

ISRAEL



Official Country Name

STATE OF ISRAEL

Languages

HEBREW, ARABIC

Population

8,424,904

Median Age

30.1

GDP Per Capita

US \$36,400

Source: CIA World Factbook

Total Value of Art Exported

(UN Comtrade Database 2017)

US \$97,043,000

Arts Funding

(Visual Arts)

US \$121,091,000

Schools with Art Programs

(University Level)

10

Student Enrollment

2,591

Source: Central Bureau of Statistics, AAP (non-official)

Museums Exhibiting Contemporary Art

21

Contemporary Art Galleries

(Commercial)

68

Contemporary Art Spaces

(Nonprofit)

28

Art Foundations

(NGO + Private)

13

Source: AAP (non-official)

Acknowledgments: Nirith Nelson, Aliza Peleg, Shaul Setter, Tal Yahas



RON AMIR, *Khamis's Kitchen (La Cuisine de Khamis)*, 2015, inkjet prints of color photographs on baryta paper, 130 x 160 cm. Copyright the artist. Courtesy Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris.

Israel's military occupation in the West Bank as well as the military and

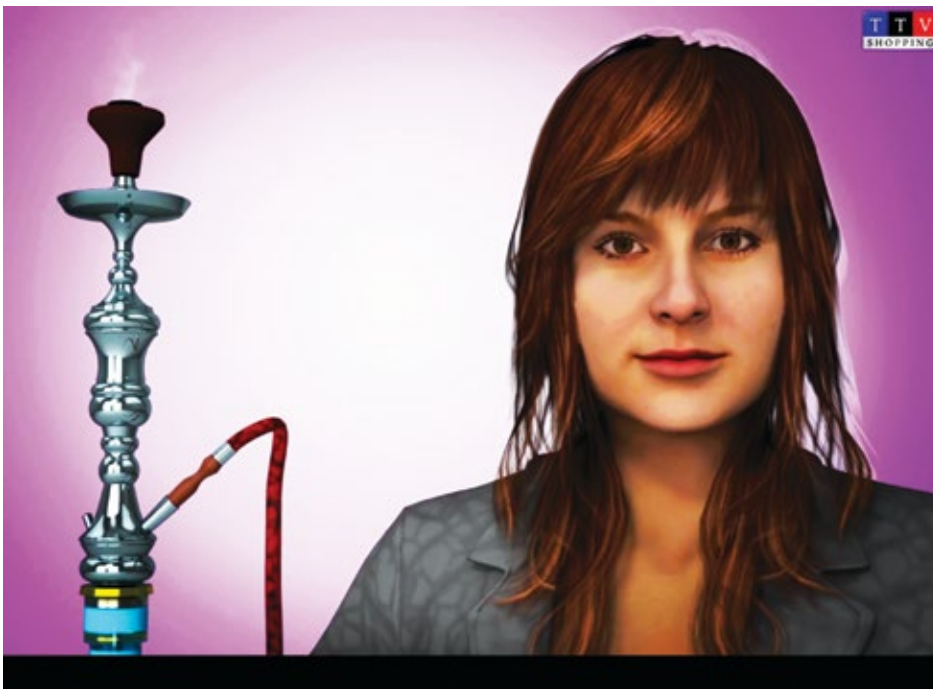
economic siege on Gaza continues as the ultra-right-wing government extends its antidemocratic legislation. A bill passed in 2018 specifies the State of Israel as the nation-state of the Jewish people. While Israel and Hamas are trying to prevent an escalation of the situation into a full-scale Israel military operation in Gaza, the alleged corruption scandals surrounding Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu are dramatically destabilizing the political system.

