



Artists: Yishuv and Israel: 1920-1970

by Ruth Markus

## INTRODUCTION

Until the 1970s women were always a minority among Israeli artists and most of them either followed the men or worked outside the leading artistic movements. Although the early twentieth-century Yishuv (the Jewish settlement in Palestine) was a pioneering society with egalitarian ideals, it was (like every society in the world) ultimately led and directed by men, and so too were the various artistic groups. Hence any attempt to isolate the women artists as a group is artificial and takes them out of any cultural-historical context. Nonetheless, there is no other way of understanding their role in Israeli art.

Any discussion of the place of women in Israeli art immediately raises two key questions. First: Can we distinguish “feminine” characteristics in women’s art? Second: Can we identify distinctively Israeli characteristics in this art?

Grouping women artists together as a separate category requires us to define what distinguishes them from male artists. What is Women’s Art? Does it express itself in “feminine” thematics? Or is it perhaps made of “feminine” materials and forms? Women artists themselves give diverse answers, stemming from two main standpoints. There are those who categorically refuse to relate to the question of their gender. Some of them do not want to be labeled “feminists” because of the militant connotations which they feel are associated with this term. Most of them argue that they should be judged as “artists” in the general sense, because any definition of them as a gender group heightens the inequality between men and women and perpetuates male-chauvinist conceptions. On the other hand, there are women artists who present themselves as feminists and are interested in accentuating the difference between themselves and male artists, in their artistic approaches, in their subject matter and in their choice of techniques and materials.

In an inclusive (and superficial) attempt to define the historical development of these different approaches, we can say that the first is characteristic of women artists who were active mainly before the 1970s, while the second approach is more characteristic of women artists who began creating in the 1970s, after the rise of feminist awareness.

Nonetheless, even in the works of the first group—those who objected to being classified as women artists—we can find themes that are connected to their female experience, such as pregnancy, childbirth or motherhood. Until the 1970s, however, the work of women artists in Israel contains no trace of more intimate personal experiences such as menstruation, incest, male violence, etc. Yocheved Weinfeld was one of the first women artists whose work deals with the subject of menstruation, as in *Untitled*, 1974, in which cloth resembling sanitary napkins is stained with red like menstrual blood and placed on pubic hair. Yet while in other countries these subjects long ago became the principal themes of contemporary women's art, in Israel they have appeared on the feminine agenda only in recent years. Before this, the incessant struggle for survival in Israel far overshadowed what was considered as women's private suffering, which had become secondary both to loss and bereavement and to social or political criticism. Only in recent years has the protest of the female body become legitimate in Israel, even serving as a vehicle to express other protests.

Besides themes connected with the female experience of childbirth or motherhood, we also find in the works of the first group techniques and materials that were perceived as "feminine," such as needlework, weaving or clay. It should be noted that these "feminine" materials were defined as such not by the women artists, but by the critics and researchers, some of whom consider them inferior in value. For example, most of the women sculptors who created in clay did not do so because they identified it with femininity (Mother Earth) but because they found a "vacant niche" there that allowed them a freedom to create and invent as they wished. Gdula Ogen, for example, says that she turned to ceramics because she felt that there was a vacant space which enabled her to develop as she wished: "I had some air there," she said.

We should also bear in mind the fact that many women from the first group were artists concurrently with their regular activity as homemakers, who generally did not have "a room of one's [their] own"—and if they did, had only a very small one, partly because of the modest living conditions and the difficult economic situation prevalent in the country at the time. Women painters could manage somehow in a corner of a room, but women sculptors had to limit themselves and create in dimensions and techniques that did not require much space. (Finally, however, as in the cases of Gdula Ogen or Siona Shimshi, their creative drive led them to complex techniques and monumental works.) Hence before the establishment of the State of Israel most of the women artists in the Yishuv engaged in painting, ceramics or even sculpture in wood, and very few in stone or bronze monumental sculpture.

At the time, this phenomenon was unique neither to Israel nor to women artists in general. Sculpture requires a spacious studio as well as money to cover the costs of the materials. It also involves techniques that require physical strength and the help of assistants and technicians. Only a well-known sculptor, one who has received a commission and knows that there will be enough money to cover both the technical costs and the expensive materials, can create monumental works. This condition made it particularly difficult for women sculptors, most of whom were perceived as part-

time artists, women who engaged in art beside their main work—raising children and managing a home. It also explains why the role of women sculptors in the erecting of monuments in Israel has been so minimal: out of approximately one thousand monuments, only thirty were done by women sculptors, and of the three hundred artists who created these monuments, only twelve were women.

Contrary to the slow development of sculpture in stone and metals, sculpture in ceramics was perhaps the distinctive contribution of women artists in Israel. While women who sculpted in stone and bronze generally represented traditional approaches to sculpture, at least until the 1960s, those who sculpted in clay were far more innovative and original. Not only is there an impressive number of women artists who work in clay, but we can find distinctive characteristics in their works—not so much feminine, but distinctly local.

These “local” aspects bring us back to the second question posed at the beginning of this survey—can we identify Israeli characteristics in women’s art? The problem of local identity is germane not only to women’s art but also to all art created in Israel, since Israel—both pre-State and since statehood—was (and still is) a country of immigrants. Art developed in the country within a short span of time, with no artistic tradition, and therefore it was—at least in its beginnings—eclectic, imitative and based on many imported influences. Moreover, since there existed almost no tradition of Erez Israel symbols apart from the “seven species,” artists were constrained to use Jewish symbols such as the Shield of David in order to characterize “Israeliness.” As a consequence most of the artists, including the women among them, sought their lexicon of forms in the local flora and fauna and in local motifs—some of them archeological items and patterns, not necessarily Jewish, and some of them “Oriental”—namely Arabic, Yemenite or North African.

This local orientation finds expression particularly in the works of women artists because more women artists engaged in ceramics, where we find conspicuous use of archeological sources. However, expression of the local is no greater in paintings by women than in those by men, whether they were realist artists, painting landscapes, figures and scenes of local life, or abstract painters, inspired by local light, colors and forms.

#### UNTIL THE 1920s

The Bezalel Art School, which opened in 1906, symbolized the beginnings of the new Jewish art in Palestine. The school combined the ideas of the Arts and Crafts movement with those of a Jewish national utopia. The founding of Bezalel was first mooted in 1901, at the Fifth Zionist Congress in Basel, when the leaders of the Zionist Executive discussed the subject of culture and art in Palestine, and the artist Boris Schatz (1867–1932) (later the founder and director of Bezalel) proposed that a Jewish art center be established in Jerusalem. From that moment on, a debate began (which continues to this day) about the character of culture and art in the country—a debate

between a separatist national approach that seeks Jewish and Israeli characteristics, and an international approach that aims to integrate Israeli art with Western culture. At the outset, the former approach prevailed, and the Bezalel style was identified as a local and national style with an Orientalist character, be this Arabic and North African Orientalism incorporating Western influences, or an Orientalism that appeared at a later stage, influenced by the handicrafts and the jewelry of the immigrants from Yemen. It should be noted that in the first years there were very few art students at Bezalel, most of them men. Most of the women who appear in the early Bezalel photographs studied various handicrafts.

