

A JOURNEY
THROUGH
THE MAHJ'S
CONTEMPORARY
COLLECTION



Musée
d'art et d'histoire
du Judaïsme

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Inviting artists, designers and architects to intervene in the context of a museum collection or historic monument is now a widespread practice, and a perilous but stimulating exercise. Our aim since the museum opened in 1998 has been to constitute a contemporary collection out of these 'encounters', that is, to work on a long-term basis with Jewish and non-Jewish artists, always in a spirit of open-mindedness, to create resonances with the objects and themes in the permanent collection.

Christian Boltanski inaugurated this programme with *Les Habitants de l'hôtel de Saint-Aignan en 1939*, a fragile monument vertically traversing the museum's 20th-century wing. Jean-Pierre Bertrand, Arik Levy and Michel Nedjar were invited to work on the festivals of the Jewish calendar, whose themes have nurtured their work in often surprising ways.

The relationship to the book, the written word and language has almost naturally been the framework for many of our commissions and acquisitions. Micha Ullman created five *Sand Books* for the museum collection, and Serge Lask and Judith Bartolani contributed works associating memory and the compulsive practice of writing.

The Prix Maratier, awarded every two years by the Fondation Pro-Mahj, has given us greater freedom, enabling us to integrate into our collection works as different as those by Max Wechsler, Pierrette Bloch, Iris Sara Schiller and Mikael Levin, after fascinating debates with juries attentive to the complexity and specificity of our task.

The *Nuit blanche* continues to be an annual opportunity to commission a work for the museum's courtyard. Kader Attia and Antoine Grumbach are just two of the artists who have accepted this challenge.

This ongoing project has progressively enriched the collection with emblematic works, which have been complemented by gifts by the artists, collectors and organisations, and also loans, notably from the Fonds national d'art contemporain. The aim of the selection of works shown here is to create echoes with the permanent collection and its themes, particularly the written word.

Contemporary art is 'infiltrating' the permanent collection this summer, and, by highlighting some of its aspects, also inviting us to revisit it.

KADER ATTIA (Dugny, 1970)

Big Bang, 2005

Metal, resin, mirrors

Acquisition, 2005

For its first participation in the *Nuit blanche* in 2005, the museum commissioned Kader Attia to create a work dealing with religious symbols.

Big Bang metaphysically evokes the creation of the universe, with specific reference to the shared history of the Jews and Muslims. The globe is coated with star of David and crescent-shaped mirrors, whose reflections play over the facades of the Hôtel de Saint-Aignan.

Kader Attia was born in 1970, at Dugny (Seine-Saint-Denis). He graduated from the École supérieure des arts appliqués Duperré in 1993. His work explores the complex relationships between oriental and western culture.

MICHA ULLMAN (Tel-Aviv, 1939)

Sand Books, 2000
Rusted iron, red sand

Acquisition, 2002

Micha Ullman created the five *Sand Books* (in reference to the five books of the Torah) for the *Conversation* exhibition at the museum in October 2000.

The *Sand Books* are part of a series of works closely related and responding to the museum's collection and its recurrent themes: homeland and exile, the relationship to the book and Hebraic script.

The books are made of red sand and rusted iron, and the principle of their construction is an axis around which the pages turn. Reading the sand book involves turning its pages, which causes the displacement of the sand from one side to the other. The grains of sand are the letters. The act of reading the sand turns it upside down, which can evoke the act of digging, and that to leaf through a book is to search it, to question it.

'I gradually became convinced that the true home of the Jew is the book. In the book he finds himself, in the book he questions himself, in the book he has the freedom he has been refused everywhere else. This is why the Jew has questioned the book for two thousand years.'

— Edmond Jabès

Micha Ullman was born in Tel Aviv in 1939. He lives and works in Israel. He was awarded the Israel Prize in 2009. In his sculpture — he describes himself as a 'man who digs' — he engages in a work process that could be termed 'archaeological', questioning the traces of what once was and establishing an acknowledgement of its absence.

Since his involvement in the Israeli conceptual movement in the 1970s, his work has explored the notion of the earth. One of his major pieces, the subterranean *Bibliotek* memorial in Bebelplatz in Berlin (1995), commemorates the burning of 20,000 books there by the Nazis on 10 May 1933.

Permanent collections, The Jews in France in the Middle Ages' room
(Les Juifs en France au Moyen Âge)

SERGE LASK (Paris, 1937 — Nuce, Aveyron, 2002)

Kaddish, 1999

Indian ink, gouache on Canson paper, tracing paper, marbled paper, silk paper, canvas and cloth

Acquisition, 2000

'Pages of books. Scored, crossed out, calligraphed, covered over with other pages of the book, scored, crossed out, calligraphed until the last page, the last letter. A book lost and found. Letters and words now definitively incomprehensible. Neither sadness nor bitterness, only the urgency of writing out again.'

— Serge Lask

Serge Lask paints absence, the absence of his mother, murdered by the Nazis. For the last fifteen years of his life, consumed by the necessity to keep alive a language buried within him and which had fallen silent, he began copying out in Yiddish the pages of the books he read as a child: grammar manuals, children's books, then the books in his father's library.

