ציבי גבע: אובייקט, מעבר

מוזיאון אשדוד לאמנות

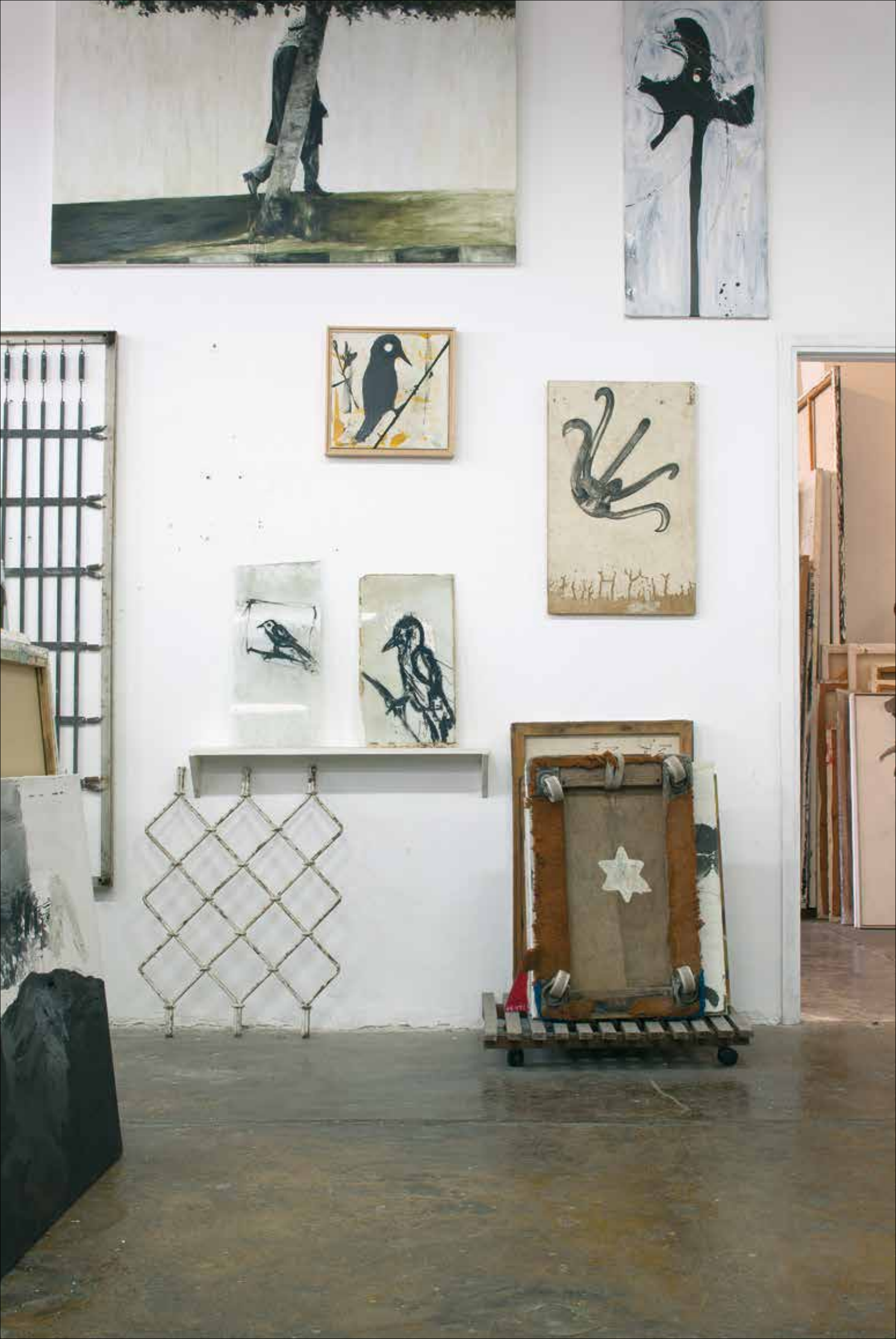
ציבי גבע Tsibi Geva

Tsibi Geva: Transition, Object

Ashdod Art Museum

Untitled, 1990, acrylic on wood, 80×50.5×3

80×50.5×3 ,עץ על קיר ,1990 ,ללא כותרת



מרכז מונארט Monart Center
מוזיאון אשדוד לאמנות
Ashdod Art Museum

Tsibi Geva

Transition, Object

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Ashdod Art Museum
Monart Center

