

## STIRRING VOICES from an ANCIENT LAND

By Ursula Ilse-Neuman

**In** the burgeoning world of international art jewelry, beset by both lookalikes and provocateurs boldly competing for attention, the authenticity and directness of Israel's art jewelry has consistently set it apart. Yet I only fully appreciated what makes this country's work exceptional after having the opportunity to live there for the past two years. This experience provided vital insights into the deeply felt political, social, and individual convictions of its jewelry artists, who translate their humanity into impassioned works that achieve far-reaching resonance.

Contemporary Israeli jewelry is infused with the historic significance of a land held sacred by three major religions. This fact is also, quite tragically, at the heart of the conflict and enduring passions that affect all levels of society, even as bridges are being attempted to unite people in the search for a common future.

Subject to winds of change, Israel's multicultural and multiethnic society weaves together people of different ancestries, cultures, and languages to create a rich human tapestry, as generations-old communities welcome uprooted immigrants striving to integrate into a new country and a new society. I am constantly reminded that this is a young nation. The city sidewalks are alive with polyglot choruses of Hebrew, Arabic, English, French, and Russian, though the seclusion and quiet of rural Kibbutzim and Moshavim are not far away. In addition, Israel's booming technological centers offer innovations that are transforming every corner of the globe. It is amid these multifaceted realities that thoughtful and skilled jewelry makers realize their deeply felt concerns.

I have traveled from the Galilee in the north, to the Negev Desert in the south, from sophisticated jewelry schools in major cities to studios and master classes in rural communities. Warmly welcomed, I have met people using their creativity and skill to produce spirited jewelry that captures the complexities of a region perpetually in the crosshairs of history. Yes, there are walls that separate and divide, and their existence is a deeply affecting and inescapable aspect of life here.

The majority of the jewelry artists I met developed their exceptional technical skills in the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem (established 1906); the Shenkar College of Engineering and Design in the Tel Aviv District (established 1970); and the Tel Hai School in the Upper Galilee (established 1957). In addition, the NB Haifa School of Design and the Megemeria School of Jewelry in Nazareth are reaching out to jewelry students from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds to teach them the techniques they need to give voice to the individual ideas and issues at the root of their art.

While the works featured here possess strong visual immediacy, the context of the artist's backgrounds and cultures reveals their full richness and emotional impact, which infuse the very sinews of their objects and invite a second (or third) look.

During the process of selecting these works, four key themes came into focus:

**Inspired by the Land**

**Articles of Faith**

**Echoes of Conflict**

**Expressions of Identity**

## INSPIRED BY THE LAND

Jewelers contemplate the visible and hidden attributes of the land and man's impact on it, from visions of distant horizons and romanticized villages to a focus on the forms and colors of desert landscapes.

### Vered Kaminski (b. 1953)

Kaminski splits apart her hand-cast stones to reveal the vibrant colors provided by the humblest of materials: sand, drawn from the deserts of Israel.



#### Vered Kaminski

*Stones*, 2015

Cement, sand, pigments, stainless steel pin

Dimensions varied:

3.5 x 4 x 1.5 - 4 x 4.5 x 1.5 cm

Collection of the artist

Photo: Elie Posner

## INSPIRED BY THE LAND



### Vered Babai (b.1967)

Like erratic boulders alien to their surroundings, Babai's delicate forms created from pencil shavings appear on her atmospheric photographs like life forms determined to survive in the untamed Negev desert.

#### Vered Babai

*Erratic* (shown superimposed on local photography), 2017  
 Photograph, pencil shavings, wood, glass, brass, glue  
 39 x 26 x 5.7 cm  
 Private collection  
 Photo: Alain Delmas



---

**Maya Schossberger** (b.1991)

Using her observations of the lines, surfaces, and shapes of local landscapes, the artist creates a mysterious new horizon to portray her inner world.



**Maya Schossberger**  
*Landscape Story*, 2016  
 Sterling silver, copper, enamel,  
 rubies, sapphires, aquamarine  
 22 x 19 x 4 cm  
 Collection of the artist  
 Photo: Ilan Besor



## INSPIRED BY THE LAND

### Ariel Lavian (b.1983)

Lavian creates new life forms using the soil, leaves, insects, and animal remains he recovers from the land around his studio.

