



Hadas Maor

## Vernacular Art

“Archeology of the Present,” Tsibi Geva’s project for the Israeli pavilion at the 56th International Art Exhibition – la Biennale di Venezia, is a new, site-specific installation encompassing the thematic and formal characteristics that have come to define Geva’s work over time. The project extends over the exterior of the pavilion as well as throughout its interior, destabilizing familiar divisions between inside and outside, the functional and the representational, high and low, abandoned, found, and modified elements. Geva’s work raises self-reflexive artistic concerns and epistemological questions, as well as political and cultural questions pertaining to locality and immigration, hybrid identities, existential anxiety, ephemerality, and existence in an age of instability. The viewer’s interaction with the project begins while approaching the pavilion, which is entirely enveloped by hundreds of used black tires. Tightly bound to each other with cable ties and other improvised means, the tires form a thorny, prickly protective layer of sorts that both absorbs and repels contact. The pulsating pattern created by the tire walls is formed by an interplay between material presence and absence, and the entire structure is transformed into a sculptural event on a scale that exceeds familiar dimensions, disturbing the visual and subjective experience of the viewer. Even as one approaches the structure, it remains difficult to determine whether it is a solid, impenetrable block or a hollow container – an interior that can be observed and perhaps even entered.

The tire walls enveloping the pavilion’s exterior make use of a common everyday object to create an environment charged with layered spatial possibilities: They allude to the political context, in which a tire may function as a protective object capable of absorbing shocks while also constituting a sign of protest and serving as an improvised, readily accessible weapon; at the same time, they also relate to the installation’s architectural and artistic context. These used tires, which are impregnated with a distinct odor, form an organized network of holes imbued with a protective potential,

while simultaneously attesting to a state of danger, constituting a powerful material presence, and communicating a charged, urgent visual and political statement. Over the years, Geva has created various installations based on the use of tires, but these were always exhibited in closed, interior spaces. In this case, the displacement of the artistic action from the interior to the building's exterior walls transforms the entire pavilion into a sculptural object. This strategy enhances the architectural dimension of the work and the sculptural power stemming from it, while producing a deceptive spatial and conceptual vacillation between the real and its semblance, between an alleged origin and the tribute or fabrication presented by the work.

The tire walls create a clear spatial demarcation while seeming to circumscribe a buffer zone, a protective sphere that has a significant heterotopic dimension. In this context, the entrance into the pavilion is experienced as an entrance into a clearly defined arena of action. In his book *Bunker Archaeology*, Paul Virilio describes the structure of the bunker as a monolith, a uniform concrete cast devoid of connective elements that relies structurally on the force of gravity: "One of the essential characteristics of the bunker is that it is one of the rare modern monolithic architectures. While most buildings are embanked in the terrain by their foundations, the casemate is devoid of any, aside from its center of gravity, which explains its possibility for limited movement when the surrounding ground undergoes the impact of projectiles."<sup>1</sup> Geva's installation coats an existing building rather than constituting a monolithic structure, yet the material and visual

<sup>1</sup> Paul Virilio, *Bunker Archaeology*, trans. George Collins (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1994), p. 37.



The Israeli Pavilion in the Giardini della Biennale, Venice  
 הביתן הישראלי בגני הביאנלה, ונציה  
 الجناح الإسرائيلي في حدائق البينالي، البندقية



Installation view from Tsibi Geva's exhibition "Master Plan," 2003,  
 Haifa Museum of Art  
 מראה הצבה בתערוכתו של ציבי גבע, "תוכנית אב", 2003,  
 מוזיאון חיפה לאמנות  
 منظر تركيب في معرض تسيبي غيفع، «مخطط رئيسي»، ٢٠٠٣،  
 متحف حيفا للفنون

power of the tire walls, which envelop the pavilion and transform it into a quintessential sculptural object in space, creates a monolithic cognitive, tactile, and emotional presence.

The enclosure of the pavilion through the construction of block walls overlain by tires creates a series of undefined, intermediate spaces that can only be perceived from within the building.<sup>pp. 18-21</sup> These are enclosed storage spaces – tributes to, or echoes of, the typical Israeli *boidem* (the Yiddish word for attic or crawl space) – a relatively inaccessible domestic space located under the roof or in a niche within an apartment, and used to



Installation view from Tsibi Geva's exhibition  
 "Mound of Things," 2008, Tel Aviv Museum of Art  
 מראה הצבה בתערוכתו של ציבי גבע "תל דברים",  
 2008, מוזיאון תל-אביב לאמנות  
 منظر تركيب في معرض تسيبي غيفع. «تِلْ أشياء».  
 ٢٠٠٨. متحف تل أبيب للفنون

store old or rarely used objects. Up until the 1980s, every Israeli apartment included a *boidem* located in an overhead space in the corridor or kitchen.

