Homeland
(The Hole in the Painting, or the Painting that Is Nothing but a Hole)

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Tsibi Geva's exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art includes several of his most important and well-known series of paintings – among them those titled keffiyeh, terrazzo, windows, thorns, flowers, birds and mountains. Since the principal characteristic underlying Geva's mode of action involves the creation of thematically defined series of paintings over long periods of time, parallel to working on additional, distinct projects, this exhibition introduces the viewer to the imagery, language and significance of each individual series – while focusing on the intriguing relationship that develops between them, and on the complex and unique worldview to which they give rise.

Geva's series of paintings are composed of multilayered works; even when their surfaces seem to be inhabited by specific images, they contain numerous additional layers shaped by processes of revelation and concealment, figuration and abstraction. These layers are akin to an accumulation of archaeological strata; they contain multiple allusions to the history of art and to place, politics, biographical details, fear and longing. At the same time, it is interesting to examine the way in which the question of painting is present in Geva's work alongside political and cultural questions, and especially, how these questions simultaneously camouflage and conceal one another. Employing strategies of disruption and displacement, repetition and accumulation, Geva assimilates ostensibly given fields of action and meaning and generates liminal hybrids, which strive to open up new discursive channels. In order to examine this dynamic in depth, one must study the various works he created over the years, and the strategies of deictic marking and deflection he chose to employ within them.

Geva's early works already gave expression to the complex political dimension of Israeli-Palestinian existence. His series from the early 1980s mark the beginning of his ongoing concern with specific signifiers of local identity and with the intricate tangle of related political themes. A recurrent motif in this series is the stereotypical

image of an expressionless Arab Everyman identified by his keffiyeh and mustache, and devoid of a personal identity. This image is confronted in the works with fragmented landscapes, a recurrent image of a wounded lioness, and images of various sexual intercourse poses. These different elements intersect both within the works and in the tight spaces in which they are situated; they form complex installations in which some works lean against the walls, while others are affixed to walls and columns by means of external clamps; taken together, they hint of an agitated environment rife with tension and shaped by an ongoing struggle, and to an uncamouflaged concern with the relations between occupier and occupied ►. ► p. 23

The introduction of "Arab" images into the Israeli art scene of the early 1980s, and the preoccupation with the stereotypical manner in which they were perceived in the Israeli collective consciousness, amounted to an explicit demand to expand the existing limits of discourse by introducing a new discursive element. This demand grew more pronounced as it developed in the following series of works, in which Geva continued to critically examine, and expand upon, the theme of identity and place through the mapping of geographical and cultural territories.

This series of works, which was painted on intentionally loose and sloppy canvases, contains a multiplicity of figurative elements – including various kinds of vegetation; schematic, flattened-out figures; decorative patterns; and the names of both imagined territories and real places (mostly those of Arab towns and villages, or of mixed Jewish-Arab towns and cities, such as Jaffa). The overall feeling that arises from these works is that of a dispersal of painted elements and of an absence of proportions. This impression is amplified by the appearance of undulating, disorderly, declaratively hybrid inscriptions. Composed of Hebrew letters yet painted in the style of Eastern calligraphy, these ornamental texts include words such as "*biladi*" (Arabic for "homeland"), and Arab names such as Umm El-Fahim, Taybeh, A'isha, Ara or Yafa ►. ► p. 12

In this series, Geva creates recurrent encounters between East and West, both in terms of his choice of imagery and in terms of the language of painting. He uses the canvas to present various matrixes of linguistic and cultural translation, and examines in depth the possibilities of relating texts and images that either complete one another or substitute for each other. Instead of a visual description based on stereotypical Arab imagery and the use of exposed visual metaphors, these works address Israeli-Palestinian existence through the use of words and names, which create panoramic landscapes composed of repressed and denied territories. This strategy assumes the existence of a shared cultural context that enables the viewers to read the texts and identify the words or names; at the same time, it opens up

onto an expansive, multilayered sphere, which allows these works to be read and interpreted in additional contexts that do not necessarily have a local resonance.