'Some people leaf through books that have survived, strange books one has to open backwards and read the wrong way, while others, like Serge Lask, copy them out word by word, words squashed together forever, the words and names of those who once talked and wrote, in order that between destruction and oblivion a few letters can stand up, simply for the beauty of the gesture.'

— Jean-Claude Grumberg

Serge Lask was born into a family of Polish Jewish immigrants in France in 1937. A tailor, he took up painting when he was thirty. Serge Lask died on 19 October 2002, as this work was being installed in the museum.

ARIK LEVY (Tel-Aviv, 1963)

Sparkler, 2004

Video, 1 min 59 sec

Candle, 2004

Video, 25 sec

Sevivon, 2004

Video, 54 sec

Acquisition, 2004

In 2003, we asked the designer Arik Levy, known particularly for his work with light, to create a piece for the *Hanukkah* festival.

Hanukkah, the 'Festival of lights', celebrates the Maccabees' victory over the Hellenistic dynasty of the Seleucids between 165 and 163 BC. The Jews, led by Mattathias the Hasmonean and his sons, drove the Seleucids from the Temple, which had been profaned by King Antiochus IV Epiphanes. Tradition has it that Judas Maccabeus found only one unprofaned container of oil, enough to keep the menorah alight for only a day, but the oil burned for eight days, sufficient time to prepare more oil.

Arik Levy's installation, *Sevivon* (spinning top), is based on the idea of perpetual renewal. The inside of the giant spinning top, placed in the museum's courtyard, was clad with mirrors that diffract light infinitely, and three videos were installed throughout the permanent collection:

- *Sparkler*, the light that dispels darkness in joy
- *Candle*, the candle that never burns down
- *Sevivon*, the spinning top that never stops

Arik Levy was born in Tel Aviv in 1963. He trained at the Art Center of Design-Europe at Tour-de-Peilz in Switzerland. He works in a variety of fields, ranging from industrial design, packaging and graphic design to image creation, sculpture in urban settings, interior architecture, exhibition design and contemporary ballet.

ANTOINE GRUMBACH (Oran, 1942)

Model for a *sukkah*, 2006

Wood, fabric and plastic

Gift of the artist, 2011

For the *Nuit blanche* in 2006, the museum commissioned Antoine Grumbach to make a hut for *Sukkot*, to be erected in the courtyard of the Hôtel de Saint-Aignan. The commission was prompted by a lecture he had given at the museum on the Jewish space.

'In praise of shade'

'The hut built for the festival of *Sukkot*, to commemorate the Israelites' journey through the desert, is also a means of reflecting on architecture's origins.

Ancient treatises on architectural theory all begin with a description of 'Adam's house in Paradise'. All forms of shelter are discussed: a cave, a tent, a wooden structure covered with foliage, a construction in dressed or crude stone. In one of his last great theoretical works, the 18th-century architect Ledoux conceived the primitive house as a tree and its shadow.

The treatise of the Talmud dealing with the festival of *Sukkot* is also a veritable treatise on architecture. Written over one thousand five hundred years ago, this text broaches all of architecture's theoretical questions, reflecting on the separation of the structure and the walls, on the definition of a space, on virtual walls, openings, systems of proportion and the question of scale. All these points are abundantly discussed and their possible transgression is always envisaged.

The *sukkah* is an ephemeral, dismantlable construction. Its roof of branches protects from the sun yet enables one to see the stars by night.

The memory of the shadow cast by the cloud that protected the Hebrews during their wandering is an essential part of the festival's celebration. Great attention is paid to the quality of this shade, which has to be more important than the light casting it. More than merely a memory of the crossing of the desert, the *Sukkot* hut is a light trap in which the praise of shade manifests its presence.

By realising this construction in an archaic fashion, on a bed of sand with a structure of roughly-hewn tree trunks assembled with saddle notches and rope, a roof of woven willow, osier, chestnut and palm branches, and walls of white linen fabric like a prayer shawl, I had the feeling I had been able to formulate my version of Adam's house in Paradise, whilst understanding, thanks to the Talmud, that building is above all creating shade.'

— Antoine Grumbach

Antoine Grumbach is an architect. He teaches at the École d'architecture nationale supérieure de Paris-Belleville. For several years now, he has been pursuing a reflection on the prescriptions concerning space in Jewish tradition.

SOPHIE CALLE (Paris, 1953)

The Eruv of Jerusalem, 1996

Photographs

Acquisition, 1998

'According to Jewish law, it is absolutely obligatory for the faithful to rest on the Sabbath. Working is prohibited, and it is forbidden to carry an article (keys or a bag, for example) from inside to outside the home. However, if one refers to the Torah, a town or a city surrounded by walls with gates is considered to be private property; and in such towns or villages a person may transfer articles from his home into the street, or from the street into his home.

Today, few modern cities are enclosed by ramparts. Consequently, each person would be required to restrict his activities to the confines of home if not for the dispensations of the Law, which permit the establishment of *eruvim*. An *eruv* consists of wires (or string) that form an imaginary wall. In most cases, these "frontiers" are created by erecting posts that are connected by threads of galvanized steel. The area surrounded by the *eruv* thus becomes a private space within which it is permitted to carry articles during the Sabbath.