#### Ariel Lavian

*My Garden—Winter Time*, 2018  
Leaves, snail shell,  
stainless steel  
13.5 x 12.8 x 7 cm  
Collection of the artist  
Photo: Ariel Lavian



#### Attai Chen

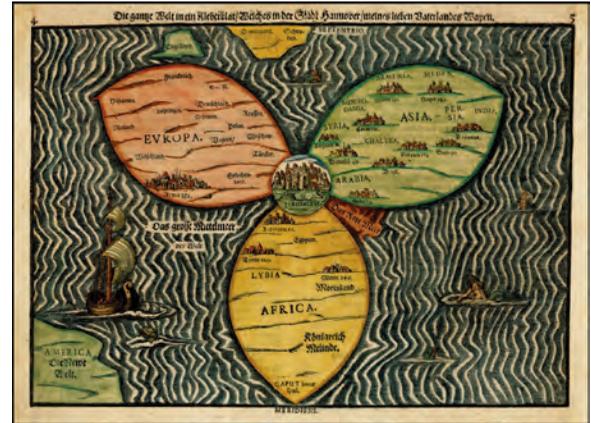
*View 2 (with detail)*, 2015  
Silver, wood, enamel,  
pigments, stainless steel  
7 x 12 x 5 cm  
Collection of The Israel Museum  
Photo: Attai Chen



### Attai Chen (b.1979)

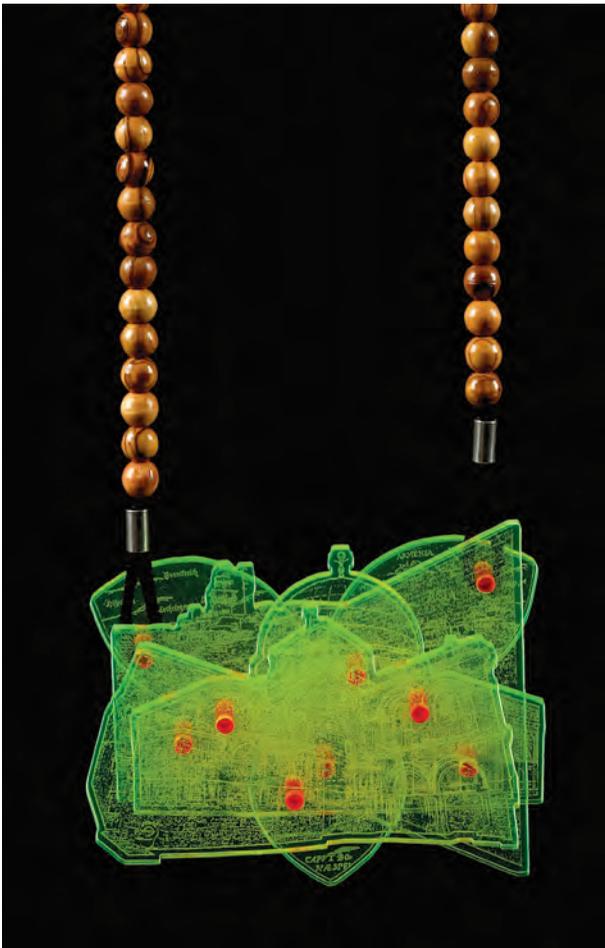
Chen transforms a piece of driftwood into a mountain scene inspired by the deserts around Jericho, and uses the Arab villages clinging to its hillsides to explore how people overly romanticize such poignant vistas.

**Heinrich Bünting**  
 Cloverleaf Map of the World, 1581  
 27 x 36 cm  
 Photo: Wikipedia public domain



**Rory Hooper** (b.1975)

Hooper calls Jerusalem “the city of many tales.” Images of the Wailing Wall, the Dome of the Rock, and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, representing the city’s three main religions, are overlaid on the sixteenth-century Cloverleaf Map of the World, which has Jerusalem as its center.



**Rory Hooper**  
*Jerusalem My City*, 2019  
 Laser etched and cut acrylic,  
 olive tree wood beads  
 11 x 10 x 4.5 cm; chain: 77 cm  
 Collection of the artist  
 Photo: Rory Hooper



## ARTICLES OF FAITH

These works must be seen in the context of the Middle East, where symbols of faith pervade everyday life. Wearable and ceremonial articles have profound significance in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, and these works, while different, are linked through the depth and sincerity of the artists' beliefs.

**Yomna Al Wazani Samara** (b.1994)

The Muslim hijab is a symbol of modesty separating a woman's private and public life. The title *Nusuki* signifies a life based on belief that also embraces individual freedom of choice and identity. Phrases from the Koran printed on the textile in traditional Arabic calligraphy effectively interweave proud traditions with the artist's perspectives on the role of women today.



