his architect recommended that he decorate the interior with artwork. Based on the recommendation of a close friend, Yossi and Daniela traveled to Jerusalem, where they met with the artist Ivan Schwebel and viewed his artwork (plate 11 in the color section). This was their first foray into the world of Israeli art. Thereafter, they

continued their personal meetings with artists; visiting studios and purchasing artwork for their collection. In addition to purchasing directly from the artists, they continued acquiring pieces in auctions; a principal venue for obtaining artwork, particularly that of past artists.

After forming the initial basis of a collection, many collectors – Lipschitz included – ask themselves, "what am I actually collecting?" In other words, have they established criteria or principles which will guide them through the collection process? Consciously, and often subconsciously as well, these criteria and common denominators are born out of the personal tastes and preferences of the collectors, thus forming the unique character of each collection. Yossi and Daniela Lipschitz's collection is dedicated to three main groups of artwork:

- Works by teachers at Bezalel and their contemporaries
- Paintings and drawings by the master craftsman Shalom (Siegfried) Sebba
- Painting through direct observation of nature by contemporary Israeli artists

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Works by teachers at Bezalel and their contemporaries The artwork of 1920s artists Ze'ev Raban (1890-1970), Meir Gur-Aryeh (1891-1951), Shmuel Haruvi (1897-1965), and Aharon Shaul Shur (1864-1945), reflect a type of art that was created by the teachers at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem, founded by Boris Schatz in 1906. Schatz and his teaching staff aspired to create "Hebrew art," whose uniqueness would be manifested by its creation on Israeli soil, therefore distinguishing it from other Jewish art of the period that was created in the Jewish Diaspora.

Ze'ev Raban was Schatz's partner in one of the initiatives at Bezalel – he made sketches for craft works that were created in the workshop for industrial art. Many of his sketches were also used in the ceramics department. Schatz convinced the first mayor of Tel Aviv to use ceramic tiles produced by Bezalel to mark the street names of the city. In addition, ceramic tiles created in the workshop adorned the Tel Aviv homes of the period, giving them, as Schatz had envisioned, a "Hebrew" look.

The Yaakov and Yitzhak Lederberg Building, located at the intersection of Allenby Street and Rothschild Boulevard in Tel Aviv, was designed by architect Joseph Berlin (1925). The three decorative ceramic tiles which connect the lower and upper windows of the building were created in the ceramics department of Bezalel under the direction of Jacob Eisenberg, using Ze'ev Raban's drawings. *Shepherd*, Raban's sketch, is included in the Yossi and Daniela Lipschitz collection (plate 2 in the color section). Schatz's goal was realized by the home owners and architect: The ceramic embellishments *Shepherd*, *Sowing in Tears* (*Hazorim B'dima)*, and *Reaping in Joy* (*B'rina Yiktzoru*) which appear on the building's facade depict farmers in the Land of Israel, endowing the building with a "Hebrew" appearance and character.

Outlining Raban's sketch is a frame made out of pomegranates intertwined in a yellow weave. A shepherd plays his flute alongside his cattle in the background frame, while behind him grows a cypress tree in front of a hill. The image is viewed through a curved arc format in the shape of a keyhole, which is a common motif within Islamic art. The uniqueness of this work within the collection lies in its creation process, which began in the artist's workshop and was then transferred to the manufacturing workshop. Thanks to the materials from which it was produced, the ceramic ornament's colors are still vibrant, over eighty years since being produced.

A different sketch by Raban features an imaginary panoramic view of a Tel Aviv street (plate 1 in the color section). In 1923, Raban published *The Land of Israel, Ten Pictures*, a printed edition of ten watercolor drawings. These panoramic views, in decorative frames, link visual themes and narratives from the Bible and from Jewish history related to the sites. In addition to the cities of Safed, Tiberias, Hebron, and Jerusalem, Raban included Rachel's Tomb, the Western Wall, and more sites. The frame style which surrounds the panoramic view of the street in *Tel Aviv* is similar in format to the frames which surround the sites included in his print edition. His apparent intention was to include a depiction of the first Hebrew city, a secular city having no connection to traditional Jewish history or biblical themes. The panoramic view of the Tel Aviv street bears no resemblance, either to the reality of today, or to the period in which it was created. This is due to the fact that the sea – an essential component in every depiction of Tel Aviv, which appears in the upper part of the drawing – is not actually located at

the top of Allenby street, where the Great Synagogue is found (identified in the drawing by its large dome), but rather down the street. Another structure included by Raban on the left side of the drawing may be Beit Bialik, the home (or rather, the architectural design of the house) of Hebrew Poet laureate H. N. Bialik, which in reality is located far from the Great Synagogue.

