

Contemporary Visions of Israel

Jane Glaubinger, Ph.D., curator



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The visual arts in Israel are vibrant and varied. Artists employ different approaches and themes often based on a common cultural experience or are influenced by international trends. The works from local collections in Contemporary Visions of Israel illustrate the diversity and vitality of modern Israeli art.

Emblematic of Israeli identity, the land itself, steeped in historical and religious significance, is the focus for several artists. While Ori Gersht's delicate image of an olive tree symbolizes the bond between farmer, ancestors, and the land, Boris Oicherman's photographs emphasize the tones, textures, and patterns inherent in the landscape. The Dead Sea is an active component in Sigalit Landau's work. The salt calcifies objects suspended under water, transforming them.

Some artists have more personal concerns. Pamela Levy, with a feminist agenda, investigates the relationship between men and women. Although the layers of media and eradications in Moshe Kupferman's abstractions hint at painful recollections of World War II, Etti Abergel's memories of her Moroccan/Israeli upbringing are embedded in found and altered objects.

Photography is a popular medium. Michal Chelbin's stunning color portraits investigate identity by posing sitters in costumes or uniforms that reveal an important aspect of their lives. Gersht's recent work explores the deceptive photographic claim of a single objective truth. Images of flower bouquets seem straightforward but are really manipulated by artificial intelligence.

Political events also affect artistic creation. Itzik Rennert and Linor Goralik respond to the horror of the Hamas incursion on October 7, 2023, and the ensuing war with powerful images and texts that reflect and memorialize this traumatic event. Israeli art, built on the history of a young, evolving country, also confronts the anxiety and turmoil of contemporary life.

Jane Glaubinger, Ph.D.

About the Artists

Etti Abergel

Abergel was born in Israel in 1960 to parents who had immigrated from Morocco. She studied at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design for many years, earning a BFA in 1981, attending a postgraduate program in Studio Arts 1996-1998, and completing an MFA in 2004. She lives in Jerusalem, has taught at Bezalel as well as at other art schools across Israel and often exhibits installations, including at the 2003 Venice Biennale.

Michal Chelbin

Chelbin was born in Israel in 1974 and graduated from the WIZO Academy of Design and Education in Haifa. She has exhibited her photographs widely in Israel, Europe and the United States and her work is included in the collection of important museums such as the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the Israel Museum, both in New York; the Los Angeles County Museum of Art; the Getty Center, Los Angeles; and the Tel Aviv Museum of Art.

Max Epstein

Epstein was born in the Soviet Union in 1974 but in 1990 his family immigrated to Israel. He earned a BFA from Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in 1997 and an MFA from the University of Haifa in 2011. He lives in Jerusalem and works in many disciplines; sculpture, painting, photography, animation and performance. A dedicated teacher, Epstein created “Wild Kids,” an animation studio for children and teenagers that provides creative education in schools all over Israel.

Ori Gersht

Ori Gersht was born in Israel in 1967, earned a BFA in Photography, Film and Video from the University of Westminster, London in 1992 and completed his Master of Photography at the Royal College of Art, London in 1995. Gersht resides in London and works in photography and video. He has had numerous solo exhibitions including at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington D.C.; the Tel Aviv Museum; the Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv; the Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco; and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston.

About the Artists

Linor Goralik

Goralik was born in Ukraine in 1975 and in 1989 immigrated to Israel with her family. She studied computer science at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Beersheba 1991-1994 and then moved to Moscow where she worked as a journalist and marketing analyst. A vocal critic of Putin, Goralik returned to Israel when Russia annexed Crimea in 2014. Often linking text and image, she has published over thirty books of poems and prose and also illustrates children's books and comics.

Moshe Kupferman

Kupferman was born in Poland in 1926. In 1949 he immigrated to Israel where he died in 2003. Kupferman was essentially a self-taught artist although his interactions with several painters were important. He acquired his first paint set from Oscar Hendler, who recognized his talent, while in a German transit camp at the end of World War II. Visiting the Alte Pinakothek in Munich, his first encounter with Old Master paintings, was also influential. In Israel, where Kupferman worked in construction for many years before he was able to concentrate on painting, he met many artists and attended painting seminars led by Joseph Zaritsky and Avigdor Stematsky.