*Nusuki* (on model)



**Yomna Al Wazani Samara**

*Nusuki*, 2018

Brass, 21 karat gold plate,  
hand printed and sewn textile  
15 x 28 cm

Collection of the artist

Photo: Achikam Ben Yossef

Photo, top: Iddo Lavie

## Tamar Paley (b.1991)

Paley offers women new ways to participate in Judaism's male-dominant rituals by redesigning religious ritual objects that reflect feminine consciousness, text, material, gestures, and the female form.

**Tamar Paley**  
*Tzitzit*, 2017  
 Silver, hand woven  
 textile, thread  
 115 x 13 x 2.5 cm  
 Collection of the artist  
 Photo: Ya Studio



**Tamar Paley**  
*Tallit*, 2017  
 German silver (alpaca), printed  
 textile, gold foil, printed parchment  
 63 x 12 x 4.5 cm  
 Collection of the artist  
 Photo: Ya Studio



**Tamar Paley**  
*A Sign Upon Your Hand*, 2018  
 Silver, acrylic string, printed parchment  
 8 x 8 x 45 cm  
 2018.2186; Museum of Fine Arts, Boston;  
 Jestkalina H. Phillips Fund  
 Photo: Ya Studio

## ARTICLES OF FAITH

*Kerdan* (detail)



Dome of the Rock,  
Jerusalem Old City,  
Israel: interior of the  
Dome, floral decoration  
and various inscriptions.  
Photo: Hanan Isachar/  
Alamy Stock Photo

**Fidaa Zuabi**  
*Kerdan*, 2019  
Stainless steel, enamel,  
silver chain  
Width: 20 cm; height 30 cm,  
with chain 43 cm  
Collection of the artist  
Photo: Boaz Nobelman

### **Fidaa Zuabi** (b.1988)

This neckpiece, based on a traditional Muslim neck ornament, is inspired by the arabesque designs from the Dome of the Rock, one of Islam's holiest sites. *Kerdan* is the first creative effort by Zuabi, an Arab woman who broke cultural barriers to learn metalsmithing skills in order to bring Islamic traditions and aesthetics into contemporary jewelry design.



## Zenab Grabia (b. 1972)

Across faiths and cultures, the hand-shaped hamsa is a talismanic symbol of protection. The artist draws from Bedouin traditions, using her signature embroidered ceramic tiles to create an individualistic neckpiece that takes jewelry's ability to represent personal and cultural perspectives to a grand scale. The title is a tribute to the traditional Bedouin necklace worn by the artist's mother.



*Kelada* (detail)

**Zenab Grabia**  
*Kelada*, 2018  
 Handmade ceramic with  
 traditional Bedouin embroidery  
 threads, beads, metal hoops  
 115 x 125 x 0.5 cm  
 Private collection  
 Photo: Boaz Nobelman



## ARTICLES OF FAITH



**Shachar Cohen**  
*The Duet*, 2017  
 Stainless steel  
 17 x 23 x 2 cm  
 Collection of the artist  
 Photo: Mirei Takeuchi

### **Shachar Cohen** (b. 1981)

Cohen uses the timeless quality of polished stainless steel to transform venerated spiritual symbols into contemporary, cool, and shiny objects of desire. The physical reflections of the viewers themselves may represent the replacement of transcendent faith by today's egocentric society.



**Shachar Cohen**  
*Personal Jesus*, 2016  
 Stainless steel, string  
 11 x 7 x 2 cm  
 Private collection  
 Photo: Maria Austen



### Deganit Stern Schocken (b. 1947)

Remembrance is at the core of collective Israeli identity, making Schocken's candles both a personal expression and a national symbol. The artist collected discarded and crushed candles that had been burned beside graves to create necklaces set with inlaid semiprecious stones to preserve the spirituality of the original vessels.

**Deganit Stern Schocken**  
*Soul Candles*, 2017  
 Found aluminum memorial candle vessels (crushed), silver, zircons  
 18 x 14 cm  
 Collection of the artist  
 Photo: Uri Grun

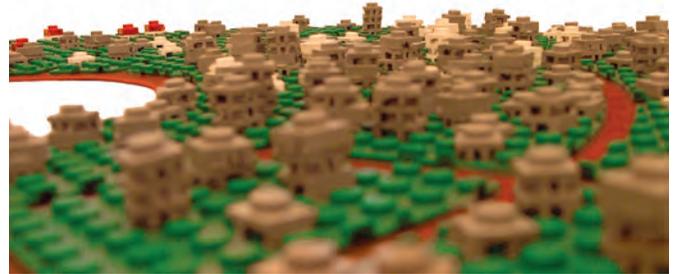


Six memorial candles are lit during a Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony at Sharkey Theater, Naval Station Pearl Harbor, April 26, 2007.  
 Photo: U.S. Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class James E. Foehl



## ECHOES OF CONFLICT

Life amid ongoing political turmoil and recurring violence deeply affects these jewelers, who eloquently capture the country's fears, griefs, and hopes with a compelling commitment to universal humanist values.