Tsibi Geva: Transition, Object

July–November 2012

Curated by Yona Fischer and Roni Cohen-Binyamini

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On the English cover: *Keffiyeh*, 2007, acrylic on canvas, dia. 50
On the Hebrew cover: Detail from *Untitled*, 2011 (see p. 103)

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in accordance with the Hebrew direction of reading.

The Readymade at the Heart of Painting

Roni Cohen-Binyamini

> Some verses you *find*, and some verses you *make*.
> The ones you find must be perfected until they are flawless.
> The others must be made "natural."
> – Paul Valéry, 1910[1]

Tsibi Geva's exhibition at the Ashdod Museum of Art is the fruit of an extensive dialogue. Over the past eighteen months meetings have been held in Geva's studio in southern Tel Aviv, at the corner of Alfasi Street and Moshe Maor Street, between all the people involved in the preparation of the exhibition – including its curators, Yona Fischer and myself – in addition to conversations between the artist and Yona Fischer.[2] The large studio, seat of Geva's activities for the past fifteen years, has long become a place –accumulating and taking form over time – that may be seen as an extension of the artist's interiority and creative processes. Paintings in progress lean against the walls or lie on the ground; tubes and jars of paint are arranged in various groupings on the floor; lattices, windows, and works from various periods, all in the artist's familiar hand and painterly language, are scattered around; exhibition catalogues and books of poetry, philosophy and art are stacked in various places, according to some unknown formal logic; and objects, an incredible number of objects, lie around in what appears to be random order – placed on shelves and cabinets, and mainly hung crowdedly on a huge wall, a seemingly formless jumble: photographs, pages from books, empty photo albums, picture frames, parts of furniture, cardboard cases, boxes, empty spray cans, lids, improvised signs haphazardly executed on a found object, posters, and even paintings found by Geva. A huge number of "abandoned objects," as Yona Fischer calls them, tongue in cheek (paraphrasing the familiar term "found objects," while somewhat anthropomorphizing them), that Geva has been finding, gathering, and hoarding for years. These are all scattered and hung around the space according to some structural order whose inner logic is only clear to Geva himself.

These days, Geva is busy dismantling his studio and relocating it. A complex

1 Paul Valéry, excerpt from his *Notebooks*, published in Hebrew in *The Marine Cemetery and Some Contemplations about Poetry*, trans. Dory Manor (Binyamina: Nahar Books, 2011), p. 62.

2 The team included, in addition to Tsibi Geva and the exhibition curators, Geva's assistant, Yasmine Bergner, and Diana Dallal, head of Parasite and the artist's representative. Also present in many meetings was a documentary film crew directed by Shiri Tzur.

situation, almost a time of crisis, which calls for introspective contemplation of all that has accumulated in the studio over the years; time to "put one's house in order." In our preparatory meetings for Geva's exhibition at the Ashdod Art Museum, we attempted to figure out the nature of the objects that inhabit the studio, and their changing status within Geva's work process: some he responds to or "assists," thus turning them into works of art; some are objects of observation or a source of inspiration; and others are just present there – and all manifest, in one way or another, a visual or conceptual essence that informs Geva's work throughout the years. This attempt gave rise to the idea to curate an extensive "archival" exhibition featuring Geva's works alongside his "abandoned objects," thus offering an exploration that, by taking apart and exposing the thought mechanisms that underlie this huge body of work, whose interpretations have become rather established, would enable new appreciation of it.