In the context of the current installation at the pavilion, these intermediate spaces function as storage spaces for subjective awareness and memory. They are filled with an accumulation of doors, shutters, metal lattices, wooden boards, flattened cardboard boxes, found and abandoned objects, artworks, furniture items, personal souvenirs, and more. The presence of these spaces facilitates a process of accumulation that results in excess and in the entanglement of functional, circumstantial, emotional, and existential concerns. They operate within the pavilion like a back yard

of sorts, where everything that has been repressed and denied is cast away, only to resurface over and over again. In an Israeli context, this tendency for compulsive accumulation is viewed as a quintessential post-traumatic symptom exhibited not only by Holocaust survivors but also by second and third-generation Israelis, and may indeed be taken to represent a collective mental state that applies to society as a whole. This state of consciousness, which is shaped by an aesthetic of uprooting and immigration, is highly present in Geva's paintings and installations, and is strongly related to an existential experience centered on transitoriness and pervaded by anxiety.

Across from these storage spaces, facing the entrance to the pavilion, is a long wall made entirely of gray cement blocks, a common construction material in Israel.<sup>pp. 14-15</sup> This wall, which is characterized by a patterned, repetitive structure, constitutes an additional element charged with circumscribing, separating and blocking. Extending above it is a large wall of windows overlooking the back of the pavilion, which reveals the interior side of the tire wall enveloping the building's exterior. This invasion of the interior by the exterior, which becomes evident the moment one enters the pavilion, ruptures and fragments the a-temporal illusion of self-enclosure created by the white cube. Moreover, the windows overlooking the tire wall are ordered within a repetitive metal grid. This Western, modernist, Mondrian-like pattern seems to overlay the disrupted, rounded, softened grid of the tire wall, so that they are visually integrated into one another in an almost inextricable manner.<sup>pp. 114-117</sup>

This integration between different formal and cultural orders forms a significant axis in Geva's works. In his early *keffiyeh* paintings, which he began creating in the late 1980s, the tangled forms represent the curlicue pattern of the traditional Arab headdress, while referring to an entire world of layered events, colors and textures. These works present the viewer with a cunningly deceptive image, which vacillates between the flatness of the surface and the depicted object, and the painterly illusion of depth. In the early *keffiyeh* paintings, Geva took care to depict these patterned headdresses with relative accuracy, and to include their ornate borders within the painting's frame.<sup>p. 42</sup> Over time, however, the patterns acquired an independent, dynamic quality. The positioning of the image on the surface



*Keffiyeh*, 1989, acrylic and oil on canvas, 178×178, private collection  
 באפייה, 1989, אקריליק ושמן על בד, 178×178, אוסף פרטי  
 «كوفية», ١٩٨٩, أكريليك وزيت على القماش, ١٧٨×١٧٨, مجموعة خاصة

of the canvas was shifted and transformed: not infrequently, only part of the original *keffiyeh* image remained visible; in many instances, various layered patterns appear one atop the other, while perspectival shifts or shading create an illusion of three dimensions. As a result, the *keffiyeh* pattern became interchangeable with that of a chain-link fence or metal lattice. Gazing at these works became a matter of making a conscious decision: Should one fix one's gaze on the work's narrative, patterned surface in order to determine its meaning, or should one let the eye wander in search of abstract painterly trails alluded to beneath this surface? The gaze thus comes to swing, with a pendulum-like movement, between the softened Oriental grid upon the work's surface and the underlying, colorful geometric divisions; between the frame of the painting and the frame of the image; between strategies of concealment and strategies of obstruction; between the illusion of depth and



*Keffiyeh 43 (Homage to Assim Abu-Shakra)*, 1992, acrylic and oil on canvas, 178×178, collection of The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, purchased through the Recanati Fund for Acquisition of Israeli Art  
 באפייה 43 (מחווה לעאסם אבו-שקרה), 1992, אקריליק ושמן על בד, 178×178, אוסף מוזיאון ישראל, ירושלים, באמצעות קרן רקנאטי לרכישת אמנות ישראלית  
 «كوفية ٤٣ (تقديرًا لعاصم أبو شقرا)», ١٩٩٢, أكريليك وزيت على قماش, ١٧٨×١٧٨, مجموعة متحف إسرائيل, القدس, بواسطة صندوق ركناتي لاقتناء الفن الإسرائيلي

the reiteration of flatness. It simultaneously penetrates the representation and is pushed back and away from its surface, so that the image of the *keffiyeh* seems to intermittently appear and disappear.