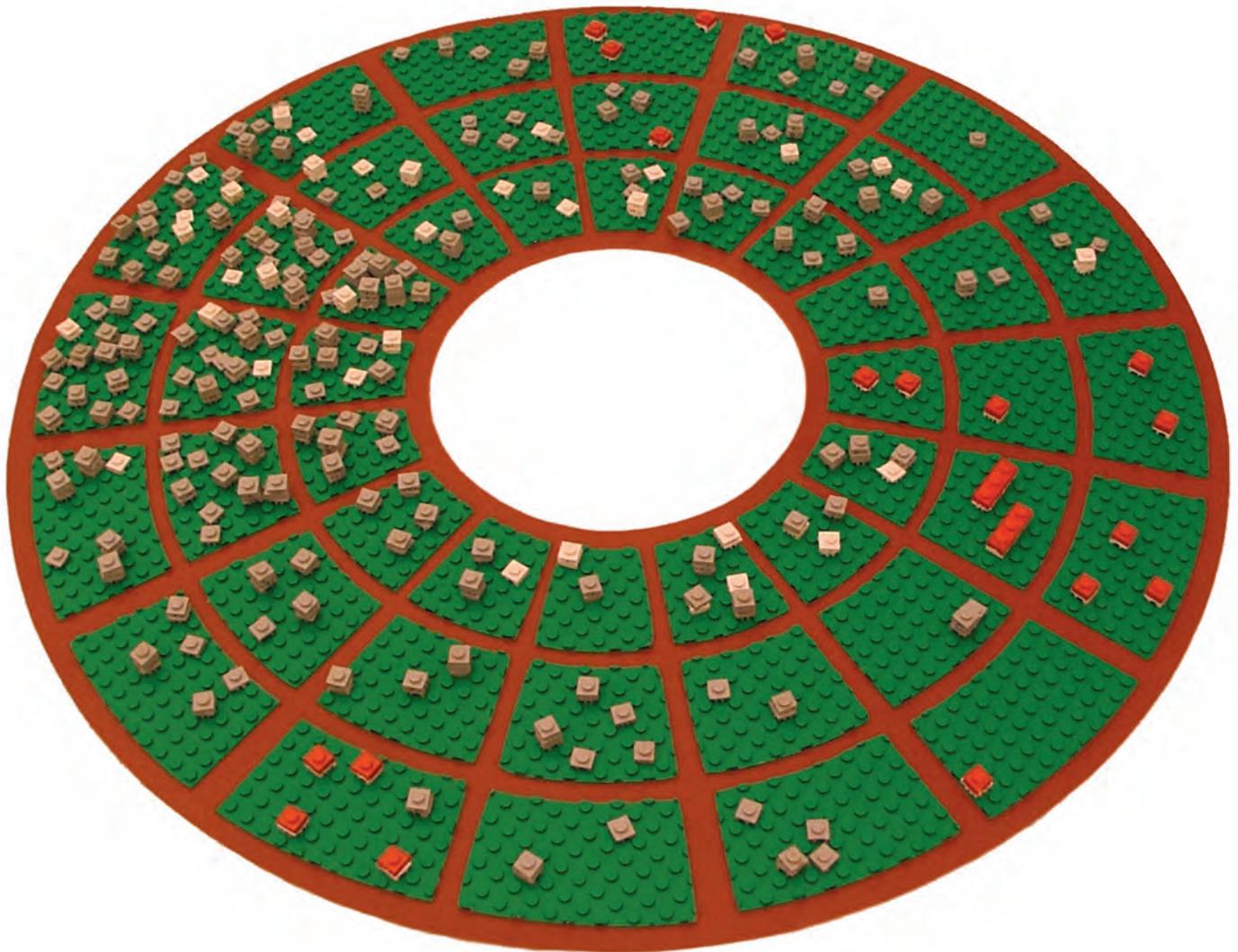


*Lego Settlement (detail)*

### Ido Noy (b. 1979)

The constantly shifting patterns of settlement, and demolition of communities in response to growing populations and the ongoing Israeli-Palestine conflict, are reflected in Noy's necklace of interlocking Lego® pieces, which allow the wearer to reconfigure the design.