Sigalit Landau

Landau was born in Israel in 1969. Although she grew up in Jerusalem, the family lived briefly in Philadelphia and then London. She attended Rubin Academy of Music High School, where she majored in dance, and then studied art at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, graduating in 1994. Landau, who lives in Tel Aviv, is a multi-disciplinary artist whose work includes drawing, sculpture, video, and performance art. Well-known internationally, Landau represented Israel at the Venice Biennale in 1997 and 2011 and has had solo exhibitions at major museums in Israel, Europe and the United States. Her work has been collected by The Museum of Modern Art, the Jewish Museum, and the Brooklyn Museum, all in New York; Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris; the Israel Museum, Jerusalem; the Tel Aviv Museum of Art and several European contemporary art museums.

About the Artists

Pamela Levy

Levy was born in the United States in 1949 and immigrated to Israel in 1976 where she died in 2004. Levy graduated from the University of Northern Iowa in 1972 and then lived in an artist commune in Santa Fe, New Mexico where she became acquainted with the newly forming feminist art movement that influenced her work throughout her career. The artist settled in Israel after converting to Judaism and marrying Itamar Levy, an Israeli psychologist and art critic.

Boris Oicherman

Born in the Soviet Union in 1973, Oicherman immigrated to Israel in 1990 and lived there until 2015 when career opportunities took him to the United States. He holds a PhD in Color Science from the University of Leeds and an MFA from Stanford University. An artist, museum curator and engineer, Oicherman was the curator for creative collaboration at the Weisman Art Museum at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, then was the program director for arts and culture at The Cleveland Foundation and is now Executive Director of Wave Pool in Cincinnati, an organization that fosters artist-led community engagement.

Sasha Okun

Okun was born in the Soviet Union in 1949 and immigrated to Israel in 1979 where he died in 2025. Okun received a master's degree from the Mukhina Art Academy in Leningrad (now St. Petersburg) in 1972. Known as a draftsman and painter, Okun taught at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design and exhibited widely across Israel, Europe, and the United States.

Itzik Rennert

Born in Israel in 1959, Rennert graduated with a degree in graphic design from Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in 1985 and from the Instituto Europeo di Design, Milan, in 1987 where he studied graphic design and illustration. He teaches design and visual communication and is renowned in Israel as an illustrator, cartoonist and comic book artist.



Itzik Rennert (born Israel 1959)

We've Been Kidnapped: Happy Holiday, Two Weeks, Very Sad, And Children Too, 2023
Archival ink-jet prints on paper

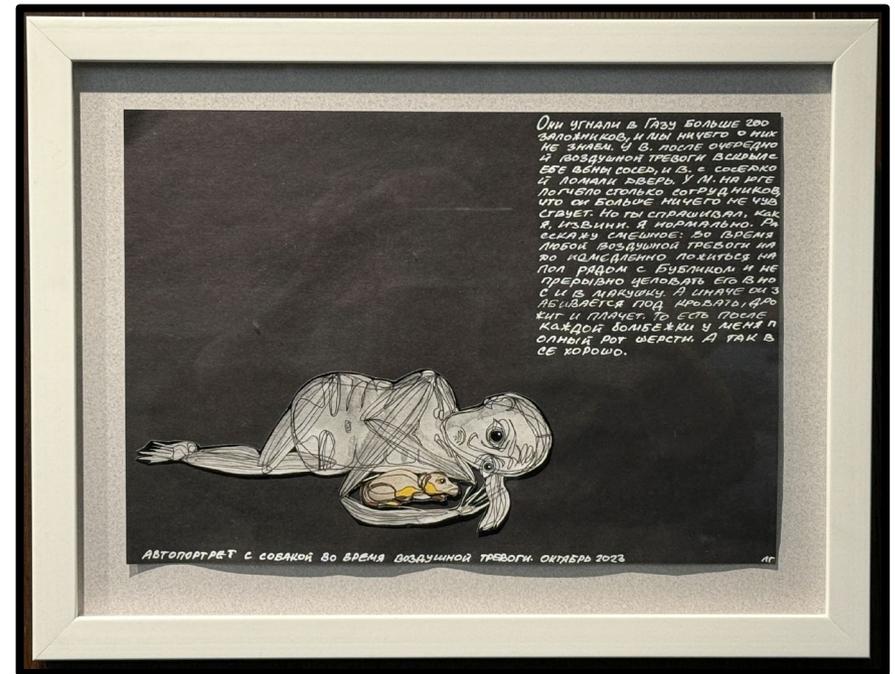
Congregation Mishkan Or Museum, Dorothy Garfunkel Baker Fine Arts Fund and Nancy and Marvin Whitman Temple Museum Endowment Fund 2025.26, 2025.23, 2024.25