Until the 1920s there were hardly any women painters in Palestine and the few there were connected, in their style and their culture, to the countries they had come from, like Muriel Bentwich (1889–1981), who painted her landscapes in the tradition of the English watercolor landscapes. Bentwich was born in London to a Zionist family, studied at the Slade School of Art and immigrated to Palestine in 1919 after having visited the country in 1914. On her mother's side, she came from a liberal, progressive and art-loving family (the family of the painters Rebecca Solomon, Abraham [1824–1862] and Simeon [1840–1905] Solomon); all the members of the family, including the women, engaged in music or arts. In Israel she lived and painted first in Jerusalem and then in Tel Aviv. In 1953 she settled in Zikhron Ya'akov with her husband Bernard Mochenson, in a house built forty years earlier by her sister, Nita Lange. Her independence as a woman painter was exceptional for those times, and despite its imported style her painting dealt with the local landscape and not with some imaginary idealization of biblical landscape in the Bezalel style.

One of the first Israeli women artists who felt the need to study abroad was Chana Orloff. Born in the Ukraine, she immigrated to Palestine in 1905. In 1910 she traveled to Paris to study at the *École des Arts Décoratifs*. In fact, since Orloff lived most of her life in Paris and was granted French citizenship, she should not be called an Israeli artist. Nonetheless she felt attached to the country, saw herself as Israeli, visited it frequently and exhibited her work there. Orloff, who sculpted many portraits of Israeli personages and artists, also created a number of monuments connected with Israeli history. Influenced by the styles prevalent in Paris just before and after World War I, her early works recall especially the massive forms and abstraction of the early Alexander Archipenko (1887–1964) and Jacques Lipchitz (1891–1973) and the abstract primitivism of Amedeo Modigliani (1884–1920).

One of the most important women artists who began painting before the 1920s, Anna Ticho was born in Brno, Moravia, immigrated to Palestine in 1912, and settled in Jerusalem with her husband, Abraham Albert Ticho (1883–1960), a well-known ophthalmologist. The city and its environs enchanted her and until her death in 1980 she engaged in drawing views of Jerusalem and landscapes of the Judean Hills—powerful and precise drawings done in charcoal crayon. She depicted the local landscape and did not get caught up in the Orientalist romanticism that characterized Bezalel at the time, even though her subjects, such as olive trees, were ones of which

Bezalel painters were fond. Although she was professional and appreciated and exhibited in many places, Anna Ticho was not a full-time artist. Until 1960, the year her husband died, she helped him as an assistant in his surgery. In this she represents a situation that was symptomatic of women artists in this country, at least in the early years: they were perceived first and foremost as mothers or homemakers or women with a trade or profession, and only afterwards as artists. It should be noted that while at the time male artists also worked at various jobs because they could not make their living by art alone, they were considered first of all as artists.

## THE 1920s

The 1920s saw an immense flowering of art in Palestine. With the end of World War I, the connection between Palestine and the art centers in Europe was renewed and Jewish artists from the Yishuv began visiting them. At the same time, immigration to Palestine was resumed, bringing immigrant artists from various countries, as well as influences of new artistic movements. Yaacov Peremen, a Zionist activist and intellectual who was also an enthusiastic art collector, arrived in Palestine in 1919 on the SS *Russlan*, which was a kind of Israeli Mayflower, bringing a collection of some two hundred modern works by Russian Jewish artists, together with a large library of books on linguistics and Hebrew culture.

After the war, the status of the Bezalel school declined until it closed in 1929. Other artistic forces, which opposed the conservative Bezalel artists, struggled within The Hebrew Artists' Association that organized exhibitions at David's Citadel in Jerusalem. As a result, towards the end of the decade most of the "modern" artists moved to Tel Aviv where, since 1925, an important center had formed. Their exhibitions at the Ohel theater and at the Herzlia Gymnasia marked the beginnings of Modernism in Israeli art. This process reached its peak in 1932, with the establishment of the Tel Aviv Museum.

The most prominent of the women artists working in Tel Aviv was the painter Sionah Tagger (1900–1988), who was born in Jaffa and played an important part in the development of modern painting in the country in the 1920s and 1930s. In her paintings one can discern the direction that was characteristic of the Tel Aviv artists of those years: in contrast to the Orientalist romantic tradition that characterized the Bezalel landscapes and figures, the "modern" artists, Tagger among them, depicted the new society that was taking shape in Tel Aviv and the building of the new, pioneering and secular city without the sediments of Jerusalem's historic past. The subjects of their art were no longer the "Oriental" man or woman, as models of the ancient inhabitants from the times of the forefathers, but the contemporary local landscape and the local culture heroes: the pioneers, authors, poets and public figures. The paintings of the 1920s expressed naiveté, joie de vivre and optimism.

Having been born in Palestine, Tagger had no diasporic past or external artistic heritage; she therefore took an interest primarily in the local and the contemporary. Nevertheless, her works contain Expressionist and Cubist characteristics. She had been influenced by these styles first as a student at Bezalel and then as a student of Joseph Constantinovsky (later the sculptor Constant, 1892–1969), but especially when she was a student in Paris with the painter André Lhote (1885–1962) in the years 1924–1926. However, the Cubist influence in her works (and in the work of other Jewish artists of the period) was only external, and even after studying with Lhote, Tagger did not follow the Cubist ideas and style beyond incorporating geometrical structural forms in her paintings. Tagger claimed that her studies in Paris contributed a sobriety to her painting and freed her from too many details. And indeed, this quality is mostly expressed in the portraits of the 1920s. In her second visit to Paris, in 1931, she was more influenced by André Derain (1880–1954) (who at that time returned to realism), and her painting became more elaborate.

#### THE 1930s AND 1940s (UNTIL 1948)

In contrast to the 1920s, when there was an endeavor to produce a local cultural statement in Palestine, the 1930s were characterized by two major orientations, imported from two different countries: France and Germany. The French orientation was a product of the “rush” of Jewish artists to Paris. A special influence was that of the Jewish Expressionist artists of the School of Paris, both for social reasons (a common language and a similar background and mentality) and for cultural reasons (identification with a universal Jewish style). The German orientation was due to the immigration from Germany and Austria that followed the rise of Nazism. The newcomer artists joined the German and Austrian artists who had been living in the country for several years. They brought with them the tradition of German Expressionism, with all its varieties, as well as the ideas of the Bauhaus.

One can say that Tel Aviv became the center of the “French” artists, and Jerusalem that of the “German” artists. The two artistic “capitals” became even more established with the opening of the Tel Aviv Museum (1932) and the reopening of the Bezalel School (1935). The new Bezalel, in contrast to the old one, was established explicitly as an art institute, with no connections to commercial workshops.

