

## CONSCIOUS COLLECTIVE

**At MAXXI, works by Tsibi Geva, Maria Saleh Mahameed and Noa Yekutieli recount a complex cultural reality between identity and place, memory and ties**

Curated by **Bartolomeo Pietromarchi, Shai Baitel**  
Associate curator **Elena Motisi**

Sala Claudia Gian Ferrari | 17 March – 4 June 2023

Exhibition realised by Fondazione MAXXI in collaboration with the Embassy of Israel in Italy

Thanks to Intesa Sanpaolo

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*Rome, 16 March 2023.* The exhibition **Conscious Collective**, curated by **Bartolomeo Pietromarchi, Shai Baitel** and associate curator **Elena Motisi** and realised in collaboration with the **Embassy of Israel in Italy**, is opening at **MAXXI, National Museum of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Arts** (Claudia Gian Ferrari Hall, **from 17 March to 4 June 2023**). Thanks to **Intesa Sanpaolo**.

On display will be works by **Tsibi Geva, Maria Saleh Mahameed** and **Noa Yekutieli** – three artists from different backgrounds and generations who seem to have little in common. **Tsibi Geva** (Kibbutz Ein Shemer, Israel, 1951), son of one of the leading exponents of the Israeli Bauhaus, is an internationally known artist of Ashkenazi Jewish origin who lives and works between Tel Aviv and New York; **Maria Saleh Mahameed** (Umm el-Fahem, Israel, 1990), born and raised in Israel's most populated Arab city, is the daughter of a Palestinian father and a Ukrainian-Christian mother; **Noa Yekutieli** (Los Angeles, USA, 1989) is a self-taught multidisciplinary artist born in California to a Japanese mother and an Israeli father, who works between Tel Aviv and Los Angeles.

The origins, influences, and sensibilities of the three artists are different, as are the techniques and materials they use. Yet, their works reveal unexpected connections.

The works in the exhibition are rooted in the individual biographies and tell of intimate, yet universal experiences – conflicts, bonds, identity – giving a multifaceted insight into a complex cultural reality. Recalling the Jungian concept of the 'collective unconscious' – a legacy from the distant past that is common to all humanity – *Conscious Collective* investigates how a sense of community can be found even in a land where conflict is a constant, and how accepting life with its contradictions can be the key to a better existence.

According to curator **Shai Baitel**, "They seem, upon first impression, to be more dissimilar than related. Their narratives, mediums, and artistic intentions can even be seen as being at odds with one another. Their work is created in the context of Israel and Palestine, resonating with the constant state of conflict in the region or within themselves. Despite their differences and divisions, these three artists all share the miraculous bond of friendship. Their mutually supportive relationship buttresses each other's work, providing a remarkable framework for this exhibition. Relationality, a world view that emphasizes an innate sense of human connectedness, underlies their work."

In the words of **Bartolomeo Pietromarchi**, MAXXI Arte Director and curator of the exhibition: "We are very honoured to have organised this exhibition together with the Embassy of Israel and curator Shai Baitel. *Conscious Collective* will offer the Museum's audience the opportunity to understand the complexity and diversity of the cultures found in the land of Israel, as part of a conversation among artists that testifies to the desire for dialogue and integration that art has the ability to weave."

Associate curator **Elena Motisi** concludes, "We present the practices and sensitivities of three artists from different generations, gender identities, ethnic communities, religious backgrounds and socio-

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economic contexts. Deeply influenced by their respective biographies, the works express these diversities, and at the same time present a complex multicultural dimension. Geva forcefully takes us back to the streets of Israel, Saleh Mahameed enables us to almost touch the coal of his hometown, and Yekutieli opens a window on his life experiences with his refined carvings."

#### **Works on display:**

An expressions artist, **Tsibi Geva** has placed the exploration of his own identity and that of his country at the centre of his work since the late 1970s. His works simultaneously address the political situation in Israel, the psychological consequences of the ongoing conflict and the resulting aesthetics. ***Where I Come From***, i.e. the work on display, is a modular painting composed of canvases of different sizes presented as a collective unit. Each canvas has its own autonomy, but together they create unprecedented connections and paths – a metaphor for those chance encounters and decisions that led the artist, like many others, to find himself living in Israel.

The work summarises recurring motifs in Geva's works – the repetitive pattern of the keffiyeh, the "Balatot" tiles once found in every house in Israel, the fences – and explores the theme of the border, which characterises a life without a clear geographical definition.

Black coal – a material specific to the town of Umm el-Fahem ('Mother of Coal' in arabic) – dominates **Maria Saleh Mahameed's** work.

The work on display, ***Ludmilla***, presents an imaginary landscape, combining references to the cities of Umm el Fahem and Kiev, the city of origin of the artist's mother – from which the work takes its name. This is the first chapter in a series dedicated to the history of her parents and represents the memories of her mother, a young Ukrainian woman who moved to a society with a strong Palestinian cultural identity for love. As with memories, the work does not follow a linear narrative, but is a fluid collection of images in which Soviet landscapes merge with Middle Eastern panoramas, with motifs ranging from Palestinian olive trees to *Misha*, the teddy bear mascot of the 1980 Moscow Olympics.

**Noa Yekutieli's** interdisciplinary practice combines sculptural elements, found objects and the art of Japanese paper cutting in an attempt to reconcile her often conflicting identities as a Japanese-Israeli-American woman.

***Where We Stand***, the installation in the exhibition, consists of cut-out paper windows, framing an amalgam of heterogeneous images that evoke either natural landscapes or visions of destruction and conflict. The optical illusion created by the windows gives viewers a sense of distance and security, and leads one to reflect on how the perception of self and socio-political issues can be easily distorted and changed. The window thus becomes a metaphor for the human propensity to selectively open or close one's eyes to reality, and to mask or deny the truth in order to survive.

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