Ultimately, the artist's (or publisher's) decision not to include this depiction of Tel Aviv in the series *The Land of Israel, Ten Pictures,* provides the *Tel Aviv* sketch with a uniqueness and rareness which conveys a great deal about the artist's creative process and the perception of Zionism during the period in which it was created.

Meir Gur-Aryeh, known for his silhouette drawings, in which he immortalized the lives of the pioneers during the 1920s, is represented in the collection by *Portrait of Ze'ev Raban*, who was his colleague at Bezalel (plate 3 in the color section). Gur-Aryeh surprises us in this drawing with his impressionist style, distinguished by the spontaneous, free, and flowing way in which he captures a young Raban in action.

Paintings and drawings by the master craftsman Shalom (Siegfried) Sebba

The expression "artists' artist" is a phrase which suggests a craftsman, whose excellence can only be understood by his fellow professionals. An "artists' artist" is a virtuoso, a person devoted to his principles, who does not accept compromise and does not bend to what is "accepted" in attempting to please others. He is therefore excluded from the ranks of the "popular," according to the artistic consensus, and his artwork rarely gains the broad public exposure usually granted by the establishment to those conforming to the norm.

One of the most talented artists who lived and worked in Israel, and who did not bend to the trend of abstraction which was dominating the local art scene, was Shalom (Siegfried) Sebba (1897-1975). The collection of Yossi and Daniela Lipschitz contains a group of exemplary Sebba drawings from his *Elements* series from the 1960s, as well as drawings that clearly show the artist's personal interpretation of biblical characters.

Sebba's early style, prior to his arrival in Jewish Palestine from Germany, had an artistic bond with a major art movement that flourished in Germany during the 1920s. "*Neue Sachlichkeit*" ("New Objectivity"), otherwise known as "*Magischer Realismus*" ('Magic Realism"), was an artistic genre which sought maximum objectivity, through which artists depicted direct and immediate descriptions of their daily existence. The still-life genre suited the artistic vision of these artists, who studied and described reality coolly and serenely. To the objects commonly found in still-life paintings, they added technical devices and mechanisms, toys, and machinery, as well as simple modern objects, including matches and cardboard boxes. The artists tried to depict the objects in their paintings using an almost photographic technique, but they seem to go through a process of "cleansing"; their look is both natural and supernatural, mainly due to the distortion of perspective in the paintings in which they were placed.

In the 1960s, Shalom Sebba was preoccupied with objects, which he presented in his *Elements* series. The series was first exhibited at the Tel Aviv Museum in 1961[4]. Sebba drew, among

4 Gideon Ofrat, "Objectivity or the Rescue Operation of Shalom Sebba (1960-1963)," in *Shalom Sebba, Monograph,* Museum of Art, Ein Harod, Tefen Open Museum, 1994, 106.

other things, representations of food items, including milk, wine, dark and white bread, fish, grapes, and pomegranates. In another group of the *Elements* series, he depicted materials such as paper, glass, metal, copper, wood, and stone. Sebba painted every picture dozens of times, perfected them, and delved into their essence, presenting them, as Galia Bar Or describes:

> […] as products that were cast into a mold (metal), regularly sawed (wood), carved by a pattern (stone) and the liquid conforming to the shape of the container (milk, wine). The *Elements*, as told by Sebba through his paintings, were designed by humans, serve human needs and are formed to fit his needs. These are domesticated factors, and because they are domesticated factors, they require an interior space and they are presented according to the traditional principles which characterize the still life genre. [5]

In Sebba's *Preparatory Sketch for* "*Milk*" (plate 13 in the color section) a wide-mouthed bottle stands on the floor in the corner of the room. A stain of spilled milk marks the blue and white tiled floor. A blue shadow is cast by the bottle onto the wall, which is painted a complementary color of orange-beige. The shadow conveys the volume of the bottle, which, in the painting, is naturally completely flat. *Milk* reminds us more of paintings by Stuart Davis, rather than the Magischer Realismus style. But while Davis was more interested in the industrial, technological, and modern aspects of objects, Sebba focused on their basic and primary patterns. It is interesting to note that Sebba's paintings were (apparently deliberately) historically inaccurate, since in the 1960s, in Israel, as in the entire Western world, the milkman had already ceased to exist. The milk bottles placed on customers' doorsteps had disappeared by then, replaced instead by plastic or cardboard industrial packaging. The milk bottle in Sebba's painting, although once iconic, is now somewhat anachronistic. Sebba's entire *Elements* series has no connection with industrial reality; perhaps it laments a forgotten world.