In the mid-1980s, Geva's works began to be geometrically partitioned in a more pronounced manner, and infused with multicultural quotations from the art of Japan, China, Africa and other cultures►. Yet it was only toward the end of the 1980s, as he began to work on the series of keffiyeh paintings, that Geva completed the transition from compositions containing a multiplicity of scattered images and themes to seemingly more homogeneous paintings, whose layered quality is shaped by numerous registers of meaning rather than by a proliferation of painted elements.

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This seeming withdrawal inward highlights the presence of a single, central image – in conjunction with the use of one of several quintessential nouns such as "keffiyeh," "terrazzo" or "window," which would come to constitute the titles of Geva's major series of paintings. Rather than presenting us with an "untitled," "still life" or "abstract" painting, these works clearly feature concrete, quotidian objects in a seemingly descriptive manner. Yet even though these familiar objects are part of everyday Middle Eastern life, they are immediately identified as culturally and politically charged elements. In this context, the use of the keffiyeh image, for instance, makes manifest a familiar, pan-Arab national signifier – a quintessential cultural symbol that has come to be related to the Palestinian struggle for an independent identity and state. The use of a single noun in the titles of these works thus posits an a priori form of specificity (by directing the viewer's eye and awareness to a given object in the world); at the same time, it also gives rise to a complex polemic, which is expressed both in terms of the painterly action and in terms of the dialectical status of the featured subjects.

The tangled keffiyeh paintings represent the curlicue pattern of the traditional Arab headdress on one level, and an entire world of layered events, colors and textures on the underlying layers. They present the viewer with a cunningly deceptive image, which vacillates between the flatness of both the depicted object and the work's surface, 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►. Over time, however, the patterns acquired an independent, dynamic quality. The positioning of the image on the surface of the canvas was shifted and transformed: not infrequently, only part of the original keffiyeh image remained visible; in many instances, various layered patterns appeared one atop the other, while perspectival shifts or shading created an illusion of three dimensions. As a result, the keffiyeh

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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 one's gaze 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 the reiteration of flatness. The gaze thus 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.

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The series of terrazzo paintings, which Geva began creating in the late 1980s, infuses the reading of his oeuvre with additional narrative potential. This series 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 well-known Palestinian refugee camp [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 lead to the painting of the terrazzo 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 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 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 East, while the painterly undertaking itself engages in a process of negotiation with the West. At times, indeed, it seems as if the political stance shaping these works thwarts the possibility of thoroughly examining the accumulation of intriguing artistic allusions they contain; in other instances, however, it seems that the choice of subject matter amounts to an attempt to camouflage a purist, self-reflexive preoccupation with the structure and language of painting. This hybridity is a fundamental component

of the logic shaping Geva's creative process – a logic whose poignancy becomes clear as one examines his evolving body of work as a whole.

The keffiyeh paintings bespeak a preoccupation with the limits of the painting's frame that is based on the distinction between the borders of the object (the keffiyeh) and the limits of the canvas, as well as on the range of shifts taking place within these two frames. The terrazzo paintings, by contrast, are seemingly borderless; forms and patches of color extend out over the entire canvas, and the compositions are frequently arranged into diptychs, triptychs and other combinations of numerous painterly units►. Yet even if these paintings are not circumscribed by external borderlines, they are composed of an assemblage of fragments shaped by internal outlines. The patches of color and forms that structure these paintings were created through a continuous process of circumscription and transgression, addition and subtraction: layer by layer, different parts of the painted surface are intermittently revealed and concealed with masking tape; painting and pasting are followed by peeling and exposing. The surfaces thus reveal, like an archaeological cross-section, arbitrary fragments of accidental compositions that resemble sections torn from a larger whole, or subcutaneous, light-sensitive layers that have suddenly become exposed.

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At first glance, then, the terrazzo paintings appear entirely abstract. Their identification with a concrete object in the world is based on the name of the series, a procedure that transforms them into abstract compositions that do, in fact, contain "a thing." In the catalogue of the Moshe Kupferman exhibition at the Israel Museum (2000), Yona Fischer argues that the "thing" in his works "denotes matters in general as well as the specific matter under discussion; […] and ultimately it carries the load of the meaning – yet Kupferman says *davar* – [some]thing – but is reluctant to spell out the meaning."[1] In Geva's work, by contrast, the "thing" always seems to be already defined; it is both the conceptual and the formal point of departure – "keffiyeh," "terrazzo," "window," "flower" or "mountain." Yet the definition of this "thing" as a thing in the world is merely the first step in examining the dialectic complexity and polemic meaning that it reveals.