According to the Torah, in all villages surrounded by an *eruv*, the public domain may be considered private property.

The stations. I asked inhabitants of Jerusalem, Israelis and Palestinians, to take me to a public place that they considered private.'

— Sophie Calle

Sophie Calle was born in Paris in 1953. The virtual frontier constituted by the *eruv* has a particular resonance in her work, which explores the limits between private and public.

BORIS ZABOROV (Minsk, 1935)

A couple, 2009

Acrylic and pencil on canvas

Gift of One for All Artists, Paris, 2010

'My eyes ceased looking and, traversing the image plane, went out through the frame of the old photograph, as if through a wide-open window, to reach the infinite spaces of memory. With the suddenness of a memory flash, I saw the vast panorama of the happy times of my past. Memory had rejected all shades of black and kept only the colours of the rainbow.'

— Boris Zaborov

It was this chance encounter with an old photograph that prompted Boris Zaborov to develop a new approach, a new vision, the 'inward eye'. He paints the world of memory, opening a window on the past and going through, as he says, a 'hidden door'.

Boris Zaborov was born in Minsk in 1935. He trained in Leningrad then Moscow, where he lived and worked until 1980. He designs theatre sets and illustrates books. He emigrated to France and has lived in Paris since May 1981.

The exhibition continues on the 2nd floor.

ANNE VALÉRIE HASH (Paris, 1971)

Mère veille sur moi (Mother is watching over me), 1999

Silk, muslin, sequins, paste gems, beads, gold and silver thread, collage and printed photographs

Gift of the artist, 2000

'*Mère veille sur moi* was inspired by the many wedding dresses I made early in my career — stories of life.

On the front of the dress there is a broken, deformed mirror reflecting the portrait of a beautiful, smiling, benevolent woman — a mother.

At the back of the dress, the train is printed with photographs, revealed by the lightness and transparency of the organza.

The front and back complement one another. The bride wishes to take her past life with her.

Birth, marriage and death are the three important stages in a person's life, marriage brings all three together, it is a birth in which the projection of the past reinvents itself to create tomorrow.'

— Anne Valérie Hash

A gift to the museum in 2000, the *Mère veille sur moi* wedding dress was made especially for the *Mariage* exhibition at the Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, Palais Galliera in 1999.

After working for Nina Ricci and Chanel, Anne Valérie Hash showed her first luxury ready-to-wear collection in 2000 to wide acclaim.

IRIS SARA SCHILLER (Haïfa, 1955)

La Tresse de ma mère (Plaiting my mother's hair), 2003
Digital video, 13 min

Acquisition, 2007, with the aid of the FRAM Île-de-France

'I'm dreaming of my mother dreaming of me dreaming of her. I'm trying to unveil the enigma of the transmission between mother and daughter. – a daughter is a daughter is a daughter of a daughter is a daughter of a daughter...

A never-ending chain of symbiotic links.

The role reversal in the film (here it is the daughter who plaits her mother's hair) is part of the idea of this game of mirrors.

I'm dreaming of my mother dreaming of me dreaming of her.

Our identities merge.

How am I to do this? How can I separate myself from her?

I'm still part of her, the umbilical cord links us, I am merely an extension of her.

A reminder of the archaic, the plait, as old as mankind, as the umbilical cord.

Plaiting, handed down from mother to daughter, evokes for me the bond between all women and the mother of all mothers, an archaic divinity.

So it is by plaiting that the revelation will come.

Combing her tangled hair, source of all confusions, and putting order in the emotional chaos.

Plaiting her hair doesn't help me understand, I have to undo it and redo it better, more meticulously. There is nothing strange about doing and undoing for me, I recognise the lunar cycle, it is an integral part of my innermost body.

But this repetitive ritual doesn't appease me.

I'm in the grip of this obsession, caught in the compulsive state of plaiting.

My opposition isn't liberating but convulsive, I'm pretending to be crazy.

A daughter is a daughter / is a daughter of a daughter / is a daughter of a daughter is a daughter // is a daughter is a daughter is an escape / is a daughter from an escape / is an escape from a daughter / is an escape from an escape of daughters // is a daughter is a crazy girl / is a crazy daughter / a crazy daughter of a daughter / a crazy daughter // is a daughter of a daughter / is a line of crazy daughters / a crowd of daughters / is a daughter...'

— Iris Sara Schiller

Iris Sara Schiller was born in Haifa in 1955. She studied at the Bezalel Academy in Jerusalem. She has lived in France since 1984. She began her career as a photographer, then in the 1980s took up sculpture using a variety of techniques including drawing, photography, life casting and making objects. The rituals of mourning, filiation, engenderment, terror and offering are the framework on which she builds her work.

The Fondation Pro-Mahj awarded her the Prix Maratier 2007.

The exhibition continues on the 1st floor.