Genghis Khan, Attila the Hun and Hitler are supposed to belong to history, not to the present, not to your protected life, not to your home environment. Apocalypses of all kinds belong to second-rate movies, science fiction literature, boring old religious texts, far away countries. Not to your morning local news, not to people you know. It is still too early to understand, digest, or summarize anything. The trauma is just in its beginning.

Linor Goralik (born Ukraine 1975)
*Thank You for Asking (Open Letters):
Self-Portrait with a Dog During an Air Raid,*
2023

Markers and collage on paper

Congregation Mishkan Or Museum,
Dorothy Garfunkel Baker Fine Arts Fund 2024.21



They took more than 200 hostages to Gaza, and we don't know anything about them. V.'s neighbor slashed his veins another civil defense siren, so V. and their other neighbor had to break in. M. has lost so many co-workers in the South that he is unable to feel anything any longer.

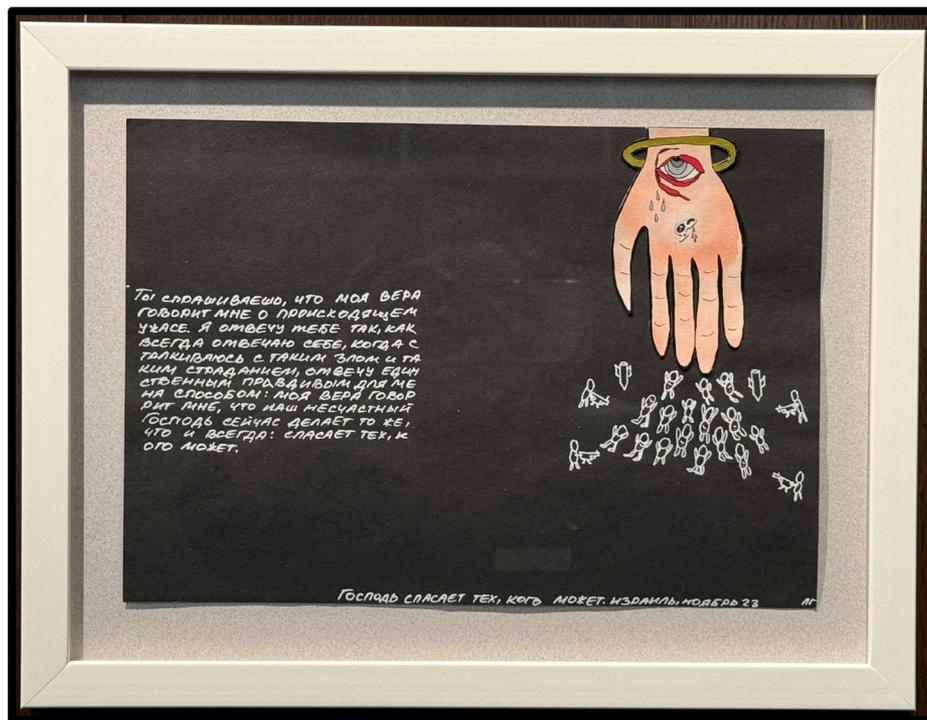
But you've asked how I am, sorry. I'm ok. I'll tell you a funny thing: during any air raid I must immediately lay down on the floor next to Bagel, kissing him ceaselessly on the nose and the top of his head. Otherwise, he crawls under the bed, shivering and crying. So, after every siren I have a mouthful of dog's hair. Otherwise, all is well.