In his essay "Unpacking my Library: A Talk about Book Collecting," Walter Benjamin describes the collector as someone inside whom "there are spirits, or at least little genii, which have seen to it that for a collector . . . ownership is the most intimate relationship that one can have to objects," adding further: "Not that they come alive in him; it is he who lives in them."[3] Geva is not a collector such as Benjamin describes. He does not actively seek out objects to own, but he does wander around and, motivated by a sense of urgency, gathers things that meet his eye and correspond to what he describes as some inner frequency. His relationship with these objects is so intimate that he almost always remembers the time and place they were found. To him, collecting is a distinctive act that takes place "when something in the abstract form of an object in the world corresponds to an inner order or form unconsciously imprinted in us."[4] Thus one may think about it as a fascination that Geva has with primary geometric forms of division and organization (such as the grid, the X, the diagonal line, etc.) found in the products of a marginal, negligible representational culture that are usually not given much thought – packing boxes, furniture skeletons, windows, blinds – as well as with the poignant human aspect of improvised, worn objects such as street signs that have outlived their usefulness and have been abandoned, or anonymous photo albums empty of photographs, in which only signs and captions remain, vestiges of an unidentified life. Marked by time and worn out, these objects are imbued with a different sort of sensitivity, far from the flow of polished, "well formulated" imagery that inundates the visual space we live in.

3 Walter Benjamin, "Unpacking my Library: A Talk about Book Collecting," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), p. 67.

4 All quotations from the artist are from conversations with the author, July-August 2011.

Geva appropriates and reuses objects whose original function, even if unknown, is of great significance for him. Each of these objects originally had a precise function, which then ceased. Each object had functioned within a system of signs or usages that had either come to completion or was interrupted, and the significance that Geva ascribes each of these items stems from its being "an object with an independent life," which functions "as a model of sorts, corresponding to some hidden principle." In his essay "Abandoning Painting and Painting with Abandon: Tsibi Geva and the Readymade," poet and art critic Barry Schwabsky writes of Geva as having "a knowledge equivalent to that which the poets share," that is, "the knowledge that when one uses a certain material, makes a certain mark, deploys a certain image . . . it is always one that trails a history behind it." This knowledge, Schwabsky adds, "is always, as Marcel Duchamp has taught us to say, readymade."[5] Schwabsky is referring both to the representational schemata that underlie western painting from its beginnings, and to the material underpinnings of painting (which in Modernism became the very subject of painting) as the readymade that "lies at the heart of painting" – knowledge that is nowhere clearer, he believes, than in the work of Geva.[6]

The current exhibition exposes in Geva's work a double course of action: featuring works (mostly paintings) from his entire career alongside the "abandoned" objects he collects, it not only reverberates the underlying representational schemata in his work, but also presents them as primary visual essences that he extracts from his time and place. Are these representational models that have percolated from "high" culture (art or painting) down to the practical, quotidian layers of life – that is, "low" culture – or is this a painterly refinement of archetypal schemes, part of the human endeavor to organize the world?

Geva's work straddles these alternatives, dialectically. He is nourished both by High Modernism's tradition of refinement and abstraction (painters such as Piet Mondrian, Sol LeWitt, or Robert Ryman) and by the conventional representational forms (of which we are mostly unaware) that organize and give form to the space we live in. This duality may have something to do with the modernist architectural tradition that he grew up with as the son of an architect – Yaakov (Cuba) Geber who, working for Hakibbutz HaArtzi movement, designed since the early 1930s cultural venues, factories, agricultural buildings, homes, and even a mosque.

It is interesting to note that Geva is also engaged in various levels of discourse about the object and the twentieth-century tradition of the readymade or "found

5 Barry Schwabsky, "Abandoning Painting and Painting with Abandon: Tsibi Geva and the Readymade," in Hadas Maor (ed.), *Tsibi Geva: Mound of Things*, exh. cat. (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2008), p. 310.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 309.

object": the ontological standing of the objects that habitually inhabit his studio and are now partly on view at the Ashdod Museum of Art runs the entire gamut – from found objects turned into painting supports; through "assisted" found objects, either simply framed or attached to other found objects; through objects Geva himself produced by industrial processes; to "abandoned" objects that are just present there, without having been "elevated" to the status of a work of art. It is a whole range, circular and closed (its boundaries at times only perceptible to Geva), from object to painting.

