

Municipal Creativity: Approaches to Pluralistic Curatorship in the Israeli Art Scene

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This study stems from the understanding of a particular difference between art in ancient times and contemporary art, for while ancient and traditional art were an integral part of one's daily life, contemporary art is detached and viewing and responding to it is a matter of choice. Another difference lies in the alienation that can exist in contemporary art, which is often not understood by those who do not engage in art as a profession or are not versed in the field of art. As a result, a situation has arisen in today's modern world in which art tends to be the property of a limited public only, and the curatorial work is ostensibly directed at them. This study seeks to change this situation through a method defined here as "pluralistic curatorship", based on the principle of pluralism in Israeli society. A pluralistic approach already exists to some extent on the Israeli art scene, but pluralistic curatorship still requires a defined, cohesive, and structured outline. This study presents five approaches to achieving such pluralistic curatorship, with the first three sections discussing the theoretical aspects and the last two sections discussing its practical implementation.

Keywords: Israeli art, cultural pluralism, hegemony, aesthetics, municipality

Introduction

Common types of entertainment among the public include theater, dance performances, cinema, and classical or rock concerts, with occasional visits also being paid to museums, especially when a unique exhibition is held—of the sort that attracts a huge audience, such as the recent exhibition of work by Zadok Ben David at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, for which entire families queued in line; and the current exhibition of work by the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama. Visits to art galleries are relatively rare among the general public, however, especially where galleries are concentrated in industrial areas, such as Kiryat Hamelacha, where access during the week is almost impossible; and exhibitions held in alternative spaces in artists quarters are almost solely the property of the art community. Vacations abroad by most ordinary travellers may include a visit to a famous museum, or sometimes as part of a list of "places to see", which can then be "marked off".

Viewing exhibitions of the plastic arts tends to be the least preferred of such cultural activities due to the fact that, unlike a theatrical performance that provides instant enjoyment without the need for prior knowledge, understanding the plastic arts often requires previous knowledge. Many such works of art are based on historical and cultural layers that are not always known, causing a barrier to understanding the work, while conceptual works of art may appear to be non-communicative and entirely incomprehensible.

Most of the public, so it seems, still perceives abstract painting from any period as “scribble”, and also questions why a particular object—a “Ready-Made”—should be presented as a work of art.

The present study offers a comprehensive approach to changing this situation, and seeks to generate an atmosphere in which art can become an integral part of the lives of the many for whom art is not their profession, so that a visit to a gallery, museum, or an alternative space for the display of art will become equivalent to a visit to a cinema, theater, rock concert, or restaurant.

This approach is defined here as “pluralistic curatorship”, based on that of pluralism in Israeli culture. Cultural pluralism is a worldview shaped as part of the principle of secular Judaism by thinkers, such as Yaakov Malkin, and Yehuda Bauer. Secular Judaism has sought to renew the integration of the Jewish community within the universal cultures, as opposed to Orthodox Judaism that has called for isolation.

The essence of secular Judaism, as determined by Malkin, is based upon a belief in the autonomy of the subject; a belief in the centrality of humanistic values, and humanism as a supreme value; the freedom of choice alongside a commitment to society and just laws; a belief in the right of the subject to pursue pleasure and happiness in life, while also having consideration for others. Secular moralism is autonomous and is based on the moral responsibility of the individual. Secular Judaism is thus perceived as a culture, and religion is only one aspect of the Jewish existence, or included within it but not identical to it.

A prominent characteristic of the secular Jewish culture is that of pluralism, or a “mosaic of Judaisms”, as defined by Malkin. As a migratory nation, separated and dispersed, and comprising many different ethnic communities and religious branches, pluralism stands at the core of the Israeli nation and its history (Malkin, 2006, pp. 148-150; Malkin, 2003, pp. 22-23, 39-41, 60-75, 79). Yehuda Bauer (2006) concluded that pluralism is the sole path to the survival of the Jewish culture. Pluralistic curatorship is a direct continuation of this worldview, in establishing the pluralistic principle as a cohesive curatorial conception.

“Municipal”, another term that appears in the title of this study, is significant, since the approach discussed requires municipal support in order to be realized. Indeed, every municipality is committed to the cultural well-being of its residents—artists and creators, as well as the public of viewers. Nonetheless, as will be shown in the last section of this study, this commitment is carried out in cities and towns in Israel only sporadically and inconsistently.

The purpose of this study is, first and foremost, to give legitimacy to pluralism in the field of Israeli art. This requires the abolition of existing perceptions and the introduction of new ones, along with a detailed explanation. Second, the study seeks to delineate the essence of pluralistic curatorship for its practical application in the field. The five sections of the study present the various approaches to pluralistic curatorship, with the first three being theoretical and the last two being of a practical nature.

The study is based on a wide variety of sources: research in the field of curatorial studies, research in Israeli art, philosophical and ideological sources, and sources from the field of art itself.

The Containing Approach: Curating for Whom?

In her discussion on the concept of “relational aesthetics”, as termed by curator Nicolas Bourriaud (1998), the art researcher Claire Bishop asks: “If relational art produces human relations, then the next logical question to ask is what types of relations are being produced, for whom, and why?” (Bishop, 2004, p. 65).

I would like to expand upon this question and ask: For whom is the curatorial work done?

This might seem initially obvious, but is far from being so, as will be shown.

The question is related first and foremost to larger and more general questions—For whom has art been created? Who have been the clients for art throughout history?

Most of the art objects in Antiquity were an integral part of daily life, with no separation between art and life. Indeed, in antiquity, the public were more accustomed to seeing art than the public in our contemporary age: Egyptian art played a prominent role in the worship of kings and was aimed at glorifying them; in Greece, pottery painted with figures and designs was part of everyday life, and sculpture was part of religious worship; in Rome, sculpture played a role in religious worship, as well as being part of the cult of the personality of the emperors, and mural frescoes and mosaics presented the revered gods inside the houses, shops, and other spaces; Byzantine mosaics in the early Middle Ages were intended to serve as a “bible for the poor in spirit”, to enchant the masses with their beauty and splendor and thus to attract them to the bosom of the Church; and the Gothic cathedral functioned similarly, with glittering stained glass scattering colorful light throughout its spaces, creating a special atmosphere that captivated the worshippers. The patrons of Renaissance art were the elite social class, while art functioned as a religious-political means in the churches, and was intended for the general public; and Baroque art was used by the Catholic Church in Italy to attract the devotees by expressive means.

Art as specifically intended for viewing, rather than for practical use, was born in the 18th century. This autonomy of art is the result of an historical process in which art achieved its separation from religion and became an independent sphere. In the mid-17th century, a process started in which art became accessible to the general public as *art per se*. This began mainly in Paris, with the churches no longer being the only space where art was accessible to the general public. The display of art became supported and organized by the state institutions in public exhibitions, the “Salon” was established, and such exhibitions became accessible to large and diverse audiences, a process that intensified in the 19th century. This liberation of art from religious dependence eventuated in its presentation to the general public.

As a result, however, of this new “freedom” of art, a kind of alienation and lack of communication came into existence between the “naïve” viewer and the art world. In the 20th century, and especially since Dada and Marcel Duchamp, art seemed to have become increasingly non-communicative, and understandable to only a limited audience. Following Duchamp, when conceptual art was born, a kind of alienation began to characterize the art world, as reflected by theoretician and curator Gideon Ofrat (2010):

Your eyes fall on a critical review article in one of the newspapers, relishing about the wilderness in which you had wandered only a minute ago. You don't believe what you have just read, and it is clear to you: someone is blind here. Your bad temper causes you to burden yourself with guilt, and this time too you say: It must be your extreme age that is responsible for your dull eyes and spirit [...]. (pp. 11-12)

Ofrat complains that many art exhibitions elicit this sense of alienation, and he perceives them as pseudo-exhibitions, which are simply bad, empty of content; while vague and seductive titles, which may sound philosophical-poetic or function as a kind of “copywriting”, glorify them. He further complains that often neither the name of the artist nor the name of the work appear alongside the works, the curatorial text too is vague, and the viewer is not provided with any key to understanding the works. The visitor to the exhibition feels that “the experience of visiting the gallery is that of endless wandering in the spaces of nothingness” and of “an endless sense of emptiness”. This is defined by Ofrat (2020, pp. 173-176) as a state of intellectual condescension conferred upon the viewer. The viewer consequently experiences a kind of suffering, for such condescension and alienation is unpleasant for anyone. No one likes their intelligence to be underestimated, and the result is a

disconnection between the public and the art world, with the viewer feeling that the art he or she is looking at is directed at, and speaks to, only very specific viewers and in codes known only to them.

Indeed, as determined by Ofrat, the art scene in Israel has always been dominated by hegemonies, namely, the specific viewers to whom the codes are directed. The two main hegemonies noted by Ofrat are that of Joseph Zaritsky and the artistic movement “New Horizons” during the 1950s and 1960s, and that of Raffi Lavie and “the Want of Matter” since the 1960s, a domination titled by Ofrat “Raffi’s force” (Ofrat, 2011).

The term “hegemony” and its relation to Israeli art require clarification. According to Antonio Gramsci (2004) who elaborated upon and defined the concept of hegemony, hegemony is a state of total dominancy of an elite social group that is embodied in norms and rules designed to serve the interests and needs of that group, and imposed on the powerless groups. Hegemony exists when an elitist group succeeds to make its approach dominant and the only legitimate one, contending that it has received the support of the majority. The hegemony then establishes a mechanism in order to maintain its control, rejecting anything and anyone that is different and opposes its rules. It generates a situation in which its views seem to become the “natural” and only way to perceive matters. The hegemonic class dictates and defines the rules to the extent that produces an atmosphere in which no other attitude or opinion can be expressed. These rules and norms permeate the entire cultural system and become part of it, and the hegemony affects that its dominance is supported by the consensus of the majority. The subordinated classes fail to notice that they are being manipulated and even identify with the interests of the hegemony, and accept the imposed rules naturally as an absolute truth, and not as a relative ideology that can be examined, criticized, or challenged. Hegemony has always felt threatened by modes of thought that differ from those of its own, and hence fights them (Gramsci, 2004).

Hegemony thereby has some of the characteristics of a sect: its members are bound in a dependent and controlled relationship; the way of the group is presented as the only way; it generates a bondage of the group members; psychological techniques are used by the leader to achieve a sense of weakness and dependence among the members, while also enveloping them in love in exchange for obedience; it controls emotions, thoughts, information, and behavior; encourages whistleblowing among group members; conceals information; uses language understood only by the group; holds long personal conversations with the group leader or his loyalists (Galanter, 1989).

In her discussion of hegemony on the Israeli art scene, Ariella Azoulay (1999) stated that hegemony produces certain criteria that constitute the measure of every discussion and assessment. In the cultural field struggles are waged by cultural agents over the doxa—the domination and distribution of beliefs and opinions, and their protection and preservation. The field is based on the loyalty of its partners to the doxa, and on their being part of the self-monitoring mechanism by which to reduce the struggles and replicate the doxa, as pointed out by Azoulay. This mechanism functions as a kind of entrance gate to the cultural field (Azoulay, 1999). Similarly to her earlier definitions of hegemony in the socio-political and economic fields, Azoulay (1999) described the hegemony in the artistic field as a religious belief that functions as a screen to restrict the commentator’s perspective and prevent him or her from seeing and unveiling the mechanisms of power and the justification systems that support these mechanisms. Critics and commentators tend to interpret a work according to the common and accepted hegemonic criteria and standards, and to reveal any ostensible inferiority in relation to those standards; while glorifying another work and pointing out that it fits these same criteria (Azoulay, 1999).

Azoulay (1999) termed the hegemonic mechanism—“the discursive police”, and pointed out that the only concern of this “police” is that the artists will maintain the same internal order and rules in order to maintain the

status of the rulers. She cites Foucault, who defines this situation as such that the participants have to obey the rules of discourse in order to belong and continue to belong to a reputed group (Azoulay, 1999); the function of the museum in the hegemonic field is to impose a sanction on the gaze. The observers are required to see what they are supposed to see, and those who do not see what they must see, are removed from the field, the discourse, the class, etc.; and, naturally, anyone who seeks to make claims, such as “the emperor is naked” will be removed by the hegemonic rulers and be referred to as expressing the ignorance of the “general public”. In contrast, those who demonstrate an “understanding” of the works representing the hegemonic discourse are perceived as having crossed the threshold and been accepted into the club (Azoulay, 1999). Azoulay (1999) described the hegemony in the Israeli art field as a privileged fortress, well-fortified and protected by a wall, in which there are rules regarding what is allowed and what is forbidden, and a monopoly on the entrance gate. This fortress has for decades prevented personal expressions and changes, and ensured the maintenance and reiteration of power relations in the field (Azoulay, 1999). She highlights that a work that does not correspond to the hegemonic rules will be pushed to the margins, outside the main visibility of the field (Azoulay, 1999). She further defines the hegemonic field as an autarkic club in which the participants are accepted due to their contacts with the major players, conditional upon obeying the rules of this closed club (Azoulay, 1999). Moreover, she notes that the hegemonic field declares that it bears the message of pluralism, while in fact, under the guise of tolerance and openness, it neutralizes any radical expression that might threaten it (Azoulay, 1999). She concludes that there is a fundamental contradiction in that, on the one hand, art is intended to be independent, unique, and individual; but on the other hand it is related to social moods, fashions, and trends (Azoulay, 1999).