Sebba's mission in the *Elements* series was, according to Gideon Ofrat, to merge modernity with reality. The food items he depicts in *Wine* and *Grapes* imply an absent group of diners, as

5 Galia Bar Or, "The Blind Horse," in Shalom *Sebba, Monograph*.

they are presented during mealtime[6] or after, according to the traditional "set table" classical still-life motif.

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Another series of paintings by Sebba, titled *Archeology*, are also connected with *Elements*. Here, too, he deals with objects which are remnants of the past: classical column fragments, capitals, and a monumental Roman sculpture. In the *Archeology* series, scholar Karlheinz Gabler observes works directing our attention to Caesarea, Herod's city. Sebba depicts these ruins on a Mediterranean background, alluded to in the drawings with blue triangle-shaped areas. The marble relics are worn and weathered. Gabler describes *Archeology* (plate 12 in the color section) as "a crimson-red figure, placed before the Byzantine staircase."[7]

This "crimson-red figure" is headless; Sebba portrays it from behind, viewing it from the back. This is a Roman sculpture of the Emperor Hadrian[8], made of pink-crimson granite. There is no doubt that Sebba was well aware of the universal and Jewish perspectives associated with the character of this emperor. It is not by chance that he includes the image of this specific statue in his drawing, for it is not merely an archeological artifact. Emperor Hadrian is considered to be the third among the five "good" Roman emperors; he was known for his support of cultural and artistic enterprises, and his reign was one of the most prosperous (Hadrian was one of the few Roman emperors who was not murdered). However, In the Jewish context, Hadrian is viewed in a negative light, due to his central role in suppressing the Bar Kochba rebellion, and due to the decrees he imposed on the residents of Judea known as "Hadrian's decrees."

The vantage point in Sebba's drawing - a significant factor in all of his works – places the viewer behind the statue. If his head had been on his shoulders, we would notice his gaze directed towards the blue sea. From a local beach covered in relics of the past, together with the statue, Sebba's gaze and ours are directed over the sea, to Europe.

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6 Ofrat, *ibid*.

7 Karlheinz Gabler, *Sebba, Maler und Werkmann*, Kassel, Thiele & Schwarz Verlag, 1981, translated into Hebrew in *Shalom Sebba, Monograph*, 119.

8 Publius Aelius Traianus Hadrianus, 76-138.

As noted above, Sebba's other works in the Yossi and Daniela Lipschitz Collection relate to biblical figures. One of the most impressive drawings, despite its small dimensions, is *Preparatory Sketch for "The Binding of Isaac."* The legend of the binding of Isaac, which appears in Genesis, chapter 22, tells the story of God's test of Abraham's loyalty, in which he commands Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Six characters are cast in this biblical narrative: Abraham, Isaac, two servants accompanying them, an angel, and a ram. (Sarah, Isaac's mother, remained behind and is not present during the binding of Isaac). The list of characters described here is crucial to understanding the message that the visual depiction is attempting to convey.

Throughout the history of art, artists traditionally related to the story of the binding of Isaac by selecting one moment from the narrative:

- Abraham and Isaac before their arrival at Mount Moriah, where Abraham builds an altar
- Abraham preparing the altar on which he will sacrifice his son
- Psychological approaches, depicting the father-son relationship before and during the actual act of binding, and after the appearance of the angel
- The dramatic moment in which the angel emerges from heaven and commands Abraham "do not lay your hand upon the boy," thus resolving the tension in the story

In Sebba's series of drawings devoted to biblical themes, the figures are most often presented with extreme foreshortening, directing our vantage point from the bottom-up. This is the case in *Preparatory Sketch for "The Binding of Isaac*," Where we, the viewers, are positioned downhill from where Abraham builds the altar. We view Abraham and Isaac from a distance, and see them "close" to us, as our field of vision is directed through them towards the sky. Abraham is depicted with his body bent backwards, and therefore the leg which is closer to us looks enormous, and his head, located further from the viewer's position, appears small. His hand, which due to the acute foreshortening, appears outsized, bends Isaac's head almost violently. Isaac is also depicted with exaggerated foreshortening - his torso is revealed and that his hands appear to be tied behind his back.

Sebba presents us with a dramatic moment: the moment in which the angel, with only his forehead appearing through the cloud, snatches the knife from Abraham's hand. In the foreground, one can see the back of what appears to be a small lamb, which, in Sebba's version, replaces the biblical ram. This is the depiction of the "resolution," Isaac's redemption from his unresolved fate.

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Sebba utilized his very unique biblical exegesis to submit a design proposal for the gravesite of Chaim Weizmann, the first president of Israel, who died in 1952. He designed a structure[9] with stained glass windows, which presented the twelve sons of Jacob, who became the twelve tribes of Israel. The sketches for the windows are found in the Yossi and Daniela Lipschitz Collection; they are rare pieces through which we can fathom the essence of Sebba's in-depth research, which he conducted for each public project he planned.