**Ido Noy**  
*Lego Settlement*, 2005  
 Lego® pieces, rubber  
 50 x 1.5 x 50 cm  
 Courtesy Galerie Ra  
 Photo: Ido Noy



**Einat Leader**

Brooches from "Order Has Not Been Restored" series, 2009  
 Fine silver  
 Collection of the artist  
 Photos: Ron Amir

**Sheikh Muwannis**

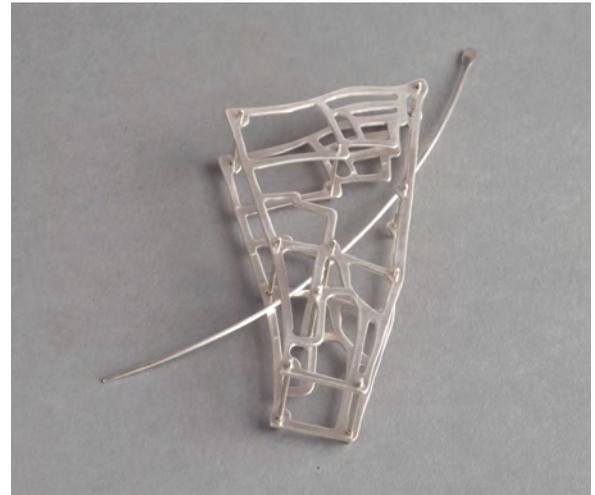
2.3 x 3.3 x 8.7 cm

**Einat Leader (b.1966)**

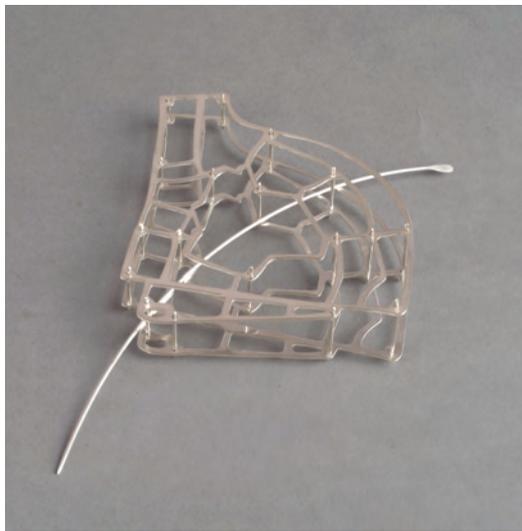
The design of each brooch starts with the borders of lost Palestinian villages that existed prior to the 1948 establishment of Israel. Leader uses the outlines of their growth projected to the present day in a series of brooches that are not only intended to recall the pain of forgotten people, but to reflect hope for a shared life between Palestinians and Jews.