Another critique of the hegemony on the Israeli art scene is expressed by Sara Chinski. Chinski calls the dynamics of this field “oppressive relations”, and a hegemonic socio-political structure with its own rhetoric and language code that does not accept other “truths”. The hegemonic “truth” is actually a political code of approval and silence; while the approval that encourages the “proper” discourse is in fact the exile of all that must not be talked about. Chinski (2015) emphasized that the hegemonic domination presents itself as revolutionary and critical, while in fact it is a canonical and institutional position that excludes everything that differs from its agenda (pp. 43-44, 49, 86-89). Following her discussion of the problems inherent in the concept of “Israeli art”, she contends that any cultural expression that does not conform to the legitimate national definition of “Israeli” is neither defined nor identified at all as a culture, and therefore is removed from the agenda of the hegemony (Chinski, 2015). She criticizes the conduct of canonical curators and the way in which they appropriate the post-colonial discourse on de-territorialization; and the conduct of Deleuze and Guattari, for example, in their seeking rather to reinforce the canonical and national practice, which in essence contradicts the true meanings of the appropriated conceptions (Chinski, 2015). She recognizes two main factors in the Israeli artistic discourse: the local and the universal. The local is all that is anchored in the Zionist myth, while the universal is all that belongs to western culture, especially European culture. The Israeli art field, as noted by Chinski, is based on the mythical concept of the “West” as its organizing principle, and is modeled as an exact model of the European art field. Hence, other realms are almost entirely absent from this discourse. The belonging to Western culture and the aspiration of the hegemonic Israeli culture to be European-centric is criticized by Chinski as causing compartmentalization, exclusion, oppression, and disregard for other elements seeking to exist in Israeli culture. She defines the Israeli immigrants who perceive themselves as the agents of European culture as “gentrified settlers” who consider the local culture as wild and primitive (Breitberg-Semel, 1988) and themselves as culturally superior. They express their concern that they will be identified with the natives, whom they perceive

as cultural “savages”; they appoint themselves on their own behalf as agents of the Western imperial power, and thus colonial cultural relations are formed (Chinski, 2015, pp. 147-206; Chinski, 1993, p. 114; 2004, p. 264). A similar criticism was also expressed by theoretician and curator Dalia Manor (Manor, 2010; 2005). Chinski (2015) concluded that the adoption of a Western identity is a colonial trap in which the hegemony of the art scene in Israel is confined.

The situation described above has generated two destructive results, as described in detail in the following.

The Denial and Contradiction of the Principle of Freedom Inherent in Art by Its Very Nature

One of the criteria for determining that an object is an artwork is that of its presentation in an artistic context: namely, in an institution defined by specialists as a space for the display of art. This criterion was formulated by George Dickie and is called the Institutional Theory (Ofrat, 2020; Dickie, 1997). However, this criterion is deceptive, since determining who will exhibit at the museum is made by the hegemonic group and according to their criteria, and this generates a vicious cycle.

The definition of art is actually much broader. Art involves aspects, such as the representation of reality and its interpretation, the creation of beauty in its philosophical and broadest sense (this will be elaborated upon in the section on the aesthetic approach), the emotional aspect, the intuitive aspect, and the social aspect. The common denominator in all these aspects is that of the freedom of the artist to choose, to interpret, and to imprint his/her personal artistic signature. A work of art is a unique and one-time creation in its idea and appearance, and this is a prominent criterion for the definition of art. The discourse on “the death of art” was never truly an effective one, since the possibilities and the artistic potential are endless.

In the *Ion* dialogue, Plato (1939) defined the artistic creation as being mastered by a divine inspiration that imposes insanity upon the artist; and the artist creates out of the freedom inflicted by that insanity. Moreover, as defined in discussions of the nature of art, the artist is not obligated to historical correctness; art comes from the imagination; and art is actually deceptive (Aristotle, 1970; Lorand, 1991). Moreover, freedom of choice and free will are basic human concepts, far beyond the art world and regardless of being an artist. As noted by Ariella Azoulay (1999), the museum is a space whose purpose is to give the public an opportunity for freedom and sovereignty of self-expression, and the establishment of the modern museum is part of the establishment of the belief in the freedom of humankind. Hence the museum should offer one of the most effective sites for the establishment of freedom (Azoulay, 1999). Accordingly, the creation of art requires a free spirit and creativity and must not tolerate domination. Consequently, “hegemony” is a term basically foreign to art.

Sharing of the Artistic Products Only With Associates and Favorites, who Are Perceived as Belonging and Familiar With the Hegemonic Group and as Acquainted With Its Language

At the beginning of her chapter “Modern National Art”, Sara Chinski describes a pleasant Saturday morning at the art museum. Somewhat cynically, she describes how visitors respond to the printed interpretive texts distributed by the museum: quick, stolen, and embarrassed glimpses, as if they are trying not to reveal their need for the museum’s explanatory pages, as if they are “supposed” to understand the aesthetic codes presented to them, and thus seek to avoid disclosing the possibility of their not belonging to the accepted current (Chinski, 2015, pp. 45-46).

This description is picturesque and even a little exaggerated, but well reflects the fact that the art scene in Israel has become the property and interest of “club members” or of a particular affiliated group only. The artists consequently find themselves subject to a dictated format; and the artistic discourse has become internal and

exclusive, dismissing anyone whose occupation is not in the field and is not associated with the spirit of the hegemony. The very basic Aristotelian function of art as purifying the soul of the spectator (1939, XI) is also dismissed, since art is addressed only to a particular and exclusive audience (Lorand, 1991).

What is the position of the curator in this hegemonic system?

Gideon Ofrat (2020) pointed out that on the Israeli art scene highly-esteemed curators perceive their main mission as that of defending and promoting the hegemony. In other words, the curator's role has become a political one. The claim that the world of contemporary art is dominated by political factors is ostensibly also reflected at the global level, as indicated by the Italian art historian Carlo Bertelli (1990).

Hence, a question arises: Is it indeed so, that the curator's function is political only? And following this: What is the role of the curator nowadays, and for whom is he/she actually curating?

Gideon Ofrat (2020) had contended, importantly, that as long as the work of art is preserved in the artist's studio or in storage, it does not fulfill its cultural role. However, even after the work is displayed to the public, it might still be emblematic, needing the mediation of a professional to decode the encoded emblems, and thus release its cultural potential.

The spectator who confronts a work of art is in effect confronting symbols and signs that must be deciphered in order to reveal its meaning in the time and space to which the work is related (Azoulay, 1999). Art is a language, and every work of art delivers some information about the world in its unique way, and one should know this language in order to understand the messages. For example, in order to understand and enjoy a cubist work by Picasso, a spectator needs to be acquainted with the language of cubism. An original artist is one who composes a new language. The gap between the spectator and an original artist, or a new current in art is due to the new language that has not yet been learned. There are many examples of this throughout history: Impressionism was rejected and ridiculed at the beginning, as was Fauvism and other currents and styles. Moreover, although art is manifested by physical means, the essence of art is spiritual, and the material embodiment of an artistic object is merely a medium for delivering spiritual meanings (Lorand, 1991; Croce, 1983). The spiritual essence in a work of art is not always immediately apparent. Hence, curatorship might offer something like a rescue mission, or an opening of hope, as remarked by Ofrat (2020). The role of the curator, therefore, is to bring the works to public and historical consciousness, and to fill in the gaps in the viewers' knowledge in order to enable them the enjoyment of a knowledgeable observation (Lorand, 1991). Deciphering and interpreting the codes encoded in a work of art, and revealing the spiritual essence concealed behind its physical appearance, is proficiency derived from a knowledge of art history and research, and hence the curator is necessarily an art historian.

Ofrat (2020) described the relations between curator and artist as symbiotic, in which the artist is a holder of divine secrets, as if the spirit of God rules over them, and the curator has to decipher them. The curator, thus, is like an Oracle who elucidates the obscure words of the Pythia.

The work of the curator, therefore, can be described briefly as follows: formulating the exhibition concept; selecting the works according to the concept; interpreting the works in relation to the artists' intentions, the related currents, and precedents in the history of art, and related literary or philosophical sources and texts; composing the texts to be displayed in the exhibition; producing a catalogue; installing the exhibition; promoting the exhibition; conducting activities, such as gallery talks, tutorials, lectures, etc.

All these acts involve keeping in mind the target audience, and hence the curator functions as a mediator between the artists and the artistic arena, and the audience.

The curatorial profession bears a responsibility to the public, as emphasized in discussions about the meanings of curatorship, its role and definition (Horie, 1986).

Ofrat notes that mediation is the basic role of the curator, whose task is to mediate between the work of art and its viewers, and make its meanings accessible to them and to present the work's and the artist's originality. The responsibility of the curator is thus both to the artist and to the public. The curator has to clarify the meanings of the works, and ensure optimal communication between them and the public, which necessitates a high level of mediation and an intellectual one. The curator must thus possess a universal and cultural approach, a broad knowledge of art history, and research abilities (Ofrat, 2020). Moreover, as Ofrat (2020) noted, because every exhibition is in itself a part of art history, the curator bears an historical responsibility for the sequence of past-present-future.

Similarly, while providing the observer with knowledge, the curator should also be familiar with Roland Barthe's (1968) "the Death of the Author" concept, according to which the viewer plays a significant part in interpreting the work. The curator must therefore provide the viewer with some codes and clues for independent thinking and interpretation.

Ofrat defines the curator as a creator—"the creator curator", since there must be a creative sense in curatorship. Curatorial creativity has been compared to the proficiency of conducting a symphony orchestra (Ofrat, 2020, p. 122; Zukerman-Rechter, 2020, pp. 191-258). Similarly to how a qualified conductor knows how to emphasize and intensify the character of each instrument in the orchestra, the curator has to know how to intensify the significance of every work of art in an exhibition.

Another dominant function of the curator's work, as noted by Ofrat (2020), is the creation of links between present and past, hence creating cultural bridges through the exhibition and its accompanying texts.

The exhibition, Ofrat notes, constitutes a significant curatorial statement, and must therefore derive from the curator's passion and sense of urgency to deliver its messages to the public. Passion, consequently, must be a central characteristic of the curator (Ofrat, 2020, pp. 23-24).

Passion is the first quality of the curator that is noted by the Australian curator Nick Waterlow, while mediation is the sixth quality in his list of the seven necessary qualities of the curator:

1. Passion;
2. A discerning eye;
3. An empty vessel;
4. An ability to be uncertain;
5. Belief in the necessity of art and artists;
6. A medium—bringing a passionate and informed understanding of works of art to an audience in ways that will stimulate, inspire, question;
7. Enabling the altering of perception. (Smith, 2012, pp. 21-22)

Ofrat (2020) considered that since the curator is driven by his or her passion and urges to deliver his/her messages, s/he is required to reject hegemonies. All this leads to a different perception of curatorship: elimination of the dominance of a hegemony and decentralization instead of centralization. Azoulay (1999) too sided with decentralization of the art field.

Decentralization is related to the concept of the Rhizome Theory—of perceiving reality as a polyvalent entity, devoid of beginning or end, roots and borders; a stratified universe under a constant movement and metamorphosis (Deleuze & Guattari, 2007, pp. 6-24). Decentering rather than centering, a lack of hierarchy and

equality between center and fringe is an ancient concept rooted in archaic Greek thought, devoid of center, as a network of trade, myths, religions, and identities (Malkin, 2011). Such decentralization is a basic and main feature of cultural pluralism.

Chinski (2015) drew attention to the fact that it would be more appropriate in Israel to use the term “art in Israel” rather than “Israeli art”, since the former would more accurately encompass the pluralistic aspects of Israeli culture (p. 144). Decentralization is rooted in the Derridian conception, according to which there is nothing that lies outside the text and anything that asks for a place should not be considered inferior or be ignored (Royle, 2003).

Indeed, only by behaving in this way is the curator able to be free of every dictate and achieve creative and qualitative work.

In light of all the above, it is clear that curatorial work should be intended for the general and plural public and not just for a hegemonic group. Pluralistic curatorship is hence obligated to the public and the entire population, while necessarily being aware of the differences between different modes of observation among different observers: art lovers, amateurs, casual viewers, or professionals.

The Accepting Approach: Outsiders Are Insiders

The dominance of the hegemony in the Israeli art scene has generated a situation in which there are the few favored artists who receive many opportunities and promotions, as opposed to the much larger group of artists who have not been selected as part of the dominant trend and the mainstream, and therefore do not receive the same opportunities, despite their high level of professionalism and their many years invested in studies and advanced training. These latter artists speak an artistic language that significantly differs from the dominant and accepted one; they maintain their individuality and even distance from the mainstream and are classified as “outsiders”.

As noted by Azoulay (1999), the absence of necessary conditions for artistic criticism in Israel has not allowed “outsider” artists who do not belong to the hegemonic “club” to make their mark on the art scene (p. 159).

An example of referring to “outsider” artists can be found in review article on an exhibition at the Municipal Gallery in Kfar Saba. Before the review begins, the reviewer notes: “Next to the Kfar Saba Artists’ House, dedicated to artists who are residents of the city, the municipal gallery is definitely making an effort to be contemporary” (Pitchon, 2021).

In other words, the work of the artists who exhibit in the Artist House is not contemporary and, therefore, should not receive any consideration or journalistic commentary. These latter artists are “outsiders” for the writer, and should not be included at all in the narrative of the “contemporary” art history.