Throughout the year, several attempts to pass the loyalty-in-culture bill—which would give the Minister of Culture and Sport the authority to reduce funding for cultural institutions according to ideological criteria—were blocked due to internal opposition. Yet the growing discontent of directors of cultural institutes as well as artists and other practitioners in the cultural field is largely unheard in the public sphere. Despite these adverse conditions, there are established museums, commercial galleries and alternative artist-run spaces throughout the country. Municipalities provide other sources of funding, though the hegemonic centers—mainly Tel Aviv and Jerusalem—get bigger pieces of the pie. Explicit discrimination means that Palestinian-run institutions within Israel's borders receive less than their Israeli counterparts.

In Tel Aviv, the cultural heart of Israel, Tania Coen-Uzzielli was appointed as

the new director of **Tel Aviv Museum of Art**, replacing the retired director Suzanne Landau. Dalit Matityahu was nominated chief curator for Israeli art after Allen Ginton retired, after holding the position for 30 years. Under the leadership of chief curator Doron Rabina, the museum's more open curatorial agenda continued this year with several exhibitions featuring young Israeli artists, such as "Recovery Plan: Join or Die" (7/17–11/24), curated by Rabina; Tamar Harpaz and Assaf Hazan's "Till I End My Song" (5/31–11/3), in which the displayed objects and sound pieces reacted to their surroundings, curated by Anat Danon Sivan; and Ronit Porat's "The Sentence" (3/27–10/1), comprised of black-and-white collages made of found images. Two standout exhibitions were the first retrospective of one of Israel's architectural forefathers Arie Shalom, "Architect of the State" (4/13–10/27), and the retrospective of Avraham Ofek, "Body, Work" (5/31–10/27), which focused on the artist's interdisciplinary collaborations and installations. The blockbuster exhibition of the year was "Modern Times" (10/12–2/19), exhibiting late 19th- and 20th-century masterpieces on loan from the Philadelphia Museum of Art. Another large-scale exhibition that opened just before the end of the year was of the Japanese artist Hiroshi Sugimoto (11/15–6/8/19).

The provocative and humoristic paintings of Zoya Cherkassky were the center of her exhibition "Pravda" (1/10–11/3) at the national **Israel Museum** in Jerusalem. Another much discussed exhibition was an enigmatic large-scale installation by Gil Marco Shani, "Buses" (3/28–10/31), an imitation of two tour buses in a parking lot. Christian Boltanski's "Lifetime"



SCANDAR COPTI, *Promotion image of CoptiCo's product Shishette®*, 2018, digital image, dimensions variable. Courtesy CoptiCo Intellitechnologies.

(7/1–11/3), curated by Laurence Sigal and Mira Lapidot, was the biggest international exhibition of the year in the art wing of the museum. The survey “Victory Over the Sun” (12/28–6/10/19) featured paintings and drawings of the Russian avant-garde throughout the 20th century.

Local alternative spaces and festivals in Jerusalem earned attention in 2018. The group exhibition of 15-plus artists, “Properties” (10/23–12/7), curated by Rinat Edelstein and Lee He Shulov, ran as part of **Manofim Festival**, exploring the history of the pre-1948 Palestinian neighborhood of Talbiya. The artist-run space **Mamuta Art and Media Center** hosted artist Thalia Hoffman’s project exploring political imagination in the Middle East (10/5–11/23). The artist-run **Barbur Gallery**, whose existence is currently under threat from the municipality due to its leftist political affiliation, held painter Matan Oren and photographer Yair Barak’s “Handstand” (2/8–3/16).

South of Tel Aviv, the Stockholm-based **Magasin III Museum & Foundation for Contemporary Art** opened a satellite space in Jaffa, with a show by conceptualist Haim Steinbach, “Zerubbabel” (1/20–7/13), exhibiting the artist’s painting and objects from the last five years. Curated by David Neuman, it was the artist’s first solo presentation in his home country.

The most prominent nonprofit art space, the **Center for Contemporary Art (CCA)**, exhibited several solo shows by Israeli female artists. Elham Rokni’s “The Seven Abdulkarims” (1/18–3/17) explored the role of folktales in creating memories and identity among refugees and immigrants in Israel

through drawings and video. Tchelet Ram appropriated materials that refer to various forms of ascetic life—including a pickup truck placed outside the Center—in “Third Wheel” (6/7–9/1). A very different aesthetic was presented in Nevet Yitzhak’s “Permanent Exhibition” (10/4–12/1), which showed digital modifications of folkloric works produced at Palestine’s first art school, Bezalel.