Linor Goralik (born Ukraine 1975)

*Thank You for Asking (Open Letters):
The Lord Delivers Those He Can, 2023*

Markers and collage on paper

Congregation Mishkan Or Museum,
Dorothy Garfunkel Baker Fine Arts Fund 2024.22



You ask me what my faith tells me about the ongoing horror. I'll answer you as I answer myself when I encounter such evil and such suffering, I'll answer in the only manner true for me: my faith tells me that our wretched Lord now does the same as ever: delivers those he can.



Max Epstein (born Soviet Union 1974)

The Hill in Front 1, 2023

The Hill in Front 2, 2023

Watercolor, coffee and graphite on paper

Congregation Mishkan Or Museum, Meshorer/Ascherman/Bedol Fund 2025.136, 2025.137

The works by Rennert, Goralik, and Epstein reflect these Israeli artists' responses to the brutal Hamas invasion October 7.

While Rennert and Goralik express their horror overtly, Epstein's reaction is more restrained. Residing in Jerusalem, the artist begins each day by drawing on his terrace overlooking the picturesque, verdant Ein-Kerem neighborhood. After October 7, these sketches, now executed with a backdrop of explosions and sirens, became less colorful and more controlled, reflecting the artist's distress.

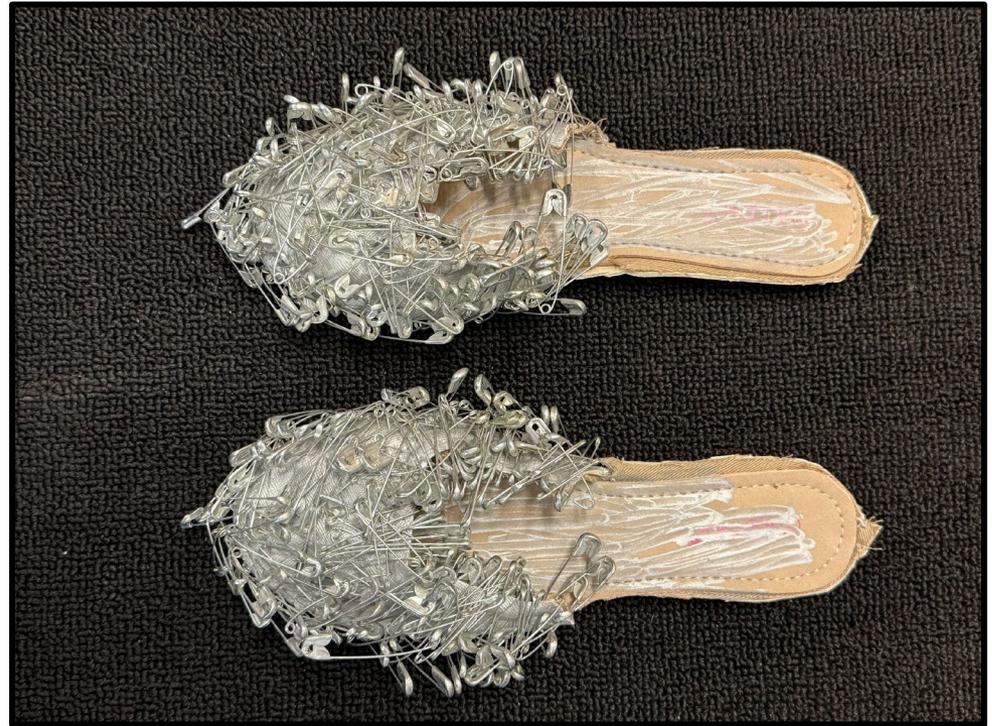
Etti Abergel (born Israel 1960)

Home Slippers / Safety Pins, 2019

Slippers, gesso and safety pins

Congregation Mishkan Or Museum,
gift of Ximena Valdes-Sessler and Dan Sessler,
Trudy and Steven Weisenberger and
Meshorer/Ascherman/Bedol Fund 2024.20

Abergel, whose parents immigrated to Israel from Morocco, mixes her Mizrahi, or Eastern heritage, and Western art. To understand the space between high/low, East/West, religious/secular, she explains, “art functions as a bridge between these fragments of identity.”