Genia Berger (1907–2000) was born in the Ukraine, where she studied sculpture. In 1925 and again in 1930–1933 she studied painting at the Academy of Art in Berlin. In 1935–1937 she studied at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière in Paris. In 1938 she married Yehuda Gabbai, an actor at the Ohel Theater and director of the Theater Museum in Tel Aviv. In the 1960s she started to work in ceramics, sculpture and the painting of bas-reliefs, but she engaged mainly in stage design for performances at the Habimah and Ohel theaters. She was one of the founders of the artists’ village in Ein Hod (1953).

Kaete Ephraim-Marcus (1892–1970), who arrived in Palestine in the 1930s, had already been recognized as an active artist in Germany. Born in Breslau, she studied art there and later in Berlin, with Lovis Corinth (1858–1925) and Max Beckmann (1884–1950). In the years 1916–1919 she painted portraits of her friends, of German intellectuals and of workers. In 1917 she married Dr. Josef Marcus, one of the leaders of the Zionist movement in Germany and a founder of the Blau-Weiss youth movement. In 1920 she met Käthe Kollwitz (1867–1945) in Berlin and was influenced by her and by other Expressionist painters. On the advice of the Expressionist painter Otto Mueller (1874–1930) she traveled to Paris to study at the Académie de la Grande Chaumière and with André Lhote, and there she adopted a lighter and more colorful style. In 1928 she was accepted into the Association of German Painters and in 1930 she moved to Düsseldorf and joined the Rhein Group.

Ephraim-Marcus visited Palestine twice (for the inauguration of the Hebrew University in 1925 and for the opening of the Maccabiah Games in 1932), painting landscapes and portraits there. In 1933 she and her family left Germany because of Hitler's rise to power and traveled to England, from which they immigrated to Palestine in 1934. To earn a living she opened a bed-and-breakfast lodging in Beit ha-Kerem, Jerusalem. In 1943 she opened a studio in the Old City, but was evicted from it by the British in 1947. Later it was totally destroyed by Arabs, who burned her works. During the siege of Jerusalem she painted many war scenes. In 1948 she and her family were evacuated to Ramat Gan. She studied sculpture with Moshe Sternschuss (b. 1903) and concurrently continued painting and sculpting. Ephraim-Marcus did not belong to any group or defined trend. Her work has an atmosphere of melancholy, loneliness and alienation. She often painted subjects of mothers and children, bewildered and lonely women in hostile environments, new immigrants and transit camps. She also depicted fishermen, pioneers, and landscapes of Safed, Lake Kinneret and the Negev.

Anna Neumann (1906–1955) was born in Germany, studied at the Higher School for Art and Artists in Berlin, participated in exhibitions there and received prizes and favorable reviews. After a visit in 1913, she immigrated to Palestine in 1933. Neumann worked outside the local art scene. Although she created in various techniques and for a short while engaged in sculpture, she focused mainly on drawing and watercolors and also did illustrations for books, especially children's books. In her drawings, despite their discernible academic background, there is a clear Impressionist influence and an emotional and psychological approach. She painted many figures of mothers and children and also of destitute people. In all her paintings there is a strain of grave melancholy. She died of a malignant disease.

Haya Schwartz (1919–2001), born in an area on the Poland-Ukraine border, immigrated to Palestine in 1929. She studied painting and sculpture at Bezalel and afterwards with the painters Israel Paldi (1892–1979) and Yosef Zaritsky (1891–1985). She married in 1933 and traveled to Paris to study at the Académie Scandinave in 1935–1937. In Paris she discovered the paintings of Pierre Bonnard (1867–1947)

and Georges Braque (1882–1963) and was also influenced by the Post-Impressionists. Mané Katz (1894–1962) introduced her to the technique of gouache, but from 1947 on she painted mainly in oils. Later she shook off all these influences and began painting in a lyrical and personal style. The dominant colors in her paintings are blues. They depict landscapes, still life, interiors, figures and portraits. She produced a series of paintings in Zikhron Ya'akov and many paintings of Safed, where she lived and where she was a founder of the Artists' Alliance. Schwartz painted and exhibited extensively during the 1940s, but with time she preferred to protect her privacy and to paint outside the art scene. Zaritsky invited her to join the "New Horizons" group (which was considered to be an honor and a recognition of her artistic quality), but she refused.

Hanna Twersky (1900–1969) was born in the Ukraine, studied philosophy and aesthetics there, and immigrated to Palestine in 1931 with her husband. She then began studying and engaging in painting. She traveled to Paris for the first time in 1937 and again in 1949 to study at La Grande Chaumière. She continued her tours in Europe during the 1960s. She was described (in the periodical *Gazit*) as one of the intellectual figures in the art circles, especially in her writings on art. Twersky was influenced by many artists, among them Sonia Delaunay, Piet Mondrian (1872–1944), Fernand Léger (1881–1955), Georges Braque (1882–1963), Pablo Picasso (1881–1973) and Marc Chagall (1887–1985). She painted still lifes and imaginary forms in a semi-abstract approach, in oils and gouache and in rich, warm colors. Her brushstrokes are expressive and thick with paint (*impasto*). From the late 1940s on she participated in many exhibitions.

In a review of the collective exhibition of Israel's artists at the Tel Aviv Museum in 1938, Dr. Karl Schwarz made particular note of the considerable presence of sculptures in the exhibition. Indeed, the 1930s saw a significant development of this medium in Palestine, especially by women sculptors.

One of the women sculptors who were active in the 1930s was Miriam Berlin (1888–1974). Born in St. Petersburg, she arrived in Tel Aviv in 1921 with her husband, the architect Joseph Berlin. In St. Petersburg she had met the sculptor Naum Aronson (1872–1943), who had been invited there from Paris to sculpt a portrait of Rasputin. He appreciated her talent and suggested that she study in Paris, but because of the Communist revolution she remained in Russia and studied there. In 1923, two years after immigrating to Palestine, she traveled to Rome and Brussels to study. On her return she sculpted portraits of Jewish personages such as the poet Hayyim Nahman Bialik (1873–1934) and the mayor of Tel Aviv, Meir Dizengoff (1861–1937). (The present location of the latter is unknown.) Shown at the Jewish pavilion at the International Exhibition in Paris in 1937, both these portraits won much praise. Berlin's style was very conservative, ranging between an expressive realism, especially in the various character types such as *Yemenite* (1937), and a realism possessing geometrical structural forms, as in the sculpture of Bialik.

Among the important German artists who immigrated in 1933 were the ceramic artist Hedwig Grossmann (1902–1998) and her husband Rudi Lehmann (1903–1973), a sculptor and a skilled woodcut artist, who had studied art in Berlin when Expressionism was at its height. Grossman specialized in potter's wheel work. After higher studies in ceramic art in Berlin she took specialist studies with teachers from the Bauhaus and also learned ceramic chemistry. In 1937 Grossmann and Lehmann established a sculpture and ceramics studio in Jerusalem, where Grossmann taught generations of ceramic artists.