GÉRARD GAROUSTE (Paris, 1946)

Qohelet, 1989

Etching, aquatint, drypoint heightening on Arches paper

Gift of the artist, 2008

'For in much wisdom is much grief,
And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.'
Ecclesiastes I.18

'The wise man's eyes are in his head,
But the fool walks in darkness.'
Ecclesiastes II. 14

'For there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the
fool forever,
Since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come.
And how does a wise man die?
As the fool!'
Ecclesiastes II. 16

— « Paroles du Sage », *Les Cinq Rouleaux*, translated by
Henri Meschonnic (Paris, Gallimard, 2009)

The book is central to Gérard Garouste's work, and he has always drawn inspiration from the masterpieces of universal literature, illustrating Villon (1986), Dante (1986) and Cervantes (1998). He began measuring himself against the biblical texts in 1988 with *Qohelet* (Ecclesiastes), seeking a new kind of writing and artistic language and, in his practice of etching, finding resonances between the written word and drawing. At that time, he was being taught by rabbis Philippe Haddad and Marc-Alain Ouaknin, but had not yet begun studying biblical Hebrew. He first read this late biblical text in Henri Meschonnic's translation and, like the other texts of the five scrolls, he is particularly fond of it. He produced a series of lithographs for Edmond Jabès's *Le Livre des ressemblances* (1997) and, at Marc-Alain Ouaknin's request, illustrated the *Haggada* for *Passover* (1998), pursuing the long Hebraic tradition of illumination and decoration dating back to the Middle Ages. His ink and gouache drawings for the *Haggada* were shown at the Mahj in 2001.

Gérard Garouste was born in Paris in 1946 and studied at the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts. His work has evolved in several directions: theatre, stage design, writing, painting, sculpture, ceramics and etching.

MIKHAIL KARASIK (Leningrad, 1953)

Illustrations

JOSEPH BRODSKY (Leningrad, 1940 — New York, 1996)

Text

Retch o prolitom moloke (Speech About Spilt Milk), janvier 1967
Saint Petersburg, Mikhail Karasik Publishing, 2003

Acquisition 2010

Retch o prolitom moloke is a nostalgic stroll through the Saint Petersburg of his past, seen through the figure of Joseph Brodsky.

'The old houses have suddenly lost their faces. And I've lost my city. For years, I seem to have been living in another city, in a city where carriage entrances no longer link parallel streets, their doors closed now with keypad locks, in a city where one can no longer go to friends' or acquaintances' houses like before – dropping in on a whim, without remembering the apartment's exact number, only the building and the floor. [...]

The doorways no longer reek of bad alcohol and cat's piss, on the window ledges winos no longer leave bottles of that cheap eau de Cologne that passed for vodka on bad days. I walk along Pestel Street, looking at the old doors that have survived. Forty years ago, Iossif Brodsky used to walk along this street, past these houses everyday. He lived on the corner of Liteiny Prospekt and Pestel (formerly Panteleimonskaïa), at no. 24/27, first floor, apartment 28, in a building still known today as "Mourousi House".

— Mikhail Karasik

Mikhail Karasik was born in Leningrad in 1953. A graduate of the Graphic Art faculty at Herzen Institute in Leningrad, he is one of the principal thinkers, innovators and 'propagandists' of the artist's book in Russia.

Joseph Brodsky, 'Jew, Russian poet, American essayist', was born in Leningrad in 1940. He was sentenced to hard labour for 'social parasitism' in 1964 and following his expulsion from the Soviet Union in 1972 emigrated to the United States. He was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1987 and died in New York in 1996. *Retch o prolitom moloke* is one of the eighteen poems that Joseph Brodsky wrote every Christmas from 1962 to 1993.

MAX WECHSLER (Berlin, 1925)*Untitled*, 2001

Acrylic on paper cut-out

Gift of the artist, 2003

Untitled, 2001

Acrylic on paper cut-out

Acquisition, 2003

Untitled, 2001

Acrylic on paper cut-out

Loaned by the artist

Vis-à-vis, 2010

Ink on paper

Loaned by the artist

'Letters interest me for their typographic aspect, their form, their slant, their density. My project consists in divesting letters of their function: writing. I proceed to transform them, breaking them up, using only their particles: a contour, a line, a curve. I arrange and stick these letter fragments, converted now into signs, on a sheet of paper, according to a rhythm, an inner light. I then make photocopies of the initial module. The covering of a surface can then begin. Illegibility takes over the space. Yet there always emanates something of the written origin. The letter, constantly transformed, deconstructed, resists, reveals itself to be indestructible. Other representations appear; the letter becomes its alter ego.

I like associating what will be forever unknown with what will remain indelible. This metamorphosis reinforces the omnipresence of the letter that objects to its disappearance.'
— Max Wechsler

Max Wechsler was born in Berlin in 1925. He lives and works in Paris. After a period of Surrealist inspiration, he stopped painting in 1974. Five years later he turned to abstraction, choosing typographic script as his material and a black and white photocopier, scissors, glue and binder as tools. Max Wechsler was awarded the Prix d'honneur Maratier in 2003 for his entire oeuvre.

