



Devoted Resistance

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The Jewish Religious Art of Nechama Golan

David Sperber

Introduction

When in 1999 Nechama Golan showed in a museum *You Shall Walk in Virtuous Ways* – a high block-heeled sandal covered with Xerox copies of a Jewish sacred text – it was criticised by the Israeli Orthodox Jewish world.¹ The headline to an article about the work in *Yom Shishi* (a weekly publication for the religious public) was ‘Ha’sandal Ve’ha’skandal’ (‘The Sandal and the Scandal’),² and the article discussed the juxtaposition of the Jewish sacred text incorporated in the work with the sandal as ‘a wink and ironic’. Each time the writer of the article referred to Golan or her art, he used quotation marks (‘the work’ and ‘the artist’), the implication being that there is no real art or artist here.

Golan is one of the best-known Jewish Orthodox feminist artists in Israel. This article deals with her most prominent and poignant work, *You Shall Walk in Virtuous Ways* (1999–2011). Rather than studying the art object as if it were complete when it leaves the artist’s studio, I will look at the history of its reception. Most research into reception history remains within the artworld, as it consists mainly of analysing what was written about a work by art critics. Recently, the art historian Nancy Troy has shown how examining the reception of art in the intertwined domains of the artworld, the art market and popular culture is essential to understanding the processes of creating the symbolic and capital value of an artwork.³ This article builds on Troy’s insights and expands them by showing how the study of an artwork’s reception within different cultural spheres clarifies the processes of the meaning-making of that work. Such processes are formative to the development of art and allow the researcher to assess the contribution of art to the social field and its intersection with other cultural areas. By studying

Nechama Golan, *You Shall Walk in Virtuous Ways*, 1999, photocopies of Talmud pages and polymer glue, 30 × 12 × 18 cm, collection of the artist

- 1 The work was shown first as part of the exhibition ‘Lahlock Et Ha’zman’, (Time-Sharing), at the Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem, curator Hagai Segev.
- 2 B Kariv (no first name given), ‘Ha’sandal Ve’ha’skandal’, (The Sandal and the Scandal), *Yom Shishi*, 19 November 1999, no page number (in Hebrew, author’s translation)
- 3 Nancy J Troy, *The Afterlife of Piet Mondrian*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2013, pp 169–228



Nechama Golan, *You Shall Walk in Virtuous Ways*, 2011, photocopies of Talmud pages and polymer glue, 30 × 12 × 18 cm, collection of the artist

- 4 As customary in the literature of Jewish religious feminism in Israel, I use the term Modern Orthodoxy as a synonym for Religious Zionism and National Religious (Dati Le'umi), terms that are more usually deployed in a political context.
- 5 See Diane Apostolos-Cappadona, *Religion and the Arts: History and Method*, Brill, Leiden, 2017, p 54
- 6 Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House', in Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldua, eds, *This Bridge Called My Back*, State University of New York Press, New York, 2015, pp 94-97
- 7 Ronit Irshai and Tanya Zion-Waldoks, 'Ha'feminism Ha'ortodoxy Ha'moderni Be'yisrael: Bein Nomos Le'narativ', (Modern-Orthodox Feminism in Israel: Between Nomos and Narrative), *Mishpat U'mimshal (Law and Government)*, vol 15, no 1/2, 2013, p 246 (in Hebrew)
- 8 See references to relevant literature in Sally M Promey, 'The Return of Religion in the Scholarship of American Art', *The Art Bulletin*, vol 85, no 3, 2003, p 601, n 56
- 9 Rosalind Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1985, p 12
- 10 Quoted in James Elkins and David Morgan, eds, *Re-Enchantment (The Art Seminar)*, Routledge, New York, 2009, p 112
- 11 Quoted in Dov Berkovitz, 'Yetsira Omanutit Ve'avodat Hashem', (Creation of Art and Divine Work), *Tsohar (Hatch)* 34, 2009, p 67 (in Hebrew)
- 12 Shany Littman, 'Haim Efshar Litsor Omanut Amitit Keshe'tsarik
- the reception of Golan's work within the artworld as well as by Jewish Modern Orthodox society,⁴ I will demonstrate its effect on broader communities.⁵
- The nature of Golan's art lies at the heart of the discussion: the feminist practices she uses in her work and the feminist attitudes she employs. By investigating the reception of the work in the artworld as well as in religious society in Israel, I will show that Golan's feminist art is radical in that it subverts the patriarchal infrastructure of the Jewish world and does not even conform to the accepted practices of the feminist Jewish Orthodox world. However, unlike radical feminist discourse, and following Jewish Orthodox feminist dialogue, it does not undermine the validity of the texts or their sanctity. Instead, it operates *within* the religious system and criticises it, but does so with the same perspective of sanctity it accepts is inherent in the text. If in the past, the radical feminist thinker Audre Lord called for the dismantling of the master's house,⁶ Golan is intent on creating far-reaching change without abandoning her religious world.
- An accepted distinction in the artworld and in feminist discourses places art and feminism in opposition to religion. The art and feminist worlds both distinguish themselves from the religious worlds alongside them. Feminist discourse generally rejects religious worlds and sees them as spaces that reflect and generate patriarchal positions,⁷ and the modern secularisation thesis – the idea that traditional religions are in decline in the industrialised world – still dominates the artworld.⁸ Rosalind Krauss noted the emergence of an 'absolute rift' between art and religion following the desacralisation of art in the nineteenth century,⁹ and visual culture scholar Kajri Jain expressed a similar idea, stating: 'I think that contemporary art just doesn't "do" religion.'¹⁰ The study that follows challenges these dichotomies by connecting art and feminism with religion.
- Moreover, this article seeks to undermine the predominant view in contemporary Israeli art discourse, which characterises work created by religious artists as uncritical and restricted, the only purpose of which is to ratify traditional Jewish ideas and forms. This paradigm was presented, for example, by the Israeli writer Yoram Kaniuk, who argued that contemporary poetry is incompatible with religious Judaism because poetry requires an authentic expression of an experience stemming from inner freedom; any expression from a religious perspective must always be artificial and enlisted to the benefit of the ideology.¹¹ Tzaki Rosenfeld, director of the Rosenfeld Gallery in Tel Aviv, one of the most important galleries in Israel, also claims: 'Art based on religious values is devoid of independent thought. The laws of religion do not allow a believer to deviate from the laws that the religion creates and it becomes art that serves [the religion].'¹² The prominent Israeli art scholar and curator Gideon Ofrat went so far as to say that art created in a religious space is almost always ideological art and is, therefore, shallow and regressive: 'Religious artists... mostly approve art whose artistic and ideological content submerge it into a shallow morass, which separates it from the complexity of form and content of the 150 years of modern art (not to say postmodernism).'¹³ In 2017, Ofrat identified a clear dichotomy between religious faith and art: 'The soul of faith is incompatible with innocence, with free artistic expression, since the latter is committed to

Levakesh Ishoor Me'harav?', (Is it Possible to Create Real Art When One Needs Rabbinical Approval?), *Ha'aretz, Arts & Leisure*, 2 July 2015, <http://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/art/.premium-1.2673608> (in Hebrew, author's translation), accessed 29 October 2019

- 13 Gideon Ofrat, *Washington Crossing the Jordan: Selected Essays 1984–2008*, Hasifria Hatsiyonit (The Zionist Library), Jerusalem, 2008, p 207, (in Hebrew, author's translation). See more Gideon Ofrat, 'Ha'im Titaken Omanut Yemanit Be'yisrael?', (Is Right-wing Art Possible in Israel?), *Kivunim Hadashim* (New Directions) 9, 2003, pp 139–150 (in Hebrew); Gideon Ofrat, 'Ha'im Mitholelet Mahapekat Omanut Be'kerev Hovshi Ha"kipot Ha'serugot"?' (Are We Witnessing an Artistic 'Cultural Revolution' among Observant Israelis?), *Kivunim Hadashim* (New Directions) 17, 2008, pp 164–176 (in Hebrew). Both essays have been reprinted in Ofrat, *Washington Crossing the Jordan*, op cit, pp 191–201, 202–211.

- 14 Gideon Ofrat, 'Davar El Reay Omaney Ha'yamin', (To my Friends, Artists of the Right), *Ha'Mahsan Shel Gideon Ofrat*, (Gideon Ofrat, Archive of Texts), 9 May 2017, <https://gideonofrat.wordpress.com/2017/05/09/%D7%93%D6%B8%D7%91%D6%B8%D7%A8-%D7%90%D7%9C-%D7%A8%D6%B5%D7%A2%D6%B7%D7%99-> (in Hebrew, author's translation), accessed 29 October 2019

- 15 See more David Sperber, 'Israeli Art Discourse and the Jewish Voice', *Images: A Journal of Jewish Art & Visual Culture* 4, 2010, pp 109–113

- 16 This interpretative move is described in the title of the collection by Talal Asad, Wendy Baron, Judith

heresy no less than to faith.¹⁴ These assertions are based on theoretical distinctions that have become trendy in Israeli art discourse and that are deployed as incontrovertible truths.¹⁵ In contrast, this article contends that it is actually the works of an Orthodox woman artist that have advanced, in Israel, direct feminist critique of the Jewish religious world.¹⁶ In so doing, the article demonstrates that art, religion, feminism and critical thinking are not as antithetical as some have claimed.