1 Yona Fischer, *Moshe Kupferman* (exhibition catalogue, Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 2000), p. 342.

Geva began working on the "window" series toward the mid-1990s. From a formal point of view, this series marks the transition from the Middle Eastern grid of the keffiyeh to the Western grid of the square window. This grid – the purified emblem of modernism – is explicitly exposed in these works, yet is also unequivocally fractured and disrupted. Through the layering of these various grids one upon the other – repeatedly shifting the basic pattern while revealing, covering and concealing their various parts – Geva creates a structured incompatibility

between the different layers. Some of the works seem impenetrable to the gaze, while others disclose in-depth structures and identifiable figurative elements. Thus, the patterns they contain resemble either a window (the reflection *of* a given reality) or a mirror (a sophisticated reflection *on* the world). The works in this series are characterized by a "dirty" geometry and by disruptions and deflections vis-à-vis the rigid Minimalist tradition. Rather than separating, and thus underscoring, the difference between the Middle Eastern grid and the Western one, Geva produces different kinds of hybrids that assimilate one pattern into another, one discursive order into the other.

In her essay on the grid, Rosalind Krauss writes that the modernist grid gives expression to modernist art's longing for silence.[2] In a different and 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."[3] Yet Geva's work is based both on the grid – be it Western or Middle Eastern, ordered or disrupted – and on its relationship to language. By using different variations of the grid culled from the context of local culture, and their association both with the history of Western art and with the local political situation, 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.

Later on in her essay on the grid, Krauss describes two models of examining the grid and reading works that are based on it both optically and spatially: the centrifugal model and the centripetal model. According to the centrifugal model, a grid may, in principle, expand in all directions, extending out to infinity. A work based on this model is thus a fragment, an arbitrary section of a larger whole. According to the centripetal model, by contrast, a grid has a core that seems to suck what is outside its frame inward. This core is the essence, or re-presentation, of everything that exists beyond it. Naturally, this model relates to the grid as a structure based on repetition.[4]

Geva's works operate within and between these two hermeneutical spheres, while creating a pendulum movement that swings inward and outward, left and right. The keffiyeh works, for instance, may be read according to the centripetal model as

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

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

4 Rosalind Krauss, "Grids," in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1986), p. 18.

grids that suck the image inward, while the terrazzo or window works may be read according to the centrifugal model as potentially expanding into infinity.

In contrast to the strategy that underlay the work of artists of high modernism – the peeling of one representational layer after another to the point of exposing 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 that is also an abstract landscape, the grid that is also a window or built structure. Layer by layer, what appears as a grid conceals an image, and 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 localness of these terms. Parallel to the distinction made in recent decades between innate and acquired qualities, between sexuality and gender, one may – through Geva's work – think somewhat differently of 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, choosing and decision-making.

The keffiyeh, the terrazzo and the window are all familiar signifiers that attempt to create a distinction between private and public, interior and exterior, concealment and exposure. Although these objects seem to be unmistakably present in Geva's paintings, their presence cunningly deceives us, directing our gaze to what they are blocking or concealing.

In this context, one must also note that Geva's lattice and tire installations, which ostensibly attempted to supply some form of protection through the use of ruptured structures, function in a similar manner. The tire installations that Geva presented over the years made use of a readily available, hollow object to create a layered spatial environment – both in terms of the tire's political resonance (as a form of protection and shock absorption, and as a provisory and readily available weapon), and in terms of the architectural and artistic context underlying the creation of an installation►. The dense and charged installation of these tires in various exhibition spaces created an organized net of holes, alluding to the possibility of protection while attesting to a situation fraught with danger.

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The lattice installations, in turn, were based on the imitation of a common object

and a series of procedures involving deflection and disruption. These procedures were given expression in the conceptual displacement of the lattices from the exterior to the interior, from a functional context to a larger cultural context, from the singular to the plural (all similar yet distinct concepts in Geva's work). These lattices were installed in various exhibition spaces as a model vacillating between the Oriental and the modernist, between the functional and the decorative, and above all, they were presented as a familiar means of separating and protecting, which – in the context of the exhibition – did not delimit any defined space. Arrayed one alongside another and offering no possibility of escape, these lattices resemble a series of empty, lifeless, cold and threatening cages.