Like the safety pins that embellish *Home Slippers*, the artist fastens together various aspects of her personality and life. Abergel transforms everyday objects from cheap anonymous commodities into personal, meaningful objects which trigger a memory she wants to re-examine in order “to restore the essence of the moment of feeling.”

Sasha Okun

(born Soviet Union 1949,
died Israel 2025)

Untitled (Palm Seedlings), 1998
Graphite on paper

Katya and Boris Oicherman



Okun's paintings, most often single nude figures, are the result of a relentless examination of the human body. Brutally realistic portrayals, they suggest loneliness and suffering. Similarly, these palm seedlings, like tall figures swaying in a breeze, are each isolated by a grid of rigid white lines and appear desolate. The artist connects his figural compositions to the landscape by painting with a dry, textured application of media influenced, he says, by the topography of the Judean Desert.

Date palms, deeply intertwined with Israeli history, the Bible, and agriculture, are one of the seven species of native Israeli plants revered in Judaism. They grow extensively in southern Israel where modern agricultural methods have transformed deserts into productive farms.

Boris Oicherman

(born Soviet Union 1973)

Untitled, 1990s - early 2000s,
Archival ink-jet prints on paper
from 35mm film scan

Katya and Boris Oicherman



These photographs were taken in the Galilee region of northern Israel near Beit She'an, one of the oldest cities in Israel, during the dry summer months. Oicherman, however, does not convey a sense of place. Rather, he selects a viewpoint and crops the scene to emphasize the gritty textured patterns and tonal variability of the terrain, transforming the landscape into contrasting black and white shapes.

Ori Gersht (born Israel 1967)

Olive 4, 2004

Chromogenic color print
mounted on aluminum

Courtesy of Cleveland Clinic Art Collection



Gersht describes the process of making these photographs:

I took the photographs at midday, when the bright and bleaching sun was hovering mid sky. I overexposed the film by many stops, allowing the harsh and violent sun to attack the film and melt the images of the trees. Later in the darkroom I attempted to rescue the details and the traces from the overexposed and therefore dense negatives. In contrast to the violent and destructive act of exposure, the images that appeared on the paper were frail, delicate, and gentle.

These olive trees, in the Galilee in northern Israel, are over 500 years old. They symbolize the bond between the farmer and his ancestors and the land and so were at the forefront of the territorial disputes at the time.

Sigalit Landau (born Israel 1969)

Dégagé, 2017

Screenprint on paper

Beth and Jim Finley

The Dead Sea, a natural salt lake, is the lowest land-based place on earth and has nine times the salinity of the ocean. Due to rampant economic exploitation, water levels have dropped significantly causing drastic ecological changes. Landau, whose family often visited the Dead Sea, feels a strong connection to it and laments the deteriorating conditions.



Since 2004, she has submerged mundane objects, like the tutu, under water for several months where they calcify (salt crystallization is a phenomenon exclusive to the Dead Sea) and are transformed into beautiful dense, glistening white sculptures. While salt both preserves and destroys, immersion suggests ritual purification: baptism or the mikveh, a cleansing bath.

Landau studied ballet growing up so is familiar with costumes like the tutu and dance terminology. *Dégagé* is a barre exercise where the foot slides along the floor from a closed position to slightly off the floor and pointed and then returns to a closed position.