Indeed, the current exhibition in the Municipal Gallery certainly belongs to the customary language in the category of conceptual art, being based on large installations and the use of ready-mades and video films; while the exhibitions at the Artist House mostly present the traditional arts such as painting and sculpture. However, the latter artists demonstrate a personal and unique style, prolific and continuous work, professional seniority, and often academic degrees from art institutions. Indeed, painting and sculpture are arts that have never disappeared, and it seems that they will also never cease to be a major focus in the art world. The determination that these artists are not “contemporary” is an artificial determination that is based on a hegemonic way of thinking that excludes those techniques and individuality that are inconsistent with the hegemonic taste and dictates. An

example of such dictated techniques is found in the determination immanent in the concept of “the want of matter” (Breitberg-Semel, 1986). This concept is problematic because it interferes with the artist’s work, and states that the quality of the work is determined by the quantity of material used. Should, the artist, however, deliberately choose poor or poor-quality material in order for his work to be accepted by the ruling establishment? This concept is problematic, as noted, because it deals with quantities, whereas a work of art should not be valued according to the amount of material it contains (see also Ofrat’s criticism: Ofrat, 1988, pp. 76-79; 2005, pp. 457-463). The artist should have the freedom to use the quantity and quality of materials that are appropriate for what he/she wants to express. “The want of matter” is thus a completely materialistic concept, contrary to what its thinkers intended. Unlike in all other fields of art, it was only in the plastic arts that this strange demand for a denial of the quality of workmanship seems to have arisen. In other fields, it is not possible to create without a well-established technique: The dancer is fundamentally committed to a high technical level, as are the actor, musicians, etc. Finally, and most importantly—a curatorial concept cannot stand as an obstacle and limitation to artists and their work.

A similar problem lies in the dictate that “the technique in the creation of art does not matter, only the idea”, as conceived by the artists Joseph Kosuth and Sol LeWitt (Kosuth, 1991; LeWitt, 1967, p. 166). This dictate is misleading, and it has led artists to seek to invent gimmicks, with such art becoming a kind of “copywriting”. In fact, ideas are repetitive and focused on a number of key issues, such as that of human loneliness in the universe, political criticism, anti-war statements, social messages, etc. Moreover, how is an idea to be evaluated, and who is authorized to determine its originality? In effect, the originality of a work of art lies in its unique representation of a recurrent idea; and the technique and manner of its execution are thus of great importance.

The question that arises from this discussion is: What authorizes an art critic to determine that certain artists are not “contemporary”? And in the more poignant words of art historian Amelia Jones (2017): “What is the mandate of curators in an age of rapacious late capitalism and neo-liberalism, marked by a perversion of political freedom through its conflation with consumerism?” (p. 231).

The redefinition of the target audience as presented in the previous section, and the perception of pluralistic curatorship, changes the situation in which an active group of artists is perceived as non-contemporary. The argument presented here is that pluralistic curatorship accepts all artists as “contemporary” without exclusion, and provides equal opportunities on the basis of their skill and professional level, and not on the basis of artificial determinations regarding class affiliation.

According to pluralistic curatorship, and following Jacques Derrida, there is nothing that lies outside the cultural narrative (Royle, 2003, pp. 49-50; Derrida, 1967, p. 154), so every individual artist must be included as “contemporary”.

The only differences between artists are that there are professional artists and amateur artists; artists who are connected to the current atmosphere and to the mainstream, and artists who work in isolation. All are included, and all are worthy of reference.

In his book *Thinking Contemporary Curating*, art historian and curator Terry Smith states that the first step in defining contemporary curatorship lies in recognizing that the object of contemporary curating is much greater than only contemporary art, since it must encompass all other kinds of art: art from any and every past; current art that is not classified as “contemporary”; as well as projective, future art. Smith emphasizes that the term “contemporary art” does not necessarily bind curators (Smith, 2012, p. 29).

Moreover, as Ofrat (2020) claimed, the curator needs to engage with issues of memory and oblivion in the history of art by also choosing forgotten artists and redisplaying their work that has disappeared from the public eye. Ofrat (2020) noted that the curator is committed to redressing injustices and criticizing the hegemonic historical view, while standing by the forgotten artists who have been excluded from history.

In relation to this, it is important to note curator Galia Bar-Or's words in her introduction to Ofrat's book *Guerrilla Curator*, which echoes Che Guevara's advice to rely on the people, to draw power and resources from the field, and to cooperate with local peripheral networks (Ofrat, 2020).

Ofrat points out in his book that mapping the invisible is the challenge of the curator: the mapping of the denied, excluded, erased artists, of those doomed to the margins of the art world and little recognition. Ofrat notes that the curator must know how to combine the visible map with the invisible map, characterizing his artistic view as the acceptance of the other, and defining the curator who searches for the excluded, the rejected, and the denied as a "cartographer" (Ofrat, 2020, pp. 62-63, 74-75).

He points out that one of the roles of the curator is to deal with questions of memory and oblivion in the history of art, and cites as an example an exhibition he curated in 2011, titled "The Cabinet of Emil Renzenhofer".¹ This exhibition engaged with a forgotten Zionist artist who had been excluded and vanished from the collective cultural memory (Ofrat, 2020). He concluded that it is the museum's mission to illuminate forgotten quality artists, but that this has been neglected, and he considers himself as a fighting opponent (Ofrat, 2020).

As a "guerrilla fighter", as the title of his book suggests, Ofrat (2011) declared in one of his articles "The era of hegemony is over", in accordance with the thinking of Jacques Derrida, Michelle Foucault, and Deleuze and Guattari, who locate the rejected and the Others at the focus of attention (Ofrat, 2011).

The term "outsider art" or art brut was coined by French artist Jean Dubuffet to define the art of artists unrelated to the established art world or to the accepted art institutions (art schools, galleries, museums). For Dubuffet, art brut transcended national boundaries and nationalisms (Mintur, 2004). The term was further elaborated in 1972 by the art critic Roger Cardinal. It was intended primarily to define artists on the fringes of society, the mentally ill, whose work is sometimes recognized only after their death. Dubuffet recognized that in outsider art there is an initial expression of emotion and thought, authenticity, primacy, and originality that has not been shaped by the conventions of academia and the art institutions, and in fact has been neutralized by the mainstream (Cardinal, 1972). In general, those that fall into the category of Outsiders in art are the LGBT, minorities, injured, sick, and hospitalized in institutions, and artists with disabilities such as mouth and foot artists, etc.

In its broad sense, "outsider art" is a term referring to artists working outside the artistic establishment, as defined in the following:

1. Art brut—the term coined by Jean Dubuffet, referring to artists who create art outside of the art establishment or the established academic tradition.
2. Folk art—art associated with indigenous people, not influenced by the mainstream art world trends, and not typically created by members of the art establishment.
3. Naïve art—defined as art created by an individual without formal art education. In effect, this is a part of an innocent and naive nature.

¹ Ofrat's exhibition was part of a larger exhibition entitled—"The Curators", curated by Revital Ben Asher Peretz at the Petah Tikva Museum of Art. The large exhibition was composed of several small exhibitions by different curators.

4. Outsider art—the term coined by Roger Cardinal but also referring to all forms of self-taught art.
5. Self-taught (contemporary self-taught)—art that shares something with the visionary, inspirational, or vernacular characteristics that define the genre of outsider art (Evans, 2016).

Roger Cardinal's (2009) understanding is significant for the definition of "outsider art":

Certain commentators have insisted that true Outsider Art can only be produced by people whose mental lives are at odds with the norm, or who have been physically afflicted in some deeply disturbing way, or again whose social status is pitiful and lacking in all comforts. Thus, there has been a tendency to envisage Outsider Art solely in terms of its makers' aberrant biographies, and to insist that its producers be eccentrics, misfits, recalcitrant, lunatics, convicts, hermits and so forth. But I must insist that, despite the signs that certain unconventional lifestyles and deviant beliefs do contribute to the nourishing of an outsider approach to art, there is a better way of handling the issue of definition: namely, by underlining the anti-conventional nature of the art making itself, its idiosyncrasy, its often unworldly distance from artistic norms, as well as from commonplace experience. I insist that Outsider Art earns its name not because of an association with a lurid case history or a sensational biography, but because it offers its audience a thrilling visual experience.

The above quotation relates to the concept of pluralistic curatorship introduced in this study, in the sense that the term "outsider artist" can also refer to the broader meaning of "outsider", and not necessarily only to the mentally ill, poor, or isolated.

Moreover, the concept by its very nature refers both to innumerable artists and to a huge public, since both naturally and literally they are outsiders in or to art.

Hence, outsider artists can be regular people who live regular lives, who may have experienced some distress during their lives that led to a burst of creativity, but their distress is not visible and is not discussed. It is not the distress therefore that is the issue, but the abundance and originality of the work that does not meet the dictates of the mainstream. Indeed, today, the term generally characterizes art created by artists who are outside the mainstream of the art world, regardless of the circumstances of their lives or the content of their work. The definition of some "outsider" artists as mentally ill is thus a paternalistic approach that does not take into account that, emotional and mental problems can also exist in individuals whose lives may seem outwardly normal.

Three common characteristics of "outsider artists" in its broad meaning and in relation to the concept of pluralistic curatorship can be discerned:

1. Working in isolation and without any connection to or awareness of the mainstream.
2. An individualistic and personal style that does not meet and does not seek to meet the criteria of the mainstream.
3. High dedication and prolificacy, their art is at the center of their lives, and their work does not depend on any external factor and is not influenced by any dictates.

There are outsiders who have studied high art and graduated; there are those who abandoned their studies because even then they discovered that their path was different and they rejected the dictates of teachers and institutions; and there are those who have never studied and are self-taught. Some artists of this latter type make a living from their art, others from teaching art (usually in a private setting and not an institutional one), and others still find their livelihood in a different way but remain very prolific and dedicated to their art.

The interest in "outsiders" in the art world has become widespread in the last few years, as reflected by Massimiliano Gioni, curator of the 55th International Art Exhibition of la Biennale di Venezia:

Blurring the line between professional artists and amateurs, outsiders and insiders, the exhibition takes an anthropological approach to the study of images, focusing in particular on the realms of the imaginary and the functions of

the imagination. What room is left for internal images—for dreams, hallucinations and visions—in an era besieged by external ones? And what is the point of creating an image of the world when the world itself has become increasingly like an image? (Wiley, 2013)

Rachel Sukman (2013), an Israeli curator and editor of *Terminal: A Review of 21st Century Art*, considers Gioni's attitude to be both courageous and revolutionary, in changing a fixed and conservative institutional direction and thought. It should be noted that Sukman sees herself as a curator who is committed to exhibiting outsider artists, and the gallery she manages—"Office Gallery in Tel Aviv"—regularly holds exhibitions for artists who do not belong to the mainstream.

Israeli curator Ruth Direktor (2013) noted that Gioni's curatorship of the Venice biennale was bold and revolutionary not because the exhibition featured contemporary art, but because it featured contemporary thinking. Direktor herself had curated an exhibition of Outsider Artists titled: "Art's Outer Circles: Outsiders. Na'ive, and Self-Taught Artists" (Haifa Museum, 2013), which presented the work of artists who had almost no connection with the institutionalized art world, including the mentally ill, solitary, impoverished, and handicapped.

However, the aim of pluralistic curatorship is not necessarily to present once in a while a large-scale exhibition of non-mainstream artists as a sort of homage, but to regularly hold collaborative exhibitions of artists perceived as "outsiders", and display their work on a regular basis. The illumination of forgotten artists is one of the most significant tasks of pluralistic curatorship, and the institution responsible for this is the municipality, since the Artists' House should be part of the services provided by the municipality for its residents.

In practice, the municipality should pay attention to their resident artists and display their work on a regular basis, such as including professional individualistic artists in exhibitions held in the city's municipal gallery, in which artists associated with the dominant art scene participate (in accordance of course with the exhibition theme and the works displayed, and not arbitrarily); or combining the works of a famous or international artist with an exhibition by local artists (and again, while maintaining professionalism and quality); and regularly holding solo exhibitions for the city's resident artists in the municipal gallery or in other supported spaces.

The Aesthetic Approach: Beauty as Useful; or, Beauty Is Permissible

In his book *The Abuse of Beauty: Aesthetics and the Concept of Art*, Arthur Danto (2003) declared that: "Nor was beauty the point of most of the world's great art. It is very rarely the point of art today". Danto further asserts that beauty in contemporary art is not only irrelevant but is actually dethroned (pp. 25-36).

This assertion makes "beauty" almost an obscene word in the artistic jargon, and seemingly a feature that is detached from contemporary art and associated with ancient art, which is considered anachronistic and irrelevant, and raises a number of questions: What is beauty? Is there anything wrong with visual beauty? Does "beauty" necessarily negate other features of the work of art? What did "beauty" mean in the ancient world? And are ancient art and concepts of beauty really no longer relevant?

Throughout history, there has been a distinction among scholars of the aesthetic between beauty in nature and beauty in a work of art. This distinction suggests that while the beauty of nature can be perceived even by the average and untrained eye, the beauty of art is created by humans and reflects genius and exalted thought. This latter kind of beauty can only be discerned by the trained eye and the learned consciousness, which is able to recognize the qualitative and deeper beauty inherent in art (Bosanquet, 1966).

In the popular perception, art is nonetheless associated with beauty. One of the common reactions upon encountering a work of art is: “How beautiful!”, which spontaneously expresses a relationship between art and beauty.