In a letter he wrote to a friend, Sebba described his research prior to creating the sketches of the twelve tribes. First, he examined the blessing Jacob gave to his twelve sons (Genesis 49). Sebba wrote: "although this blessing is difficult to decipher, particularly because it is short, and due to its symbolic descriptions, "between the lines," however, one can definitely feel the merciless ruling given."[10] He continued to read later chapters in the Bible as well, in which he found detailed descriptions of some of Jacob's sons[11], based on which, he created a kind of "psychological mapping" of each character. He then qualified his work with the following statement:

9 Although we are not in possession of the architectural sketches which Sebba most likely created for the structure, we can presume, based on his in-depth understanding of artistic symbolism, that the planned structure would have been based on a circular or polygonal design (most likely hexagonal, fitting the 12 characters of Jacob's sons), which are architectural forms that are characteristic of mausoleum structures.

10 Shalom Sebba in a letter to a friend, as quoted in Gideon Ofrat, *Shalom Sebba, Monograph*, 93.

11 Some of the events which Sebba discovered in the lives of the twelve sons of Jacob : Reuben's gift to his mother, Reuben's divorce from his wife, Simon and Levi's betrayal in Shechem, Reuben and Judah scheming against Joseph, Judah's behavior towards Tamar, and more.

> [...] all of these events, described in the later books of the Torah, do not specifically apply to Jacob's blessing, which I utilized. Only on this basis was I able to achieve emotions and a combination of traits and characteristics, through which I was able to slowly uncover the tangible description of every personality. This is also the reason that they are depicted subjectively.[12]

Sebba's decision to present the twelve tribes of Israel as human figures is revolutionary and innovative, since they were traditionally represented by Jewish artists through iconic symbols and emblems. This tradition was developed, particularly by German Jewry during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, when representations of the twelve tribes in relief decorated the monumental bronze doors of synagogues.

This tradition also reached Jewish Palestine. Ze'ev Raban designed the metal entrance gates for the Bikur Holim hospital in Jerusalem, which are embossed with the emblems of the tribes, and in 1933 he created a drawing for stained-glass windows intended for a synagogue. In Bialik House in Tel Aviv, symbols representing the twelve tribes are incorporated into ceramic tiles which adorn the columns of the building's lobby. The Bezalel ceramics department was also responsible for the tribe motifs on the ceramic tiles that appear on the facade of Tel Aviv's Moshav Zekenim Synagogue.

In the face of this longstanding tradition, Shalom Sebba chose to expand, deepen and give new conceptual insights into the way the twelve tribes were represented, based on the "psychological mapping" which he created for each of the twelve sons of Jacob. After summarizing the characteristics of each one, he then created dozens of drawings based on each. He translated the verbal list of character traits and psychological insights into visual facial expressions, postures, body language, costumes and accessories.[13]

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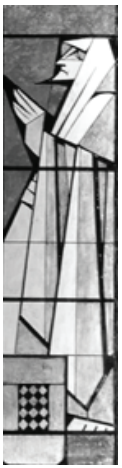
12 Shalom Sebba in a letter to a friend, *ibid*.

13 The following paragraphs list Sebba's 'psychological mappings' in quotations and subsequently my descriptions of each of his sketches.

Issachar: "A slave for rent. Mentally lazy, devoid of ambition and initiative, timid, submissive, ascetic. Association: violence, submission." Sebba depicts Issachar as dancing, his body twisted to the right. His right hand clutches his waist, and left hand is aloft, fingers open, revealing only his eyes, and obscuring the lower part of his face. Issachar is bare-chested and he wears a skirt-like garment tied with a sash around his waist, from which dangle two ribbons ending in tassels. The traditional emblem, at the bottom of the picture: a donkey.

Simon: "Law enforcer, violent, short-tempered, wild, ascetic, indecisive, bending to Levi's will. Association: blood." Simon's hands grip an axe, on which he leans his weight, while his head tilts toward his left shoulder. His emblem is a fort.

Judah: "The 'knight', brave of heart, decisive, self-assured, calm, benevolent, fair. He has the most noble character of all. He is worthy of confidence and recognition. Steel and scarlet." Judah wears a blue and white cloak. His hair is black, and his left hand grasps an unidentified object, which rests on his shoulder. He is presented in three-quarters view. His emblem is a lion.



Levi: "The Priest. Introspective, scheming, Simon's leader and his exploiter. Association: shadows, darkness." Levi appears as a white silhouette. He wears a head covering from which his face emerges, observing those around him. His hand is raised in a pose of blessing. His emblem is a priest's breastplate.