While the study of religious Jewish feminist thought and activism is well developed, the same is not true regarding Jewish religious feminist art.¹⁷ Furthermore, the discourse on diversity that has developed over the last few decades may have opened the artworld to many new 'peripheral' voices but it has not embraced the art of Orthodox Jewish women. By shedding light on feminist art that addresses religious issues, I aim to make visible its unique contribution to the artworld, which has yet to be incorporated into contemporary mainstream art and feminist discourses.

You Shall Walk in Virtuous Ways

You Shall Walk in Virtuous Ways severely criticises the *Halakhic* (Jewish religious law) text that deals with the *kinyan* or 'acquisition' of the woman during the marriage ceremony. It was created in two versions, one in 1999 and the second for the exhibition 'Matronita: Jewish Feminist Art' held in Israel at Mishkan Le'Omanut, Museum of Art, Ein Harod in 2012.¹⁸ The work is made of layers of paper and polymeric adhesives to create the shape of a high, block-heeled sandal. Golan's sandal is covered with Xerox copies of the opening page of Tractate *Kiddushin* (marriage ceremony) in the Jewish codex's Mishnah (third century CE) and the Babylonian Talmud (fifth century CE):

A woman is acquired in three ways and she acquires herself in two ways. She is acquired through money, through a document, or sexual intercourse... And she acquires herself through a bill of divorce or the death of the husband (Mishnah, Kiddushin 1a).

The inscription 'You shall walk in virtuous ways' appears on the upper and lower straps of the sandal. The work combines two themes: the institution of Jewish marriage and the policing of women's bodies in Western fashion culture. The text in the work is the Rabbinic introduction to a discussion of marriage, which defines marriage as a one-sided acquisition when the man purchases the woman.¹⁹ The Orthodox Jewish feminist thinker Tamar Ross points out that the laws of marriage and divorce blatantly express the inferior status of women in the traditional Jewish family.²⁰ Beyond the symbolism, the legal implications of these laws raise severe problems in the context of annulling the marriage for divorce. Legally speaking, the Jewish marriage is a one-sided acquisition, in which the man acquires the woman; even the annulment of the acquisition may only be performed unilaterally, leading to the difficulties of *agunot* and *mesuravot* *get* – women who are 'chained' to their marriage.²¹ From a feminist

Butler and Saba Mahmood, published in 2009: 'Is Critique Secular?' See Talal Asad, et al, eds, *Is Critique Secular? Blasphemy, Injury, and Free Speech*, University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 2009.

- 17 One of the exceptions to this rule is Paula J Birnbaum, 'Modern Orthodox Feminism: Art, Jewish Law, and the Quest for Equality', in Frederick E Greenspahn, ed, *Contemporary Israel: New Insights and Scholarship*, NYU Press, New York, 2016, pp 131–165. See also Efraim Sicher, 'Written on the Body: Re-Embodying Judaism in Contemporary Jewish Feminist Art', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 19, 2019, pp 271–296.

- 18 Curators Dvora Liss and David Sperber

- 19 The feminist scholarship on the dimension of acquisition assimilated in the act of Jewish marriage is extensive. For a summary, see Irit Koren, *You Are Hereby Renewed unto Me: Gender, Religion and Power Relations in the Jewish Wedding Ritual*,

perspective, agunot and mesuravot get pose the most serious Halakhic problem in the contemporary Jewish world in general, particularly in Israel where there is no separation between religion and state.²² Gideon Ofrat synthesised the accepted interpretation of the work, 'A high-heeled shoe – accepted in feminist thought as an expression of male oppression of the woman and her transformation into a sexual object – wrapped in the text about the acquisition of a woman in marriage. As such, Golan's shoe acted as an analogy of protest and liberation.'²³

Golan's Critique of the Religious Jewish Text

The critique that appears in the work *You Shall Walk in Virtuous Ways* seems to continue along the same trajectory as that of other Israeli artists, active in the 1970s, who included the exploration of Jewish text in their works. While the latter aspired to expand the visual language through conceptual art,²⁴ through dismantling or defamiliarisation of Jewish religious texts, Golan directly criticises the Jewish world from a feminist perspective. Yocheved Weinfeld and Michal Na'aman explicitly tackled Jewish texts and connected them to a gender-based discussion. Weinfeld combined texts based on the laws of mourning and purity from the Jewish codex *Shulchan Aruch* together with invented rituals.²⁵ Na'aman addressed Jewish issues and writings from a feminist perspective and in the context of cross-gender issues.²⁶ Na'aman's works exemplify deconstructive games with the Jewish texts, and the binding and releasing both verbal and visual images.²⁷ Similarly, Weinfeld's works were interpreted primarily as an expression of her focus on her body, materials and work methods, and not as a direct criticism of the Jewish world.²⁸ The artist herself did not think of her work as critical. Indeed, she ruled



Yocheved Weinfeld, *Untitled*, 1976, performance documentary photographs, collection of the artist, photo: David Darom

The Hebrew University Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 2011, pp 31–32 (in Hebrew).

20 Tamar Ross, *Expanding the Palace of Torah: Orthodoxy and Feminism*, Brandeis University Press and the University Press of New England, Hanover and London, 2004, p 17

21 An *agunah* is a Jewish woman who is 'chained' to her marriage. A *mesurevet get* is a woman whose husband refuses to grant her a divorce document. See Irit Koren, 'The Bride's Voice: Religious Women Challenge the Wedding Ritual', *Nashim: A Journal of Jewish Women's Studies and Gender* 10, 2005, pp 31–32.

22 The literature on this topic is extensive. For example, see Ruth Halperin-Kaddari, *Women in Israel: A State of Their Own*, Pennsylvania Studies Human Rights Series, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 2004; Susan M Weiss and Netty C Gross Horowitz, *Marriage and Divorce in the Jewish State: Israel's Civil War*, Brandeis University Press, Waltham, Massachusetts, 2012.

23 Gideon Ofrat, 'Shoes in Israeli Art', in Gal Ventura, Ori Bartal and Einat Leader, eds, *Thoughts on Shoes*, Anthology, Resling Publishing House and Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem, 2014, p 202 (in Hebrew, author's translation)

24 Adam Baruch, 'Hem Yorim Ba'zikaron', (They're Shooting Memory: Young Israeli Artists on Religious Experience: An Anti-Religious Response?), *Monitin (Reputation)* 27, 1989, pp 56–58, p 128 (in Hebrew)

25 On Weinfeld's pioneering works, see Gannit Ankori, 'Yocheved Weinfeld's Portraits of the Self', *Women's Art Journal* 10, 1989, pp 22–27; and Tal Dekel, 'Feminist Art

out a feminist reading of her work over the years. In 1991, she was quoted as follows in the newspaper *Maariv*:

I may have addressed *niddah* [Jewish ritual purity] as part of my preoccupation with Shulchan Aruch, but I would not draw the equation of woman = niddah. It's too simple... I arrived at the Shulchan Aruch as a way to break free from formalism – from the sweeping cultural guidelines prescribed by Raffi Lavie [one of the most influential Israeli artists at the time]. I found a Readymade text. But my choice was spontaneous. I was not seeking to submit an intellectual protocol of the woman's status in Jewish law.²⁹

Thirty years after the performance, Weinfeld still denies that feminism had any impact on her work, discussing it only through the prisms of formalism and conceptualism.³⁰ In contrast to the art created by Weinfeld and Na'aman, Golan, an Orthodox woman artist, presented a direct and subversive feminist criticism of a Jewish text within the Israeli artworld in the late 1990s.

The work has found a significant place in the discourse of contemporary Jewish art. It is taught in academic courses that focus on Jewish art in Israel, and is part of the curriculum for Israeli high-school matriculation. Its inclusion in discussions about contemporary Jewish art is reflected in the discussion of the work in the main article of the catalogue for 'Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Design for Jewish Life', which was shown at the Jewish Museum in New York in 2009–2010. Golan's work was not included in the exhibition itself, yet the work and the artist were given a noteworthy place in the article by Daniel Belasco, curator of the exhibition. Belasco compares the work to a work by the Jewish architect Daniel Libeskind, who used pages of the Bible to wallpaper the interior of the architectural model of the Berlin Jewish Museum, which he designed.³¹ Belasco asserts that using a holy text as a material in contemporary art may transgress a taboo that forbids damaging religious texts but he emphasises that these works confront the text with dignity and do not violate them. He says that works such as these mark the value of the text through its materialism. Belasco argues that the transition from the treatment of the content of a text to an examination of its form is the most prominent phenomenon in contemporary Jewish art.

Belasco aside, the artworld uses the artist's remarks as a basis for its reaction and discussion. Most critics describe the work in a variation of the artist's statement, 'a metaphor for laws and practices that were created for the woman by male culture, both religious and secular'.³² The discussions within the artworld and academic art study did identify the criticism the work proffered, but they did not see the grouping of the sandal and the Talmudic text as provocative or profane. On the other hand, the far-reaching and polemical discourse surrounding the work in the Orthodox Jewish world was not grounded in the artist's statement. The religious world identified a dimension of blasphemy in the work, which led to an animated discussion.