Grossmann and her husband admired the sculpture and the vessels of the ancient inhabitants of Erez Israel, then Canaan. This admiration was shared by a group of artists, writers and intellectuals who were active in the late 1930s and the 1940s. They sought their Jewish roots not in the Jewish culture of the Diaspora, but in the ancient Canaanite culture, and were therefore termed "Canaanites." They turned to the Hebrew Bible, not from a traditional Jewish approach, but in order to expropriate it from the religiously observant and to use it as kind of guidebook to the geography and history of the land of their ancestors. In her book *The Clay*, Grossmann wrote that a sensitive artist is the one who is rooted in his/her land, who creates in its unique atmosphere and aims to develop his/her forms into an original local style. But, she added, since this is a long process that develops over generations, the artists can only prepare the foundation but cannot accelerate the process.

Grossmann appreciated works such as folk art that appeal to the emotions, without any need for rational explanations. In her opinion, national and folk motifs accord art a wealth of color. Nonetheless, her own simple vessels represent the local "poverty." Her works are thin in color, as if expressing the fact that Israel is an arid country that lacks resources. They have thick walls, their color is that of the fired clay, and she refrained from giving them a delicate finish. In her clay sculptures we can see how abstract she was, despite the figurative representation.

One of the best-known women sculptors of the time was Batia Lichansky, largely due to the many monuments that she sculpted. Lichansky was born in the Ukraine and came to Palestine in 1910. She studied at Bezalel in 1919 and during the 1920s exhibited wooden sculptures. In 1923 she traveled to Berlin to study and in 1925 she studied at the *École des Beaux Arts* in Paris, exhibiting at the *Salon des Indépendants* in 1926. In 1929 she returned to Palestine. In her early sculptures one can discern the influence of Auguste Rodin (1840–1917) and of Camille Claudel (1864–1943). Working from a Socialist-Zionist standpoint, Lichansky was among those who built the myth of equality between men and women that ostensibly prevailed in the country at the time. In her sculptures she always represented the two sexes as equal, as for example in her monument in Huldah, *Work and Defense* (1932–1936). Her style ranged between expressiveness and realism. She frequently incorporated various textures of treated stone beside untreated stone. Lichansky also created many portraits of public personages.

## THE 1940s (FROM 1948) AND THE 1950s

World War II disrupted all contacts with the art centers abroad and until 1948 (the establishment of the State of Israel) there was no new artistic activity in the country beyond the continued disputes between the conservative artists and the modern—or, as they were then called, the “progressives.” There were also disputes between the Committee of the Association of Painters and Sculptors and the directorate of the Tel Aviv Museum, to the point that in 1948 the modern artists seceded from the Association and founded the New Horizons group, a name under which they held a joint exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum. The members of this group saw themselves as representing a new perception of reality and a new conception of art—the development of an international and abstract artistic language. They initiated discussion of fundamental problems touching on the essence of art in the modern period and its role in Israeli society. During the 1950s New Horizons continued to be the major power center and held six exhibitions (most of them at the Tel Aviv Museum) in the course of the decade.

New Horizons was one of the most dominant groups in the history of Israeli art, mostly because several of its members had become important teachers of painting in Israel and had influenced many artists. Yehezkiel Streichman (b. 1906) and Avigdor Stematsky (1908–1989), two of the founders of New Horizons, established a painting studio that was called The Studio. It was active in 1945–1948 and served as an alternative to the art school of the Labor Federation [Histadrut] directed by Aharon Avni (1906–1951) and Sternschuss (later to be named the Avni Institute), which was then considered too conservative. Several prominent artists (mostly from New Horizons), as well as theorists who advocated progressive art, participated in the teaching and the criticism of works. Among the students were Claire Yaniv and Lea Nikel, who had both left the Histadrut (Avni) school.

New Horizons was an exclusively male group. Concurrently with New Horizons, however, other power centers came into being in the 1950s such as the Group of Ten, which was founded in 1952. Its members argued for a social and national commitment and championed figurative and realistic forms (although by the end of the decade most of them became involved with abstraction in one way or another). They sought to use a modern language in order to express the Israeli experience and landscape, and opposed the universalism of their teachers. The group was made up of young artists, most of them students at The Studio of Streichman and Stematsky, and included three women: Shoshana Lewison, Shulamit Tal and Claire Yaniv. During its ten years or so of existence the group held twelve exhibitions throughout Israel.

Shoshana Lewison (1920–1996) was one of the founders of the Group of Ten, but took part in only three of its exhibitions. Born in Warsaw, she immigrated to Palestine with her family in 1922 and settled in Tel Aviv. In 1938 she studied with Itzhak Frenkel (1898–1981) and in 1945, together with Shulamit Tal, transferred from

Frenkel to The Studio. She stopped painting circa 1975 and distanced herself from art, but returned to it in the 1980s.

Shulamit Tal (1919–2005), who joined the Group of Ten in 1953 after returning from studies at La Grande Chaumière, participated in all of the group's exhibitions. Tal was born in Warsaw and immigrated to Palestine in 1935. She studied first with Itzhak Frenkel, then at The Studio and after that in Paris, in 1950–1951. In the reviews of the Group of Ten exhibitions she is mentioned as one of the most “promising” artists in the group, for her free and rhythmic painting, the radiant landscape and the bright coloring with plenty of white, the independent calligraphic line and the interplay between line and form. In the later stages of her work Tal returned to figurative painting, some of it Symbolist in character. In 1961 she studied ceramic art. She lived and worked in Old Jaffa.

Claire Yaniv (b. 1921), one of the founders of the Group of Ten, participated in all its exhibitions. Born in Iraq, she immigrated to Palestine in 1928 and studied painting with Frenkel, Jacob Steinhardt (1887–1968), Streichman and Stematsky, as well as sculpture with Sternschuss. In 1958 she made a study trip to Paris and afterwards studied at the Oranim College and the Seminar ha-Kibbutzim, completing a bachelor's degree in philosophy and art history at Tel Aviv University. In 1974 she was one of the founders of the Climate group.

In her early years, Yaniv focused in her paintings on the development of the female identity of a young girl and her relations with her mother. In her paintings there is a conspicuous feminine presence and the expression of an intimate feminine world vis-à-vis the eastern society from which she came. Her paintings were very sensual and highly colorful, in the Fauvist tradition, with decorative elements and rhythmic repetition of ornamental motifs which probably stemmed from her oriental roots. She soon moved on to painting landscapes, especially landscapes from a bird's eye view, which blended lyrical abstraction and realism. Towards the 1960s her landscapes became more abstract and the color scale of her palette softened and became more melodic, with an emphasis on movement and space. Concurrently, perhaps as a counter to the extreme abstraction of her later paintings, Yaniv also painted many portraits, especially in the 1980s and 1990s.

Another dominant group in the 1950s comprised young kibbutz-born and city-born artists who propounded artists' obligation to express social and political criticism in their work and proposed the realist style (as practiced in Mexico and Italy, for example) as the most appropriate. The most prominent artist representing this trend is Ruth Schloss (b. 1922), who for years was known as “the Israeli Käthe Kollwitz.” Schloss was born in Nuremberg, Germany, moved to Stuttgart in 1935 and immigrated to Palestine in 1937. She was accepted into Bezalel at an early age and studied there in the years 1938–1942. After this, she was a member of Kibbutz Lehavot ha-Bashan for ten years and worked as an illustrator for the children's weekly *Mishmar la-Yeladim* and at the *Sifriat ha-Poalim* Publishing House. She

traveled to Paris (1949–1950) to study with André Lhote and at La Grande Chaumière. In 1953 she left the kibbutz with her husband, Binyamin Cohen, and joined the Communist Party. She made her home in Kefar Shemaryahu (near Tel Aviv) and exhibited at many galleries in Switzerland and Germany.