Zebulun: "The fisherman. Sturdy, clumsy, slow, measured, settled, taciturn. Association: water, smoke, tar." Zebulun is depicted as a determined man, his hands clutching a fishing net. His right hand is raised towards his left shoulder, clenched as he grips the net. His emblem is a ship with an 'Egyptian' sail.

Reuben: "The shepherd. The eldest son and heir, proud, self-aware, responsible, but also sensual, impulsive, big-hearted and weak of will." Reuben is shown in profile; both hands raised in supplication. A pleated garment hangs from his shoulder. The traditional symbols of Mandrakes have become, in Sebba's sketch, a pomegranate.

Benjamin: "The thief. Stubborn, vain, pleased with himself, arrogant; the spoiled youngest child, scornful. Association: threat". Benjamin has his back to us, but his face is turned, looking over his shoulder, and his glance meets ours. His face expresses concern – his eyebrows slant upwards. His left hand grips a sword. His right hand is placed on his hip in a posture of defiance. His emblem is a wolf.

Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh): "Children who are curious about life. The younger one is more beloved to Jacob. He stands in front and holds Joseph's bow. Association: Pink freshness, morning sun." A young man is holding a large bow. Behind him stands a figure who rests his hand affectionately on his brother's right shoulder. The emblem: head of ram or bull.

Naphtali: "Enthusiastic, content, and carefree. Mischievous, imaginative and inspiring, Combines gestures and words. A singer and dancer. Represents all that is related to muses. Association: gaiety, clarity." Naphtali is a young man wearing a type of Greek dress in a ceremonial dance pose. His open mouth indicates that perhaps a song is accompanying his dance. His right hand is raised with outstretched fingers, while his left hand faces downwards. His inner palm is revealed and his fingers are also posed as if in a dance of some kind. His emblem is a doe.

Asher: "The farmer. Diligent, measured, content with his lot. Appreciates the value of his work. Association: harvest, afternoon warmth." Asher is presented in profile, as a harvester. In his left hand he grasps a sheaf of grain, and in his right a sickle. His face is turned to the viewers. His head is covered and bowed. His emblem appears to be a jug; perhaps a jug of olive oil, since his traditional emblem is an olive tree.

Gad: "The soldier. The observant guard who watches over the border. Tense, flexible, sturdy. Association: desert, the setting sun." Gad is an observer; his right hand covers his forehead, casting a shadow over his eyes, in order to sharpen his vision, and his left hand holds a spear. His emblem: a tent.

Dan: "The judge. Authoritarian, tyrannical, arbitrary, critical, he disarms opposition, and is dialectic and sharp. Association: poison, bitterness." Dan bows his head towards his right shoulder. His hands are purposefully oriented: his right hand points downwards towards his emblem – two snakes –, and his left rests on his right shoulder, upon which rests his head.

יש מצב לקבל כאן?

Throughout the history of Jewish tradition, the twelve tribes of Israel symbolized the entire Jewish people; all of the features and the various human actions symbolize in a general and formal way the complexities of Jewish culture and society. Shalom Sebba added a human, secular dimension, allowing himself to work according to the centuries-old tradition yet to expand it into secular contemporary terms. His expression of opposing views, such as the characters of Benjamin and Judah – one "pleased with himself, arrogant, the spoiled youngest child" as compared to the other: "the most noble character of all" distinguish him from the preceding Jewish artists, who settled for traditional iconic depictions of the twelve tribes.

Sebba's goal in designing the gravesite for the first president of the State of Israel, was, apparently, to present the complexity of the new Israeli society, and thus to endow the institution of presidency with a sovereign aspect. Sebba's revolutionary ideas, however, were not accepted by the conservative public committee appointed for the design of the gravesite. Ultimately, after discussions and deliberations, the project was granted to sculptor Moshe Ziffer, who designed a standard and banal tombstone, devoid of any symbolic significance and meaningful expression.

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Painting through direct observation of nature by contemporary Israeli artists A significant portion of the Yossi and Daniela Lipschitz Collection is made up of contemporary paintings, defined, due to the lack of more precise terminology, by the all-encompassing term "Figurative realism." "Figurative realist" painting is a contemporary phenomenon in the global, as well as Israeli, art scene, in which painters examine reality and depict it using classical painting techniques.

Since the beginning of the modern era, during the fifteenth-century Renaissance, artists sought adequate ways to candidly represent reality. Since the late-nineteenth century and throughout the twentieth century, painters diverged, in certain situations, from the desire to imitate reality, yet in other cases they looked for modern, contemporary methods of representing reality in their art. Every artistic attempt differed from the next, due to the emphasis placed on one (or more) formal elements: line, shape, color, texture, and convincing illusory space.