**Jammasin**

2 x 3.7 x 8 cm

**Salama**

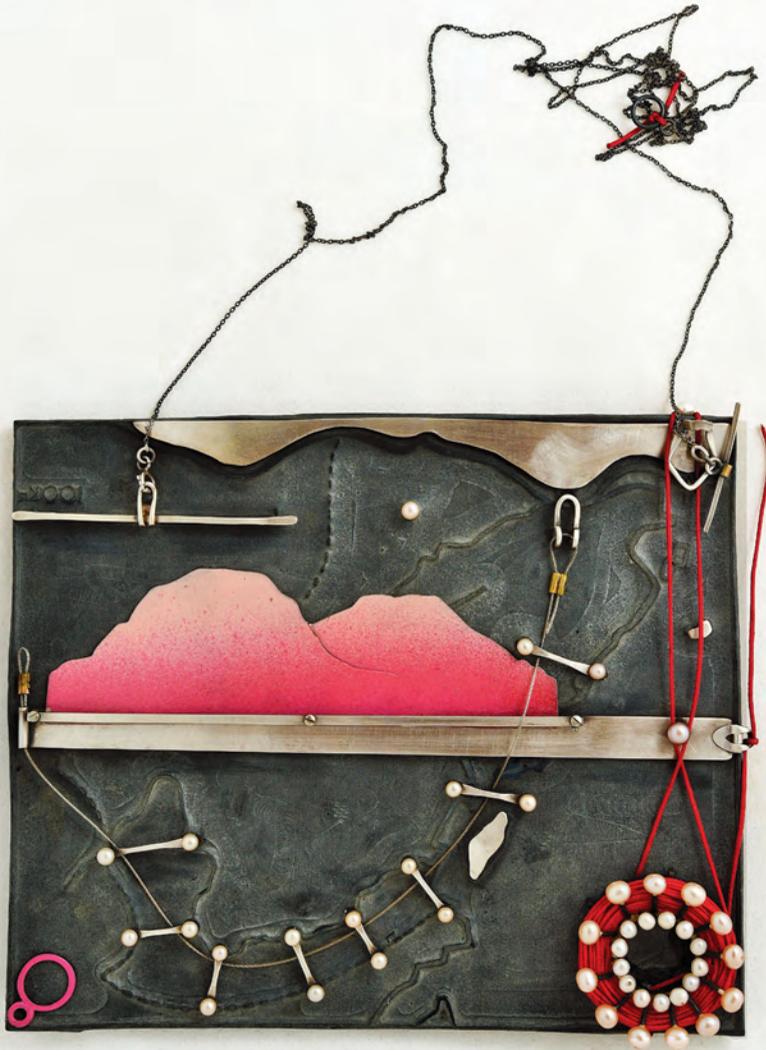
2.3 x  
 7 x 8.5 cm



Sketches by the artist of projected borders of these Palestinian villages if they were to exist today (the original areas of the villages are marked in orange).

The 2007 Zochrot maps of destroyed Palestinian villages of the corresponding areas.

## ECHOES OF CONFLICT



### Anat Aboucaya Grozovski (b.1959)

In response to the violence and anxiety of the 2014 military conflict between the Gaza Strip and Israel, the artist used old rubber mapmaking plates to build chaotic landscapes of arbitrary borders and secret tunnels.

### Anat Aboucaya Grozovski

*Parting-line #4*, 2015

Rubber printing plate, silver, nickel silver, textile thread  
15 x 14 cm

Collection of the artist

Photo: Anat Aboucaya Grozovski

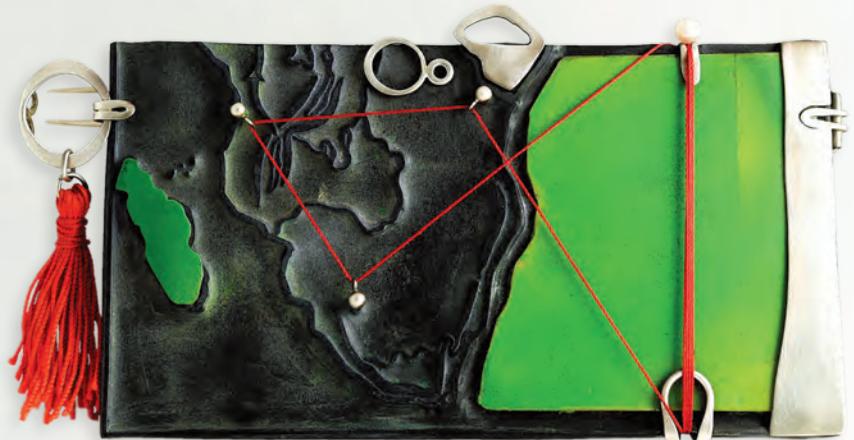
### Anat Aboucaya Grozovski

*Parting-line #1*, 2015

Rubber printing plate, silver, nickel silver, textile thread, pearls  
7.5 x 14 cm

Collection of the artist

Photo: Anat Aboucaya Grozovski



---

**Shirly Bar Amotz (b.1974)**

Instead of celebrating the symbiotic relationship of man and dog, this neckpiece depicts images in which assault dogs and their trainers become one, a military hybrid of man and animal.



**Shirly Bar Amotz**  
*Jump Mobile*, 2018  
 Copper, iron, enamel,  
 iron powder, epoxy resin  
 putty, rubber  
 33 x 36 x 2.2 cm  
 Collection of the artist  
 Photo: Boaz Nobelman

---

**Esther Knobel (b.1949)**

The gold needles and crushed spool of thread are metaphors for mending, representing the artist's belief or hope that anything broken, including our thoughts, can be repaired.

**Esther Knobel**  
*Kit for Mending Thoughts*, 2005  
 18 and 24 karat  
 gold, silver,  
 paper, tin box  
 18 x 8 x 2 cm  
 Collection of the  
 Rotasa Foundation  
 Photo: Leonid  
 Padrul



## EXPRESSIONS OF IDENTITY

Immigration is the country's lifeblood. Jewish immigrants, from countries including Russia, France, and Ethiopia, join Israeli-born Jews, Christians, Palestinians, Druze, and Bedouins in confronting issues of identity and social status, in order to encourage the acceptance of differences and the rejection of intolerance.