As a result of the ideological removal of the “beautiful” or aesthetic feature in contemporary art, the experience of visiting a museum or gallery has become a purely intellectual one, and therefore not suitable for everyone. The result is a situation in which art communicates with only a small part of the public.

I would like to argue, rather, that:

1. The perception of beauty in a purely physical-visual sense is incorrect. “Beauty” is a broad concept in the context of art and thought, and does not refer only to the visual aspect. Indeed such a perception of “beauty” is misleading.

2. The need for visual aesthetics is a basic human need; and art has always been associated with “beauty”. Therefore, there is no point in rejecting it, especially in a field in which appearance is a tangible aspect.

3. In the context of pluralistic curatorship, the visual aesthetic features may actually benefit and promote the rapprochement to art by the general public, and hence will open up new opportunities for much larger audiences to enjoy art.

The appropriate use of “beauty” thus has the power to make intellectual thought accessible to the general public.

A short overview of the meaning of “beauty” in dominant ancient conceptions and the embodiment of “beauty” in art is required in order to explain and apply this approach.

The concept of the “beautiful” in classical thought and the use of this concept in art are basic. First and foremost, the importance of beauty and its perception as no lesser a necessity than other factors was defined by Vitruvius (2006): *utilitas*—usefulness, *firmitas*—firmness, and *venustas*—beauty, are the three principles of architecture (III. 2).

The absolute beauty, or the idea of beauty, according to Plato (1951) in the *Symposium*, is spiritual, and hence eternal and unchangeable, in contrast to corporeal beauty. In a parable in the *Phaedrus* dialogue, Plato (2011) presents the benefits of visual beauty, having Socrates’ state that sight is the sharpest sense, and had wisdom possessed a physical appearance, its beauty would have aroused in us an infinite intensity of love. Hence, the strong benefit of visual beauty is that of its tangibility with the physical being the medium through which spiritual beauty is revealed.

Indeed, the desire to witness visual beauty is a characteristic human trait, as recounted in the *Phaedrus* dialogue. This dialogue tells the parable of the human soul that had dwelt amongst the divinities and sublime ideas before her corporeal incarnation. In this previous lofty existence, the soul had witnessed the sublime divine beauty. After the soul became detached from the divine realm and incarnated in corporeality, she forgot the astounding beauty she had seen, though a faint memory of it still remained in her it is this memory retained in the soul that imbues her with permanent longing for the heavenly visions she had once witnessed. Hence, whenever the soul in the mundane world encounters a human beauty that reminds her of that divine beauty, she is filled with a passion and love for that human being, and she wishes to merge with them (Plato, 2011, 203a, 251). This parable presents the human soul as seeking to perceive beauty, and it emphasizes the connection between visual beauty and love.

This ancient way of thinking led to the assessment of aesthetic appearance, the so-called “beauty”, and its use in public sculpture and vase painting. Aesthetically, attractive images, such as female nudity and diaphanous

drapery were used to attract the viewer's eyes in order to deliver political and moral messages (Sevilla-Sadeh, 2019).

In regard to male beauty, this was manifested in the concept of *kalokagathia*, namely, "the beautiful and the good": The *agathos*, which is the good or the useful, was that of the heroism and nobility of the good citizen who contributes his valor for the benefit of the city-state, and which was conceived as revealed in the *kalos*, which is the beautiful (Donlan, 1973, pp. 365-372; Weiler, 2002, p. 11). This concept is Platonic in nature, and in essence, it embodies the perception according to which the good is the useful or the intrinsic value of things; and thus beauty is formed from the good; and what is good and useful is beautiful (Plato, 1963). *Kalokagathia*, which is a combination of *kalos* and *agathos*, became the aim of the Athenian citizens in the *polis* and was associated with the aristocracy, athletic excellence, and manliness (Weiler, 2002, pp. 11-12; Raschke, 1988, p. 39; Yalouris, 1976, pp. 52-64; Donlan, 1973, pp. 365-374). In the art of the classical period, the concept of *kalokagathia* was manifested in a typical and uniform appearance, lacking any individuality, with the same facial features characterizing all images of youths in classical sculpture: a straight nose, an inward gaze, and often a slight sideways inclination of the head. This generalization of the human appearance is Platonic in origin and was aimed at embodying the concept of *idea* or archetype of the spiritual beauty and harmony of body, soul, and mind that is based upon the principle of *symmetria*—a "commensurability of parts" (Plato, 1897, p. 64). In ancient Greek thought, the soul—*psyché*—is not separated from the physical—*soma*, and this principle is manifested in movement, body language, and expression. Hence, the images of athletes in classical Greek art should be interpreted as a visual manifestation of the inner spiritual and preferred qualities (Reid, 2012). This aesthetic would become further elaborated in the neo-Platonic philosophy, including its importance for the definition of beauty in art, as will be discussed below.

The Roman philosopher Plotinus, the father of neo-Platonic philosophy, and whose doctrine had an enormous influence in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, perceived the origin of beauty as the Divine, which is the One (*Hen*). Accordingly, the beautiful image draws its beauty from the transcendental existence, and reflects the heavenly idea. The soul and the intellect that dwell in the human are derived from the Divine, and the soul experiences a permanent longing for beauty that derives from her desire to draw near to the Divine sublime (Plotinus, 1991, I. 6. 6, 7, 8). The origin of beauty is in the divine, but it is manifested in the physical realm, and the role of beauty is to lead the human being to the spiritual world (Plotinus, 1991, I. 6. 4, V. 8. 9). The beautiful work of art is that in which the artist has imprinted the Divine idea on the physical object, and this is the difference between a stone in nature and a stone that has become a work of art (Plotinus, 1991, I. 6. 2). Hence, the good is reflected by the visual beauty, as defined by the Greek concept of *kalokagathia*.

Plotinus ascribed much importance to art, considering the role and value of art as bestowing beauty upon humankind, and perceiving art as a medium through which to apprehend the sublime beauty. Hence, they who observe art may reach transcendence, and art is thus a means to reach the sublime. In order to reach the real beauty that is the sublime, the human being must develop his soul and become accustomed to viewing art and discerning its beauty (Plotinus, 1991, I. 6. 9).

Plotinus pragmatically recommended avoiding perspective illusions, depth, and shadows in painting, but rather that the images are presented on one surface, flat, bright, and illuminated with light. This kind of aesthetics is designed to reduce the material dimension of the objects in order to increase their spiritual aspect, as Plotinus considered the material as dark and the spiritual as light (Plotinus, 1991, V. 1. 6; VI 9, 11). His

approach deeply influenced the Early Church Fathers as well as throughout the Middle Ages, which leads us to the discussion of the significance of beauty in medieval times.

The use of light was realized extensively in Byzantine mosaics, which are characterized by flat images, lack of mass and weight, and a multiplicity of glittering gold, and brightly-colored tesserae radiating with light. The light eliminates the materiality and overcomes the darkness, and light and radiance were thus associated with God (Plotinus, 1991, V. 1. 6). The devotees who entered the church were amazed by the difference between its modest exterior and the splendor and glitter inside, and experienced a feeling of awe, and even of being in the presence of God. Visual beauty played a significant role in creating the illusion of encountering God, and thus also in church politics. Powerful use was made of light penetration in the late Middle Ages in Gothic cathedrals: the rays of light pierced the colorful and transparent stained-glass windows, filling the vast church space with the effects of this play of light, and these sights thrilled the worshippers. The human longing for visual beauty and its exploitation, therefore, became fully utilized in religious art.

Perceiving God as the source of all beauty and all good was also asserted by the Renaissance humanist Marsilio Ficino: Beauty shines and irradiates from the Divine and, accordingly, visual beauty is a manifestation of inherent goodness. For example, the shine projected from gemstones stems from the harmony in their internal structure, just as the inner balance of the soul creates its extrinsic beauty.

Similar to Plato and Plotinus in antiquity, and as a neo-platonist, Ficino also related to the benefits of visual beauty (although emphasizing the superiority of the spiritual), since human consciousness focuses on the senses. This approach had a major impact on Renaissance and Baroque art (Hofstadter & Kuhn, 1964). This, however, is beyond the scope of the present study, as is a review of the perception of beauty throughout the history of the philosophy of aesthetics. My focus here is to clarify the relationship between art and the conception of beauty, and the relevance of this relationship to pluralistic curatorship.

Therefore, the three main points of discussion are:

1. The recognition of the human need to view and become stirred by visual beauty, and the benefits of such visual beauty.
2. The beauty of a work of art lies in the balance and harmony between its spiritual content (*idea*) and its physical components.
3. The possibility of visual beauty being a medium for spirituality (*idea*).

Since the main principle of pluralistic curatorship is to make art accessible to the broad public, these three points may be useful. An audience that has been fascinated by a visual appearance will sometimes feel that they have undergone a significant experience. Indeed, the viewer wants to be amazed, excited, enchanted. Why not therefore use visual means to make this possible? The non-professional public in the field of art generally perceives a direct connection between beauty and art, and there is no need to change this perception, but to adjust to it. A visual aesthetics may cause the gaze to linger and ponder, and lead to a prolonged contemplation, following Merleau-Ponty's (2004) perception.

It is important to note that pluralistic curatorship does not seek to instruct artists to change their style and way of working, and the adaptation is mostly in the curatorial field itself, as will be presented further on.

This approach can already be discerned in the contemplations of several Israeli thinkers, and it is consolidated here and formulated as a theory.

Gideon Ofrat (2020), for example, contended that an exhibition should be stirring and surprising; a kind of ideological or aesthetic provocation that leaves the viewer changed from when he entered. Ofrat (1998) defined

the human being as “a beauty-seeking animal”, with every earthly encounter with beauty being a moment of grace; and he contends that beauty rules human lives (pp. 15-16, 23-24). He defines the relationship between beauty and art as an “alliance”, and treats with skepticism the thinkers of non-aestheticization in art (Ofrat, 1998, pp. 31-35).

Accordingly, an art exhibition is imagined by Ofrat as similar to a theater play: it is comprised of a dramatic move such as an exposition, which is the entrance to the exhibition, followed by the climax and release, similar to an act of catharsis. He also likens an exhibition to an architectonic construction, to the orchestration of a musical composition, and to a choreographed stage. The works exhibited are like actors, musical signs, or dancers (Ofrat, 2020, pp. 28-29). These comparisons accord with Aristotle’s aesthetic principal of unity in multiplicity (1970, XII, XIII, XXIII), aimed at endowing a sense of harmony and aesthetic unity.

Ruth Lorand (1991) presented notions that are similar to those of Plotinus: a well-developed aesthetic sense of taste and discernment in beauty refines humankind and helps to shape it as more moral, better and complete, with art constituting a good instrument for developing a sense of the aesthetic. Following both Plotinus and Emanuel Kant, Lorand (1991) noted the difference between beauty in nature and the beauty of a work of art, which is conceptual, reflecting the harmony between content and form, and human excellence.

In conclusion, an approach that does not negate the connection between art and visual aesthetics seems appropriate to the principle of pluralistic curatorship, and its implementation will be discussed in the following section.

The Combining Approach: Making Art Accessible

In light of all the above, it appears that art should and can be a part of the life of everyone. In this section, I engage with the practical issue of how to make art accessible to the general public, and its potential for accessibility to all.

The first and main suggestion here is to present art at sites and in buildings that are part of everyday life, by means of exhibitions curated by professional curators, and attended by professional artists, on a regular basis. The first aspect I would like to focus on is that of the content of the exhibitions.

The concept “Guerila Curator” coined by Ofrat means that the curator operates radically, outside the establishment system, with almost every space being seen as valid for an exhibition, irrespective of its spatial standing, with the prestigious museum exhibitions perceived as just one of various alternatives. Ofrat argues that the more curators avoid institutional artistic spaces such as museums and galleries, the better. “Curatorship is a wall and a passion”, he contends. Therefore, every wall, everywhere, is a potential substrate for an exhibition, whether in the center of the artistic arena or on its fringes (Ofrat, 2020, p. 137). For Ofrat (2020), an exhibition should not be dependent on the patronage of artistic institutions, as a good exhibition is possible in any space imaginable and can benefit the context relevant to the exhibit. Ofrat (2020; 2014) also contended that a temporary space loads the work with particular meanings, and he defines the exhibition space of the 2000s as a space with more than a single identity, or a space that wears and removes identities.

However, displays held in alternative spaces, such as theaters, cafes, corridors, old buildings, etc. are frequently amateurish and seem random—the walls are often decorated since they were not intended for the display of art; the lighting is not professional; and the display in general can seem sloppy and fall short of that of professional spaces. The suggestion here is that alternative spaces do not need to be amateurish, but should be prepared to make them equal in quality to that of galleries and museums.

Such alternative public spaces could be in municipal libraries, city halls, courts, health clinics (national and private), hospitals, national and municipal offices (local committee offices, income tax, electric company, water company, ordinary offices, etc.), high-tech factories, conservatories, malls, restaurants, coffee houses, synagogues, sports clubs, abandoned buildings that could be renovated and converted into exhibition spaces; universities and colleges, and schools. Indeed, I would like to suggest that every school (and all schools basically feature many spaces), at all levels will have a professional art gallery. The use of these suggested sites for regulated exhibitions will accustom the public to observing art, in accordance with Plotinus' proposition, and hence develop an artistic sensitivity and aesthetic sense. This could also lead to additional events in which the general public can participate. For example, the opening event of an exhibition in a school, with the participation of a reputed artist, can greatly contribute to the relations between pupils and their families and the school staff, and the sense of belonging to the school. Activities related to exhibitions should also take place, as will be shown below. This may also increase livelihood and job opportunities for artists, curators, and the maintenance crews who install and secure the exhibitions. All these activities should receive strong municipal support on a regular basis. The involvement of the municipality in such activities could be given a title, such as MuniArt, which emphasizes the involvement of the municipality in increasing the artistic activity in its city.