A significant turning point in the desire to enhance the illusion of reality occurred in the mid-nineteenth century, thanks to the publication of research in the field of optics on the ways in which our eyes perceive color.[14] The painters' affinity to color theories inspired a modern, contemporary depiction of light in painting. In Italy, at that time, a group of artists known as Macchiaioli (from the Italian "macchia", meaning "stain") would paint in the open air in order to create compelling and moving depictions of light in nature.[15] The Macchiaioli painters advocated the use of areas of light and shade in a painting, created by using patches of color, as the most significant components of modern painting. Unlike the French impressionist painters, they did not base their painting on the complete color spectrum, and unlike the well-known painter Claude Monet, they did not paint the entire picture outdoors; instead, they would create quick sketches outdoors and return to complete the work inside their studios.

In the United States, in the early twentieth century, well-known American artists continued the search for a truthful representation of reality, without sacrificing their personal points of view. Israel Hershberg (b. 1948), one such artist belonging to this painting tradition, was responsible for bringing its basic principles to Israel, based on the works of American painters: nineteenth-century artists such as William Merritt Chase (1849-1916), John Singer Sargent (1856-1925), and alongside them, students and followers such as Charles Webster Hawthorne (1872-1930), Edwin Dickinson (1891-1978) and Lennart Anderson (1928 -). These artists, among others, constituted the connection between American painting and the import of its principles to Israel. Israel Hershberg opened The Jerusalem Studio School in Jerusalem in 1988, which became a center for a significant number of Israeli artists who sought to return to classical painting methods.[16]

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14 The *Color Theories* of French scientists Eugene Chevreul had a significant influence on the Impressionist artists. Prior to Chevreul, the philosopher=scientist Johan von Goethe also published his research of color theories as well as the English art historian=aesthete John Ruskin.

15 The 'Nachuaioli, among others, were Vincenzo Cabianca (1827-1902), Telemacho Signorini (1835-1901) and Giovanni Fattori (1825-1908).

16 Dror Burstein, "Lenochach haMamashi, Tziyurim Muvcharim shel Bogrey haSadnah leTziyur veleRishum Yerushalayim" (Facing the Real, Selected Paintings by Graduates of the Jerusalem Studio for Drawing and Painting) (cat. exh.), Jerusalem, Artists House, 2003.

As mentioned above, the term "figurative realism" does not do justice to the individual characteristics of these artists. The individual painting styles of artists such as David Nipo, Aram Gershuni, Daniel Enkaoua, Eran Reshef, Meir Appelfeld, and Sigal Tsabari – whose artwork can be found in the Yossi and Daniela Lipschitz Collection – indeed attempt to depict reality through direct observation, but each artist does this in a different way. None, however, are connected to, reminiscent of, or based on, works of past master-craftsmen such as Velázquez, Ingres, Vermeer, or van Eyck. Instead, their spiritual guides are mostly American late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century modern artists.

Artists use the painting technique known generally as *alla prima*, in order to build an image directly on their canvases, without any prior preparation, by directly placing areas of paint on its surface. This technique characterized the creative process of most of the Impressionists, Fauvists and later in specific cases, also the Expressionists.

In contrast, the painting process used by the Israeli artists mentioned is more complex and not "preliminary," in most cases starting with a *sinopia,* a type of line sketch, which "carves" the elements of the composition using strong and powerful lines. This is followed by planning the initial drawing for the areas which the artist wants to illuminate or, alternatively, to shade. In these sketches the artist marks areas of color, which is created using dynamic smearing and dabbing of nearly translucent color, whose patches are also used to mark the location of the main narrative that will appear in the painting. In the next stage, patches of color are placed on the canvas, which serve a dual purpose: to provide objects, figures or landscape scenery with local color, and to create the illusion of light shining on them, thus, giving the illusion of volume. The methodologies of the above artists may differ from one another but in general, they follow these stages of painting, while each chooses his/her own unique characteristics from the methods of a teacher – a master-craftsman from the past.

One of the facets of a painting that depicts reality through observation is the virtuosic ability of painters to depict the surface of objects, of human figures, or of parts of landscapes. The artists must create the illusion of these unique textures, and in some cases, they pose difficult tasks for themselves. The resulting paintings enable the artists to demonstrate a skill which

gives them great satisfaction, and the viewers, great pleasure. Thanks to their skills, we behold pure beauty. Such experiences can be found in viewing *Untitled* by Michael Halak (plate 5 in the color section), in which the artist creates a virtuosic depiction of the texture of a transparent plastic sheet, and in perfect contrast, the surface of an apple. Similarly the painting by Orit Akta Hildesheim (plate 16 in the color section), contrasts the soft and airy texture of the lace fabric with a gray opaque wall.