Rather than underscoring the difference between the Middle-Eastern grid and the Western one, Geva produces hybrids that assimilate one pattern into another, one discursive order into the other, much like the simultaneous view of the grid of windows and the tire wall as seen from within the pavilion. Geva's unique ability to shift between two and three dimensions, painting and sculpture, conceptual ideas and installations in space, while continuing to delve even deeper into the thematic axes of

meaning that have continuously preoccupied him over the years, is revealed in this project in an unprecedentedly complex and comprehensive manner.

In her essay on the grid, Rosalind Krauss writes that the modernist grid gives expression to modernist art's longing for silence.<sup>2</sup> In another, related essay, Krauss adds that "The grid promotes this silence, expressing it moreover as a refusal of speech. The absolute stasis of the grid, its lack of hierarchy, of center, of inflection, emphasizes not only its anti-referential character, but – more importantly – its hostility to narrative."<sup>3</sup> Geva's work is based not only on the grid – be it Western or Middle-Eastern, ordered or disrupted – but also on its relationship to language. By using different variations of the grid culled from the context of local culture, and attending to their association with both the history of Western art and the local political sphere, Geva undermines the fundamental principles represented by the modernist grid. This strategy produces a seemingly unacceptable hybrid that charges form with content, the general with the specific, the a-temporal with the ephemeral. Vacillating between Western formalism and Orientalism, Geva – as an Israeli artist – seeks to create a local terminology, language, and context that exceed the tangle of limiting and mistaken assumptions related to preexisting, restrictive definitions.

In contrast to the strategy underlying the works of high modernist artists – the peeling of one representational layer after another in order to expose the grid as the ultimate minimalist reduction – Geva employs tactics that involve adding, disrupting, and camouflaging. He engages in a continuous process of repeated painterly and conceptual shifts that are potentially imbued with multiple meanings and interpretive possibilities: the *keffiyeh* that is also a chain-link fence or a metal lattice, the terrazzo tile that is also an abstract landscape, the grid that is also a window or built structure. Layer by layer, what appears as a grid is revealed to conceal an image, while what appears as an image conceals an abstract form. His work presents numerous hybrids of nature and culture, of East and West, of Palestinian and Israeli elements, of what exists as is and what is occupied. One may also argue that Geva employs these tactics not only in order to create a local terminology and formal vocabulary, but above all in order to question the seemingly obvious locality of these terms. In parallel to the distinction made in recent decades between innate and acquired qualities, between sexuality and gender, one can – through Geva's work – think somewhat differently of

<sup>2</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1986), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "The Originality of the Avant-Garde," *op. cit.*, p. 158.

the relations between the historical, the political, and the local. These terms may subsequently be understood as neither categorical nor dichotomous, but rather as notions subjected to a process of construction, selection, and decision-making.

The two paintings presented on the lower level of the pavilion **pp. 26-31** are large works whose condensation into a circumscribed space seems to transform them into a single panorama, while enhancing the experiences of discomfort, aggression, and violence that already pervade them. Their positioning conforms to the conceptual principle underlying the creation of an installation, so that they become another intensive focal point in the layered space. The works combine different themes that have appeared in Geva's work over time, including recurrent figurative elements, the terrazzo-tile motif, and landscapes bordering on abstraction. They capture an arena of sexual, violent interaction between numerous male and female figures, raising concerns related to domination and subjection and providing the impression that the represented figures are part of a hierarchical chain of abuse, exploitation, and humiliation. Rather than operating autonomously in space, these figures seem to be controlled by an external force.