### Samah Batheesh (b. 1984)

Though respected Israeli citizens, the Druze community in the Golan Heights still endures the pain of separation from their people across the nearby Syrian border, which was created in 1967. Batheesh expresses her longing to be accepted as she is through dormant branches that wait to bloom again. "My work is a combination of hope and pain," she says.

**Samah Batheesh**  
*Identity Thornes*, 2018  
 Left: Natural branches,  
 cement, threads, paint  
 3 x 18.5 cm  
 Right: Brass, thread  
 7 x 10 cm  
 Collection of the artist  
 Photo: Boaz Nobelman




---

**Tehila Levi** (b. 1982)

Levi expresses the story of her family's immigration from Yemen to Israel by invoking her grandmother's memories of the jewelry she lost during her journey across the desert. Elements of the acclaimed Yemenite filigree silversmithing are central to her dramatic jewelry.

**Tehila Levi**  
*Tear Earrings*, 2016  
 Silver  
 3.8 x 8 cm  
 Collection of the artist  
 Photo: Vered Babai

**Tehila Levi**  
*Eden Necklace*, 2016  
 Silver, copper  
 28 x 8 cm  
 Collection of the artist  
 Photo: Vered Babai

---

## EXPRESSIONS OF IDENTITY

---

### Lior Amiel (b. 1975)

Using a self-taught technique, Amiel transforms rigid and sharp steel fencing wire into a clothlike texture that appears soft and malleable. Inspired by the traditional Arab ornamental embroidery of his Egyptian-born mother and grandmother, he achieves a harmony of contrasts: soft and hard, feminine and masculine, Arab and Jewish, traditional and contemporary.



**Lior Amiel**  
Veil (wall piece), 2015  
Iron net wire  
70 x 45 x 45 cm  
Collection of the artist  
Photo: Yuval Katzover

---

**Gregory Larin** (b.1978)

With biting humor, this “meat” medal captures the venality hiding behind the gaudy uniforms of dictators. A Russian immigrant, Larin inserts a large fly attracted by the fleshlike textures, as a telltale sign of the decay underlying Stalin’s despotism.


**Gregory Larin**

*Nice to Meat You*, 2014

Woolen thread, brass,

polymer, lacquer

7.3 x 3.8 x 8 cm

Left: shown superimposed on

photograph of Joseph Stalin

Collection of the artist

Photo: Dima Reinstein


**Hirut Hizkiyahu**

Earrings from “Shamkan” series, 2018

Top: Copper, silver

Each earring: 2.5 x 6 x 0.8 cm

Right: Copper, brass

Each earring: 10 x 6 x 0.8 cm

Collection of the artist

Photo: Achikam Ben Yossef

---

**Hirut Hizkiyahu** (b.1987)

A child of Ethiopian immigrants, Israeli-born Hizkiyahu lives in a home full of reminders of her heritage. Ethiopian objects are part of her daily life and an integral part of her aesthetic and her cultural identity.



## EXPRESSIONS OF IDENTITY

### Dania Chelminsky (b.1961)

The prickly pear or sabra cactus was transplanted to Israel from Mexico, as was the artist. The sabra has become the symbol of the native-born Israeli, but for Chelminsky it symbolizes immigrants who adapt to new surroundings while maintaining qualities of their former identities to create a new life that merges the two.



### Dania Chelminsky

Pendants from "Opuntia" series, 2018  
 Silver, iron, dried nopal stems and veins,  
 rust powder, epoxy resin, stainless steel  
 8.5 x 10.5 x 1 cm  
 Collection of the artist  
 Photo: Ran Erde

Mexican coat of arms.  
 Photo: Wikipedia public domain

Prickly pear, or  
 sabra cactus, in Israel.  
 Photo: Dania Chelminsky





**Naama Haneman**  
*Sibling Life*, 2012  
 Limestone, silver, magnets,  
 stainless steel  
 variable dimensions  
 Collection of the artist  
 Photo: Tal Rogovski




---

**Naama Haneman** (b.1987)

One of ten siblings, Haneman's life is inseparable from theirs. The artist represents these relationships using fragile but enduring local stones inlaid with distinct silver letters and symbols as stand-ins for family members who come together to form an integral whole.