As mentioned above, while direct references were made to the work in the religious world during its presentation at a museum, the conversation around it occurred later, after a photograph was published in two different places. The criticisms that first appeared were in response to my article

- Hitting the Shores of Israel: Three Case Studies in Impossible Times', *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol 33, no 2, 2012, pp 113–117.
- 26 See Gideon Ofrat, 'Thou Shalt Make...': *The Renaissance of Judaism in Israeli Art*, catalogue, Zman Le'omanut (Time for Art), Center for Israeli Art, curator Gideon Ofrat, Tel Aviv, 2003, p 15 (in Hebrew)
- 27 See Sharon Weisner Ferguson and Ronit Sorek, 'Depicting God in Jewish and Israeli Art', *The Divine Image: Depicting God in Jewish and Israeli Art*, catalogue, The Israel Museum, curators Ronit Sorek and Sharon Weisner Ferguson, Jerusalem, 2006, p 50
- 28 Yael Guilat, 'Gender, Ritual and Video Art', in, Gideon Katz, Shalom Ratzabi and Yaacov Yadgar, eds, *Beyond Halacha: Secularism, Traditionalism and 'New Age' Culture in Israel, Iyunim Be'tkumat Yisraeli*, (Studies in Israeli and Modern Jewish Society), Thematic Series, Ben-Gurion Research Institute for the Study of Israel and Zionism, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Sde Boker, 2014, p 586
- 29 Emanuel Bar-Kedma, 'Mikreh Isha', (A Woman's Case), *Maariv*, 18 June 1991 (in Hebrew, author's translation)
- 30 Dekel, 'Feminist Art Hitting the Shores of Israel', op cit, p 127 n 17
- 31 Daniel Belasco, 'Chopping Noodles: The Art of Jewish Practice', *Reinventing Ritual: Contemporary Art and Design for Jewish Life*, The Jewish Museum and Yale University Press, New York and New Haven, 2009, p 31
- 32 For example, see Judith Margolis, 'A Challenging Grittiness: Spirituality in Jewish Women's Art', *Nashim: A Journal of*
- published in the weekend supplement of *Makor Rishon*, an Israeli newspaper associated with the religious-Zionist sector. The article looked at 'Israeli women artists who use the Jewish world as raw material for religious-feminist art'.³³ It led to an impassioned discussion that started in *Ma'amakim*, an online magazine on literature and art with a religious-Zionist focus. The editor, Rabbi Prof Yehuda Eisenberg, a scholar of education and philosophy, published the image to invite readers to discuss the boundaries of art. According to Eisenberg, the use of holy printed materials to create art is a boundary that should not have been crossed. In other words, from the very outset, the debate did not revolve around the subject or meaning of the work, but rather the use of the Talmudic text in art.
- Later, the discussion continued following the inclusion of an image of the work in a book that became a bestseller in Israel: a commentary to the Mishnah, *Pirkei Avot* (Ethics of the Fathers) by Prof Avigdor Shinan.³⁴ As the photo editor of the book I included an image of *You Shall Walk in Virtuous Ways* as a critical reference to the teachings of the Mishnah in Tractate Avot: 'Do not increase conversation with the woman... From this, the sages said, "Any time that a man increases conversation with the woman, he causes evil to himself and neglects the words of Torah; and, in his end, he inherits *Geihinom* [hell]"' (Mishnah, Avot, 1:5).³⁵ Many of the critical articles published in the press on the book mentioned positively the images of art included in it and the interpretive interaction between them and the text. Conspicuously, all the Orthodox writers who referred to the book condemned the image of Golan's sandal. Some of the criticism was directed against the work itself, while others referred to the inclusion of her picture in a canonical and sacred book.
- Eisenberg initiated the controversy in 2006 when he wrote: 'It reminded me no less of the use [by the Nazis] of Torah scrolls for lampshades and decoration. My position is that there are limits to artistic freedom... Not everything is material for art, and not everything can be turned into a joke.'³⁶ The author invited readers to express an opinion on the question, 'Are there things permitted and forbidden in art, and if so – what are the limits?' The Orthodox poet Yosef Ozer responded and referred to the combination of the sandal, perceived as inferior, with the sacred text. Ozer: 'I saw the work and the immediate visual context was without a doubt to belittle the original principle.'³⁷ He opposed and reviled the work, calling it 'spiritual garbage' and an 'inarticulate artistic act' and concluded by stating, 'This is prostitution. Not love. Not art.' Another writer responded similarly: 'There are clear limits. Using a page of *Gemara* [Talmud text] to construct a woman's shoe is, in my opinion, traversing the boundary of a taboo.'³⁸ These responses did not relate to the meaning of the work but to the materials, particularly and especially to the combination of the sandal, seen as inferior, with a sacred text. On the other hand, the women who responded to the work did not ignore its feminist implications, even when their response was critical. The poet Esther Vitkon wrote,
- The shoe wrapped in a page from the Gemara, its entire purpose is to provoke anger and scandal and to place its creator at the centre of attention. This work was created dishonestly, because of when and

Jewish Women's Studies and Gender Issues 9, 2005, p 8, p 51; Dvora Liss, 'Tsena Ure'ena', *Matronita: Jewish Feminist Art*, catalogue, Mishkan Le'Omanut, Museum of Art, Ein Harod, curators David Sperber and Dvora Liss, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, 2012, p 190; Ben Schachter, *Image, Action, and Idea in Contemporary Jewish Art*, Penn State University Press, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 2017, p 33, p 35

33 David Sperber, 'Kav Ha'mashveh', (The Equator – Jewish Women Artists Use the Jewish World as Raw Material for Creation), *Makor Rishon, Shabbat Supplement for Torah, Contemplation, Literature and Art*, 14 July 2006, p 12 (in Hebrew, author's translation)

34 Avigdor Shinan, *Pirkei Avot: Pirush Israeli Hadash*, (Pirkei Avot: A New Israeli Commentary), Yedioth Ahronoth Books and the Avi Chai Foundation, Jerusalem, 2009 (in Hebrew)

35 Ibid, p 11

36 Yehuda Eisenberg, 'Haim Yesh Le'hatsiv Gevoilot La'omanut?', (Should We Set Limits for Art? Invitation for Controversy), *Ma'amakim: Virtual Journal for Literature and Art*, 2006, http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/ktav_et/maamar.asp?ktavet=1&cid=30 (in Hebrew, author's translation), accessed 15 January 2019

37 Yosef Ozer, 'Al Gevoilot Ha'omanut', (On the Limits of Art: Continuing the Discussion), *Ma'amakim: Virtual Journal for Literature and Art*, 2007, http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/ktav_et/maamar.asp?ktavet=1&cid=241 (in Hebrew, author's translation), accessed 29 October 2019

38 Ron Gera, 'Al Gevoilot Ha'omanut', (On the

where it was created; there are dozens of proper ways to express a feminist or revisionist statement toward sacred texts.³⁹

Similar to Belasco's assertion that the text has a value beyond that of its meaning, Vitkon stressed that even if there is room for feminist criticism of the holy texts, 'the Talmudic text, its sacred symbolic value is far beyond the content contained within it'.⁴⁰ While Belasco saw this as the value of the work, Vitkon argued that it was a defect.

Unusually, Dr Zevulun Boaron referred directly to the feminist critique of the work and, like Eisenberg, he associated it with the Nazis' actions during the Holocaust. His response was published in *Makor Rishon* under the headline, 'Kindling a Strange Fire':⁴¹

I would like to point out that even before I read the article – seeing the image of the show, I immediately associated it with the image of the coat sewn by the Nazis from Torah scrolls... The sacred opening [sentence] of the Mishnah is that 'the woman is sanctified in three ways'. Thanks to this opening, our people have observed and preserved its uniqueness and purpose for two thousand years. When an artist uses this opening sentence as an element of criticism – it is not an art for its own sake, but rather self-hatred and hatred of Jewish heritage, as was formed by the 'enlightened' nations.

The writer linked the various condemnations of the work, that is, the combination of the desecration of the sandal to the text and the actions of the Nazis, and to these, he added a critical reference to the feminist context of the work.