Figures have appeared in Geva's oeuvre only rarely, during two clearly defined periods – the early 1980s and a specific moment at the turn of the current century. In the earlier works, the figures appear to have been arbitrarily arranged on the canvas, and are stripped of a narrative context. Delineated in a schematic, flattened manner, they seem to represent a specific human, cultural, and political sphere. In the later works, which are included in the current exhibition, the figures' appearance seems to have acquired an apocalyptic, narrative dimension that attests to the state of humanity as a whole. The brutalist dimension of these works, together with the sense of enclosure and suffocation produced by the installation at the pavilion, give rise to an intensive sensory experience that accompanies the viewer's movement through space.

As the viewer transitions to the pavilion's intermediate level, he comes upon a large installation composed of metal *lattices*. **pp. 63, 86-87** This work is based on the imitation of a found object, while displacing it from the exterior to the interior, disrupting its functional role in a given cultural context, and transforming it from an individual presence into a multiplicity.



*Umm al-Fahm*, 1983, mixed media on paper, 100×140, collection of Haim Katzman, Miami, Florida  
 אום אל-פאחם, 1983, טכניקה מעורבת על נייר, 100×140, אוסף חיים כצמן, פלורידה, מיאמי  
 «أم الفحم». ١٩٨٣. تقنيّة مختلطة على ورق. ١٤٠×١٠٠. مجموعة حايّم كتسمان، ميامي

Moreover, the work enhances the playful patterning of the lattices, which vacillates, much like Geva's paintings, between Orientalism and modernism and between rigid and softened forms. Following upon the viewer's experience on the pavilion's entry level, these lattices appear as a series of floating prison cages.

Visible beyond the lattice installation on the intermediate level is a tall, long wall covered entirely by closed shutters and opaque panels made of various materials, which come together to form a mosaic of sorts.<sup>pp. 62-67</sup> The wall is present in the space as a representation of vernacular architecture – unrestrained, urgent, immediate, and above all circumstantial.<sup>4</sup> This palpably material entity rises from floor to ceiling – overlooking the

<sup>4</sup> Vernacular architecture is characterized by an absence of planning and by the use of local materials and traditional technologies to create buildings that tend to evolve over time, in a manner reflective of the surrounding environment, culture, and history.

space, overflowing onto the adjacent wall, and constituting a gigantic partition that bespeaks its own potential invasion or penetration. The wall's surface constitutes a mesmerizing topographical expanse that playfully engages with the pattern of the grid while combining, in an entirely non-hierarchical manner, found, new, old, painted, and modified shutters, opaque windows, stretches of fabric, and more. The shutters are arranged so that the viewer is observing their closed, exterior side, which is usually oriented towards the public sphere, while creating a deceptive vacillation between painting and sculpture, interior and exterior, front and back. The installation disrupts the relations between the different elements constituting the wall and their categorical status in the world, while creating a powerful impression of an insurmountable obstacle, a powerful and total impasse.

Geva's first shutter works, which were created together in 1993,<sup>p. 48</sup> are hybrid entities that exist in the space between the found and the made-to-order. In terms of their materiality and appearance, they seem identical to the shutters available on the market, and thus initially appear as quintessential ready-mades. Yet they were not found in backyards or junkyards or taken from existing apartments, but rather ordered by the artist especially for the project, and produced according to his specifications concerning their size, materiality, and form. These new aluminum-and-plastic shutters carry no patina, residue, or nostalgic resonance<sup>5</sup> – and are ostensibly charged with nothing beyond their identity as functional objects in the world. In this respect, Geva's shutters undermine the traditional notion of the ready-made and form its conceptual antithesis, expanding upon the possibilities it embodies.

The shutter wall at the pavilion, a development of this early series, underscores the inner tautology characteristic of Geva's artistic strategy. The single closed shutter, the solitary object that was based on a ready-made and then subjected to a process of modification, acquires a new status in this work, functioning once again as a ready-made; this time, however, it is taken from within Geva's own body of work rather than from a general cultural sphere.

On the pavilion's upper level, the viewer comes upon another large *lattice installation*.<sup>pp. 80, 90-97</sup> In contrast to Geva's early installations, where the lattices were arranged in long rows with no exits, like cold, threatening, empty cages,<sup>p. 49</sup> here they contain various objects – empty flower pots,

<sup>5</sup> The aluminum-and-plastic shutters in Geva's work are a development of the Israeli louver shutters that first appeared in the 1950s, and were originally intended to filter and block the intense local sunlight. Over the years, these shutters also became a readily available way to enclose outdoor balconies, thus allowing for a provisional expansion of residential apartments. Today, they are perceived as a quintessential component of a unique local identity.