PIERRETTE BLOCH (Paris, 1928)

Untitled, 2006

Indian ink on paper

Gift of the artist to the Fondation Pro-Mahj, 2011

'I love tools that make lines.
I know them, I frequent them, lines,
With no conclusion, endless, their returns,
Their forests of accidents, their apparent speed,
Their tenacious duration, their persistence,
Their urgency.'
— Pierrette Bloch

Since the 1950s, Pierrette Bloch has pursued a rigorous, obstinate and silent oeuvre. She works with relentless horizontality, using two materials: Indian ink, which she deposits with tiny, repetitive, random dabs on long horizontal bands composed of lengths of paper glued together, creating compositions resembling musical staves, full of silences and resumptions, which she calls 'a place of uncertainty'; and horsehair yarn, which she braids, again horizontally, in densely packed, slack or undulating lines.

Yet she objects to any comparison with writing: '[...] people always end up by asking me about the relationship between what I do and writing. And I say outright: there is none (but deep down I'm not so sure!) and repeat without thinking: no, there is no relationship between my writing and what I do. (I'll see later.)'

Pierrette Bloch was born in 1928 in Paris, where she had her first exhibition in 1951. Her work, although rigorous and concentrated, also plays on chance: the slightest variations of an ink, the speed of the hand, the reactivity of the paper. The Fondation Pro-Mahj awarded her the Prix Maratier 2005 for her entire oeuvre.

MOSHE KUPFERMAN (Yaroslav, 1926 — Lohamei Hageta'ot kibbutz, 2003)

Megillat, 1990

Oil and graphite on paper

Gift of Esther and Jacques Topiol, 2004

Megillat, 1990

Oil, graphite and pastel on paper

Gift of Esther and Jacques Topiol, 2004

Megillah, 1995

Oil, graphite and crayon on paper

Acquisition, 1999

Megillah, 1998

Oil and graphite on paper

Gift of the artist, 1999

The Megillot de Moshe Kupferman exhibition was one of the museum's inaugurate events in 1998, and marked the beginning of our reflection on contemporary practices concerning the book and the written word.

Megillah is the name given to five biblical texts (Ruth, The Song of Songs, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes and Esther), which are written on separate parchment scrolls by scribes.

Since the 1970s, Moshe Kupferman has worked on rolls of paper, initially narrow and restrained then gradually more monumental and complex.

The specificity of working on scrolls is that it evokes both the activity of the scribe, the *sofer*, and that of the officiant: Moshe Kupferman deposits signs on the paper, but, like the reader of a text on a scroll, he apprehends only the part of the paper he is working on, and then has to roll up this section of script before going on to the next. He works from left to right until the end of the scroll, then begins again from right to left.

Moshe Kupferman was born at Yaroslav in Galicia in 1926. Interned in a labour camp in the Urals in 1940 and later in Kazakhstan, he was the only member of his family to survive. In 1948, he emigrated to Israel, and the following year took part in the foundation of the Lohamei Hageta'ot (Ghetto Fighters) kibbutz in Galilee. His training under the leading representatives of Israeli lyrical abstraction, Yosef Zaritsky and Avigdor Stematsky, was decisive in his evolution towards abstraction, the sole means of expressing what cannot be restrained whilst arming oneself against a resurgence of obsessive images. By 1959, all traces of figuration had disappeared from his work.

Recent acquisition

MOSHE GERSHUNI (Tel-Aviv, 1936)

Kaddish, 1984

Etching, sugar aquatint, electric pencil and soft varnish on Arches and Guarro vellum

Printed and published by the Jerusalem Print Workshop

Acquisition, 2011

Yitbarakh (Blessed)

Veyishttabah (Praised)

Veyitpaar (Extolled)

Veyitromam (Honoured)

Veyitnasse (Exalted)

Veyithaddar (Venerated)

Veyit'aleh (Adored)

Veyithallal (Glorified)

[Be the Name of the Holy One]

The *Kaddish*, the Jewish prayer said by a member of the family over the deceased's still-open grave is a moment of profound sadness at the disappearance and burial of a loved one, and a hymn to the glory of God and the world he created. The surprising juxtaposition of physical decay, finiteness, loss, the enigma of death and this prayer exalting, without the slightest protest, the grandeur of the creator of the universe, strikes a chord with Gershuni's work: an oeuvre distinctive in the disturbing way it combines listening to the body, destined to die, to all that is most sensual and most material, and the fervent quest for a higher power, a metaphysics of the spirit.

Gershuni is one of the founders of Israeli modern art — a secular art if ever there was one — and in 1984, when he began work on the *Kaddish*, central to Jewish liturgy, he had clearly reached a turning point. Breaking with his 'Israelity' and uncompromising laicism, his ambition now was to create a modern Jewish painting drawing on both Jewish history and theology. Despite everything that bound him to western secular art, he acknowledged the historical and theological gulf separating, on the one hand, the Greek world and Christian tradition from which this art stems, and on the other, the tradition he himself came from. From this struggle between two worlds, that of western art, his first culture as an artist, and the Jewish culture he asserted, would grow a remarkable oeuvre forged out of identification and admiration but also differentiation and otherness. The happy medium and clearly defined forms gave way to excess and disintegration, the line masterfully springing heavenwards became a tortuous line clumsily reaching for heights but falling again like a question mark, like a cyclamen stalk — the cyclamen, one of the recurrent images of fragmentation: leaves, stalk, flower, encounter between stalk and flower.