Another aspect of "realistic" painting is reflected in the choice of vantage point from which the painters look at the subject which will then be interpreted on the canvas. When the chosen perspective is not the conventional frontal view, but rather a top down perspective (or vice versa), this adds interest, due to the way in which the artist depicts the objects with foreshortening, which may accent the expression of tension in the painting. Beyond the reliable depictions of local color and convincing illusions of textures, *Self Portrait* by Aram Gershuni (plate 4in the color section) encourages us to enter into his character. When we look at the painting, which directs our line of vision as it were from the top down, the painter's legs look as if they are our own feet.

In Roi Shapira's *Lemons (the Opposite of Kiwi)* (plate 19 in the color section) the lemons are placed on a smooth mirrored surface. A grey color darkens the shiny yellow shadows of the lemons. The deliberate blurring, accomplished by dabbing a brush of dry color, creates the illusion of depth and presents us with a simple, colorful vision of beauty, even when the subjects are banal, everyday objects.

The small opening of the eye aperture which enables us to focus our gaze on still life paintings, opens up and expands when it comes to viewing landscapes. Eldar Farber, Daniel Enkaoua, Avraham Pesso, and David Nipo observe nature and demonstrate great skill in presenting diffused light over its vastness. In Nipo's *Mamshit* (plate 15in the color section) a subtle depiction of pink sky is revealed. This is early- morning light, radiating across the spatial landscape and blurring the shapes of the hills, shrubs and a wall that blocks us from the mountains in the background. If there is a painting that, in its depiction of light, is reminiscent of the magnificent abilities of the Italian Macchiaioli-- it is Nipo's. Avraham Pesso's *Landscape*

(plate8 in the color section) is painted from a high vantage point, from which the artist observes the vast landscape below. The rocks, objects, and roads are illuminated in the morning light. Light is rendered in the painting by highlights, most of which are made of dabs of white paint, which define the bright areas; the reflectors that are dispersed among the open landscape. Daniel Enkaoua's *Landscape* (plate 9 in the color section) is also painted from a high vantage point, presenting us with diffused light that is rendered in a different way: the artist "pulls" his paint-laden brush on the surface of the canvas, and thus the light depicted is made through a complex tonal method.

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The works in the exhibition are only a small part of the Yossi and Daniela Lipschitz Collection, yet they provide us with insight into the level of significance which Israeli-Zionist history, symbolism, nature, and even simple objects representing "Israeliness" held for the collectors. The works of art presented here are a feast for the eyes, and their exhibition at the Open University Gallery is a golden opportunity to experience Israeli art, some of which is being displayed publicly for the very first time.

Alec Mishory
Tel Aviv, January 2014

List of Works Exhibited

All measurements in centimeters

Meir Appelfeld, *Night Landscape – Jerusalem 1,* 2010, oil on canvas, 90x86
Meir Appelfeld, *Night Landscape – Jerusalem 2,* 2010, oil on canvas, 56x42 (Figure 7 in color section)
Leonid Balaklav, *Self Portrait*, 1995, oil on canvas, 20x25
Leonid Balaklav, *Still Life with Fruit Tray and Glass,* 1992, oil on canvas, 30x49 (Figure 20 in color section)
Orit Ekta Hidesheim, *Untitled,* 2004, oil on canvas, 16x16 (Figure 16 in color section)
Daniel Enauoa, *Landscape,* oil on canvas, 45x47 (Figure 9 in color section)
Eldar Farber, *The Yarkon River,* 2011, oil on canvas glued to wooden board, 37x31 (Figure 10 in color section)
Aram Gershuni, *Self Portrait,* 2012, oil on wooden board, 25x30 (Figure 4 in color section)
David Gerstein, *Balcony,* 1995, oil on canvas, 110x120 (Figure 17 in color section)
Meir Gur Arieh, *Portrait of Ze'ev Raban,* 1920s, chalk on grey paper, 27.5x20.5 (Figure 3 in color section)
Michael Halak, *Untitled,* 2010, oil on canvas, 30x40 (Figure 5 in color section)
Michael Halak, *Untitled,* 2009, oil on wooden board, 40x50
Aharon Halevi, *Figures on the Way to Jerusalem,* 1937, pen and ink on paper, 45x59 (Figure 22 in color section)
Shmuel Haruvi, *Orchard Dwelling Near Bethlehem,* 1948, watercolor on paper, 10.5x14.5
David Nipo, *Mamshit,* 2010, oil on canvas glued to wooden board, 17.5x28 (Figure 15 in color section)
David Nipo, *Kfar Uriah Grounds,* 2001, oil on canvas, 28x24
Avraham Pesso, *Rocks,* 1995, oil on canvas (diptych), 25x30 each panel (Figure 8 in color section)
Avraham Pesso, *Landscape,* 1995, oil on canvas, 130x130
Ze'ev Raban, *Illustration for H. N. Bialik's 'Legend of Three and Four',* watercolor on paper, 25x18