Sigalit Landau (born Israel 1969)

Tutu, 2017

Screenprint on stainless steel

Collection of Erica and Richard Horvitz

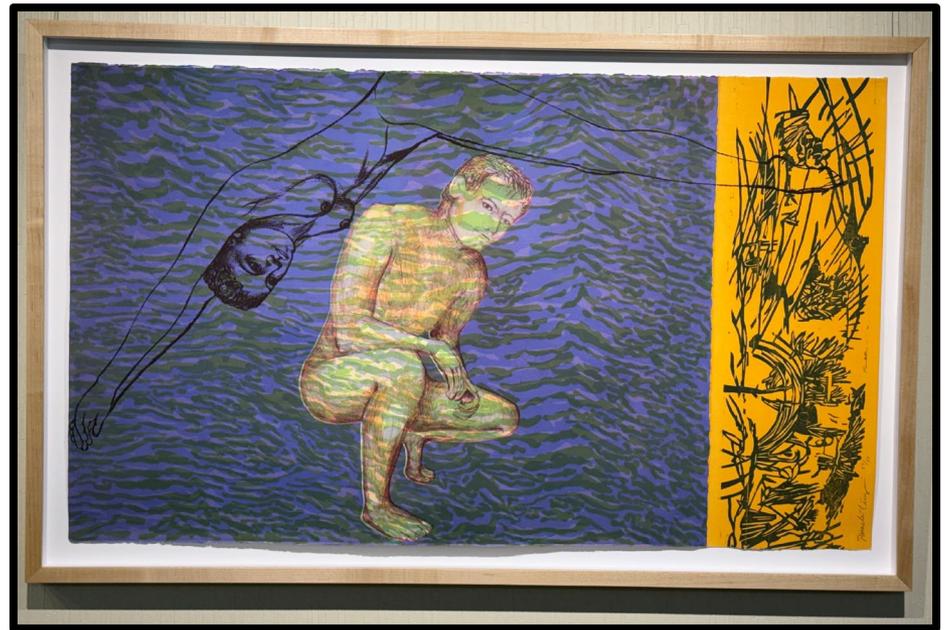
Landau's collaborator, Yotam From, photographs the metamorphosis of the objects submerged in the Dead Sea as they calcify. The image of the tutu after emerging from the water was then transferred to a screen and printed in black ink for D'égagé and Tutu. The result varies, however, depending on the support.



Printing on white paper achieves a clear image with strong contrasts between solid black areas and bright highlights. The example printed on stainless steel is dark and details only become visible to the viewer by standing in certain positions. Moreover, the reflective surface acts like a mirror which adds the spectators in the scene.

Pamela Levy (born United States 1949,
died Israel 2004)
Man in Depths II, 1983
Woodcut, lithograph and screenprint

Collection of Erica and Richard Horvitz



Pamela Levy was influenced by the feminist ethos emerging in 1970s America where she was born and educated. Her art continued to address the rights of women and universal issues like oppression and sexual violence after immigrating to Israel in 1976, although feminism only became prevalent there in the 1990s. Levy wanted “to establish a new world order through which things that could not be expressed ...could now be said,” as she addressed the fact that both in the United States and Israel men continued to dominate economic, cultural and political domains.

Nude women, the object of male scrutiny, often appear in Western art. *Man in Depths II* challenges that tradition by emphasizing a colorful, three-dimensional male nude while the much less noticeable black outline of a female figure floats above. The figures do not relate to each other and so convey the underlying tension between men and women that Levy investigated in her work.

Ori Gersht (born Israel 1967)
Fields and Vision: Untitled 03, 2022
Archival pigment print

Matthew Garson and Case Bochenek

Gersht recently investigated traditional still life painting to explore the relationship between photography, optical perception and technology. Despite the convincing realism of paintings and drawings which document newly discovered flora and fauna by Maria Sibylla Merian and Martin Johnson Heade, who travelled to Suriname in the 17th century and the Amazon in the 19th century, respectively, their work reveals a fusion of fact and fiction.