Untitled, 1993, plastic shutter in aluminum frame, 115×68.5×3  
 ללא כותרת, 1993, תריס פלסטיק במסגרת אלומיניום, 115×68.5×3  
 «بدون عنوان». 1993. أباجور بلاستيك في إطار ألومينيوم, 115×68.5×3

mattresses, used furniture items, old television sets, pp. 18, 94, 95 and more. This installation imitates a conventional logic employed in the Israeli urban sphere, where lattices serve as an improvised, minor extension of the interior, a temporary storage space where necessary and unnecessary objects are piled up indiscriminately

The appearance of this installation calls to mind the term *bricoleur* as employed by Claude Lévi-Strauss in his book *The Savage Mind*.<sup>6</sup> The *bricoleur* is skilled at various tasks and specializes in creating things by reassembling existing objects in new ways, while adjusting his project to the limited inventory of materials and tools at his disposal. The engineer, by contrast, as Lévi-Strauss argues, focuses on the project in its entirety – conceiving of, creating, and recruiting all the materials and tools necessary for its completion. In Geva's work, *bricolage* and the vernacular seem to be fused together with a singular, existential intensity.

<sup>6</sup> See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind*, trans. George Weidenfield and Nicholson Ltd. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).



Lattice, installation view from the exhibition "Power,"  
 2005, Reading Power Station, Tel Aviv  
 סבכה, מראה הצבה בתערוכה "כוח", 2005,  
 תחנת הכוח רדינג, תל-אביב  
 شبكية, منظر تركيب في معرض «طاقة», 2005,  
 محطة الطاقة ريدنغ, تل أبيب

Like the self-enclosed spaces on the entrance level, the lattice installation includes, among other things, a number of old TV sets pp. 18, 94-97 – some of which broadcast, in a recurrent loop, the video *Lattice* (2002), which Geva created in collaboration with Boaz Arad and Miki Kratsman. pp. 22-23 This work is composed of a series of static gazes filmed over the course of a single day through various patterned lattices at Hagar Gallery in Jaffa; it was presented as part of the exhibition "Lattice," which was shown that year at the gallery (curator: Tal Ben-Zvi). Since the TV sets are not synchronized,

the viewer comes upon different images seen through the lattices as he wanders through the pavilion space. This work documents the everyday life of residents in Jaffa's Ajami neighborhood as it unfolds from early morning until after sunset. Its slow rhythm allows one's gaze to linger both on the patterned lattices and on the way in which they dissect and map the public sphere, while blocking the viewer's access to it. In this manner, the work blurs the distinction between the wandering gaze and the fixed, controlled gaze; between the position of the observer and the position of the one being observed; between the viewer trapped within the exhibition space and the individuals who are excluded from it, remaining free to wander throughout the outdoor sphere.

Geva's work is based on different types of obstructions, which always contain gaps and holes through which the gaze can penetrate but the body cannot pass. The layout of the project within the pavilion space creates sharp transitions between experiences of blockage, discomfort, and spatial ambiguity and between intimate, poetic moments, so that fragility and crudeness, lyricism and violence, are inextricably intertwined. The installation's different focal points create enclaves that offer support for the overwhelming anxieties arising from within. Yet the semblance of protection provided by these enclaves is in fact nothing but an illusion: The tire walls are incapable of defending against an actual attack; the spaces on the entrance level offer only a temporary refuge or hiding space; the displaced lattices no longer serve to expand an interior space or offer protection, but rather constitute an obstruction in space that cages in their contents; and the shutter wall embodies the potential of penetration.

The *keffiyeh*, terrazzo tile, window, shutter, lattice, and block wall are all accepted signifiers that serve to create a separation between private and public, interior and exterior, concealment and exposure, while partaking of a vocabulary of concepts and elements that have populated Geva's work over the years. At the same time, their presence in this specific project is – as it has in fact always been – fragmentary. They are present as bits and pieces of a home that no longer exists, or which may potentially come into existence in the future, yet not as the vestiges of an actual, concrete house. The concept of home, which repeatedly resurfaces in Geva's work over the years, thus remains, in the end, a locus of distilled longing; an unrealized dream about a coherent, unquestioned identity.