Ze'ev Raban *Tel Aviv,* 1923, [probably a preparatory sketch for *Land of Israel – Ten Pictures*], watercolor on paper, 16x24 (Figure 1 in color section)

Ze'ev Raban*, Illustration for H. N. Bialik's 'Legend of the Shamir*, 1920s, watercolor on paper, 20x20

Ze'ev Raban, *Ilustration for a Passover Haggadah,* 1924, watercolor on paper, 18x19

Ze'ev Raban, *Shepherd,* 1925, preparatory sketch for ceramic tile decoration on the façade of the Lederberg building in Tel Aviv, pencil and watercolor on paper, 28x21 (Figure 2 in color section)

Ze'ev Raban, *Sketch for Synagogue Stained Glass Windows,* 1933, pen and ink, watercolor on paper, 17x8 each

Eran Reshef, *Peeping Hole,* 2012, oil on wooden board, 15.8x15.3

Eran Reshef, *Switch and Plug,* 2009, oil on canvas, 39x45 (Figure 6 in color section)

Moshe Rosenthalis, *Boats in Jaffa Harbor,* 2001, oil on canvas, 49x69

Moshe Rosenthalis, *Portrait of Moshe Bernstein,* 1979, oil on canvas, 100x40 (Figure 23 in color section)

Ivan Schwebel, *Judean Hills – Zion Square,* 1994, oil on etching glued to canvas, 99x99 (Figure 11 in color section)

Ivan Schwebel, *Implant,* 1994, pencil, oil on etching glued to canvas, 99x99

Shalom (Sigfried) Sebba, *Soldering Equipment,* 1944, tempera on paper, 21.5x23

Shalom (Sigfried) Sebba, *Milk Saucer,* 1960, gouache and collage on paper, 17x21

Shalom (Sigfried) Sebba, *Wood,* 1960, tempera on paper, 18x25

Shalom (Sigfried) Sebba, *Preparatory Sketch for 'Milk',* 1960, oil and tempera on canvas, 19x14 (Figure 13 in color section)

Shalom (Sigfried) Sebba, *Wine,* 1960, oil on woosen board, 39.6x44.4

Shalom (Sigfried) Sebba, *Still Life with Grapes,* 1960, watercolor on paper, 17x24

Shalom (Sgifried) Sebba, *Archaeology,* 1961, gouache and tempera on paper, 25.5x15 (Figure 12 in color section)

Shalom (Sigfried) Sebba, *Archaeology (Mediterranean Sea)*, 1961, tempera on wooden board, 30.3x66.3

Shalom (Sigfried) Sebba, *Ashkelon* (from the *Archaeology* series), tempera and small stones glued to paper, 13x24.5

Shalom (Sigfried) Sebba, *Still Life with Bottles,* 1928, woodcut print, 64x46
Shalom (Sigfried) Sebba, *Preparatory Drawing for "Moses Breaking the Tablets of the Law",* 1948, pencil pn paper, 20x10
Shalom (Sgifried) Sebba, *The Twelve Tribes of Israel,* 1952-1953, watercolor on transparent paper, 37x12 each (Figure 14 in color section)
Shalom (Sgifried) Sebba, *Preparatory Drawing for "The Binding of Isaac",* 1948 pencil on paper. 21.5x11.5
Roi Shapira, *Once again, Me,* 2010, oil on paper glued to wooden board, 28x16.5
Roi Shapira, *Lemons (contrary to Kiwi)*, 2009, oil on paper glued to wooden board, 16.5x25 (Figure 19 in color section)
Aharon Shaul Shur, *Safed,* watercolor on paper, 31x17.2
Aharon Shaul Shur, *Lake of Galilee Landscape,* 1923, watercolor on paper, 14x21
Ruth Schlos, *Captive,* 1990, acrylic on paper glued to canvas, 111x75 (Figure 24 in color section)
Herman Struck, *Landscape,* 1922, watercolor on paper, 13x9
Sigal Tsabari, *Tulip Flowers in the Studio,* 2003, pencil and pastel chalks on paper, 100x70 (Figure 18 in color section)
Sigal Tsabari, *Notes in the Apple Tree,* 2010, oil on canvas, 64.4x64.3
Maia Zer, *Lemon Tree,* 2009, oil on canvas, 45.5x56 (Figure 21 in color section)