The video work *Lattice* (2003) ▸, which Geva created in collaboration with Miki Kratsman and Boaz Arad, documents everyday life in Jaffa's Ajami neighborhood – as it unfolds from early morning until after sunset – through a series of patterned lattices installed at Hagar Gallery (curator: Tal Ben Zvi). The slow rhythm of the work 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 have been removed and excluded from it, remaining free to wander throughout space.

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The tension between the potential of the gaze to penetrate Geva's surface patterns and its blocking – and between the matter, form and texture of the various works and the gap or hole at their core – calls attention, above all, to the structured failure inherent to these works; it points to the fact that the centers of these complex paintings or other works are all camouflaged, hollow or concealed. In a certain sense, the gaze directed at Geva's works is swallowed by a void, by absence. By the missing body. This sensation is enhanced as one turns to examine additional series of paintings created later on, featuring thorns and flowers, birds and mountains.

The various flowers that appear in Geva's works are all poisoned, black, dripping, hollowed-out flowers. These flowers are not withered, but rather imbued with a strange, repellent, barren quality. Their first appearance in Geva's work occurred in the mid-1980s, in his early thorn paintings ▸, and they have continued to appear ever since – isolated, fragmented and rootless; at times they are prickly and thorny, while in other instances they seem to soften and dissolve. Like Geva's other works (especially the more open series, such as the birds or

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mountains), these paintings also combine numerous materials and modes of action. Movement and stasis are frequently interchangeable, as are traditional colors and industrial materials, brush strokes and liquid paint or other materials poured onto a tilted surface. The background in these paintings is busy; it often seems to be camouflaging something or to be itself camouflaged, so that only the flower remains visible – either through a delicate gesture of revelation or through a violent act of exposure. These existentialist paintings combine refinement and excess, bold materiality and a gaping, missing core. Their urgency and transgressive dimension result in a fusion of death and desire. As Georges Bataille wrote late in his life, poetic insanity has its place within nature; it justifies nature, agreeing to beautify it. Refusal belongs to a lucid consciousness, which evaluates all that happens to it.[5]

[5] Georges Bataille, "The Oresteia," in *The Impossible*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: City Lights, 1991).

Like the paintings of the solitary, uprooted and detached flowers, the paintings in the bird series each feature a single, isolated, static and motionless bird. These birds, which are painted in profile, are usually perched on something, turning a hollow eye toward the viewer. Although the bird paintings are characterized by a fundamentally descriptive approach, which combines painterly refinement and self-assured contours that clash with excessive materiality, they were not created from direct observation of nature, but rather through the mediation of bird guides or stuffed specimens. This is a local inventory, in which one may identify a bulbul, a wagtail, a woodpecker, an egret and other birds. Often, the process of identification is enhanced by a written inscription indicating the name of the species upon the painterly surface. The spatial presentation of these works is usually based on a modular principle that seems to have been borrowed from the terrazzo or window paintings ►, yet is one that imitates potential natural possibilities. Each assemblage of works consists of a group of individuals, which is neither a "flock" in the familiar zoological sense nor a random collection of entirely unrelated details. One may argue that the bird – which began to appear in Geva's works in the early series of works, during the 1980s – has remained suspended not only between nature and culture, but also between here and there, between Israel and Palestine.

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Many of the works in this series are painted on found materials – metal panels, wooden doors, plastic trays and so forth – as if in an attempt to enhance their local charge. Strangely, however, the underscored materiality of these supports weakens the depicted birds' potential for life and movement. Their detachment from their original surroundings and transposition to a new context divests them of their inherent functionality, and echoes the detachment of the bird from its natural habitat.