Minus 1, an exhibition space dedicated to showing works from the collection of *Haaretz* newspaper—one of the biggest holdings of Israeli art—invited guest curator Gilad Reich to work with the collection for the first time. “Whose Work Is This?” (5/1–9/1) revisited the collection from the perspective of artistic labor with works by Nir Evron, Tal Mazliach, Ido Michaeli and others.

A few commercial galleries moved from the center of Tel Aviv to the south of the city, where most artistic activity now takes place. The acclaimed **Gordon Gallery** inaugurated a new space with the exhibition “Trojan Horse” (10/18–11/30), in which artist Saron Poliakine showed a series of abstract paintings. **Alon Segev Gallery**, another gallery that moved to a spacious location in the south, ended the year with an exhibition of Dead Sea salt-encrusted objects by Sigalit Landau—one of Israel’s most renowned artists—in “Lot’s Wife” (12/3–1/25/19).

In the Kiryat Hamelacha area, which is now Tel Aviv’s gallery district, the artist-run **Binyamin Gallery** hosted the project “Ground Truth” (8/9–9/1) by London-based collective Forensic Architecture and supported by Zochrot Foundation. The centerpiece of the project was a geographic platform that maps the historical remains of the al-Araqib Bedouin village in the desert

before the State of Israel demolished it.

Raw Art Gallery mounted several short-term and intriguing solo shows featuring experimental works, such as the modified furniture sculpture by Sharon Glazberg (1/11–2/10) and Yaron Attar’s impressive, cinematic-style video work (7/12–8/11). Not far from there, **Rosenfeld Gallery** featured a solo show of the up-and-coming artist Karam Natour (11/15–12/22), where he deals with his Palestinian identity through video work and drawings. Down the street, **Inga Gallery** exhibited a delicate and well-positioned collaboration between Shay Zilberman’s collages and Rami Maymon’s photos (3/22–5/12).

In the city center, the **Ha’Kibbutz Israeli Art Gallery**, opened in 1968, closed down. The last solo exhibition in the space was the archival project “The Havatzelet Case” (8/30–10/6) where artist Lioni Schein explored the history of the gallery. The established **Givon Gallery** exhibited the thought-provoking paintings of Avner Ben Gal (3/23–5/5). The most notable exhibition of the year in **Noga Gallery** was of Shahar Yahalom’s sculptures crafted from modified everyday materials, curated by Tali Ben-Nun, “Nut Case” (6/22–7/27).

Just south of Tel Aviv, at the **Museums of Bat Yam**, newly appointed director Hila Cohen-Schneiderman curated the group exhibition “Plenty” (6/21–11/17), featuring sculptures and photographic works. Participating artists included Irit Hemmo, Drora Dominey and Zohar Gotesman. East of Tel Aviv, the **Petach Tikva Museum of Art** exhibited two large site-specific, dystopian installations by Paris-based artist Tatiana Trouvé (6/7–9/29).

North of Tel Aviv, the largest exhibition of the year at **Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art** was “Respire: Works from the Lemaître Video Art Collection” (6/23–11/17), curated by Marie Shek. The exhibition featured works by Anri Sala, Sebastián Díaz Morales, Arash Nassiri



KARAM NATOUR, *Saturn*, 2018, archival inkjet print, 140 cm diameter. Courtesy the artist and Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv.

and others. The museum also exhibited projects by local artists, including 20 years of digital works by Miri Segal in “Miriage” (2/24–6/2); “A Dwelling Down Below” (2/24–6/2), where Shai Azoulay translated his search for a higher being into painting; and an audio project by Ofri Cnaani and May Zarhy, “If, Then . . . Else” (7/23–11/17). At the nearby **Herzliya Artists’ Residence**, artist Jasmin Vardi held her first solo show, “Hyper-Intention” (7/5–9/20), comprised of a multichannel video installation presenting therapeutic environments.