The eight etchings in the *Kaddish* series (1984) are based on eight Hebrew words — one for each etching; eight words that follow one another in the prayer, written for the most part in Aramaic, and whose repetitive rhythm forms a sequence on its own. All praise God in His greatness: *Yitbarakh Veyishttabah Veyitpaar Veyitromam Veyitnasse Veyithaddar Veyit'aleh Veyithallal* — blessed, praised, extolled, honoured, exalted, venerated, adored, glorified [Be the Name of the Holy One]. This inversion, inherent in the etching process, gives the impression that the words were written from the other side, from elsewhere, and that we are witnessing an event not destined for us, an event taking place after the death of the body. An event sustained by a powerful movement, whose spiral progression through the series reaches its apogee in the last two etchings, very different to the others. The penultimate etching is almost entirely covered by an enormous, downy black mark: an almost complete obliteration — darkness, dissolution, the void. Yet in the last etching the darkness brightens in the middle, a dim glow emanating from the depths, filtered by fig leaves. It is as if, reaching the end of its eventful journey towards the heavens, the soul were standing on the brink of a revelation — the very revelation to which the *Kaddish* prayer aspires.

The fourth etching (“ויתרומם” — ‘veyitromam’) seems to hold the key to the series and point towards its addressee. For whom is this *Kaddish* said? We can make out a sequence of words, also written by the artist, but not in the traditional prayer: ‘for the destruction of the daughter of my people’. The words come from the Book of Lamentations, ritually read from the 9th of Av, the day of the Temple’s destruction. Could the disaster to which Gershuni is alluding be the catastrophe that struck the Jewish people in Europe, at the very heart of civilisation and the modern world? The presence of affectionate pet names for Jewish children — Yitzkhakele and (in the plural) Avrahamelekh and Moyshelekh — supports this interpretation, especially since by including his own first name, the artist is implicating himself in an event that took place when he too was a child, but a child who, by chance, lived in Israel. Gershuni creates a *Kaddish* for those for whom the prayer could never be said over their grave, and in the last etching in the series even offers a consolation: the light of an elsewhere.

— Sarah Breitberg-Semel

Moshe Gershuni was born in Tel-Aviv in 1937. A conceptual artist in the 1970s, he revolutionised his work in the 1980s, notably at the Venice Biennale. He has created a fusion between image and language and phrases that obsess him, dealing with the sacred and profane, Jewish life, the Zionist heritage and the rituals of life and death.

CHRISTIAN BOLTANSKI (Paris, 1944)

Les Habitants de l'hôtel de Saint-Aignan en 1939

(*The Inhabitants of the Hôtel de Saint-Aignan in 1939*), 1998

Print on paper

Gift of the artist, 1998

Les Habitants de l'hôtel de Saint-Aignan en 1939, Christian Boltanski's installation in a narrow lightwell, rises through the building from bottom to top. In this space like the back of a stage set, it retraces a story of intimacy and desolation reminding us of the building's other, missing, unostentatious history. It was commissioned for the museum's inauguration in 1998.

There is a kind of nominalism running through Christian Boltanski's work, which gives individuals, things and sometimes gestures back their reality, provided that they can still be named.

It is in the self-effacement and meagreness of the artist's intervention that *Les Habitants de l'hôtel de Saint-Aignan en 1939* constitutes a work of great reserve. His gestural self-restraint and avoidance of fabricated emotion takes the form of the death notices once posted on the walls of the towns and cities of Eastern Europe.

The presence of the people who lived in the building is evoked minimally, by their name, first name, place of birth, profession and sometimes a date. It is in the very ellipsis of these dates that the fracture, between ordinary, uneventful lives and lives that history transformed into tragic fates, becomes apparent, that the dividing line is drawn and the crime that tipped the balance gradually manifests itself. This tenuous monument, installed in a ubiquitous, neglected space yet subjected to our permanent attention, pays tribute to lives that were unique yet like many others.

Christian Boltanski was born in 1944. Although he has always abstained from directly addressing the horror of the Holocaust, the theme of disappearance subtends all his works.

PHILIPPE BOUTIBONNES (Avignon, 1938)

Leur dernier regard (What they saw last), 1987

Ink on Verge paper, organic sequins on reused paper, photographs

Gift of the artist, 1999, 'in memoriam Sarah Kofman'

'The piece is composed of seven photographs and seven triangles, six of which are drawn over with small, charred, semi-effaced rods. The seventh, on a sheet of paper used by Italian butchers, is partially coated with graphite flakes and gold dust. To my mind, this signifies the return to the earth, after the definitive effacement of human remains and names (no word is legible, only the lines of the rods denote an exhausted counting process).

The seven frames were meant to signify insignificance and 'insignification' — "here there is no why," the SS said in the camps - but also disappearance. Without showing it, the seven small elements lay down a trace of the horror. It was when I visited the camp at Struthof in Alsace that I felt the need to do this piece. What made the horror of this place all the more unbearable was that the gate to the compound opened onto a magnificent landscape, a panoramic view of the Vosges shrouded in mist — and yet it was a summer morning. Horror and beauty (a beauty that added its "uselessness" to the horror that had taken place then and there). So I imagined the gaze of the prisoners being drawn not to the unattainable, unreal beauty of the landscape, but to the lowly, accessible, discrete beauty of a few daisies growing in the thin carpet of grass.