Schloss's strength is her drawing, in which she displays a virtuoso control. She paints workers and destitute people from a sharp critical perspective, aiming to make the viewer identify with the suffering of her subjects. Her sensitivity to human suffering stemmed from her upbringing in Germany in a home suffused with humanist culture. In Schloss's opinion, if an artist wants to influence and make the public aware of the problems around her, she has to be very direct and precise. As she puts it, "Realism, in the broad sense, is humanism." She used to visit the Jewish immigrant camps of the 1950s as well as the Arab villages and poorer neighborhoods, and when she was unable to reach these places she made use of photographs. A considerable portion of her drawings and paintings in the 1950s was devoted to the theme of motherhood and to figures of women and children—Jews and Arabs—but over the years she extended her thematic range and engaged both in uncompromising political criticism and in personal problems that are also universal, such as aging. In the 1970s, while working on her Anne Frank series, she began incorporating photographs in her paintings, and did so also in her political works in the 1980s. She is the most consistent among the realists.

Beside the Group of Ten and the Realists there were many women painters who created without any group framework. One such is Audrey Bergner (b. 1927) who was born in Sydney, Australia. When she was sixteen she began studying at the National Gallery Art School in Melbourne, where she met the painter—then also a student—Yossl Bergner (b. 1920). They immigrated to Israel in 1950, after touring various places in the world, among them Paris, Canada and New York. They tried to get married, but because he was a Jew and she a Christian no one wanted to marry them, not even at the Australian consulate. Finally they traveled again to Paris where they married and then returned to Israel. Her early works show a strong academic influence, because of the character of the studies at the art school in Melbourne. But her first encounter with Paris, especially with Camille Corot's landscapes, liberated and enriched her. When she settled in Israel her paintings became more illuminated and free. In the 1950s she began exhibiting at various galleries in Israel. She fell in love with Safed and lived there with her husband, both of them painting its landscapes. There she first began painting watercolors, which were appropriate to the misty character of the local landscapes.

In the 1960s she discovered the Negev and began painting on large canvases and in strong colors, depicting its landscapes and the Bedouin who live there, with their dress, their way of life, their herds. She built a lexicon of abstract forms based on the shapes of the Bedouin tents and garments. In the 1960s she began to design many stage sets, especially for the plays of Nissim Aloni (1926–1998), one of the greatest Israeli playwrights, who was a friend of hers and her husband's and frequently wrote

about her paintings. In the 1970s she began painting Tel Aviv, where she finally found her place. A more gloomy tone entered her paintings in the 1990s, after the Gulf War, due to the destruction caused by the Scud missiles and the claustrophobic experience of staying long hours inside a sealed room. Bergner refrains from defining her work as feminine. In her opinion her work has a romantic dimension, but not a feminine one. However, some would say that the abundance of cloths that wave about in her paintings, especially in the Negev paintings, as well as the tapestries that she has with exceptionally patient labor created out of strips of cloth, may stem from her being a woman.

Hannah Levy (b. circa 1920) was born in Germany and arrived in Palestine in 1934. In the 1940s she lived in Moza, near Jerusalem. In 1944 she married the musician and painter Itzhak Levy. She studied painting at the studio of Jacob Steinhardt in Jerusalem and in the 1950s exhibited very expressive landscapes that were full of movement, with slight influences of Chaim Soutine (1893–1943) and Van Gogh (1853–1890). She moved to Safed and changed her style to a restrained, constructive, monochrome painting. Towards the late 1950s an abstract trend appears in her paintings. The Safed paintings from the 1960s are full of energy and tensions. In the 1970s she was one of the founders of the Climate group, with whom she exhibited large abstract landscapes divided into two parts with a chasm between them—aggressive, non-idyllic landscapes that are metaphors for an existential condition in Israel. In the late 1970s she began painting close-ups of faces, with asymmetrical eyes. She lives in a home for seniors in Rehovot.

Lea Nickel (1918–2005) was an important artist who began painting in the 1950s. Born in the Ukraine, she immigrated to Palestine in 1920. She studied painting with Haim Gliksberg (1904–1970) and Avni, but soon transferred, together with Claire Yaniv, to The Studio of Streichman and Stematsky and to the end was perceived as their student, although she herself denied their influence. She claimed that she was influenced by the art in Paris, where she studied and lived in the years 1950–1961, especially by the freshness and colorfulness of Henri Matisse (1869–1954) and the spontaneity of Joan Miró (1893–1983). During her stay in Paris she exhibited in Israel and earned praise from the critics. Her paintings at that time were considered daring, because of the combination of paint, collage, scratching, areas of bare canvas and semi-automatic doodling resembling Action Painting. Her expressive abstraction, spontaneity and strong coloring were different from the style of her teachers from the New Horizons group.

In the 1960s Nickel traveled a great deal, staying successively in Paris, Israel (Ashdod), New York, Africa, Israel (Safed) and Rome. Throughout this time she continued exhibiting in Israel and was prominent as an exceptional artist who did not belong to any artistic current or group. In the 1970s she lived in New York for several years. Her paintings from that period are large and incorporate components such as strips of cloth. She used nets to imprint net forms on her canvases, as well as letters and words. In the 1980s she continued in this style, which became more airy and free,

at times very colorful and at times monochrome. She did not change her style, even when the styles in Israel changed. Nikel always insisted on separating her work from her biography and never connected her work to literary contents of any kind. She always stressed that she was an “artist” (irrespective of her sex) and for this reason refused to participate in the “Women Artists in Israeli Art” exhibition held at the Haifa Museum in 1998. Ultimately she was included in it, but without helping the curator.

Mina Sisselman (b. 1916) is another woman artist perceived as having established an alternative to the lyrical abstract of New Horizons. Sisselman was born in Neveh Zedek, one of the oldest neighborhoods of Tel Aviv. She studied painting with Paldi, Gliksberg, Frenkel and Castel. In 1947 she traveled to the U.S., seeking to study in a place where there was much openness and no shackling tradition. In this too she displayed her uniqueness as opposed to other Israeli artists, who preferred to travel to Paris. She studied at the Boston Museum School of Arts and at the Ozenfant School in New York. In 1954 she returned to Israel and lived on Kibbutz Einat until 1958 when she moved to Tel Aviv, where she still works in her studio in Neveh Zedek, in the house where she was born.