The two works that open the exhibition – *Cuba's Pipe* (1996) ► and *Untitled* (1990) ► – serve as anchors for these conceptual axes. The first, a homage (as its title indicates) to the artist's father, refers to the renowned pipe in René Magritte's painting *The Treachery of Images* (1929-30). The French inscription "Ceci n'est pas une pipe" (This is not a pipe) beneath the image of the realistically rendered pipe has come to stand for the crisis in twentieth-century art, which called into question the ability (or inability) of painting (or any language) to represent the world. The second work depicts the image of the famous *Hat Rack* presented by Marcel Duchamp in 1917, one of his most distinctive readymades which, through the artist's act of appropriation, attained the status of a work of art. Rendering the image on a wood panel (also a found object), Geva's work refers to its having long turned into a symbol or even a readymade icon, and so turns the discourse back on the relationship between object, image and painting.

► p. 8
► p. 2

In a text that accompanied his 1997 show at Julie M. Gallery in Tel Aviv, Geva writes: "I must know in order to forget. So that the world, matter, will return through the unconscious as a necessity. If I succeed, the painting will be a 'thing.' Not 'a painting of,' but a thing that existed before me and will remain after me, like an indifferent door. That's how I want it: like an indifferent and beautiful door."[7] Geva's painting is accordingly both the thing itself and, simultaneously, a door of transition. Likewise, one may regard the rearrangement of the objects in his exhibition at the Ashdod Museum as a transitional stage, during which the complex practical task of dismantling and reassembling the studio is charged with metaphoric, almost ideational meaning, to the point that it becomes an artistic act in its own right. Thus Geva exposes the subtle dialectic mechanism that underpins his work, which transpires in the gap between that which is abstract, formal and universal and that which is practical, local, familiar, and common.

[7] Tsibi Geva, "X," *ibid.*, p. 147.

Reincarnation

Tsibi Geva in Conversation with Yona Fischer

Abandoned Objects

Yona Fischer — I've been thinking about a sort of proximity between art and life in which, rather than art offering itself to life, it is life that offers itself up to art: "Take me in, isolate me from my surroundings, from the totality called life, and do with me whatever you like, including art."

Tsibi Geva — I like this way of putting it. When I'm on the move around town, wandering about, sometimes while driving (in the southern part of Tel Aviv, for instance), I see the things that are placed or tossed by the side of the road as evidence of something. Almost every object has potential, holds a different option; it is offered up as a choice, an option on the "shelf." Very rarely, I stop and pick up an object that "flickers" at me. When I do, it isn't normally with any purpose in mind, at least initially. Rather, I identify something that offers itself to me. The act of picking up these objects reminds me of Lord Tennyson's poem about plucking a flower, which is often used to illustrate the Western (as opposed to Eastern) mode of observation.

So sometimes, just as Beuys described it, something calls out to me and I stop and pick it up from the sidewalk. Without knowing what's going to become of it. It may be useful or useless, but it is always something that has a particular resonance for me. It is an external object that makes some inner membrane vibrate, probably because it corresponds to some formal pattern or a particular thematic sensitivity, and seems to offer itself to me.

YF — These objects were abandoned in specific surroundings. They are part of a particular place, in the most fundamental sense. You wouldn't find inscriptions written in Finnish or in the Mongolian language in southern Tel Aviv, only Hebrew and Arabic. These objects are like your appointed representatives of their environment. You don't ask them if they're willing to be such representatives, you determine it. Had you seen some of these objects in an antique shop, for instance, I don't imagine you'd buy them, even if they were offered at blowout sale prices... They belong to the corner where you found them, to that gesture of getting rid of something or abandoning it.

TG — That's right. When I did once or twice carry some object here from a flea market abroad, it lost its soul en route, it just didn't belong here.