Diverging from the blistering attacks that came mainly from men, other writers reacted positively. The artist Iris Wexler Tamir claimed that the work contained 'a strong statement about the status of women',⁴² and the artist Dr Nurit Tzederboim elaborated and explicated the difference between an object and the representation of an object.⁴³ She described the feminist principles she found in the work:

The shoe, in this case, is no longer a shoe for walking, it is an object and a symbol that describes the woman as an object, as a tempting sexual object. Golan the woman, the creator is referring to herself, about the place where she treads and appropriates and uses different symbols to say what she wants.⁴⁴

Controversies about what appears to be desecration often take place in and beyond the world of art.⁴⁵ A comparison of the response to *You Shall Walk in Virtuous Ways* with the reactions produced by similar works or objects clarifies the distinctiveness of Golan's work and sharpens the understanding of the criticism aimed at it. A dispute surrounding the link between a shoe and a sacred religious name took place in the United States in 1990. Nike had designed a shoe with a logo on the sole that resembled the word *Allah* in Arabic script.⁴⁶ Muslim organisations demanded that Nike remove the shoes from stores. As with Golan's work, the combination of a sacred name and a shoe, which is perceived as an inferior object (more powerfully in this case, since the word



Nechama Golan, *Heil*, 2008, playmobile dolls and epoxy, collection of the artist

Limits of Art: A Second Response), *Ma'amakim: Virtual Journal for Literature and Art*, 2010, http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/ktav_et/maamar.asp?ktavet=1&cid=890 (in Hebrew, author's translation), accessed 29 October 2019

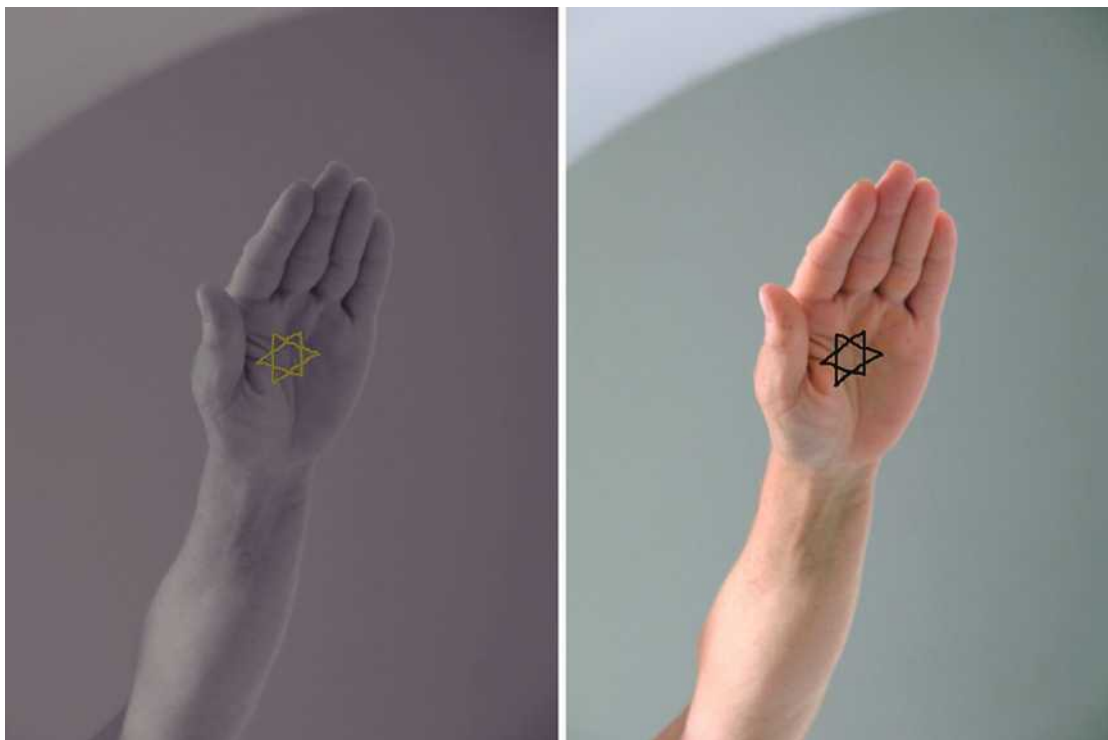
39 Esther Vitkon, 'Al Gevolot Ha'omanut', (On the Limits of Art: A Response to a Response – A Response to the Letter from Iris Vexler Tamir), *Ma'amakim: Virtual Journal for Literature and Art*, 2010, http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/ktav_et/maamar.asp?ktavet=1&cid=889 (in Hebrew, author's translation), accessed 29 October 2019

40 Ibid

was printed on the sole, to be stepped on), led a community to feel that something sacred was being disparaged and mocked. However, the most familiar controversial work in the artworld, in the context of art and religion, is the 1987 work *Immersion (Piss Christ)* by André Serrano. *Immersion* is a glossy Cibachrome print featuring a plastic crucifix surrounded by a reddish-yellow background that creates a sense of ambiguity and mystery. The effect was achieved by photographing the figurine in a glass container filled with urine. *Piss Christ*, the title of the work, is a word game with multiple implications: it can be interpreted as 'Christ is made of piss', 'Christ peeing', or the 'piss of Christ', an echo of 'the blood of Christ', a reference to the sacred blood of Jesus Christ. In 1989, a public storm erupted in response to the work, at the height of which Republican Senator Jesse Helms ripped a photograph of the work during his speech in Congress.⁴⁷ In response, the art critic Lucy Lippard published an article in *Art in America*.⁴⁸ Lippard's 'defence' consists of three parts. She describes the material and formative properties of the work, its content and its context in art history. She argues that the work itself does not appear provocative and could be displayed inside a church. Only the title of the work transforms it into a sign of rebellion by changing the framework in which viewers see and understand it. Serrano uses shock to capture the viewer's attention. The title is



Gil Yefman, *Birkenau Puzzle*, 2014, puzzle, 21 × 29 cm, collection of the artist



Nechama Golan, *Untitled*, 2008, photo, 35 x 45 cm, collection of the artist

41 Zevulun Boaron, 'Havarat Esh Zarah', (Kindling a Strange Fire), *Makor Risbon, Responses*, 29 November 2006, no page number (in Hebrew, author's translation)

42 Iris Wexler Tamir, 'Al Gevolot Ha'omanut', (On Limits in Art: Response to the Article in Volume no. 1), *Ma'amakim: Virtual Journal for Literature and Art*, 2010, http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/ktav_et/maamar.asp?ktavet=1&cid=888 (in Hebrew, author's translation), accessed 29 October 2019

43 Nurit Tzederboim, 'Ha'kankan Uma She'yesh Bo', (You Can't Judge a Book by Its Cover: Continuing the Conversation 'Should There Be Limits to Art'), *Ma'amakim: Virtual Journal for Literature and Art*, 2011, http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/ktav_et/maamar.asp?ktavet=

what made viewers aware of the fact that Serrano used urine. He combined two seemingly unrelated things (crucifixion and urine). Their juxtaposition created an image perceived to be provocative.⁴⁹ Golan, too, connects high and low, holy and profane, but, unlike Serrano, she directly creates the shock without the need for a provocative title.⁵⁰ The shock effect, in the case of both Serrano and Golan, had no impact on the artworld and was not recognised. It was in the religious sphere that both works led to a discussion of the freedom of art and, in the case of Golan, of feminism as well.

Similarly, while the link of Golan's work to the Holocaust was criticised within traditional Orthodox Jewish discourse, the artworld missed it entirely. Religious writers mentioned various objects that the Nazis had created through secondary use of Torah scrolls, and it is the case that the Nazis did use Torah scrolls to manufacture insoles.⁵¹ Indeed, a comprehensive view of Golan's works reveals that many of them have been studied and presented under the rubric of the 'second generation' of Holocaust survivors in Israel. She has often commented that this theme is embedded in her art. At a conference held at the opening of the 'Matronita' exhibition in 2012, the artist referred to the criticism that was levelled at the work and the link made between her work and the actions of the Nazis. She stated, 'They [the critics] were not so wrong.' Like artists in Israel, Europe and the United States, many works by Golan make unconventional and even provocative use of images associated with the Holocaust.⁵² For example, the work *Heil*



Nechama Golan, *Untitled*, 2003, photo, 20 × 20 cm, collection of the artist



Nechama Golan, *Genizah*, 2003, photo, clay and books, collection of the artist

1&cid=1064 (in Hebrew, author's translation), accessed 29 October 2019

44 Ibid, author's translation

45 See Anne-Marie Korte, 'Blasphemous Feminist Art: Incarnate Politics of Identity in Postsecular Perspective', in Rosi Braidotti, Bolette Blaagaard, Tobijn de Graauw and Eva Midden, eds, *Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere*, Palgrave Politics of Identity and Citizenship Series, Palgrave Macmillan, London, 2014, pp 228–248

46 Ibid

47 See for example Kathleen Massara, 'PISS CHRIST: Andres Serrano's Iconic Work On View At Edward Tyler Nahem Gallery', *The Huffington Post*, 25 September 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/25/piss-christ-andres-serrano_n_1909911.html, accessed 29 October 2019

48 Lucy R Lippard, 'Andres Serrano: The Spirit and the Letter', *Art in America* 78, 1990, pp 238–245

49 The cultural philosopher Bruno Latour has coined the term 'iconoclash' to address these situations. See Bruno Latour, 'What is Iconoclash? Or is there a World Beyond the Image Wars?', in Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel, eds, *Iconoclash: Beyond the Image Wars in Science, Religion, and Art*, ZKM and The MIT Press, Karlsruhe, 2002, pp 14–37.