Sisselman taught at the Avni Institute in the years 1964–1980 and wrote art reviews for newspapers in 1955–1970. In 1956, at the Tel Aviv Museum, she exhibited large paintings with strong, industrial color planes, with accentuated contrasts of black, light blue and red, and earned critical praise for her bold expressionism. In the 1960s and 1970s she created three-dimensional paintings—hanging boxes painted on the inside, with fluorescent paints and the use of an air brush, a technique from the world of graphics and advertising that was used extensively in Pop Art but was not yet known in Israel at the time. In her paintings from the 1990s Sisselman is involved in environmental and ecological issues and points an accusing finger at humanity for its neglect and apathy. She also responds to political subjects, to wars and revolutions in various places in the world.

Blanca Tauber (1910–1989) was born in the village of S?morín on the border of Slovakia, Hungary and Austria, where her family home was a hiding place for many refugees during the Holocaust. She studied painting in Prague and Paris, visited Palestine in 1937, but unfortunately returned to her family home and was incarcerated in Auschwitz. She was liberated in 1945 and immigrated to Israel in 1950. In 1951 she had a solo exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum. Later she settled in Safed, continuing her family tradition of assisting the needy. In the 1950s she painted immigrant camps; in the 1960s she painted many landscapes, including cityscapes. In her paintings from the 1970s on, she dealt extensively with the subject of the Holocaust.

One of the most important women artists in Israeli art was Aviva Uri. Uri, who began drawing in the 1940s, became known in the 1950s when she received the Dizengoff Prize in 1952 and had a solo exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum in 1957. She

continued to innovate and influence other artists until her death in 1989. Born in Safed, she studied painting with David Hendler (1904–1984), with whom she later lived, after leaving her husband and her daughter. At first she was influenced by Hendler’s drawings, but during the 1950s she became more influenced by abstract and Surrealist French paintings and most of all by Chinese and Japanese drawing. Already at her first Tel Aviv Museum exhibition (1957) she was much appreciated for presenting an alternative to the lyrical abstract of the New Horizons group by creating “thin” drawings in one color, mostly black, on paper. Uri’s abstract scribbles expressed personal anxieties and distress. She even developed various techniques in order to put herself into a kind of trance (similar to the “automatism” of the Surrealists), with the aim of breaking the blocks of the conscious mind and arriving at a dark, primordial and mythical world. In the 1960s she was involved in exhibitions of the Ten Plus group and, through the influence of American Pop Art, returned to figurative painting in order to express social and anti-war protest.

In the 1970s Uri focused on images of death and destruction, with signs of disintegration and explosion: in the “Requiem for a Bird” series, the bird—which in the 1950s had been a symbol of dynamism and power—became a small dead bird, a symbol of extinction. Another motif that frequently appeared in her works was the oblong, which she employed to divide the sheet of paper into different arenas of action. The oblongs, which can also be seen in the “Requiem for a Bird” series, define sky vs. earth, darkness vs. light, matter vs. spirit, evil vs. innocence. The strong contrasts between black and white even characterized her outward appearance: she was always dressed in black, with charcoal black hair and eyes heavily made up and framed in black on the background of a white face which looked almost like a mask. The mourning in her works grew stronger in the 1980s, with the Lebanon War (1982) and the death in 1984 of David Hendler, from which she never recovered.

Shoshana Heimann (b. 1923) was influenced by the ideas of the Canaanites. She was born in Germany, immigrated to Palestine in 1933, studied at Bezalel but soon left because her interest in primitive sculpture did not suit the conservative methods of study there. She studied with Rudi Lehmann from 1941 to 1946 and afterwards at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence (1946–1947). Heimann opposed the mainstream in Israeli art, which then inclined to abstraction. Her sculptures from the 1940s and 1950s are lumpy and massive; the figures are primitivistic, with thick legs and arms, although the feminine figures are graceful. Following the Yom Kippur War (1973) she made many sculptures on the theme of bereavement and sacrifice. After long stays in Egypt, Japan, Nepal and Mexico, she began developing an image of a kind of altar-throne, which she explored for many years in both two-dimensional and three-dimensional forms and in diverse materials. These altars are massive in character and create an archaic effect. In the early 1990s a change occurred in her work. In Düsseldorf she began painting large paintings, which she showed in Israel at an exhibition titled “Black Fields.” In these, the altars turn into knives and missiles and

the paintings evoke a sense of destruction and imminent danger. Heimann lives in Ein Hod.

Hava Mehutan (b. 1925). Born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Mehutan immigrated to Israel in 1946 and settled in Beersheba some years later. She sculpted in stone and olive wood—figures of women, most of them pregnant, heads and animals. In 1958, together with Louise Schatz (b. 1916), Ruth Zarfati and Lea Nikel, she participated in the Twelve Artists exhibition, which was described by its curator, Yona Fischer, as “the pick of the young generation.” In the 1960s she worked on the “Processions” series, in which she used different arrangements of vertical logs of wood positioned in such a way as to create associations with different human situations. But although she chose to sculpt many figures of pregnant women, and many critics saw in her works a reflection of a feminine cycle of life and fertility, her sculpture was considered quite masculine, almost without any external pleasantness. A woman art critic noted that Mehutan’s mode of expression contained nothing of the soft femininity that she found characteristic of other women artists. It is interesting that a woman critic employed stereotypes of femininity and masculinity and complimented Mehutan for the “masculine” qualities in her work. Mehutan herself claims that female identity engages her a great deal and appears in her works, at times consciously and at times unconsciously. Her work is always personal, subjective, emotional, and stems from her being a woman.

During the time she lived in the Negev, from the 1960s to the mid-1980s, Mehutan gradually shifted from sculpture that deals with the human body to sculpture that expresses expanses and forces of nature, as an artist involved in environmental issues. In the “Landscapes” series, which she began at the height of the Yom Kippur War, she continued to develop this approach, but this time she expressed the mood in the country with the aid of the motif of the tear or the rip. In the 1980s she moved to Jerusalem—a city bustling with political and religious activity and conflicts, which brought her feelings of extinction and impasse. These feelings grew stronger following the Lebanon War and found expression in works such as the installations that she called Situations. In Situation 88, for example, visitors had to climb onto a bridge in order to enter the exhibition and passed over “corpses” made of logs of wood. In the Beds installation she placed logs of wood that looked like corpses on iron beds.

Gdula Ogen (b. 1929), too, belonged to no defined group, although some connect her with the Canaanites. Ogen was born in Jerusalem. Her father, Shemuel Josef Schweig (1901–1984), was the photographer for the Rockefeller Museum and also photographed and edited archeological books in the 1950s and 1960s. As a child she used to wander around archeological digs, where she saw vessels and patterns that later influenced her works. Ogen studied at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem (1947–1949) and at Bezalel (1950–1952) and also as an apprentice with Hedwig Grossmann (1952–1954), who encouraged her to draw her inspiration from local traditions, based on archeological findings. Ogen’s early works, such as the pots or

animals from the 1950s, show how close she was to Grossmann's approach. Nonetheless, Ogen dislikes being called a "Canaanite," and prefers to use the word "local." She likes to fire her works on an open fire, which leaves unplanned marks on the clay, in order to give them an unfinished and primal appearance and to let the clay express itself by itself.