---

**Rami Tareef** (b.1980)

This series represents the changes in the traditional patriarchal status of men in Arab society that the artist attributes to the influences of Western culture and values. Tareef merges the lapel pin, a typically Western jewelry form, with one of the most characteristic images of Arab culture, the olive tree, using the olive pit to symbolize the interaction of male and female.

**Rami Tareef**  
*50 Shades of Patriarchy*  
 (brooches), 2019  
 Silver, brass  
 Each: 10 x 4 x 0.5 cm  
 Collection of the artist  
 Photo: Shay ben-Efraim



---

## EXPRESSIONS OF IDENTITY



---

### Elinor Cohen (b.1986)

This work expresses the alienation and plight of Eritrean migrants and asylum seekers who made Israel their destination but here are marked as the “other” and limited to a marginal role in society. Cohen’s jewelry provides a powerful visual representation of their entrapment in a vicious cycle.

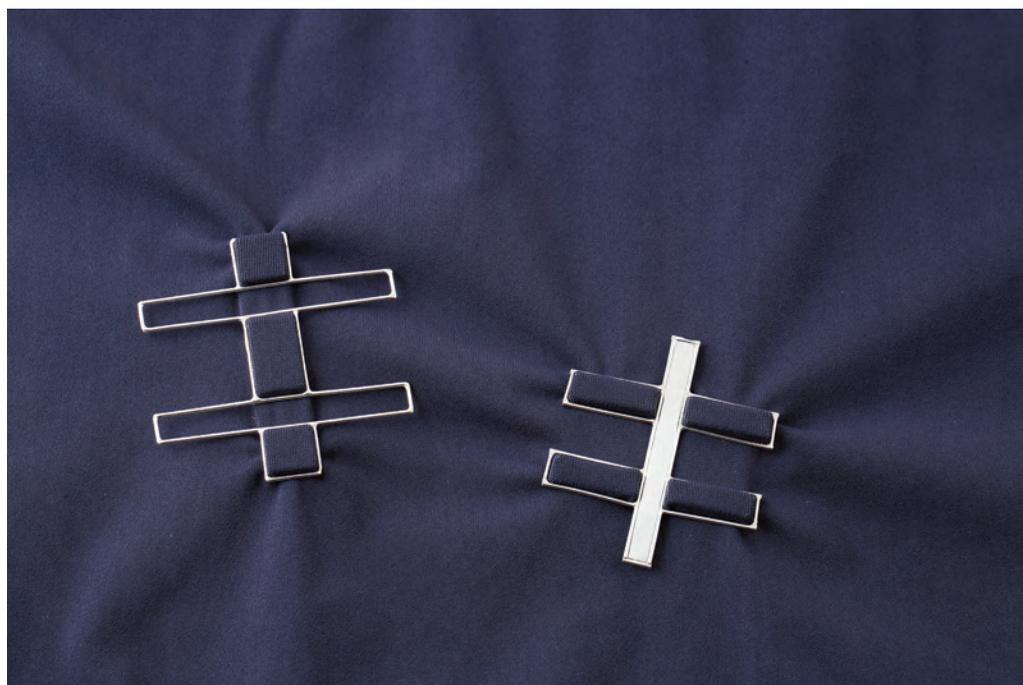
**Elinor Cohen**  
*Forced Placement*, 2016  
Sterling silver  
22 x 20 cm  
Collection of the artist  
Photo: Ahiad Danziger



---

**Yotam Bahat** (b. 1994)

Bahat's pieces express the discrimination he experiences as a member of the LGBTQ community, and his desire for legislative acceptance. When worn, the brooches make visible the tension between the equal signs on the outer side, while the "does not equal" slash of inequality is hidden underneath the garment closest to the skin.



**Yotam Bahat**  
*Equal Not Equal*, 2016  
 Sterling silver  
 5.5 x 4.5 cm  
 Collection of the artist  
 Photo: Achikam Ben Yossef

---

## IN CONCLUSION

**The contemporary jewelry community in Israel brings together artists working to breach ethnic, class, and cultural divides to unite its people, even as political forces work to divide them. Fired in the crucible of turmoil and discord, these works of nuance and concern represent the search for common ground, to transform encounters into engagements.**

*Ursula Ilse-Neuman is Curator Emerita at the Museum of Arts and Design, New York, and independent curator, author, and lecturer who divides her time between Tel Aviv and New York.*

*This project was organized with the assistance of Tamar Paley.*

*Special thanks are due to Aya Schein for her role as mentor in conjunction with the work of Fidaa Zuabi.*