50 'Shock art' is the designation for these types of works. See Robert Rawdon Wilson, *The Hydra's Tale: Imagining Disgust*, University of Alberta Press, Edmonton, 2002, pp 27–28

51 Insoles made from vellum from Torah scrolls were found in the shoes of a Nazi officer in Italy during World War II. These are found in the collection donated by Isaiah Taub of

(2008, from the Holocaust File series) is an image of a row of German-manufactured Playmobil toy figures whose hands are raised in the Nazi salute. Golan's use of children's games in connection to the Holocaust corresponds to the work of a concentration camp constructed of Lego (*Lego Obóz Koncentracyjny*, 1990) by Polish artist Zbigniew Libera and with the work *Birkenau Puzzle* (2014) by the Israeli artist Gil Yefman. Another work by Golan depicts upraised hands waving, and crowned by a Star of David, which was shown in the exhibition 'Strata of Memory: Israeli Artists Second Generation of the Holocaust' at the Zaritsky Artists' House in Tel Aviv in 2008,⁵³ and recalls the famous 2007 *Ave Maria* of Maurizio Cattelan.⁵⁴ Like the shock effect created by the combination of the sandal and the sacred text, the link between the work *You Shall Walk in Virtuous Ways* and the Holocaust was revealed and identified by the conservative Jewish religious world, not the artworld

Genizah: Tempered Radicalism and Orthodox Jewish Feminism

Another critique of Golan's piece highlights the theological basis for its rejection by the Orthodox Jewish world and the rift between the conservative orthodox Jewish community and the ideals that led to the creation of the work. Golan is undeniably criticising the text, but she is committed to and preserves its sanctity. Itzhak Tesler published a critique of the piece on the NRG Israeli news site, claiming that it has a distinctly secular dimension.⁵⁵ Like other writers, Tesler applauds the inclusion of contemporary art in Shinan's book as a way to 'build a bridge between secular and religious [Jews]'.⁵⁶ Tesler explains, 'In this case, the bridge was built by including dozens of works of contemporary Israeli art alongside the annotated text,'⁵⁷ and ties in a reference to Golan's work: 'In conjunction with the Mishnah in which Yossi ben Yochanan recommends that men refrain from overlong conversation with their wives,⁵⁸ there is a work of art by Nechama Golan, who designed a woman's shoe with a real page of Gemara,⁵⁹ on which [features] the loaded sentence "The woman is acquired in three ways".' In the final paragraph, his enthusiasm for art in a religious book is replaced by criticism:

It is important to emphasise that while this book requires an intellectual effort for most secular Jews that draws them into the religious world, for most religious Jews this is a giant step towards the secular world, where a page of Gemara, whose holiness requires it be buried in a cemetery [after it is worn out], but instead of being buried this holy page is cut and torn into pieces to realise the artistic vision of Nechama Golan.⁶⁰

Tesler, no doubt, correctly assessed the problematic nature of the work for the conservative Orthodox Jewish world. Nonetheless, he is incorrect: the underlying concepts in Golan's piece do not fall neatly into the dichotomous factions of defiant secularism and an established religiosity. Belasco emphasised the distinction between values that contemporary artists attribute to the materiality of the text – a concept

Australia to the Yad Vashem Museum in Jerusalem.

- 52 Works such as these were shown at the exhibition 'Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art', the Jewish Museum, New York, 2002, curator Norman Kleeblatt.
- 53 Curators Batya Brutin and Irit Levin
- 54 Collection of the Perrotin Galerie
- 55 Itzhak Tesler, 'Gesher Ha'halaka: Pirush H'adash Le'Pirkei Avot', (Bridge of Jewish Law: A New Commentary on Pirkei Avot), NRG, Judaism, 22 June 2009, <http://www.nrg.co.il/online/1/ART1/906/841.html> (in Hebrew), accessed 29 October 2019
- 56 Ibid, author's translation
- 57 Ibid
- 58 In fact, the Mishnah itself advises against long conversations with any woman: 'It is written, "your wife", all the more so the wife of a friend.'
- 59 In fact, it is not a real page of Gemara, but rather a photocopy.
- 60 Tesler, 'Gesher Ha'halaka', op cit, author's translation
- 61 Ibid
- 62 Margolis, 'A Challenging Grittiness', op cit, p 173
- 63 Irshai and Zion Waldoks, 'Modern-Orthodox Feminism in Israel', op cit, pp 247, n 21
- 64 Ibid
- 65 Debra E Meyerson and Maureen A Scully, 'Tempered Radicalism and the Politics of Ambivalence and Change', *Organization Science*, vol 6, no 5, 1995, pp 585–600; Debra E Meyerson, *Tempered Radicals: How People Use Difference to Inspire Change at Work*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, 2001
- 66 Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, *Women's Spiritual*

shared by them and the religious world – and connection with the text's meaning. This view, expressed in the Halakhic world as the obligation to preserve worn-out sacred texts (genizah), is precisely what Tesler criticises: 'Instead of being saved, this sacred page was cut and torn to pieces.'⁶¹ Golan's work indeed criticises and undermines the patriarchal values expressed by the sacred text (the acquisition of the woman in the act of marriage) but simultaneously emphasises its sanctity as the word 'genizah' is stamped on photographs of this and many other of Golan's works. Moreover, Golan has stated that she will never merchandise any of her works containing Jewish religious texts because of their sacredness:

You are not even allowed to shade your face with a copy of the Pentateuch, because that would be using it as a tool. Art, for me, is a kind of compulsion; I realize that. But as a sign of respect, I don't offer [these works] for sale, and I put [them] in a geniza.⁶²

The meaning of the word 'genizah' imprinted on a feminist, critical and defiant work dealing with a sacred text is intensified when it is analysed in view of Jewish feminist thought on religious texts. Whereas Christian feminist thinkers who emerged from the Catholic world and were active in the United States in the 1970s were divided between those who sought to fix the religion and those who sought to disconnect from church institutions and found a new religion of sorts based on feminine spirituality, in the various religious branches of Jewish feminism, there was almost never a demand to permanently split from tradition, and nor was there a dominant call to establish a post-Judaic religion.⁶³ Jewish theologians dealt with criticism of the Jewish rituals and texts through acts of interpretation and the reclaiming of elements from within Jewish tradition, which they viewed as feminine. Despite these feminist thinkers' critique of the tradition, they never sought to disengage from it, but chose instead to criticise it in order to reinvent it.⁶⁴ It is, therefore, imperative to see Golan's work within the framework that subverts the dichotomy between feminism and religion; the stamp 'genizah' on the images of the sandal is an act that places the work in the theological space of *tempered radicalism* and *devoted resistance*.

Ronit Irshai and Tanya Zion Waldoks, scholars of Jewish Orthodox feminism, have used these terms to describe Jewish Orthodox feminist praxis. The term 'tempered radicalism' was originally coined by Debra Meyerson and Maureen Scully, who used it in a political context with regard to organisational changes in the workplace.⁶⁵ Tempered radicalism comprises a built-in contradiction in that it calls for radical change but within the framework of the accepted rules. This term has been used in social science study in the context of feminist activism among religious societies, for example with regard to the place of black women in their churches.⁶⁶ Irshai and Zion Waldoks use it to characterise feminists in the Orthodox Jewish sector whose feminism is radical in its gender criticism and subversive in its demand for equality in the religious sphere, but at the same time tempered by being deeply rooted in Orthodox society and committed to Jewish tradition and the Halakhic framework.⁶⁷ Moreover, according to Zion Waldoks, the political agency of

- Leadership in Africa: Tempered Radicals and Critical Servant Leaders*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 2010; Faith Wambura Ngunjiri, et al, 'Tempered Radicals: Black Women's Leadership in the Church and Community', *Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol 5, no 2, 2012, pp 84–109
- 67 Irshai and Zion Waldoks, 'Modern-Orthodox Feminism in Israel', op cit, p 237
- 68 Tanya Zion Waldoks, 'Politics of Devoted Resistance: Agency, Feminism, and Religion among Orthodox Agunah Activists in Israel', *Gender & Society*, vol 29, no 1, 2015 pp 73–97
- 69 Tova Hartman and Charlie Buckholtz, *Are You Not a Man of God? Devotion, Betrayal, and Social Criticism in Jewish Tradition*, Oxford University Press, New York, 2014
- 70 Yoske Ahituv, 'Yad Aḥim Lakem Shelooka', (A Brotherly Hand is Stretched Out to You: Our Place and Our Challenge in Bnei Akiva), *YouTube*, 21 September 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=prVMaM-HLE0> (in Hebrew), accessed 29 October 2019
- 71 Ibid, author's translation
- 72 Nissim Mizrahi, 'Sociology in the Garden: Beyond the Liberal Grammar of Contemporary Sociology', *Israel Studies Review*, vol 31, no 1, 2017, pp 36–65
- 73 Margolis, 'A Challenging Grittiness', op cit, 173
- 74 Tsipora Luria, 'Likrat "Tsofia" shel Nechama Golan', (Before 'Tsofia' of Nechama Golan), text for the exhibition 'Tsofia: Bamakom Sheani Omedet', (Tsofia: The Place I am Standing), 2003, Beit Uri and Rami Nehushtan Museum, Kibbutz Ashdot

religious feminist activists is realised by penetrating the public space in acts of what she describes as devoted resistance.⁶⁸ Tova Hartman and Charlie Buckholz coined this term to describe criticism within a relationship. This criticism does not break from religion or the commitment to it, but is, rather, shaped by it.⁶⁹ Devoted resistance is characterised by wanting to voice criticism precisely in the name of the culture within which it acts, not against it.