In the 1960s her work became more monumental, especially in various wall reliefs such as *The Ingathering of the Exiles*, 1964, at the Hebrew University at Givat Ram, Jerusalem, or *The Fruits of the Land*, 1966, at the Weizmann Institute. In these works, too, Ogen draws upon motifs from the flora and fauna of Israel. In the years 1962–1980 she was head of the Ceramics Studies Department at Bezalel. In 1968 she was awarded a U.N. study grant for a three-month tour of Scandinavia and England. In 1969 she made a study tour in the U.S. and in 1977 a tour in Japan. Each of these tours had significant influence on the development of her work; she was especially influenced by her encounter with American Abstract Expressionism (principally by the works of Peter Voulkus and Stephen de Staebler) and also by her encounter with Japanese ceramics. As a consequence, in the late 1970s she changed her style to more abstract and more monumental forms made of various materials.

Ruth Zarfati (b. 1928) was the only woman artist in the New Horizons group (although several women did participate as guest artists in its various exhibitions). Even she felt an outsider since she was accepted into the group because of her marriage to one of its members, the sculptor Moshe Sternschuss. As she tells it, the members related to her as a nice young girl, but although she was indeed younger than they she felt more mature because of what she called "their infantile behavior" and their "incessant squabbling." Zarfati was born in Petah-Tikvah, studied painting with Avni (1941–1945) and (until 1947) sculpture with Sternschuss, whom she married in 1949. In the 1950s she traveled to Italy, Paris, London and Spain to study. She finally developed a very personal and definitely non-abstract style; her sculptures were figurative (but in no way realistic) and massive in character, showing the influence of primitive sculpture.

In contrast to the universalist direction of the group's members, she dealt with very intimate and personal subjects. She sculpted the people she felt close to, especially her daughter Hagit, who was born in 1958, and accompanied her growth with many sculptures. Apart from sculpture, Sarfati-Sternschuss, a prolific and versatile artist, has engaged in illustration of many children's books (some sixty in all) and designed toys (1959) and patterns for textiles (1967) for Maskit. Some might say that her interest in applied art and textiles stems from her being a woman, and this may also be true of the intimate character of her sculptures and her persistent engagement with figures of infants and children.

THE 1960s

In 1959 the Tel Aviv Museum inaugurated its new home, the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion, which at the time was the most spacious and prestigious exhibition space in Israel. In 1964 the Department of Art History was opened at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. In the same year, The Israel Museum opened in Jerusalem, comprising a large and important local and universal art collection and a unique sculpture garden. Also in this decade, youth wings were established in the three major museums, indicating a growing awareness of the importance of art education. It is no coincidence that all three directors of the youth wings were women—Gila Ballas in Tel Aviv, Ayala Gordon in Jerusalem and Aviva Barnea in Haifa. These events contributed to increased awareness of art history, of contemporary art, and of innovations in international art. Concurrently, efforts were made to put Israeli art on the map of international art.

In this decade, beside the dominance of abstract painting inspired by New Horizons, there appeared new trends influenced by new styles from abroad, such as American Pop Art and French New Realism. These trends were expressed particularly in the exhibitions of the Tazpit group and the Ten Plus group. The latter was founded by Raffi Lavie (b. 1937) and other artists in August 1965. This was not an ideological artistic movement in the usual sense. Its members saw themselves as a “promoting group,” whose role was mutual assistance and public relations. Diverse artistic styles were shown in all their exhibitions: Kinetic Art, Surrealist Expressionism, Fantastic Realism, Pop Art, New Realism, Abstract Painting, Environmental Art, etc. A theme was chosen for each exhibition, with the aim of posing new challenges to the participants. The group took care to create an avant-garde atmosphere by organizing diversified events and happenings that included cinema, theater, fashion shows, young poetry and electronic music. Over the years many young artists who later became famous and important joined the group. By 1970 the group had held ten exhibitions on specific themes, in which more than seventy artists participated in various combinations, most of them at the Gordon Gallery in Tel Aviv. Aviva Uri and Siona Shimshi were among the participants in these exhibitions.

Alima (b. 1932) is known only by her family name. She was born in Israel and after completing her military service studied at the Avni Institute (1953–1957) and afterwards in Paris (1961–1965). She participated in various exhibitions of the Ten Plus group. One of the prominent print artists in Israel, she has engaged in all forms of printmaking. In 1974 she joined the Burston Lithography Studio in Jerusalem. A year later she founded the Prints Workshop in Tel Aviv, serving as its head (1975–1978). From 1978 on she taught at the Higher School of Arts (founded by Aryeh Margoshinsky) in Tel Aviv and in 1978–1981 at the College of Visual Arts in Beersheba. In 1981 she began coordinating the prints workshop at the Midrasha Teachers’ Training College in Ramat ha-Sharon and from 1984 on she coordinated the Visual Arts department at the Thelma Yellin High School in Tel Aviv. In her prints from the 1970s she employed large and simple forms and strong color contrasts, with slight deviations from the pattern or the composition. In the 1980s trees and

landscapes and blue frames at the edge of the sheet of paper began to appear in her prints. Alima clearly distinguishes between her art and her being a woman.

Tova Berlinski (b. 1922) was born in Poland and immigrated to Palestine in 1938. She studied at Bezalel and afterwards in Paris with André Lhote. Inspired by the landscapes of her childhood in Poland, she began painting in the 1960s, with a tendency towards abstraction and a use of expressive and contrasting colors and black outlines. In these years her paintings also contained allusions to members of her family who had died in the Holocaust, who appeared in her paintings as blurred figures. In the early 1970s she began to directly confront the theme of the Holocaust, but her style became abstract and the colored areas grew. In the 1970s, following the Yom Kippur War, the coloring became more moderated and monochrome, while the stains grew even larger, extending across the entire area of the picture. She painted partially closed windows and landscapes visible through closed shutters. The landscapes from this period look burnt and smoke-filled, with an atmosphere of oppression and death. With the outbreak of the Lebanon War in 1982, figures returned to her paintings. Later, after a visit abroad, a change occurred in her work and she emphasized the local light and landscape of Jerusalem, the city where she lives and works. In the 1990s she created a series of pastel paintings with landscapes of the city, especially of the cypress trees, a symbol of grief, characteristic of the cemeteries in Jerusalem, or vivid flowers growing out of monochrome backgrounds. In another series she depicted cypresses growing out of burnt earth and rocks that look like tombstones, reflecting the conflict between Jews and Arabs. After this series she returned to painting vases of flowers and landscapes.

Nora Frenkel (1931–1995) was born in Shanghai, immigrated to Israel in 1960, and immediately began exhibiting. Apart from solo exhibitions, she also participated in some of the Ten Plus exhibitions. Her works on wood evince the influence of Pop Art: she created a series of wooden cubes on which she painted women and men being attracted to one another. In the 1970s she dealt with themes of birth, life and death and the connection between them. In the mid-1970s she shifted to doing large colored drawings suffused with movement, peopled with naked men and women alternately attracted to one another and repelled. Towards the 1980s she returned to painting in oil on canvas. In these paintings she depicted old objects from her past, taken out of their contexts and floating in space. In the 1990s, when she discovered that she had a terminal illness, she began working on paintings dealing with existence, horror and anxiety.