Untitled, diptych, 2015, acrylic on canvas, 240×178  
ללא כותרת, דיפטיכון, 2015, אקריליק על בד, 240×178  
« بدون عنوان », لوحة ثنائية, 2015, أكريليك على قماش, 240×178

On the upper level of the pavilion, situated alongside the lattice installation and the windows overlooking the tire wall on the exterior, are a number of large-scale paintings composed of several units, which come together to form a complex painterly weave. These recent works, which are all part of the series of vernacular paintings that Geva has been creating in recent years,<sup>pp. 26-31</sup> are characterized by an expressive, hybrid quality. Whereas Geva's early works related to specific objects in the world, the subjects of these recent paintings intermingle with one another in the absence of clear boundaries, like a puzzle containing countless hidden hints.

Especially notable among these works is a large expressive painting, in which a black raven appears against a seemingly abstract ground flanked by the inscription "Black Raven."<sup>pp. 110-111</sup> The composition also contains a stain-like form reminiscent of the map of Israel, as well as a partial inscription that seems to allude to the extremist Islamic movement ISIS. This work, like the other works scattered through the space and many of the earlier ones created by Geva over the years, makes evident the unique textual dimension characteristic of his artistic language, in which solitary words scattered throughout the works serve to produce mental and visual panoramas. Every word represents an image that is usually absent from the body of the painting, so that its verbal surfacing within the space of the work allows for a crossing between different layers of insight and subjective experience.

In this context, it is worth mentioning the series of terrazzo-tile paintings that Geva began creating in the late 1980s,<sup>p. 53</sup> which was born of the use of the word "balata" in one of the *keffiyeh* paintings. The word first appeared in Geva's work as an allusion to the Palestinian refugee camp by this name (located near Nablus in the West Bank). Yet since *balata* is also the Arabic word for "tile" and is commonly used, in vernacular Hebrew, to refer to the imitation-terrazzo tiles ubiquitously used throughout Israel, it subsequently led to the painting of the terrazzo-tile works. These tiles, which may be defined as an all-Israeli signifier, were long identified in collective Israeli memory with the Palestinian population both within and beyond the Green Line, whose members once made up the bulk of Israel's construction workforce. In this local context, the words "keffiyeh" and "balata" are both related to the same obvious social, political and cultural context; in addition to pointing to a given object in the world by painterly means, they represent



Terrazzo, diptych, 1989, acrylic on canvas, 215×198,  
private collection, New York

בלאטא ה, דיפטיוכן, 1989, אקריליק על בד, 215×198,  
אוסף פרטי, ניו-יורק  
«בלאטה», لوحة ثنائية, 1989, أكريليك على قماش, 215×198,  
مجموعة خاصة, نيويورك

an attempt to create a local terminology, to respond to a general state of affairs and to take a stance in the public sphere. Geva's refusal to come to terms with the accepted separation between the sphere of reality and the sphere of art, between the political and the personal, and between the decorative and the conceptual, constitutes a unique dimension of his work. His choice of subject matter is oriented toward the Middle East, while the painterly undertaking itself engages in a process of negotiation with the West.

Geva's use of written inscriptions in his works is a quintessentially conceptual strategy, which presents different systems of linguistic and

cultural translation on canvas while examining in depth the possibilities of joining together text and image, and their ability to complete or substitute for one another. This strategy assumes the existence of an imagined cultural sphere shared by the viewers of the works, and relies on their ability to read the texts and identify the words or place names (especially in the early works, where the inscriptions appeared in Hebrew only)<sup>P. 46</sup> – while providing an expansive and layered arena of action for those interested in reading and interpreting the works in additional, non-local contexts.

The words scattered throughout the space of the pavilion – “Gazza,” “Wonderland,” “Black Raven,” “Mount Hazon” – come together to reflect a specific existential state. This textual layer underscores and enhances the existentialist dimension of the project, the sense of urgency and intensity it communicates, and the existential anxiety that pervades it. Moreover, the permanent sign affixed to the façade of the pavilion – the metal letters spelling out the word ISRAELE,<sup>P. 38</sup> which are largely concealed by the tire wall – have been rewritten in black spray paint at the entrance to the pavilion, becoming an integral part of the project and of the work’s logic. pp. 36, 146

Geva’s method of working on large, essentially unlimited series over long periods of time shapes both his more modular, structural paintings such as the terrazzo-tile series described above, the *keffiyeh* or the window series, and the three-dimensional, spatial installations like the lattices and block or shutter walls.<sup>P. 40</sup> Although these works all seem to point to an origin that exists in reality, and in relation to which they are reproduced, their logic is not predicated upon reproducing or copying, but rather upon accumulation and saturation. The main focus is on the mode of action itself, on the process of gathering images and terms and on their potential interweaving with other images and terms selected by the artist. Meaning is constructed out of difference, and in Geva’s work it arises out of the ensemble of differences between the individual works in the context of repetition, accumulation, and shifting. This accumulating multiplicity, which has revealed itself over time to constitute an important principle in Geva’s work, points to a complex understanding of the immanent gaps between signifier and signified, image and language.