The second insight is that of the selection of exhibition topics and artistic styles, which should consider the interests of the public in a particular area. As pointed out by Ofra (2020), a curator should take into account the differences between regions and the character of the population of a particular city or town. For example, a conceptual exhibition will not always be accepted in areas where the majority of the public is unfamiliar with the concepts of modern and contemporary art, where it may be better to hold an exhibition of art that speaks in a more direct artistic language. On the other hand, it could also be appropriate to present a conceptual exhibition accompanied by explanatory texts that take into account the viewers' unfamiliarity with conceptual art.

These exhibitions should be followed by activities such as gallery talks and meetings with the artists and the curator. The difference in this approach lies in that whereas such activities have usually been held in regular galleries and museums, they will now also be held in the public spaces suggested above, and on a regular basis. Another activity, which has also usually been reserved for museums or gallery spaces, is that of a performance by a performance artist. Since the space under discussion is a public space that also has other purposes, the audience is random and may not necessarily be acquainted with performance art. This offers an opportunity for the curator to give a brief explanation before the performance. Performances should also be held on a regular base at the Municipal Gallery.

Artist residency is a significant aspect of pluralistic curatorship and the residency of artists from Israel and abroad should take place on a regular basis in each city, with an ongoing exhibition of their work in the municipal gallery.

Regarding the contents of the exhibitions in these many spaces, and in light of the fact that the random audience may not be acquainted with the field of art, or not recognizes art as such, I suggest here the curating of semi-didactic exhibitions: exhibitions that are intentionally aimed at imparting concepts belonging to the language of art and its history. Such exhibitions would provide immediate knowledge for a public unfamiliar with the history of art and the language of art. Held similarly to ordinary exhibitions, they would feature the participation of professional and reputed artists, with a strong emphasis on explaining concepts in art history. Exhibitions of this type should be held in particular in places entered by random audiences, such as municipal

offices, civil service offices, clinics, etc., in order to expose to art and the history of art those audiences who do not normally consume it (and perhaps this is what will make these audiences at a later stage also choose to visit museums and galleries).

Following are a few suggestions for such exhibitions, and their titles:

We Still Love Still Life—an exhibition aimed at explaining the meanings of this genre in the history of art. Such exhibition could display works by Aram Gershuni, for instance, alongside photos of works by Old Masters, with explanatory texts.

The Secrets of Mimesis—an exhibition that engages with mimesis in art, that is, the precise representation of an object in painting or sculpture, to the point of a sense of its actual existence.

The Mysteries of the Concept—an exhibition aimed at explaining the meanings of conceptual art. In contrast to current exhibitions that take an understanding of conceptual art for granted, this exhibition takes into account the fact that most of the public are unfamiliar with conceptual art. It would be designed to explain conceptual art in simple terms; while presenting works by different artists and a text with a definition of the term and an explanation of each work.

We are Ready for Ready-Made—an exhibition aimed at explaining the meaning of “ready-made” in art. The method of presentation could be similar to that of the exhibition on conceptual art. Photographs of constitutive works in the field of conceptual art could be added, such as Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain*.

Specifically Site-Specific—an exhibition aimed at explaining the meaning of “site-specific” in contemporary art. The method of presentation could be similar to the above.

A Contemporary God’s Council—this title is an example of exhibitions dedicated to art history. Exhibitions such as these could display works by a contemporary artist that refer to a masterpiece from the history of art. A qualitative reproduction of the referenced masterpiece could also be displayed. An example of this might be the work *The God’s Council* by artist Jonathan Hirschfeld (a diptych, pencil and oil on canvas, 300 × 150 cm, 2021, in a private collection, see Figure 1), which was inspired by a masterpiece by Rubens (see Figure 2). Hirschfeld’s work is accompanied by photographs that portray his work process (see Figures 3-11), and could also be displayed in the exhibition. The curatorial text would explain both the work of the 17th-century artist and that of the contemporary artist. In brief, Jonathan Hirschfeld sought to distill Rubens’ dramatic painting into a symbolic composition that sums up thoughts on the divine, the human, the beautiful, sexuality, love, and violence. His action was an act of drawing and erasing repeatedly, until the right balance was found. The artist also notes that it is appropriate to observe the stages of the work, because they reflect his meanderings until reaching the final product.² The curatorial text and the positioning of the works will emphasize this process, and contribute to transferring knowledge of both the history of art and contemporary art.

² This information was provided to me by the artist.



Figure 1. Jonathan Hirschfeld, the Council of the Gods, oil and pencil on canvas, 150 × 300 cm., diptich, 2021, in a private collection. Photo: Tziki Eisenberg.



Figure 2. Peter Paul Rubens, the Council of the Gods, oil on canvas, 1622-1624, Louvre, Paris. Public Domain.



Figure 3. Jonathan Hirschfeld, the Council of the Gods (sketch), oil and pencil on canvas, 150 × 300 cm., diptich, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 4. Jonathan Hirschfeld, the Council of the Gods (sketch), oil and pencil on canvas, 150 × 300 cm., diptich, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 5. Jonathan Hirschfeld, the Council of the Gods (sketch), oil and pencil on canvas, 150 × 300 cm., diptich, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 6. Jonathan Hirschfeld, the Council of the Gods (sketch), oil and pencil on canvas, 150 × 300 cm., diptich, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 7. Jonathan Hirschfeld, the Council of the Gods (sketch), oil and pencil on canvas, 150 × 300 cm., diptich, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 8. Jonathan Hirschfeld, the Council of the Gods (sketch), oil and pencil on canvas, 150 × 300 cm., diptich, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 9. Jonathan Hirschfeld, the Council of the Gods (sketch), oil and pencil on canvas, 150 × 300 cm., diptich, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 10. Jonathan Hirschfeld, the Council of the Gods (sketch), oil and pencil on canvas, 150 × 300 cm., diptich, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.



Figure 11. Jonathan Hirschfeld, the Council of the Gods (sketch), oil and pencil on canvas, 150 × 300 cm., diptich, 2021. Courtesy of the artist.

Mythological Encounters—a series of exhibitions that engage with mythology and, broadly, with distant and ancient cultures and history in general. In her research on ways of studying the past by means of curatorship, Francesca Leonardi (2021) noted that curators may adopt a critical approach in order to say something about the past, and that an exhibition can be used to rethink history, to revise it, and also to highlight the exhibition's role in the process of writing history. The field of Classical Reception Studies could be very relevant here (Hardwick & Stray, 2008; Hardwick, 2003; Martindale & Thomas, 2006; Morley, 2009). An exhibition that could be both attractive and instructive could be based upon Classical or mythological inspired works by reputed artists (Sydnor, 2018). This could also be an excellent opportunity to borrow an ancient work of art from a museum and plan the entire exhibition around it, with that the ancient work constituting the focus, and works by contemporary artists responding to it. Another option is to present a quality photograph of the ancient work. An example to another such exhibition could be a display of work by artist Yonatan Ullman—*Pillars of Time* (Gypsum on Formica, 60 × 100 cm, 2020, see Figure 12), with a photograph of a Classical ancient column or temple, alongside texts that explain Classical architecture, the Greek religion, and concepts such as the Acropolis in Athens, the Parthenon, or the Platonic *idea*. Similarly, the text should also refer to the intentions of the contemporary artist when he created this image of a Classical Greek pillar: the pillar that seems to “float” between two-dimensional and three-dimensional, as a dreamy and blurred memory of a culture that, although it no longer exists, has left an indelible mark.

In another example, an exhibition could display a work such as *Bacchanalia* by Asad Azi (see Figure 13), which refers to such Classical contexts as Dionysian aspects, Aphrodite, and more, alongside photographs of antique images of Dionysus and Aphrodite, together with explanatory texts, both on the ancient works and on the work by the contemporary artist (Sevilla-Sadeh, 2013, pp. 46-57); and also to Nahum Gutman's orchard, Cezanne's landscape and trees images, and Expressionism in relation to Azi's burst of color.



Figure 12. Yonatan Ullman, Pillars of time, Gypsum on Formica, 60 × 100 cm, 2020. Photo: Tal Nissim.

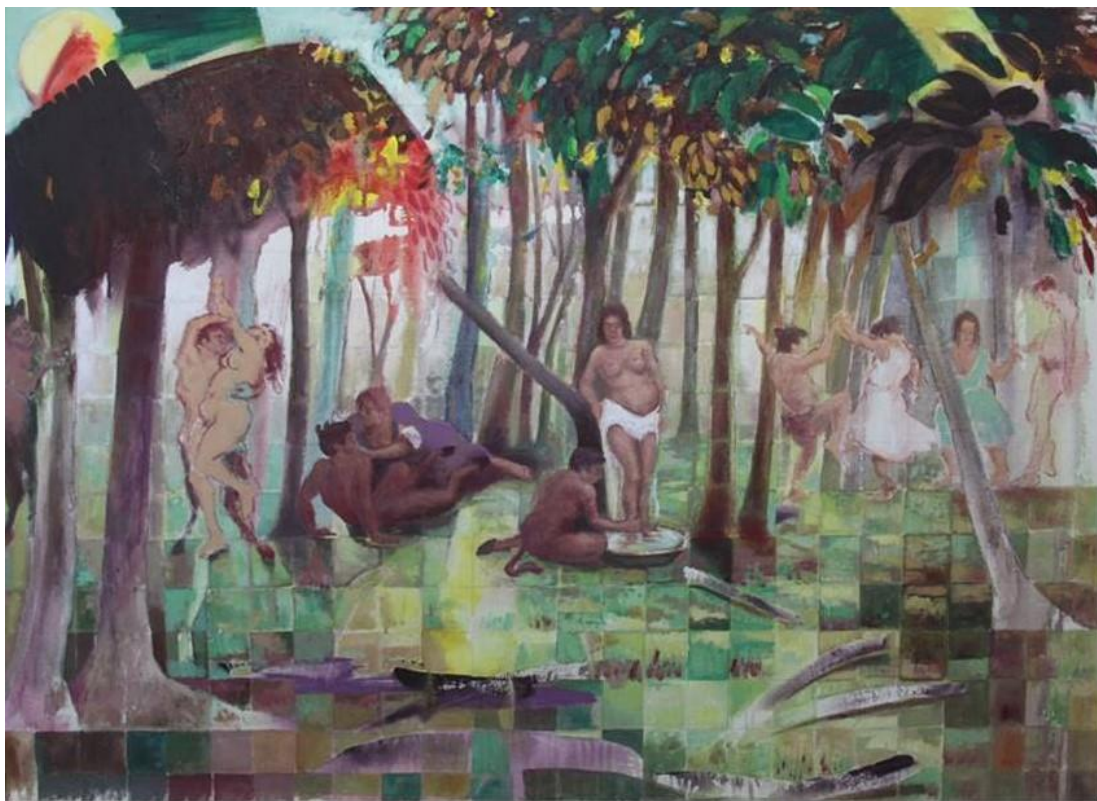


Figure 13. Asad Azi, Bacchanalia, acrylic on canvas, 100 × 137 cm, 2012. Courtesy of the artist.

Provocations Are Accepted!—An exhibition aimed at explaining the meanings of provocations, which are frequent in contemporary art. This exhibition could be based mainly on performance art, and present performances and meetings with performance artists. The concept of French curator and art researcher Nicolas Bourriaud, of relational aesthetics or relational art, is highly relevant in this respect. Relational art perceives the audience as a community, with the viewers being partners in the creative process. The principle of this concept is the gathering of people together and the realization of a joint creative activity under the direction of the artist. This type of art is based on creativity by the viewer rather than contemplation, and Bourriaud perceives the interactivity of relational art as superior to visual contemplation in front of an object that might seem passive and distant. In relational art, the audience is perceived as a community and the work of art is experienced collectively, rather than in private viewing. The work of art is thus a “social” being in the sense that it is capable of eliciting positive human relationships (Bourriaud, 1998). In the context of pluralistic curatorship, this concept could be very appropriate. Activities such as these have already been held. Recent examples are David Wakstein’s mosaic project—“A Multi participant Show”—at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art,³ and “The Snuggle Blanket” exhibition-project by Liav Mizrahi, which was recently held at the Alfred Gallery.⁴ The suggestion here is to expand these projects and present them on a regular basis in the municipal galleries.

The field of education too must be part of the pluralistic view presented here. The proposed practices are as follows: visits by all pupils, and not only by art students (as generally practiced today), to museums, galleries, alternative spaces, etc., and in the school’s gallery; hosting the municipal curator on a regular basis in the schools and their galleries; hosting reputed artists in all classes and not only for art students; holding workshops with reputed artists and presenting their works in at the school gallery; holding exhibitions of art students at the Municipal Gallery in addition to the use of the school’s gallery; holding evenings for all pupils and their parents to present what is happening at local exhibitions in Israel and around the world: at the Venice Biennale, Istanbul, Documenta, etc.; holding art tours abroad for all pupils and not only for art students. Art history studies should also comprise part of the compulsory classes for all students in the school, and not just for art students.