Nata Kaplan (1918–2005), known only by her first name, was born in Alexandria, where her father, Dr. Meshulam Levontin, served as a physician in the Zion Mule Corps. In 1919 she arrived in Palestine with her parents. Nata started painting relatively late in life, after two marriages and after giving birth to two boys. In 1955, a year after the death of her second husband, she studied Interior Design at Parson's School of Design in New York. In 1958, after she married Dr. Michael Kaplan (1957), she studied painting first with Tova Richter Rauch, then with Mina Sisselman

(1959–1960) and later at the Avni Institute (1962–1963), mainly with Streichman and Stematsky. Thereafter, she visited many art centers and stayed from time to time in London and Paris, where she continued to exhibit every year. A member of several artists' associations—in Israel, London and Paris—she participated in many important group exhibitions and solo exhibitions all over the world, gaining praises and prizes. Considered to be a follower of New Horizons, she was influenced mostly by Streichman and Stematsky. She developed her personal style—expressive portraits and landscapes, which became more and more abstract, with bold strokes of vivid colors—on large canvases. Some critics call her style “masculine” and note with surprise the contrast between her paintings and her elegant and fragile figure. The death of her elder son, Deddi, in 1996 made her paintings even more abstract and spiritual, but no less colorful.

Bianca Eshel-Gershuni (b. 1932) was born in Bulgaria and immigrated to Palestine in 1939. She studied art at the Avni Institute, sculpture with Sternschuss and Dov Feigin (1907–2000) and painting with Streichman, Stematsky and Moshe Mokady (1902–1975). While studying sculpture she also began studying jewelry-making and in the 1960s created copper, silver and gold jewelry incorporating folkloristic motifs. In the 1970s the pieces of jewelry turned into small sculptures, in which she incorporated diverse and strange materials such as gold and silver together with plastic, feathers and tiny plastic dolls. These crammed, flamboyant works were a contrast to the “thin,” minimalistic style dominant in art at the time. In the 1980s she began creating a series of jewelry-objects called “Fetishes,” makeup cases containing pieces of animal fur, images of dead and bleeding animals made of plastic, or paintings covered with blood-red paint, forms that recall voodoo and black magic rituals. In her works she incorporated Readymades and Christian and pagan ritual motifs, as well as “feminine” materials such as fur, flowers and feathers. The quantity of materials and colors carried “Kitsch” to the absurd. Many of her works deal with the battle of the sexes and with the victimized woman. In the 1990s she presented the motif of the turtle as reflecting the woman who bears the home on her back, both as a burden she must carry and as a hiding-place.

One of the founding members of the Ten Plus group was the sculptor Siona Shimshi (b. 1935) who was born in Tel Aviv in and in the years 1956–1959 studied art with Streichman and Stematsky, and with Mokady and Yitshak Danziger (1916–1977) at the Avni Institute. In the early 1960s she traveled to the United States and studied ceramics and textile design. On her return in 1962 she engaged in textile design (for Maskit and Rikmah) and carpet design (for Carmel), and also in interior design (collaborating with the architect Dora Gad). Although she began her path as a painter, she was ultimately drawn to three-dimensional work, especially in clay, but she also employed other materials, which she combined in various techniques in her works. Shimshi is one of the foremost advocates of the status of ceramics in art, claiming that this is an artistic material of equal value to any other traditional material of sculpture. She set herself the goal of engaging in education and of being involved in the art

scene in order to change artistic conceptions from within the establishment rather than from outside it. In the years 1979–1987 she was head of the Ceramics Studies Department at Bezalel.

The human figure is always central in her art, which is very political and existential. In 1965 she showed her work *Graduation Picture*, a collection of smiling clay faces and one sad face, inspired by a class picture she had seen in a display window. In 1971, in the *Ten Years Later* installation (which was also the name of the exhibition), she depicted what had happened to the pupils who appeared in *Graduation Picture*. She installed an avenue of two rows of busts on high bases, between which one could walk. She gave each bust a symbolic name, such as “M. D., Hero of All the Wars,” “K., Split Personality,” or “T. L. the Believer.” This was a personal protest against war, religious coercion and the sufferings of human existence—a protest she continued to express throughout her entire oeuvre. In the 1980s, in the “*Self-Portrait*” series, she sculpted figures of bald, armless men with sacks on their back, and again, each figure received an attribute or stereotyped name. In the late 1980s she began dealing with the supernatural, with demons and angels, all of them with flaws and deformities. In the 1990s, however, she returned to social criticism, as in the “*Not Fragile*” exhibition in 1996, where she made use of metal sculpture combined with damaged political posters (of Peres and Netanyahu) as a protest against the loss of personal responsibility. In other series she grappled with death and with the purpose of life. The theme of death engages her obsessively and she takes many photographs of cemeteries in every place in the world that she visits.

Shimshi is a multi-disciplinary artist and, apart from sculpture, also engages in environmental design, stage design, interior design—mostly of tapestries and carpets for public buildings and hotels throughout Israel. She has never believed that art has the power to change anything, yet despite this she has not ceased to express protest in her works. She does not believe in women’s art as a separate category and claims that being a woman has in no way affected her art. Nonetheless, one may argue that her sex influences her multi-disciplinary interests, particularly in the field of design.

## CONCLUSION

This survey of women artists in Israel indicates that most of them were not associated with the leading groups in Israeli art and that even if they did exhibit with one of these groups, they were generally temporarily co-opted by men who “permitted” them to exhibit together with them. In most cases they worked and exhibited separately, sometimes by their own choice. For this reason (and for other reasons recognized today in feminist research) women artists are almost never mentioned in the discourse of the history of Israeli art. For example, in a booklet published by The Israel Museum in 1985, *Milestones in Israel Art*, the section surveying painters’ activity up to the 1970s mentions only two women—Leah Nikel and Aviva Uri—and from the 1970s on, only three. This in spite of the fact that after the establishment of the State

and in the course of the 1950s there was a sharp rise in the number of women artists: more women artists, and more women artists who devote all their time to art.

Some of the women artists were well known in their time and evidence of their presence appears in reviews of exhibitions and in various issues of the periodical *Gazit* which contain surveys of the artists in Israel. However, even in these reviews and surveys there is a clear difference between the attitude to male artists and that towards women artists: while the men's works are always analyzed in a matter-of-fact manner, discussing only their artistic value, many critics of women's works start by describing the appearance of the artists. Over the years even the well-known women were forgotten by the men who wrote the official history of art in Israel. Only in recent years has comprehensive and in-depth research begun on the subject of women artists in Israeli art, but as yet no history has been written that gives them their rightful place.

Despite the clear rise in the number of women artists in the 1950s, the real turning-point came only in the 1970s, following the influx of international cultural influences and the rise of feminism in Israel. Only then was there a significant growth in the number of women artists. This number continued to grow in almost geometrical progression until the 1990s and later, when the number of participants in exhibitions in the various museums and galleries was divided equally between men and women, with the women at times even in the majority.

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