In a broader context, Yoske Ahituv, who has studied religious Zionism in Israel, noted that religious revolutions are not usually initiated by breaking existing frameworks and systems and replacing them with new ones, but by empowering one value (or a set of values) from within the existing religious system and placing it at the forefront of the society's values.⁷⁰ Ahituv explains: 'Once this is done, immediately, all the coordinates change, and the existing traditional values change their position. As a result, the face of the traditional religious system can sometimes change dramatically, beyond recognition, even though it adapts itself to a rhetoric of authenticity.'⁷¹ Indeed, the sociologist Nissim Mizrahi emphasises that a liberal social change assumes a break with the past, which means breaking old social frameworks and suppressing traditions in order to create a new world. On the other hand, change in religious communities is supported by continuity with, and attachment to, the past, and relies on the tradition as a source to justify normative change in the present.⁷² Similarly, Golan critiques the text from a feminist point of view, but she also underlines its sanctity by stamping genizah on photographs of the work. Although the work publicly criticises the content of the text, it does not abandon it. The artist stresses its sanctity while she critiques in the name of, and not against, the system in which she operates. Indeed, Golan accentuates her longing 'to live' with the text but is unable to suppress the difficulty in doing so within her feminist world. 'I do not see religion as a phenomenon that only limits women. There are two sides to my work: I put these "binding" texts from the religious world in the show, but I wish to accept them and make them part of me.'⁷³

The religious Israeli art critic Tsipora Luria summarised this duality in a list she wrote in 2003 but never published. Luria stressed that on the one hand, 'Nechama Golan is a protest artist. She relentlessly tackles a central theme, the image of the woman and space for her to exist in the male world, or, more specifically – in the male world of Jewish tradition.'⁷⁴ On the other hand, she underscores that 'what might be superficially interpreted as insolent, provocative and impertinent – at its heart aspires to be part of a demanding and determined process pursuing ways to connect, with complete devotion, to servants of God'.⁷⁵ This reading sharpens the gap between the feminist theological space, in which the artist works, and the way in which the conservative religious Jewish world reads the work. This gap is the foundation for the work's rejection by the conservative religious Jewish world. Golan's *sandal* operates in the symbolic space of the religious Jewish world and criticises it from a feminist perspective. Despite Tesler, who considered the work 'a giant step towards the secular world', Jewish feminist discourse on its duality (on the one hand, appropriation of the patriarchal text, and, on the other hand, a critical appraisal of it) perceives it as a religious act. While Tesler saw the work as an expression of the purest secularism,

Yaakov Meuhad, Israel. Curator: Ruth Shadmon, 22 January 2003. The text was not published. A digital copy is available in Nechama Golan's archive (in Hebrew, author's translation).

75 Ibid

76 Raḥamim Melamed Cohen, 'Tiferet Avot', (The Glory of the Fathers), *Makor Rishon, Shabbat Supplement for Torah, Contemplation, Literature and Art*, 1 July 2009, <https://bit.ly/2LhyWrZ> (in Hebrew, author's translation), accessed 29 October 2019

77 Irshai and Zion Waldoks, 'Modern-Orthodox Feminism in Israel', op cit, pp 256–258; Ronit Irshai, 'Religion and Morality: Akeidah Theology and Cumulative Revelation as Contradictory Theologies in Jewish Modern-Orthodox Feminism', *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, vol 16, no 2, 2017, pp 219–235

78 Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective*, Harper Collins, New York, 1990, pp 25–74; Daphne Hampson, *After Christianity*, SCM Press, London, 1996, pp 119–168

79 For example, see Blu Greenberg, *On Women and Judaism: A View from Tradition*, Trinity Press, Philadelphia, 1981, pp 143

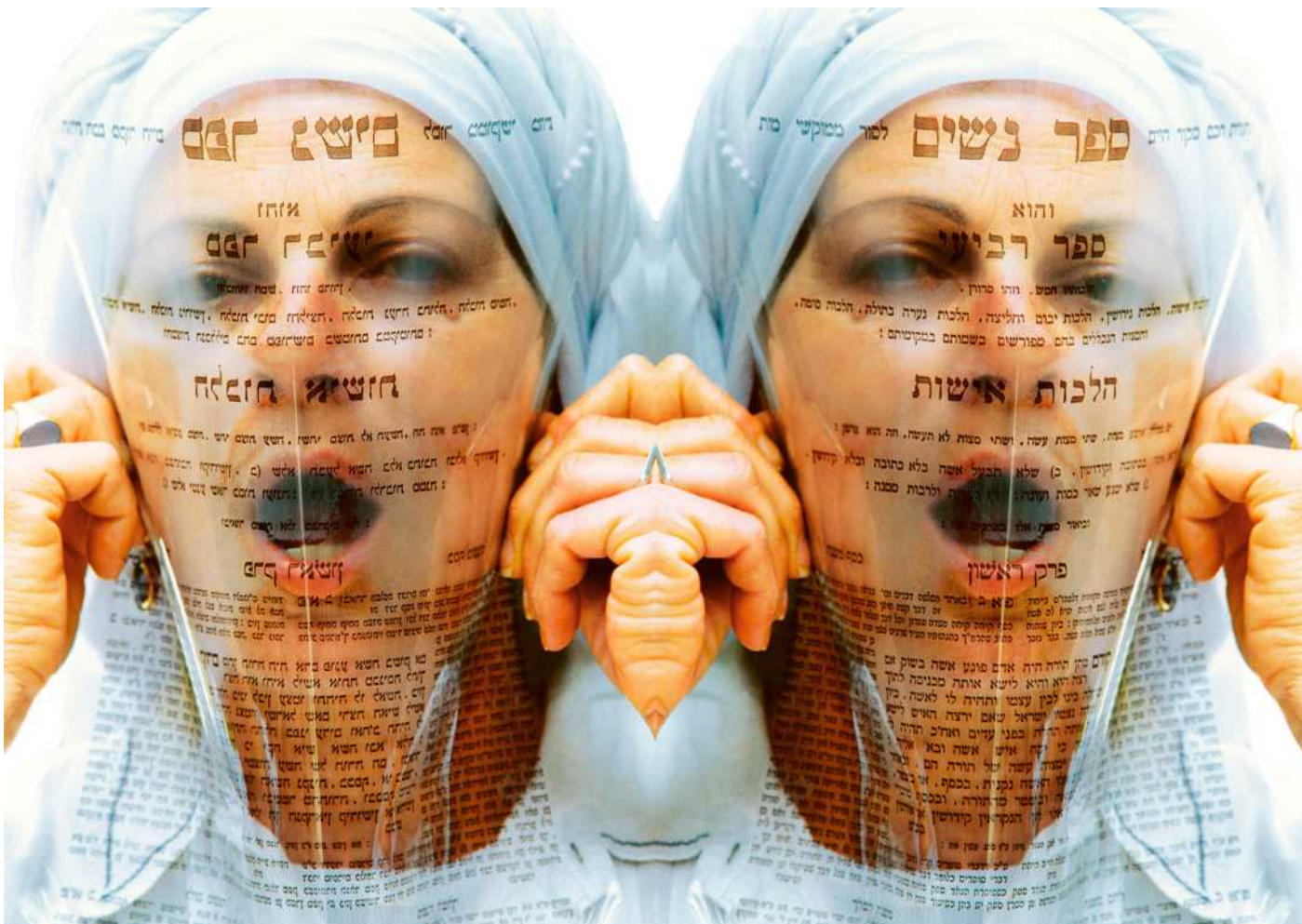
80 For more on ambivalence and criticism as a central theme in feminist theology, see Mary Farrell Bednarowski, *The Religious Imagination of American Women*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, Indiana, 1999, pp 17–43.

an assessment that considers religious feminist strategies and theology offers an alternative perspective.

A review of another critique of the symbolic sphere in which the work functions clarifies the extent to which, from a Jewish religious feminist perspective, Golan's critical work can be seen as a genuine religious act. In 2009, Raḥamim Melamed Cohen reviewed Shinan's book where, as mentioned above, an image of Golan's sandal appeared. The following criticism was published in the *Makor Rishon* newspaper:

A focus on the book shows illustrations were chosen with intelligence, wisdom and knowledge, all created by artists, all created by Jews, all getting to the crux of the matter... However, it would have been preferable if the illustration of the shoe wrapped in photocopied pages of Tractate Kiddushin (p. 11) had not been printed at all. Now that it has been printed, there is nothing for us to do but regret because it comprises defiance and protest, which is not appropriate for a holy book.⁷⁶

While most religious critics criticised the work itself, Melamed Cohen only criticises the inclusion of the work in a sacred book. He argues that the work should not be included in a holy book because it exudes 'defiance and protest'. In other words, he does not accept the assumption that criticism may itself be a religious act and disagrees with the theological paradigms underlying tempered radicalism and devoted resistance. Moreover, Irshai and Zion Waldoks have shown how anti-feminist Jewish religious discourse presents the *Akeida* paradigm (based on the biblical *akeidat Yitzchak*, or 'binding of Isaac', Genesis 22: 1–19) as the only desirable form of religious consciousness, one where people must subordinate their personal desires, insights and aspirations to the Divine Supreme will: the acceptance of this burden is what defines someone as religious. They argue that the *Akeida* paradigm serves as a rhetorical tool to undermine the religious commitment of Jewish feminist women.⁷⁷ Following other thinkers, Irshai and Zion Waldoks point out that other religious models can be used in contrast to the *Akeida* model, such as the story of 'Sodom and Gomorrah', in which Abraham confronts God and exclaims, 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?' (Genesis 18: 25). A major feminist criticism of Christian and Jewish theologies addresses these different models with a preference, from a feminist perspective, for the critical model (the 'Sodom and Gomorrah' model) to the 'Binding of Isaac' model (the *Akeida* model).⁷⁸ Accordingly, Orthodox Jewish feminist discourse, even when it criticises the religious world, views a move towards gender equality in Judaism as a trend that links feminism to Judaism through a process in which tradition organically develops, not as disengagement from it.⁷⁹ While Cohen believes that defiance and protest are 'not appropriate for a holy book', and thus defines the criticism he finds in the work as anti-religious, feminist Orthodox Jewish discourse holds that defiance and protest are suitable for a book focused on the sacred.⁸⁰ Cohen relies on the coercive model and rejects feminist criticism as inconsistent with religious devotion, but Golan, supported by the critical model, expresses her position in the name of her religion and culture. The theo-



Nechama Golan, *Sefer Nashim* (Women's Book), 2000, photo, 63 × 83 cm, collection of the artist

logical gap between Golan and her Orthodox critics explains the conservative religious Jewish rejection of the work.