Other activities within the municipal sphere could include lectures on a regular basis, followed by creative workshops. For example, a lecture on Matisse cutouts could be followed by a cutout workshop; a lecture on Kandinsky or Jackson Pollock’s abstract painting could be followed by a workshop on abstract, intuitive or action painting; a lecture on mythological images could be followed by a corresponding creative workshop, etc. Lectures could also be given by celebrity artists on a regular basis.

Such activities are also very suitable for sports clubs, as part of the cultural activity offered.

These are only preliminary proposals, and other possibilities are many, with the starting point being the principle of pluralistic curatorship.

Current Approaches: Some Examples of Realization

A pluralistic curatorial approach already exists here and there in Israel, and characterizes a number of municipal galleries, independent projects, and some individual curators in the field. Following is a brief review of several realizations of the pluralistic approach, as a basis for systematic development of the outline presented in this study.

In Israel, there are at present only three full-time municipal curators, whose position as such is combined with the position of head of the municipality’s art department. There is no municipal curatorial position in Tel

³ On David Wakstein’s project see: <https://www.tamuseum.org.il/he/exhibition/david-wakstein-multiparticipant-show/>.

⁴ On Liav Mizrahi’s project see: <https://www.alfredinstitute.org/exhibitions/lively-dead>.

Aviv, despite its perception as the leading city on the Israeli art scene, nor in Jerusalem. The three positions, rather, exist only on the periphery: in Rishon LeZion, Yavne, and Modi'in. Indeed, a pluralistic approach in its various aspects can only be found at present outside Tel Aviv. This, however, is also one of the main goals of pluralistic curatorship: the establishment of multicultural centers on the periphery.

Other municipalities, such as Kfar Saba, Hod Hasharon, Ramat Hasharon, and Ramla employ curators in a non-permanent position and under an annual contract. It should be emphasized that most of the municipalities and local councils in Israel do not employ a curator, and art exhibitions only take place sporadically, whether in a museum, artist gallery, or alternative spaces in the city.

All three full-time municipal curators in the cities noted above possess a curatorial conception that can be defined as pluralistic, as follows.

Efi Gen is the curator and head of the art department in the Rishon LeZion municipality, and curator of the Municipal Committee for Permanent Sculpture in the urban space. One of Gen's curatorial innovations is that of an annual art exhibition that engages with the relationship between art and the Hebrew language, since Israeli art is also related to the heritage of the Hebrew language, and there is a strong influence of the language on many works of art. This innovation is linked to the pluralistic approach to Israeli culture, and to issues regarding self-identification embedded in the Hebrew and Israeli culture (Malkin, 2003; 2006; 2013; Shapira, 2007).



Figure 14. Municipal Gallery of Rishon LeZion. Photo: Avi Kakoon.

The principle of pluralism guides Efi Gen in the sense that she perceives the municipal gallery (see Figures 14 and 15) as a site that should function for the benefit of the city.⁵ Consequently, the gallery seeks to display a variety of artistic approaches, with the collaboration of local artists. Gen notes that her curatorial concept is not hierarchical, but layered, and presents leading artists in the Israeli art world alongside young artists and artists who are residents of the city of Rishon LeZion. Following Gideon Ofrat's statement—"Curatorship is a wall and passion", Gen believes that curatorship is "wall, passion and viewer"; and that the viewer is therefore the one to

⁵ About the Municipal Gallery see: <https://bl-gallery.co.il/about/>.

whom the curatorial writing and the installation of the exhibition is directed. Following her belief in providing an opportunity for multiple perspectives, Gen does not curate all the exhibitions herself, but employs additional curators in the municipal gallery.⁶

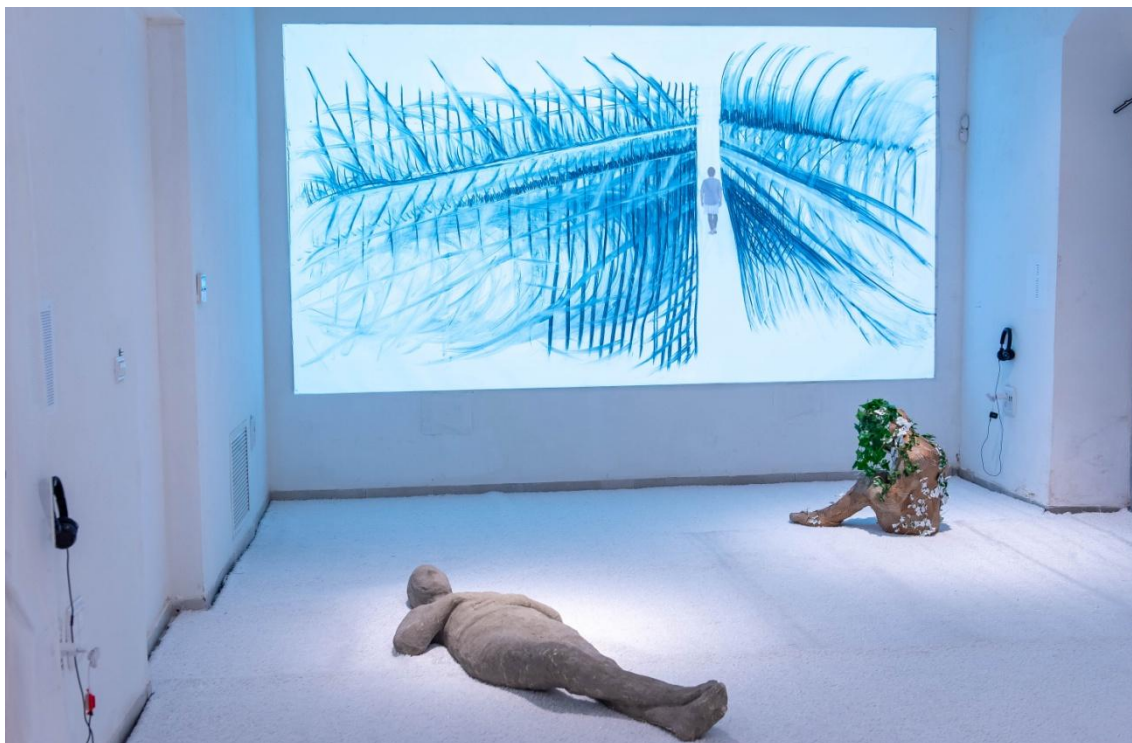


Figure 15. Municipal Gallery of Rishon LeZion, an installation view of Hila Laiser Beja exhibition (White Days, 2020). Photo: Avi Kakoon.

Roni Reuven is the curator and head of the art workshop in Yavne (see Figure 16), which serves as a municipal center for all the plastic arts. The art workshop was established in 1978 and was initially conducted by artist David Wakstein, and the gallery was founded six years later by curator Ami Steinitz. The workshop holds art classes in a variety of fields and for all ages, and activities are held for special-needs populations, such as the mentally handicapped, the elderly, and the disabled. The gallery's art workshop presents exhibitions by the best Israeli artists, along with exhibitions by Yavne's own artists, immigrant artists, and the city's school students. Reuven notes that the choice of exhibition themes stems from the educational and community nature of the gallery. The gallery also hosts Yavne School and kindergarten children for a daily gallery talk, as well as a creative workshop following the exhibitions. Reuven's vision is:

To curate in Yavneh a comprehensive exhibition of installations to be displayed in galleries, city spaces, public spaces, and historical sites. Yavneh, which was of great importance in the past as a spiritual center and seat of the Sanhedrin, will become an attraction for art lovers from all over the country.⁷

⁶ Told to me during a conversation with the curator.

⁷ An interview with Rony Reuven, *Portfolio*, published on January 29th 2020, <https://www.prtfl.co.il/archives/124175>.



Figure 16. Art workshop and gallery, Yavne. Photo: Amram Cohen.

Reuven's pluralistic approach reflects the outline presented in this study:

There is a significant difference between a private gallery and a community gallery. The gallery in Yavne is an active partner in the assimilation of educational, social, and aesthetic values and in the projects of artists from the city.

And also:

Art education is a top priority for the gallery, which is why we hold quality theme exhibitions alongside exhibitions adapted to the thousands of students who crowd the exhibition spaces throughout the year. In addition, we take care to include in the exhibitions the artists who live in the city and students who have completed their art studies in the various frameworks.⁸

Another example of a peripheral art center whose approach is in line with the principles of pluralistic curatorship is in the city of Modi'in. The municipal gallery there, titled Gallery 51 for contemporary art (see Figures 17, 18, and 19), holds four exhibitions a year with the participation of both local and national artists. The curator and head of the art department, Nitza Perry, notes that it is important for her to pay attention to the local artists (who number about 6,000). Perry maintains regular contact with the heads of art departments in schools, and hosts student visits and gallery talks for all visitors.

As noted earlier, in Tel Aviv, the city perceived as the leader on the Israeli art scene, there is no municipal curator. However, Kav 16, a gallery with a declared community vision, is located in the Neve Eliezer neighborhood in southeast Tel Aviv. The gallery is named after the only bus line (*kav*) that connected the

⁸ An interview with Rony Reuven, *ARTODAY*, published in 16th September 2020, <https://artoday.art/2020/09/16/%d7%99%d7%a9-%d7%94%d7%91%d7%93%d7%9c-%d7%9e%d7%a9%d7%9e%d7%a2%d7%95%d7%aa%d7%99-%d7%91%d7%99%d7%9f-%d7%92%d7%9c%d7%a8%d7%99%d7%94-%d7%9e%d7%a8%d7%9b%d7%96%d7%99%d7%aa-%d7%9c%d7%a4%d7%a8%d7%99%d7%a4/?fbclid=IwAR1KBw0teENTfcGnjQQly00VhUbAoV2ZEOurr1Y-Q-xdf-aw7hrk83szjrg>.

neighborhood (in the past) with the west side of Tel Aviv, and this underscores its existence on the periphery of the big city. The vision of the gallery is to bring reputed artists to neighborhoods where they do not usually exhibit. The gallery's social approach and its pluralistic affinity are summed up in the words of one of the gallery's curators, Ravit Harari (between 2013 and 2017), upon taking office:

As a curator with a background in social psychology, I am aware of the experience of visiting and viewing an exhibition, any exhibition, and believe that the way to provoke thought is through the visitor's sensory and emotional experience, one that will remain with the viewer even after the visit. (Armon-Azoulay, 2013)

And also:

I do not aim to create exhibitions "for" a specific population but to create good exhibitions wherever they are; but I will invest more in activities that will help make the exhibition accessible to different types of population—for example, through different tutorials that are appropriate for different populations. So I meet with an art instructor who creates tutorials that are suitable for children. It is important for me, for example, also to write a clear text. (Mishal, 2014)



Figure 17. Gallery 51 for contemporary art, Municipal Gallery, Modi'in. Courtesy of Gallery 51.

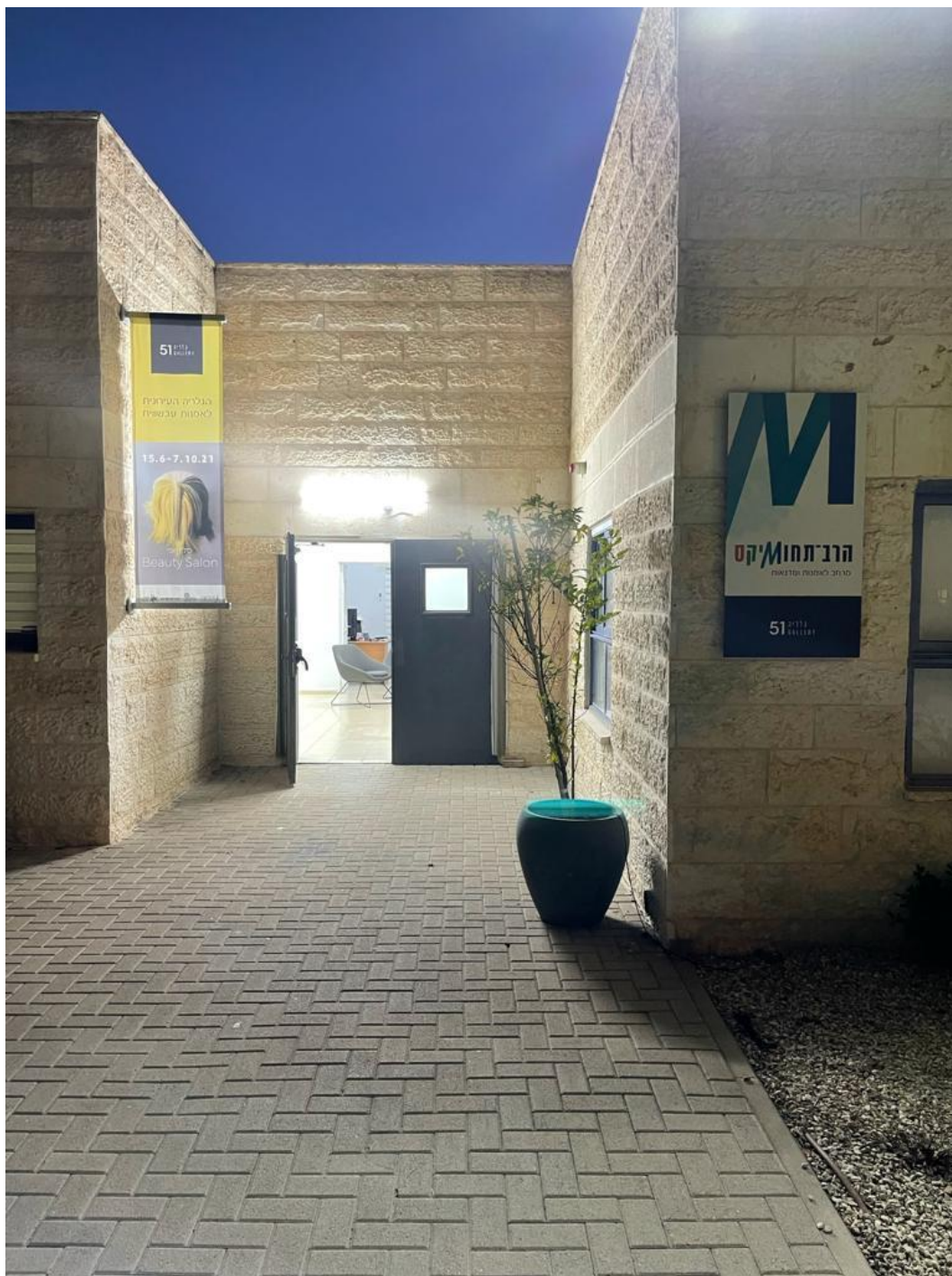


Figure 18. Gallery 51 for contemporary art, Municipal Gallery, Modi'in. Courtesy of Gallery 51.