Interested in this dichotomy, Gersht re-examined the relationship between artistic representation and the deceptive photographic claim of a single objective truth. Using high-speed photography, Gersht photographed floral arrangements at the precise moment they were blown up. Artificial intelligence software then filled in the missing information and reshaped the image. The result is no longer a faithful representation of physical matter but a hybrid: partly optical, partly digital. Gersht finds the digital revolution both frightening and exciting as “notions of reality and truth will have to evolve and find new forms.”

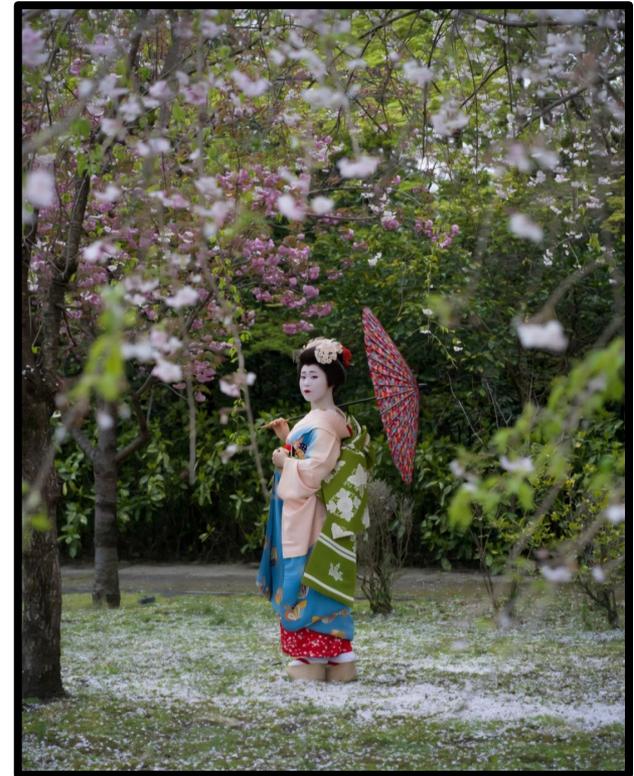
Michal Chelbin (born Israel 1974)

Himena, 2025

Archival pigment print

Matthew Garson and Case Bochenek

Chelbin's striking color portraits probe the identity of a wide range of people in various countries. The subjects are posed in a costume or uniform that reveals an important aspect of their lives as well as their personality and culture. Himena, a twenty-one-year-old student geisha, is presented in the traditional Japanese attire and makeup of the profession surrounded by cherry blossoms, another typical symbol of Japan. Photographed at a distance, with a detached clarity, Himena, demure and elegant, looks to the right, avoiding the gaze of the viewer.



The word geisha means “person of the arts” and geishas are highly skilled entertainers who dance, sing, and play the shamisen, a Japanese stringed instrument, at traditional tea houses, banquets, or public performances. Respected as talented artists, until more recently, the profession offered women one of the few ways they could achieve financial independence and autonomy. Due to societal changes, geishas are now rare. Himena, like the cherry blossoms which symbolize beauty and renewal, is preserving a dying cultural tradition.

Moshe Kupferman (born Poland 1926,
died Israel 2003)
Untitled, 1997
Pastel and graphite

Margie Moskowitz Kanfer and Joe Kanfer



Over time, Kupferman invented an abstract visual language of great refinement and power. Working intuitively with a few subtle colors, a grid is disrupted by an overlay of improvisational gestures. On the right section of *Untitled*, parallel horizontal bars, drawn in grainy pastel, are incised with freely executed graphite lines that destroy the regularity of the underlying structure. This somewhat amorphous composition is balanced by the smaller panel of dense rigid stripes on the left, which provides solidity and weight and emotional restraint to an otherwise expressive work.

Kupferman was born in eastern Poland to a traditional Jewish family. With the outbreak of World War II in 1939, they fled to the Soviet Union where they were interned in work camps. The only surviving member of his family, Kupferman immigrated to Israel in 1949. Although commentators detect references to the war in Kupferman's work, he maintains that documenting this painful past is not a preoccupation. The artist admits, however, that personal experience influences his painting which is "a safety valve, a way of letting out what was inside me."