And with this final gaze, by way of stars, they took with them the white marks — increasingly indiscernible — of these few flowers.'

— Philippe Boutibonnes

Philippe Boutibonnes was born in 1938. He works prolifically and secretively. Formerly a lecturer in microbiology at Caen University, he continues to produce his art alongside his scientific activities.

DEIMANTAS NARKEVICIUS (Utena, Lithuania, 1964)

Legend Coming True, 1999

Super 8 mm film transferred to video, 68 min

On loan from the Fonds national d'art contemporain,
ministère de la Culture et de la Communication

In Legend Coming True, Deimantas Narkevicius evokes the joint history of Lithuanians and Jews through a personal narrative. 'I don't explore history from outside, as a neutral observer — I live in it. I am not a chronicler, just a person who lives history from inside and tries to find his place in it.'

Legend Coming True is divided into three parts.

The film begins with the hesitant voice of a girl reading the legend of the founding of the city of Vilnius, then continues with a voice-over narration by a woman, Fania, of her life and flight from the Vilnius ghetto.

The shooting took four days and four nights, in four places in the city: the street where Fania spent her childhood, the front of her school, the ghetto square, and Rūdininkai Forest, where she took refuge. Each static shot corresponds to a place, and the camera was set to film one image per minute (as opposed to the usual 24 images per second). Each place or image delimits a fragment of the narrative.

'I didn't want the image to dominate; the voice of this woman is so much more powerful, there is so much in what she says... Which is why I wanted the images to have this staccato slowness — a cadence that makes one understand the concept of time. Because this story is not just interesting, it's a life.'

In the last part, another survivor of the ghetto, Chasia Spannerflieg, sings the song of the ghetto fighters, *Zog nit kaynmol* ('Never say...').

Deimantas Narkevicius was born in Lithuania in 1964 and lives and works there. After completing a classical artistic training, he began developing an approach to narration using film and video.

JUDITH BARTOLANI (Haifa, 1955)

Les Funérailles de Sara/Nos funérailles
(*Sara's Funeral/Our Funeral*), 2005
Digital video, 2 min 30 sec

Acquisition, 2006

Nos funérailles (Our funeral), 2005
Gouache, charcoal, resin and corrector on digital prints

Gift of the artist, 2006

Untitled
At Pitchipoi it's the open-air life
Sara doesn't want to leave her grandmother
With the hope of memories
Memories open wounds
Your child has opened a breach
The forests of Pitchipoi
Hope rushes in

'... Jewish origins. Born in the Promised Land. Israeli nationality. Departure against the grain. France. Europe. Chose French citizenship. Elguidj, verso Bartolani. Studies. Sculpture. Non-religious tastes and confidence. Advent of the brilliant young artist. Contemporary art. Travel. International travel. A government commission. A French embassy in one of the emirates. You can't go with it. The sculpture will depart for its own Diaspora. It will suffer from being installed against the grain, like a misinterpretation. There it is still, like a misinterpretation. Little story of the first true artist's mortification. The artist drawn into the goosetep of history. [...]

The book of memory opened at last. Sinking into the library of learning and the debate on the Holocaust. Word traps. Yiddishland, Lithuania, the world, worlds swallowed up, Central Europe, Eastern Europe. A journey and a journey, towards the origin or more simply towards history's off-screen world. The camps. The camp. The infirmary. Sara's voice. The book of a medium that sets the studio on fire with a new urgency: let this secretion flow...'
— Michel Enrici

Les Funérailles de Sara/Nos funérailles is an account of 365 days filled to the brim with words, pastel, charcoal, felt-tip and passion. The culmination of a year of intense activity, this book grew out of the artist's reflection on funerary art and mourning, leading to a pressing need to return to a buried history, to a terror, to at last listen to the ghosts and give them a sepulchre. A book that wrote itself, day by day, 'on its own, in a dreamlike state', a book haunted by the obsessive presence of a young girl, Sara, whose 'story is in fact a host of stories, whose first name is like a tattoo, a sign'.

Judith Bartolani was born in Haifa in 1955 and embarked on a meteoric career as a sculptor in the 1980s. The context for her work in the museum was her encounter with Charlotte Salomon's *Vie? ou Théâtre?* This work of great urgency, the journal of a life in images and music was produced in the South of France between 1940 and 1942. *Vie? ou Théâtre?* was shown at the museum in 2006.

MICHEL NEDJAR (Soisy-sous-Montmorency, 1947)

Poupées Pourim (Purim Puppets), 2005

Fabric and found materials

Acquisition, 2005

It was a photograph of the festival of *Purim*, taken in a transit camp in 1945, that prompted Michel Nedjar to create this *Purim* theatre sixty years later. The survivors, who no longer have a family, home or country, have disguised themselves in fancy dress: one as Hitler, with a uniform and a small moustache, another wearing the deportee's striped clothes and yellow star. In this image Michel Nedjar understood *Purim's* profound meaning: having rubbed shoulders with death, one can begin life anew, but laughter, the absurd and derision are vital.