Figure 19. Gallery 51 for contemporary art, Municipal Gallery, Modi'in, an installation view. Photo: Yoav Nir.

Another cultural center with a pluralistic approach of another kind is the Neve Schechter Center, a center for contemporary Jewish art and culture. The Center is housed in Neve Tzedek in an ancient Templar conservation building with a rich history, and offers a cultural experience that includes music, literature, and art, for a pluralistic study of Judaism. The complex comprises a gallery, an events hall, synagogue, and coffee house. The pluralistic approach of this center is based on the combination of Jewish studies with cultural events and contemporary art exhibitions that take place in this restored ancient structure.⁹

The preservation of ancient buildings and the merging of the ancient and the contemporary is one of the goals of the Old Jaffa Development Company for restoration of the Old City, and is consistent with the principles of pluralism. The company perceives its goal as restoring the ancient city while preserving its character, and housing artists in the restored quarters. As part of the company's activities, one of the ancient and restored buildings (an Ottoman house from ca. 1850, see Figures 20-26), has been entrusted to the art curator and gallery owner Nira Itzhaki. Itzhaki acts voluntarily as the project manager. In her hands the restored structure will be used as a residence for artists, Israeli and foreign. The artists will live and work in the residence and exhibit their works in the same space. There will also be seminars and events, and the aim is to make the place an interdisciplinary cultural center, and to collaborate with other art centers in Jaffa, such as the neighboring Almasen Gallery, Kandinoﬀ House, and Magazine 3 (Gillerman, 2021). The pluralistic approach of this project lies in several aspects: the desire to form a community of artists who will be involved in the local community; Itzhaki's personal belief in the commitment of the artistic institution to positively influence the environment; and preservation of the affinity and character of the place as a mixed Arab-Jewish neighborhood.¹⁰ This is reflected

⁹ See on site: <https://neve-schechter.org.il/en/schechter-gallery-1/>.

¹⁰ Told to me during a conversation with the curator.

in the redesign of the structure, which also emphasizes its original features. The design is highly aesthetic and inviting, in accordance with the pluralistic approach that emphasizes the importance of the aesthetic aspect. I would like to point out that such a house is very suitable for all the activities mentioned in this study in the context of pluralistic curatorship: semi-didactic exhibitions, performances, lectures, etc.

Another individual curator who holds a pluralistic approach is Doron Polak. Polak notes that art should exist first and foremost in the public space, and that when a person stands and waits at a train station, in line at a hospital, in a terminal, or is on a street walk, he is open to receiving visual messages. In such cases, art can replace advertisements and commercial messages. Polak also comments that both the museum and the public space have the same responsibility towards the artists, the community, the environment, and the beholders. He has curated exhibitions in the porticoes of theaters, galleries, cultural centers, and universities as well as in commercial, business, and industrial buildings. He remarks that his greatest achievement as a curator is the constitution of the relationship between art and the public, even if the viewer is not a professional in the arts (Talmor, 2021).



Figure 20. Residency house, Old Jaffa. Photos: Nira Itzhaki and Uri Gershuni.

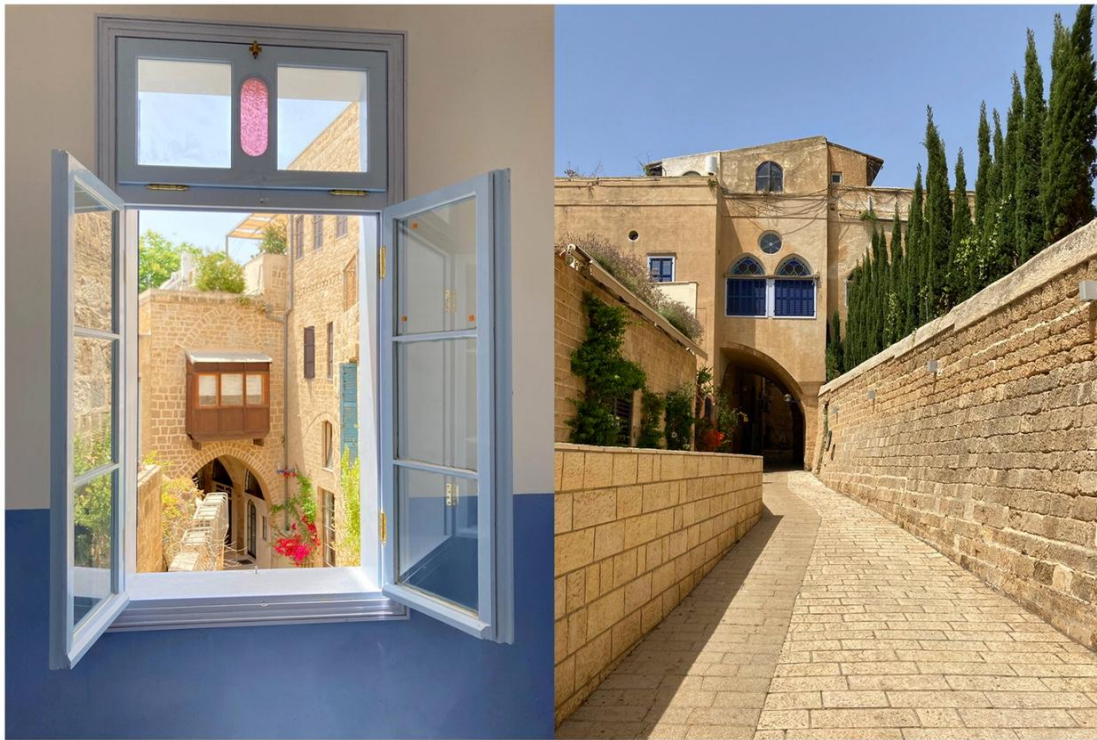


Figure 21. Residency house, Old Jaffa. Photos: Nira Itzhaki and Uri Gershuni.

In Jerusalem, Israel's capital, a pluralistic approach is effectively obligatory, due to the fact that this city is pluralistic in nature. A pluralistic approach underlies the collaborative project too of the Barbur Art Gallery, whose goal is to provide a free and tolerant space for art and as an artist residency. The gallery has however suffered from attempts to close it and to disrupt its activity, apparently stemming from political motives (Barzilai, 2017).¹¹ Today, the gallery functions as a residency—Barbur B & B; and the public are invited to enter and meet the artists and view their works (Barbu, 2017).¹²

Another project characterized by the pluralistic approach is HaMiffal, which is an art and society center that provides a home and a stage for contemporary art in Jerusalem. The project is based on a cooperative association of artists that has turned an abandoned historical building in the heart of the city into a public space constructed as a work-in-progress. The place comprises a multidisciplinary platform that combines galleries, shared workspaces, concert spaces, workshops, a coffee bar, and a local art shop.¹³ The project is located in a spacious house that was once inhabited by a Palestinian family that was forced to flee in 1948. The artist Meidad Eliyahu has been involved in this project for the past five years as a creator and curator. He perceives the structure as bearing a strong absent-presence belonging to another period, and its deep cultural contexts. This extensively absent-presence can be felt in almost every space in HaMiffal and creates a constant dialogue between past and present. Eliyahu points out that the intention is to create a broad and collaborative discourse, without any fixed

¹¹ The Seventh Reporter (2017). The State has no Freedom of Finance. *The Seventh Eye*, published on February 22nd 2017, <https://www.the7eye.org.il/237011>.

¹² *Erev Rav* editorial board, "Barbur Gallery Returns in a New Space", *Erev Rav*, published on July 27th, 2020, <https://www.erev-rav.com/archives/51510>.

¹³ A virtual tour is available in link: <https://jlmart.co.il/about-hamiffal/>.

hierarchical order among the group of creators who operate the project. Other centers for art in Jerusalem that reflect a pluralistic perception are the Muslala, Mamuta, Koresh 14 gallery, and Manofim—Jerusalem Contemporary Art Festival, all of which are based on a cultural dialogue.¹⁴



Figure 22. Residency house, Old Jaffa. Photos: Nira Itzhaki and Uri Gershuni.

¹⁴ See in sites: <https://muslala.org/about/>;
<https://hansen.co.il/resident/%D7%9E%D7%A2%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%AA%D7%94/>;
[https://www.koresh14.com/%D7%90%D7%95%D7%93%D7%95%D7%AA](https://www.koresh14.com/%D7%90%D7%95%D7%93%D7%95%D7%AA;);
<https://manofim.org/en/exhibitions-en/>.



Figure 23. Residency house, Old Jaffa. Photos: Nira Itzhaki and Uri Gershuni.

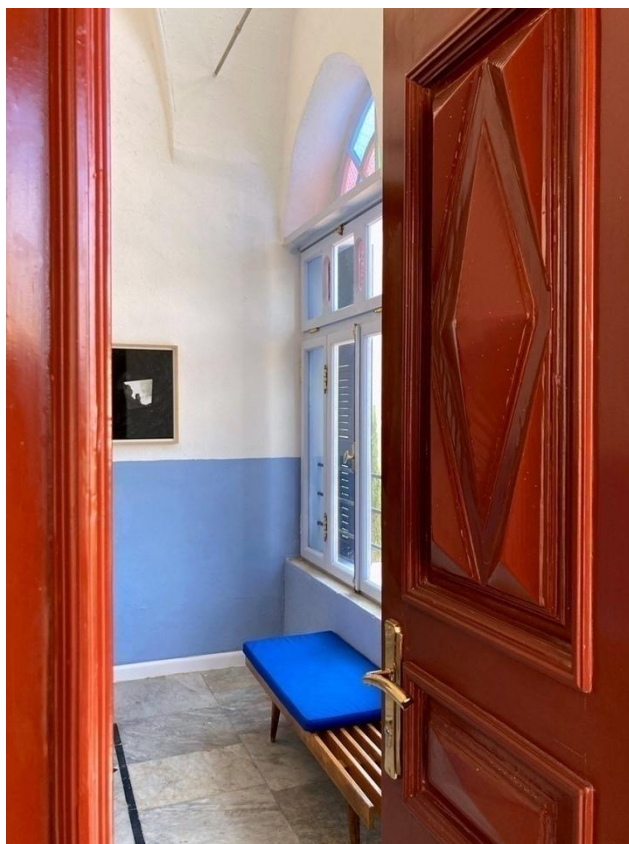


Figure 24. Residency house, Old Jaffa. Photos: Nira Itzhaki and Uri Gershuni.



Figure 25. Residency house, Old Jaffa. Photos: Nira Itzhaki and Uri Gershuni.

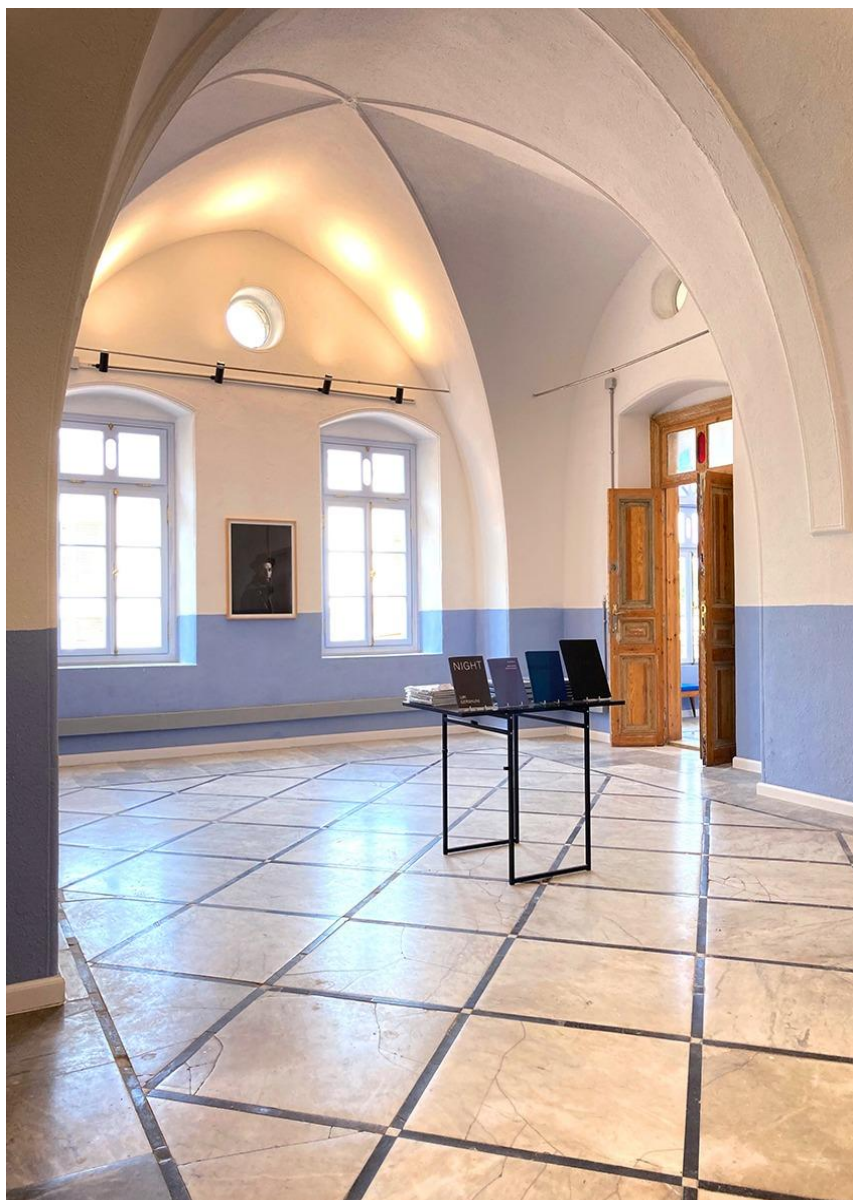


Figure 26. Residency house, Old Jaffa. Photos: Nira Itzhaki and Uri Gershuni.