The frozen quality of the bird paintings, like the exaggeration in the flower paintings, produces a harsh sensation of hollowness, which is further distilled in the mountain paintings. These paintings feature barren, scorched and lifeless landscapes characterized by a heroic, terrifying quality and imbued with both sublimity and a sense of degradation. They constitute mental landscapes of a primeval or destroyed land, and do not entertain any direct relationship with an existing place or image. In fact, these are paintings of obstruction. They are composed of dense, boldly painted expanses that seem to be bisecting the surface of the canvas on a diagonal, creating points at which color melts to form and frame to movement. Refinement is intruded upon by crudeness, lyricism is invaded by violence. Several of the paintings include a recurrent image of a truncated, burnt tree, while others contain a sort of black sun. They are all concerned with the simultaneous presentation and denial of the landscape, questioning its very existence on both a painterly and a concrete level. For the landscape is never only a landscape; it is always also a gaze, a stance, an identity, a place.

Similar divisions of the painted surface have appeared in Geva's works over the years – in the background of the keffiyeh and terrazzo paintings, in the bird paintings ▸ and in the series of geometric works from the late 1990s (which alluded, among other things, to signs pointing to military bases or roadblocks) ▸. In the mountain paintings, however, the sense of a schism, crack or split is amplified to the point that Geva seems concerned not so much with the mountain itself, but rather with the earth it has broken through, the ground from which it has emerged; blackened, exposed and scorched ground that threatens to swallow and annihilate everything it comes into contact with. It seems that between Bataille's blinding sun and Julia Kristeva's black sun, between madness and melancholy, Geva's works search for another type of gaze, for the possibility of rescuing a world from oblivion.

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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 keffiyeh, terrazzo or window series) and the more open-ended ones (such as the bird, flower or mountain series). 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: "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."[6] 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.

6 Gilles Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, trans. Paul Patton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 295.

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 that "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 on the one hand, and a comprehensive cultural dialogue related to the politicization of art-making in recent decades on the other. 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 explains 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 overspills."[7]

7 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. Despite the clear-cut structure of these works, their repetitiveness and their circumscribed boundaries, they are in fact limitless, and insist on addressing the permeability of the term "border." The modular arrangement and potentially infinite character of these series point to the potential for expansion; to a state in which formal, mental

and political borderlines remain intentionally permeable.

Nevertheless, one may argue that this exhibition both begins and ends with an act of obstruction. As one enters the lower level of the exhibition space, one comes up against a monumental concrete-block wall that obstructs the entrance to the space. This wall is part of an incomplete structure situated at the center of the exhibition, as if attempting to bisect the space or protect something within it. It echoes the formal act of circumscription taking place within Geva's paintings, their flatness, their grid structure and their seeming impenetrability; and like them, the wall is at once poetic and crude, brutal and blunt.

Entering the upper exhibition level, the viewer comes across a painted triptych featuring a wall made of concrete blocks. The location of this triptych echoes the missing part of the structure on the lower level, and further attests to the pattern of repetition and spatial expansion that characterizes Geva's work process in general. It is interesting to note that this triptych was painted years prior to the construction of the actual wall itself, and that the same block pattern also appeared in several of his early works, including a 1992 keffiyeh painting ► and an early painting from the window series ►.

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In a certain sense, the concrete structure is a surplus element in this space (even if it is not imbued with a sense of spiritual or historical excess). It is composed of standard, industrially produced gray concrete blocks, and was constructed especially for this exhibition. It has no actual functional role, and it is unclear whether it is being built or destroyed. Its presence within the exhibition space constitutes a disturbance, while also representing an imposed order of sorts; it alludes to processes of building and invasion, and thus inevitably also refers to processes of uprooting and expulsion. Touching as it does upon the concepts of home and of construction, it constitutes an additional link both in the chain of site-specific projects that Geva has created over time (such as the tire wall or lattice installations), and within the overall context of his oeuvre and his preoccupation with the problem of localness.

There is no doubt that Geva is a political artist in the deepest sense of the 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 questions concerning painting, politics and culture. His work is suffused with 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 that shape our life and actions, and to touch upon the most sensitive question of all: the question of this place's belonging to both its Palestinian and its Israeli inhabitants. Numerous and diverse questions are given different kinds of answers both in the context of Geva's work process and in the context of the exhibition itself. Yet the central question that seems to underlie the various elements that have appeared in Geva's work over time, and which facilitates their cyclical dynamic, remains open. Leaving this fundamental question open is, finally, the clearest expression of the profound stance at the core of Geva's work.