Challenging Patriarchy: Radical Art in the Jewish Orthodox World

After deploying the concepts of tempered radicalism and devoted resistance in order to examine the reception of *You Shall Walk in Virtuous Ways*, I propose reading it in another, perhaps more profound way: as a radical piece that does not align even with accepted practices in Orthodox Jewish feminist discourse. Like many works, Golan's art does not simply duplicate practices of resistance or political strategy. In fact, she offers a more direct and detached position than is the norm in Orthodox Jewish feminist discourse. Golan uses materials that allow her to articulate a view that should not be verbalised in Jewish religious spaces. Rachel Gordin, a scholar of Judaism and gender, offers a Bourdieusian analysis of Orthodox Jewish feminism. She points out that women who seek to challenge Orthodox Judaism often use conservative rhetoric that accepts the seemingly closed, autonomous and unhistorical nature of Jewish law. These modes of phrasing were referred to by the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu as *habitus*.⁸¹ According to Bourdieusian analysis, in order for feminist activists to operate within Orthodox Jewish discourse and change it, they must repeatedly prove their loyalty to its fundamental principles and to the religious interpretive community.⁸² Similarly, Zehavit Gross proposes the *challenging patriarchy* model as a unique system for Orthodox Jewish feminism in Israel. Gross identifies the activism of Israeli Orthodox feminist women as being a revolutionary act within the religious system, one which continues to adhere to the boundaries of the discourse of that system and strives for legitimacy within it, that is within the mainstream Orthodox Jewish world. Consequently, although they challenge patriarchy, such feminists have (at least tacit) legitimacy and are not denounced.⁸³ Moreover, Susan Sered, a scholar of religious feminism, has shown how struggles for change by Israeli religious Jewish feminist women have faced opposition when the public perceives them as challenging the religious system. Therefore, she says, Jewish religious feminist women activists in Israel use secular political discourse to present their struggle in a way that does not threaten the religious system and is not deemed by the public as a rebellion against the symbolic religious order.⁸⁴ Irshai similarly points out that Orthodox Jewish feminist criticism encounters fierce rabbinical opposition that portrays it as unconnected or diverging from tradition. When, however, Orthodox Jewish feminist critique can be read as the continuity of tradition, it generally does not face any direct rabbinical opposition.⁸⁵ Golan does not align herself with the challenging patriarchy model and its like. She operates directly within the symbolic religious space and her critics view and denounce her work as blasphemous. Orthodox feminist women strive to act within the hegemonic entity and to gain legitimacy from the patriarchal system, but Golan's work openly defies and challenges the symbolic order of

81 Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, Richard Nice, trans, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1990, p 53

82 Rachel Gordin, 'The Entrance of Women as Partners into the Field of Halachic Discourse: Sociological and Cultural Aspects', doctoral dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 2005, p 29 (in Hebrew)

83 Zehavit Gross, 'Shlavim Be'hitpathut Ha'siah Ha'feministi – Me'ayin Ve'le'an? Manhigut Nashit Ruhanit: Erev Likvoda shel Prof Alice Shalvi', (Stages in the Development of the Feminist Discourse – Where Have We Come from and Where Are We Headed? Spiritual Women's Leadership: An Evening in Honour of Alice Shalvi), Schocken Institute, Jerusalem, 23 February 2015, *YouTube*, 14 Mar 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9YrJM8q0f0> (in Hebrew, author's translation), accessed 29 October 2019

84 Susan S Sered, 'Women and Religious Change in Israel: Rebellion or Revolution', *Sociology of Religion*, vol 58, no 1, 1997, pp 1–2

85 Ronit Irshai, "'And I Find a Wife More Bitter Than Death" (Ecc 7:26): Feminist Hermeneutics, Women's Midrashim, and the Boundaries of Acceptance in Modern Orthodox Judaism', *Feminist Studies in Religion*, vol 33, no 1, 2017, pp 69–83

the Orthodox Jewish world. Golan operates in two different spaces. Although she directs her work to the artworld, which permits her radical actions, actions that do not even conform to the accepted order and practices of Orthodox Jewish feminism (not to mention the conservative religious Jewish world), her work essentially launches a discussion primarily within the Orthodox Jewish world. Thus, although her acts can be read as a reference to Orthodox Jewish feminist practices, they are much more direct than is considered acceptable in that world.

Golan's explicit subversion does not try to camouflage itself or seek legitimacy from the patriarchy, as is customary in the Orthodox feminist world. Her works are denounced in the conservative religious world. Her *Book of Women*, from 2000, which combines images with text, was rejected by Orthodox art teachers and can serve to underscore this dynamic. Like numerous feminist artists, Golan incorporates her own body into her work and documents them photographically.⁸⁶ *Book of Women* is a photocopy of the primary text for the laws of marriage in the *Mishneh Torah* (Codex of Jewish Law) by Maimonides (compiled between 1170 and 1180 CE). As in the sandal work, here too the text addresses marital law. It opens with a prohibition on sexual relations without a *ketubah* (marriage contract) or *kiddushin* (marriage ceremony) and, once again, defines marriage as an acquisition.⁸⁷ An image of the hair-covered head of the artist appears twice in a sort of diptych, with the page of text projected on and covering her face. In one image the text faces the viewer, while in the other the text faces the artist. The white headdress and the cover of the face, reminiscent of a bride's *hinuma* (bride's veil), connect the image to the marriage ceremony. The artist, mouth open, looks as though she is being suffocated by the text, which is obstructing her voice. Part of the text being legible, part concealed by the lines and curves of her face, even when it is hard to read it thus constitutes a tactile canvas.⁸⁸ This is one more work in a tradition of countless works by feminist artists who depict the woman as 'trapped',⁸⁹ and which reference the Jewish, Arab and Muslim women artists who deal with the covering up of women and the conflation of sacred texts and the female body.⁹⁰

The Book of Women has been shown in several solo exhibitions, as well as in the 'Matronita' group exhibition. The work has been discussed in scholarly texts on Golan's works and is featured in art studies programmes offered in Israeli high schools. A question about the work was even included on the 2007 matriculation examination for the academic art track. However, as Zipi Mizrachi, the first art instructor for the Ministry of Education for the religious sector, points out, most of the Orthodox teachers teaching in the track choose not to show the work because of what they believe is its harsh and blasphemous criticism.⁹¹ Furthermore, Mizrachi says, the leading network of religious high schools for girls, *Tzvia*, has explicitly forbidden any of its teachers from teaching or even showing the work, even though it appears in the approved curriculum for the schools in the Israeli state religious education system. As this makes clear, Golan does not camouflage her critiques, as is common in Orthodox Jewish feminism, and her works are perceived by the

86 Margolis, 'A Challenging Grittiness', op cit, p 170. On feminist performance artists who incorporate their own body into their work see Jeanie Forte, 'Women's Performance Art: Feminism and Postmodernism', *Theatre Journal*, vol 40, no 2, 1988, pp 217–235; Josephine Withers, 'Feminist Performance Art: Performing, Discovering, Transforming Ourselves', in Norma Broude and Mary Garrard, eds, *The Power of Feminist Art: The American Movement of the 1970s, History and Impact*, Harry Abrams, New York, 1994, pp 158–173; Tal Dekel, *Gendered: Art and Feminist Theory*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, Newcastle upon Tyne, 2013, p 51

87 Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Book of Women, Marital Law*, 1: 1

88 Dekel, *Gendered*, op cit, pp 176–177

89 For example, see Lucia Pesapane and Camille Morineau, *Women House*, catalogue, Monnaie de Paris and National Museum of Women in the Arts, Washington DC, curators Lucia Pesapane and Camille Morineau, Barcelona, 2017, pp 25–27, pp 67–97

90 For example, see Paul Sloman, *Contemporary Art in the Middle East*, Black Dog Publishing, London, 2009, pp 74–79

91 Telephone conversation, 28 June 2015

- 92 Eleanor Heartney, *Postmodern Heretics: The Catholic Imagination in Contemporary Art*, Midmarch Arts Press, New York, 2004, pp 134–170; Eleanor Heartney, 'Thinking Through the Body: Women Artists and the Catholic Imagination', *Hyppatia*, vol 18, no 4, 2003, pp 3–22
- 93 Gannit Ankori, *Palestinian Art*, Reaktion Books, London, 2006, pp 176–219; Gannit Ankori, 'Re-Visioning Faith: Christian and Muslim Allusions in Contemporary Palestinian Art', *Third Text* 80/81, vol 20, no 3/4, May/July 2006, p 390
- 94 Guilat, 'Gender, Ritual and Video Art', op cit, p 595
- 95 Tal Dekel, 'Welcome Home? Israeli-Ethiopian Women Artists and Questions of Citizenship and Belonging', *Third Text* 135/136, vol 29, no 4/5, July/September 2015, pp 310–325
- 96 See David Sperber, 'Contemporary Orthodox Jewish Feminist Art in Israel: Institutional Criticism of the Rabbinical Establishment', *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, Special Issue: The Feminist Art of Religious Women, vol 38 no 2, 2020, pp 191–228
- 97 See Andrea Fraser, 'From the Critique of Institutions to an Institution of Critique', *Artforum*, vol 44, no 1, 2005, p 105; Angela Dimitrakaki, 'Labour, Ethics, Sex and Capital: On Biopolitical Production in Contemporary Art', *n. paradoxa* 28, 2011, pp 5–15
- 98 David Sperber, 'Feminist Art in the Sphere of Traditional and Religious Judaism', *Matronita*, op cit, p 164–144 (reverse pagination)
- 99 See N'Goné Fall, 'Providing a Space of Freedom: Women Artists from Africa', *Global Feminisms*:

conservative religious world as being sacrilegious and are thereby rejected.