North of Tel Aviv, in the city of Haifa, the nonprofit **Beit HaGefen**—an Arab-Jewish cultural center—exhibited a show by the Palestinian, Oscar-nominated filmmaker and artist Scandar Copti. The exhibition “CoptiCo” (5/3–8/4), and the video works in it, imitate a commercial fair booth promoting products designed to solve sociocultural problems within Palestinian society.

Up north, in **Atelier Shemi** at Kibbutz Kabri—the former studio of one of Israel’s renowned sculptors, Yehiel Shemi—artist Hilla Toony Navok mounted “Extensions” (7/14–11/10), curated by Smadar Schindler. For this show, Navok added colorful and cheap PVC-coated fabric, popular in Israel, to Shemi’s canonical, large-scale, metal works.

In the northeastern and often neglected part of Israel, the **Mishkan Museum of Art – Ein Harod** featured a solo exhibition in the form of a painting installation by acclaimed painter Tamar Getter (11/19/17–3/3). Nearby, the **Beit Uri and**

Rami Nehostan Museum exhibited a well-received duo exhibition by acclaimed sculptor Drora Dominey and painter Avi Sabah, “In a Moment” (1/20–4/21), in which sculptural work was intertwined with small-size drawings.

A major controversy in the artistic scene in 2018 was the exhibition “Stolen Arab Art” (7/12–9/6) in the newly opened **1:1 Center for Art and Politics**. The Center, founded by artist Omer Krieger (a former member of the research and performance collective Public Movement) and cultural entrepreneur Adi Engelman, presented as its inaugural show video works of four Arab artists without their knowledge or consent, and without proper accrediting information. Enraged by the move, the local art community boycotted the exhibition while international art practitioners called on the Arab artists, who refuse to exhibit in Israel for political reasons, to sue the center for copyright violation. The initiators of the exhibition responded to the furor with a statement explaining their intent to transgress political conventions created by both the Israeli government and Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions campaigns.

The Israeli art world was in shock over the suicide of Boaz Arad in February. Arad was an established and prolific artist, the curator of Ha’midrasha Gallery and a high-profile art teacher at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design and the Talma Yelin Art High School. He committed suicide the day after a local news site, Mako, confirmed that the education ministry was

investigating his sexual involvement with female students—prompting the Israeli community to discuss the repercussions of media’s part in the #MeToo movement and Arad’s actions.

After participating in Documenta 14 in 2017, Roee Rosen had a solo exhibition at Centre Pompidou in Paris. The exhibition, “Histoires dans la Pénombre” (6/27–10/29) was comprised of two earlier projects of the artist, accompanied by a recent video work. At the Musée d’Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris, photographer Ron Amir exhibited his engaging large-format photographs and videos that examine the living conditions of Sudanese and Eritrean refugees in Israel in a detention center in the Negev Desert, as part of his solo show “Somewhere in the Desert” (9/14–1/6/19).

Looking ahead, the multidisciplinary artist Aya Ben Ron was chosen to represent Israel in the 58th Venice Biennale, opening in May. Ben Ron, who won the Ministry of Culture and Sport Prize in 2016, will present a project titled “Field Hospital X,” curated by Avi Lubin. “Field Hospital X” will continue her line of inquiry into “social perceptions and visual representations of the ‘ill’ and of ‘illness’” in a cultural and historical context. The Tel Aviv Museum of Art will display John Gerrard’s real-time computer simulation work *Western Flag (Spindletop, Texas)* (2017), a black flag of smoke, but no exact dates or final confirmation have been released yet.

GILAD REICH



SIGALIT LANDAU, *Echo*, 2018, cello suspended in the dead sea, 28 x 130 x 44 cm. Photo by Yotam From. Courtesy the artist and Alon Segev Gallery, Tel Aviv.