Cultural dialogue also underlies the Center for Contemporary Art (CACR) in the city of Ramla (see Figures 27-31). The center was founded in 2019 by its curator Dr. Smadar Sheffi in a British Mandate building built in 1922, and is located in the Ramla Museum complex. The city of Ramla is pluralistic by its very nature, with its population consisting in both Jewish and Arab citizens, Muslims and Christians. In accordance with this mixed nature, the vision of the center, as Sheffi puts it, is based upon the recognition of the vitality of culture and art in an open civil society that respects all the communities that comprise it, and the activities at CACR resonate with the multiculturalism and religious tolerance.

The curator, Ravit Harari, mentioned earlier in relation to the Kav 16 gallery, is the present curator of the Ramat Hasharon municipal gallery, whose exhibitions focus mainly on installations, videos and site-specific

works.¹⁵ Harari has noted that she believes in providing tools to help the viewers understand the works and the concept of the exhibition, tools which she calls “mediation mechanisms”, and she perceives the contact with the curator as one that should be unmediated. Hence, the exhibitions are always accompanied by clear texts alongside each work (something for which she was negatively criticized by one of the art critics), and each exhibition is accompanied by five gallery talks (more than usual). As a municipal gallery that maintains a close contact with schools, there are guided tours for pupils and families, along with musical events and other activities. Harari notes that her curatorial approach is based on the contact with a specific area and its community in regard to the gallery’s content and subjects. The exhibitions she has curated to date have thus engaged with narratives in the history of Ramat Hasharon, and connected between the local, the national, and the global, and between the historical and the contemporary (Tamir, 2021).

Harari is planning to curate a future exhibition with the participation of high-school art students from the city, who will respond in different ways to the works of international artists. Another activity is that of audience participation in a work of art, in accordance with Nicolas Bourriaud’s concept of relational art. This concept was realized in the work of Guy Goldstein, who recorded family whistles of the residents of Ramat Hasharon, which became the raw materials in his sound work. Residents were given credit for their participation, which was presented at the exhibition alongside the work. All these activities are consistent with the principle of pluralistic curatorship.



Figure 27. Center for contemporary art, Ramla. Photo: Ron Peled.

¹⁵ See photo in site:

<https://ramat-hasharon.muni.il/%D7%90%D7%95%D7%93%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%91%D7%A0%D7%94-%D7%9E%D7%91%D7%A0%D7%94-%D7%95%D7%90%D7%A8%D7%9B%D7%99%D7%98%D7%A7%D7%98%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%94/>.

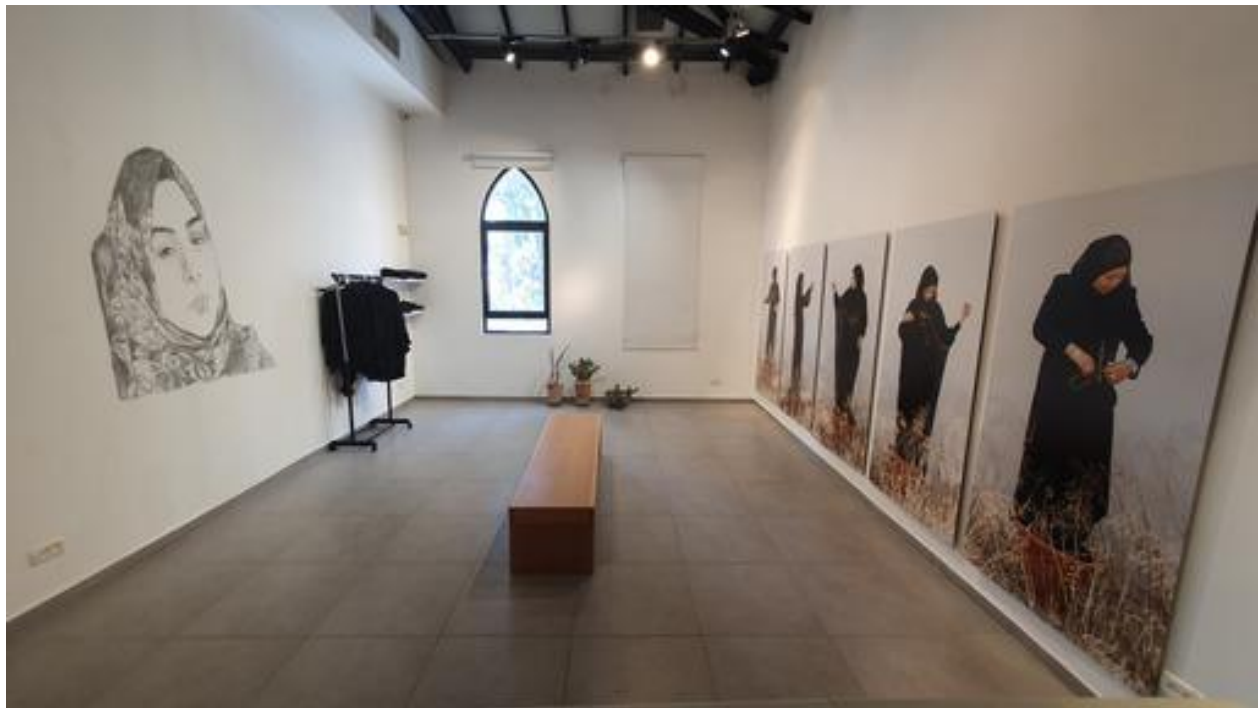


Figure 28. Center for contemporary art, Ramla, an installation view. Photo: Ron Peled.



Figure 29. Center for contemporary art, Ramla, an installation view. Photo: Ron Peled.



Figure 30. Center for contemporary art, Ramla, an installation view. Photo: Ron Peled.



Figure 31. Center for contemporary art, Ramla, an installation view. Photo: Ron Peled.

A project in which pluralism is the main approach is that of Zumu—a mobile, community-based museum that travels throughout Israel and presents rotating exhibitions. The exhibitions are created and curated together with the local communities. The title “Zumu” combines two words: move (zuz) and museum, and the concept on which the project is based is that everybody deserves to enjoy art; that art is an essential key to creating a more inclusive community; and on bridging between all sectors of Israeli society. Mobility, which is the main characteristic of Zumu, neutralizes geographical distances, bridges cultural gaps, bypasses physical barriers, and overcomes cognitive barriers. In accordance with the principles of pluralistic curatorship, Milana Gitzin Adiram, general manager and chief curator of Zumu, seeks to make culture and art, which she emphasizes are currently consumed only by a limited circle, the domain of the entire public in Israel. She also avoids the terms “center” and “periphery”, noting that Zumu offers an equal meeting point and discourse.¹⁶

The above review is intended to present just a few of the variety of pluralistic aspects that exist in current curatorship in Israel, with the hope that the outline presented in this study will contribute to the further development of pluralistic curatorship on the Israeli art scene.

Summary and Conclusions

This study has sought to propose a model for pluralistic curatorship. In order for its realization however, it requires municipal support. Following is a summary and several conclusions that have emerged from the study.

The first question asked was—For whom are art and exhibitions actually intended?

As shown, the great difference between contemporary art and ancient or traditional art is that whereas art in Antiquity was an integral part of life, and its viewers were thus accustomed to its involvement in their lives, observing art in our contemporary era is rather a matter of choice. This has led to a sense of alienation among the general public, with art having often become the property of a limited sector of society, for whom the practice of art is a profession and a livelihood, and who have established a hegemony on the art scene.

The dominancy of this hegemony has had two destructive results: the denial and contradiction of the principle of freedom inherent in art by its very nature; and the sharing of the artistic products only with those associates and favorites who are perceived as belonging to the hegemonic group. Hegemony, however, is a concept that is alien to art and contradicts its very nature. The first conclusion is, therefore, that curatorial work should be aimed at the general public and not just at a hegemonic group. Pluralistic curatorship, thus, is obligated to the public and indeed the entire population, while also requiring awareness of the differences between different modes of observation among the different types of observers: art lovers, amateurs, casual viewers, or professionals. The cardinal question is—How can art be made an integral part of people’s lives in the present era, as it was in ancient times?

The first conclusion, therefore, is that it is necessary to adopt from the ancient world the concept of integrating art into daily life.

The second conclusion relates to the inclusion of artists in exhibitions and activities on the basis of their skills and professional level, with every modern-day artist perceived as “contemporary”, without exclusion, and hence “outsiders” are also “insiders”. Similarly, the aim of pluralistic curatorship is not necessarily to present

¹⁶ See in sites: <https://zumu.org.il/home/>;

<https://basis.org.il/%D7%9E%D7%92%D7%96%D7%99%D7%9F/%D7%97%D7%93%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%AA/%D7%A6%D7%B3%D7%98-%D7%A2%D7%9D-%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%9C%D7%A0%D7%94-%D7%92%D7%99%D7%A6%D7%99%D7%9F-%D7%90%D7%93%D7%99%D7%A8%D7%9D>.

occasional large-scale exhibition of “outsiders” or non-mainstream artists as a sort of homage to them, but to organize regular collaborations of every types of artist and to display their work on a regular basis.

The third conclusion relates to the issue of “beauty” in art. The banishment of “beauty” from the field of art has led to art often becoming a completely intellectual matter, and further increased the alienation. However, as shown, “beauty” is a broad philosophical concept that refers to the harmony between form and content. Also, the aesthetic is a basic human need and rejecting it is pointless; moreover, visual beauty can function as a medium for spirituality, as it was in antiquity. Since pluralistic curatorship is designated for a broad and unrestricted public, the correct approach is thus to employ visual beauty rather than to negate its influence.

The fourth conclusion offers several insights regarding how to implement the principles of pluralistic curatorship. First, and following Gideon Ofrat, art can be displayed in any space. The suggestion here is that the alternative spaces should not, however, be amateurish, but that the appropriate preparation of the walls, lighting, etc., should establish them as equal in quality to that of professional spaces. Consequently, no hierarchy should exist between the display spaces, and hence no hegemony. Finally, the exhibitions in alternative spaces too should be curated by professional curators.

The fifth conclusion, following the issue of displaying art in many kinds of spaces, is that a professional gallery should be established in every elementary and high school, together with frequent exhibition-related activities. The involvement of the municipality in such activities is a prerequisite (a suggested title—MuniArt).

Pluralistic curatorship must also take into account the character of the population in a particular area. This sensitivity will be reflected in the choice of exhibitions and how they are presented and explained to the general public.

The sixth conclusion, therefore, is in the field of educational curatorship. A suggestion, discussed above at length, is to hold semi-didactic exhibitions, which will resemble ordinary exhibitions with the participation of professional and reputed artists, but with a strong emphasis on explaining issues in art history. Finally, and following Bourriaud’s concept of relational art, art projects should be practiced on a regular basis in the municipal galleries.

The seventh conclusion derives from the above review of several examples of realization of the pluralistic curatorial approach. The main conclusion is that every municipality should employ an art curator. It is important to note that the term “municipality” refers also to the kibbutzim and other settlements of diverse types and populations. The list of cities in which there is currently no municipal curator is long: Metula, Kiryat Shmona, Nahariya, Karmiel, Acre, Tiberias, Safed, Nazareth, Um El Fahem, Hadera, Herzliya, Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Beer Sheva, Eilat, and many other cities, towns, settlements, etc. In accordance with the principles of pluralistic curatorship, as noted above, every municipality should have an art curator. Also, every city should have an Artists House.

As shown, some suggestions for the application of the principles of pluralistic curatorship already exist in practice and in the statements of curators, but these are sporadic and devoid of any systematic outline for their realization. This study has sought to sketch a systematic and conscious way of applying pluralistic curatorship, in the belief that art can indeed have a real and practical impact on the public, and contribute to society and to humanism.

It is clear that while the implementation of some of the proposals in this study will involve increasing the budget, a major part of the study focuses on changing attitudes, and this is not related to budgets, but to achieving a different understanding of the purpose of art and of the curatorial work.

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