'The festival of *Purim*, which has become the paradigm of the condition of the Jews in the Diaspora, evokes a tragic episode which, thanks to the struggle of Mardocheaus and Esther, turned into a deliverance with messianic overtones. The way the plot against the Jews unravelled is a tale of reversal and inversion, and ever since their rescue has been associated with joy, laughter and transgression. *Purim* involves various carnivalesque rituals, including fancy dress, parodies, burlesque parades, pantomimes and marionettes.

Michel Nedjar condenses *Purim's* contradictory, paradoxical aspects, focussing on the dimension of fragility, invention, laughter and transgression. The dolls, made out of broken objects, *schmattes*, buttons, string, silver paper, fabric and cardboard delicately sewn together, embody the instability of the Jewish condition and the severance and fragmentation of exile. [...]

He also highlights *Purim's* comical dimension in the carnivalesque procession of figures: the impious Haman with his diabolical smile, the brave and mischievous Mardocheaus, the gentle and strong queen Esther decked in her most beautiful finery, the operetta king Assuerus strutting about in his chariot, escorted by his court and flanked by his guards in flashy uniforms.'

— Jean Baumgarten

Michel Nedjar was born at Soisy-sous-Montmorency (Val-d'Oise) in 1947. His father, a master tailor, persuaded him to take up his profession, but it was his grandmother, who sold all kinds of objects at the flea market, who awakened his interest in *schmattes*, or second-hand cloth. He began making his first dolls with rags, after a long period of travel over four continents from 1970 to 1975.

The musical comedy, *The Megilla of Itzik Manger* (cycle of 29 poems, Warsaw, 1936) is performed by the Bursteins.

Music: Dov Seltzer

Direction: Shmuel Bunim

With the kind permission of Mike Burstyn and Dov Seltzer, and the aid of the Maison de la Culture yiddish and the Aedcy.

The exhibition continues in the auditorium foyers in the basement.

MIKAEL LEVIN (New York, 1954)

War Story, 1995-1996

Photographs (66), texts by Meyer Levin, reproductions of photographs by Éric Schwab

Gift of the artist to the Fondation Pro-Mahj, 2010

The numbers on the walls indicate the narrative order to follow.

Landscape and Memory; Retracing my father's W.W.II journey through Europe.

In 1944-45 an American war correspondent, Meyer Levin embarked on a journey through Europe. His assignment was to seek out the remnants of Jewish communities, to cover the "Jewish story". Sharing a Jeep with him was French photographer Éric Schwab. Schwab was photographing the war. He was also on a personal mission, searching for his mother who had been deported in 1943.

In his autobiography, *In Search*, Meyer Levin describes that journey from Paris to Prague, through the Battle of the Bulge, the liberation of the concentration camps, and the first stirrings of the Cold War.

In the fall of 1995 Mikael Levin retraced his father's journey. He photographed the concentration camps and the Europe of today, contrasting his journey with his father's experiences of fifty years ago.

Mikael Levin has assembled those photographs together with his father's writings and a selection of Éric Schwab's photographs from 1945, creating a narrative of images and text spanning fifty years and two generations.

Mikael Levin was born in 1954 in New York, where he currently lives. His photography — he works only in black and white — questions the notions of identity and memory and therefore oblivion. His work takes the form of investigations and explorations, which he translates into images. The Fondation Pro-Mahj awarded him the Prix Maratier 2009 for *Cristina's History*, a story in images retracing the journey through modern European history, full of dashed and rekindled hopes, of four generations of a Jewish family — Mikael Levin's — from Zgierz in Poland to Guinea-Bissau, via Lisbon.

AROUND THE EXHIBITION

CHILDREN'S WORKSHOPS FOR 7 TO 13 YEAR-OLDS

Thursday 7 July 2011, 10 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.

(Please bring a picnic lunch)

Enrolment: 13 €

Reservation obligatory: 01 53 01 86 62

or individuels@mahj.org

The Mahj celebrates contemporary art

Children are invited to explore the world of contemporary artists and discover the many facets of the written word, working with traditional or unusual materials (photocopy, video and photography).

After a tour of the exhibition and the museum collection, they can create their own artwork inspired by the works they have seen.

GUIDED TOURS FOR ADULTS

Tours of the permanent collections and the contemporary works

Sunday 3 July and Thursday 7 July 2011 at 2:30 p.m.

Duration: 1h30

The Mahj's contemporary collection

Lecturer: Nathalie Hazan-Brunet, curator of modern and contemporary art

A tour of the museum exploring the profound resonances between works by contemporary artists on exhibit and the fundamental themes of Jewish history and civilisation, including, on the 3rd of July, conversations with the artists present.

MUSÉE D'ART ET D'HISTOIRE DU JUDAÏSME

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OPENING HOURS

Monday to Friday 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Sunday 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Ticket sales end at 17:15 p.m.

ADMISSION

Exhibition included in the museum admission

(6.80 € / 4.50 €)

This booklet was published for the exhibition of the Mahj's contemporary collection at the museum from 3 July to 11 September 2011.

Translated from the French by David Wharry
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