Toward the end of his book *Difference and Repetition*, Gilles Deleuze presents the terms “repetition” and “difference” in the following manner:



Gazza, 2014, acrylic on paper mounted on wood, 252x80  
252x80, 2014, Gazza, אקריליק על נייר מודבק על עץ.  
Gazza, 2014, אקריליק על נייר מודבק על עץ, 252x80.

<sup>7</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 295.

“The frontier or ‘difference’ is therefore singularly displaced: it is no longer between the first time and the others, between the repeated and the repetition, but between these types of repetition. It is repetition itself that is being repeated.”<sup>7</sup> Deleuze attempts to undo the fundamentally linear, developmental approach that is frequently applied to the concept of repetition. He seeks to open up a gap, to change the pattern of relating to it and to call attention to the dimension of action – to repetition itself.

In this context, one may think of Geva’s large series not in terms of the accepted relations between a given object in the world and a painterly interpretation and reflection aimed at reproducing it – but rather in the context of a system in which multiplicity produces and accumulates meaning beyond the image, beyond the object, beyond the “thing” in the world. This production of meaning, in Geva’s work, unfolds simultaneously on several levels: a wide-ranging, self-reflexive dialogue with the fathers of modernism, alongside a comprehensive cultural dialogue related to the politicization of art-making in recent decades. One may even go so far as to examine Geva’s overall body of work and the manner in which it is situated in space in relation to the concept of the “rhizome,” which Deleuze and Guattari explain in the following manner: “The rhizome is reducible to neither the One nor the multiple. It is not the One that becomes Two or even directly three, four, five etc. It is not a multiple derived from the one, or to which one is added ( $n+1$ ). It is comprised not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (*milieu*) from which it grows and which it overflows.”<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), p. 21.

This passage proves useful to understanding the principle shaping Geva’s oeuvre, and the fact that his works are simultaneously charged with different kinds of allusions and registers. On the one hand, every work is an autonomous and self-sufficient unit; at the same time, it also partakes of an extended structure, relates to a series, and intersects in space with similar thematic and visual principles. This strategy, which was already present in Geva’s early series of paintings, is further underscored by the spatial condensation of the installation at the pavilion in Venice, and the process of material and emotional overwhelm it repeatedly conveys.

Geva is a political artist in the deepest sense of this term. The political dimension of his work, however, is cumulative; it is revealed and understood in the process of observing the works and becoming acquainted

with them – rather than striking one directly, in one instant. Although his approach to painting is fundamentally conceptual, the works themselves are imbued with a surprisingly expressive charge, and his entire work process is predicated upon the creation of a dialectical tension between contrasts and the combination of different arenas of discourse and action. This combination always attempts to remain hybrid, ambiguous, multicultural and non-uniform, and simultaneously opens up onto artistic questions, as well as cultural and political ones. His work involves the collection of signs in the world, and he can even be described as operating in the space between archeology, anthropology, and art. Yet he does not gather information about a distant and foreign other. The forms and objects present in his work partake of a lived, highly specific, immediate reality, while attesting to the catastrophic dimension that suffuses it. His oeuvre is pervaded by the impossible complexity of Israeli-Palestinian existence in this place, and is imbued with a painful, sober and harsh awareness. It strives to deconstruct the fundamental concepts of place, culture, and identity shaping our life and actions, and to touch upon the most sensitive question of all: the question of this place’s belonging to its inhabitants, to both Palestinians and Israelis.

The title of this project, “Archeology of the Present,” is dialectic. It is charged with both a thematic and a sculptural dimension, while also containing an internal contradiction. Archeology is a scientific discipline concerned with studying the past of human culture by identifying, documenting, and analyzing material and environmental data. This term carries connotations of an action unfolding in space in order to study the history of time. The coming together of the terms “archeology” and “present” represents the collapse of time and space into one another. It creates a head-on collision, a structured failure, which assimilates the dimension of impossibility into the heart of this project.

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