Conclusion

You Shall Walk in Virtuous Ways criticises the Jewish religious text even while it acts in the symbolic space of the religious Jewish world that ascribes holiness to that text. My findings regarding the nature of the criticism offered by Golan is consistent with the claims of various scholars who have addressed the relationship between women's art and religion. Art critic Eleanor Heartney has investigated depictions of the Catholic image of the Virgin Mary in the art of American women artists at the end of the twentieth century;⁹² art historian Gannit Ankori has studied the works of Palestinian artists who interact with their traditional environment (Christian or Muslim);⁹³ Israel-based scholar of visual culture Yael Guilat has discussed video art by secular and traditional Israeli artists who explore the Halakhic approach to gender issues;⁹⁴ and Tal Dekel has examined the works of Ethiopian women artists in Israel who criticise the rabbinical institution while seeking to foster a sense of communal belonging for themselves and their community.⁹⁵ Through their respective fields, these scholars have shown that contemporary women artists in various geographical and cultural spheres do not reject their culture, but rather affirm it by challenging the oppressive patriarchal dictation that excludes them as women. Indeed, many contemporary religious feminist women artists voice their criticism in the name of their religion and their culture.⁹⁶ In this common practice, the field of religious Jewish feminist art connects to a familiar strategy of contemporary feminist artists who are engaged in an institutional critique and express their criticism in the name of, not against, the very institutions they critique.⁹⁷

Critical feminist Jewish art serves as a subversive workshop for the persistent scrutiny of tradition; it subverts its regimenting constructions in an attempt to reform it.⁹⁸ Moreover, artwork created in traditional cultures often facilitates the visibility of subjects that are omitted in the dominant discourse of these societies.⁹⁹ Various scholars have noted that in the Jewish Orthodox world in Israel, art, literature, poetry and cinema, often deal with taboo subjects and lend them visibility.¹⁰⁰ For instance, the scholar of Jewish thought Dov Schwartz claims that in the Israeli Modern Orthodox world, the exploration of sexuality and the body in different cultural and creative fields has allowed religious discourses on these subjects to evolve.¹⁰¹ Schwartz argues that art and Halakhic rulings are linked; he supports this by referencing Halakhic discussions about LGBT individuals after they appeared in novels by Orthodox authors.¹⁰² Valeria Seigelshifer also found that films by religious women directors in Israel were significant in initiating the process of changing the discourse on sexuality in Israeli religious society, which is now undergoing a revolution around the issue.¹⁰³ In the same way, although *You Shall Walk in Virtuous Ways* can be read in line with the subversive perceptions and practices typical of Orthodox Jewish feminism, the work also tests these very perceptions and practices.

New Directions in Contemporary Art, catalogue, Brooklyn Museum, curators Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin, Brooklyn Museum, New York, and Merrell, London, 2007, pp 71–78

- 100 See, for instance, Orit Avishai, 'Imagining "The Orthodox"' in Emuna Elon's Heaven Rejoices: Voyeuristic, Reformist, and Pedagogical Orthodox Artistic Expression', *Israel Studies*, vol 12, no 2, 2007, p 51; Tali Berner, 'Religious Feminism: Origins and Directions', *Matronita*, op cit, p 166; David Sperber, 'Body and Sexuality in the Work of Modern-Orthodox Women Artists in Israel', *Journal of Culture and Religion*, vol 1, no 1, 2015, pp 17–39; David Sperber, 'The Vagina and De Facto Feminism in the Artwork of Na'ama Snitkoff-Lotan', *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, vol 13, no 1, 2017, pp 143–153
- 101 Dov Schwartz, 'Kitsur Toldot Ha'miniyut Ba'tsiyonut Ha'datit', (A Short History of Sexuality in Religious Zionism: Following Yakir Englander and Avi Sagi's 'Body and Sexuality in New Zionist-Religious Discourse, Opinion article), *Akdamot* 29, 2014, pp 177–181 (in Hebrew)
- 102 Ibid, p 177
- 103 Valeria Seigelshifer, 'Orthodox Women filmmakers: The Art of Filming Belonging and Cultural Resistance', doctoral dissertation, Bar-Ilan University, Ramt Gan, 2019, pp 197–198, p 202; Valeria Seigelshifer and Tova Hartman, 'Staying and Critiquing: Israeli Orthodox Women Filmmakers', *Israel Studies Review*, vol 34, no 1, 2019 pp 110–130
- 104 See Arthur Danto, 'The Artworld', *Journal of*

Golan's critical approach is more radical than what is customary in Jewish Orthodox thought and activism. It therefore seems appropriate to offer some explanation for this. Since the 1960s, art scholarship has proposed institutional theories that examine art as an object within an institutional framework characterised by a set of internal rules and driven by certain 'agents'.¹⁰⁴ In this manner, Bourdieu developed concepts relating to the dynamics of the art field, its laws, structure and logic, and addressed the ideological and status-related aspects of defining art. Bourdieu found that innovation and rebellion are the primary producers of value in the art fields.¹⁰⁵ In the same way, Israeli art theoretician Sara Chinski insisted that the term 'rebellion' was the main pillar of early art discourse in Israel.¹⁰⁶ Curator Tami Katz Freiman notes the critical tendency of Israeli artists who dealt with Judaism as a subject in the 1990s:

It seems that nostalgic, yearning attitudes toward tradition are totally non-existent in Israeli art of the nineties. If there appear, from time to time, symbols originating in Jewish tradition or the Bible, it is always from a critical perspective, rather than a consecrating or nostalgic one.¹⁰⁷

Israeli art historian Dalia Manor also points to Israeli art writers' common use of terms such as contradiction, confrontation, revolution, avant-garde and rebellion, emphasising that these are not necessarily accurate descriptions of artistic activity in Israel. According to Manor, the use of these terms attests to writing that is steeped in modernist ideology, and an attempt to anchor artistic trends in Israel within the progressive narrative of the West.¹⁰⁸ Though Chinski and Manor criticise this approach, it seems that this institutional perspective is what encourages artists like Golan to generate subversive and critical work, and is undoubtedly what allows such voices to be heard. The fact that this is so underlines the significance of the artworld, which serves as a hub of subversiveness and creates a school of cultural criticism, giving a platform to voices absent from the hegemonic religious discourse. By studying the reception of Golan's work within different cultural spheres, I have demonstrated how its meanings are revealed. I have shown how it operates as socially engaged art, art which reaches beyond the walls of the museum, penetrating the patriarchal space and directly challenging its structures.

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- 105 Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Metamorphosis of Tastes', in Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, Richard Nice, trans, Sage, London, 1993, pp 108–116
- 106 Sara Chinski, *Kingdom of the Meek: The Social Grammar of the Israeli Art Field*, Ha'kibbutz Ha'meuḥad, Tel Aviv, 2015, p 39 (in Hebrew). See more Chinski, 'Silence of the Fish: The Local versus the Universal in the Israeli Discourse on Art', *Teoria U'bikoret* (Theory and Criticism) 4, 1993, pp 105–122 (in Hebrew); Chinski, 'Eyes Wide Shut: The Acquired Albino Syndrome of the Israeli Art Field', *Teoria U'bikoret* (Theory and Criticism) 20, 2002, pp 57–86 (in Hebrew)
- 107 Tami Katz Freiman, 'A Matter of Distance', *Desert Cliché: Israel Now – Local Images* (catalogue, Arad Museum, Israel; Mishkan Le'Omanut, Museum of Art, Ein Harod, Israel; Herzliya Museum of Art, Israel; Baas Museum of Art, Miami Beach, Florida; Grey Art Gallery & Study Center of New York University, New York City), curators Tami Katz Freiman and Amy Cappellazzo, Tel Aviv, 1996, p 13
- 108 Dalia Manor, 'Pride and Prejudice, or: Frequently-found Models in the Historiography of Israeli Art', *Protocols: History and Theory* 1, 2005, <http://journal.bezalel.ac.il/he/protocol/article/2688> (in Hebrew), accessed 29 October 2019