

DISRUPTED LAYER



Contemporary Art by **Zohar Gotesman**
in the Archaeology Wing

In *Disrupted Layer*, Israeli artist Zohar Gotesman intervenes in the permanent exhibition of the Archaeology Wing, placing in its various galleries seven contemporary sculptures and proposing a new reading of the display. This reading disrupts the display's linear sequence, blurring the boundaries between periods, contents, and techniques and thereby expanding the scope of the discourse on archaeology, history, and art history. This is the first time that the Archaeology Wing hosts an exhibition of contemporary art in its permanent galleries. The exhibition's title refers to a situation that sometimes occurs in archaeological excavations, where remains from one historical layer are discovered in a different layer and may disrupt its decipherment.

Gotesman's great love of archaeology and his fascination with the Israel Museum's outstanding collection were the point of departure, some years ago, for a unique journey that reached its peak with this exhibition. The large, site-specific sculptures are the result of material and conceptual research on the collection's items, visits to the galleries, contemplation of the artifacts on permanent display, and a fruitful conversation with the curators of the Archaeology Wing. The nature of the permanent exhibition and the narratives it offers captured Gotesman's imagination and inspired him to create works that propose a fresh look at the familiar collection. Each sculpture in the exhibition is a response to one or several items that drew his attention; through his works, he conducts a dialogue with these artifacts' historical and cultural contexts and with their style, iconography, and different uses.

In his artistic work Gotesman focuses on sculpture and installation, dismantling and examining these media on the basis of a broad reservoir of knowledge. As part of his practice he addresses issues of balance, dimensions, forms, and weight, deliberately mixing new and ancient ideas and narratives, juxtaposing the historical with the contemporary and the mundane with the sublime. He employs techniques from ancient sculptural traditions, working in stone, marble, wood, and bone with reference to the archaeological finds, in order to amplify the similarity (and disparity) between different periods. At the same time, he incorporates state-of-the-art techniques and materials used in

contemporary art. His sculptures abound in internal contradictions and even paradoxes that undermine the essence of the sculpture itself and subvert the conventions of the artistic canon.

In *Disrupted Layer*, Gotesman unravels the structured narrative of the Museum's permanent archaeology exhibition, creating timeless, hybrid sculptures that feature alchemic and anachronistic combinations. These sculptures are works of art in their own right, while also referencing the displays among which they are placed, as if simulating archaeological finds. In-depth contemplation reveals the deliberate discrepancies between the contemporary works and the ancient objects, the unexpected and sometimes ironic encounters between them, and the tension, dissonance, and incompatibility that inevitably arise from the act of intervening in the permanent exhibition.

Beyond their material and stylistic similarity to the archaeological finds in the collection, the sculptures also offer a personal statement – whether in the form of incisive criticism or sharp humor – regarding the period in which we live. In one way or another, they all address human nature, with its primeval needs and instincts and inherent weaknesses: the search for meaning and protection, the need to dominate nature, the pursuit of wealth, power, and authority, and the fear of the “other.” They also concern issues related to archaeology and art history such as replication, restoration, forgery, mutual influence, and cultural appropriation.

Sally Haftel Naveh and Tali Sharvit

No Relief, 2022

Halila limestone, metal frame, and pallet jack, 218×405×100 cm

The work opening the exhibition is an installation depicting a typical museum activity: a relief being transported from the storeroom to the galleries. The “ancient” relief is placed on a trolley, as if abandoned for a moment by workers on a break.

The large-scale work was inspired by two wall reliefs from Assyria (today’s Northern Iraq) on display in the Archaeology Wing. The first, from the ninth century BCE, shows a symbolic ceremony in which a date palm is pollinated; the second, from the seventh century BCE, portrays the conquest of Lachish by King Sennacherib. The work also references other wall reliefs found in the palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh, which depict the transfer of colossal lamassu sculptures from the quarry to the palace. The lamassu were protective supernatural creatures, human-headed and with the body of a winged lion or bull. In the ancient reliefs these sculptures can be seen being hauled to the palace by multitudes of porters. In Gotesman’s relief, the porters are replaced by a single carrier who transports the huge sculpture on his own.

Around the hybrid creature, Gotesman carved signs in Akkadian – the language of the Assyrians – reading “(He) drags again and again” (ish-ta-na-ad-da-ad). The sentence, repeated dozens of times in cuneiform script, encircles the figure, echoing the monotonous rhythm of the chisel marks that also surround it. The relative ease with which the museum workers can transport the relief contrasts with the Sisyphean task of the lone carrier depicted in the work; the contemporary pallet jack renders his efforts redundant, amplifying the irony and pointlessness of the carrier’s impossible undertaking.

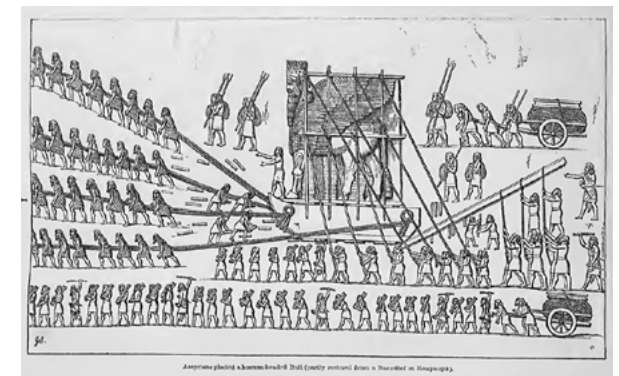
Pairs of lamassu sculptures guarded thresholds in the sumptuous palaces of Assyria, and are displayed today in the world’s leading museums. By depicting a lamassu being dragged towards the entrance to the Archaeology Wing – in an attempt to acquire the creature’s protective power in its new location – *No Relief* suggests the colonialist aspect of the West’s appropriation of the remains of the world’s great civilizations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



Lachish relief (detail, replica)*
Nineveh, Assyria (present-day Northern Iraq), early 7th century BCE
Israel Antiquities Authority
*The original relief is housed in the British Museum, London
📍 [Israel and the Bible gallery](#)



Wall relief (detail)
Nimrud, Assyria (present-day Northern Iraq), reign of Ashurnasirpal II, 9th century BCE
Alabaster
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem:
Gift of Baron and Baroness Edmond de Rothschild, Paris
📍 [Neighboring Cultures gallery](#) > [Ancient Near East](#)



Transfer of a lamassu sculpture
Illustration of a wall relief in Nineveh, Assyria (present-day Northern Iraq), ca. 703–695 BCE

Good Morning Sunshine, 2022

Limestone and pigments, 200x150x25 cm

This stone slab resembles a prehistoric burial, similar to those of a woman with a dog, dating from 14,500 years ago, and of a youth with antlers of a red deer, from 92,000 years ago – both displayed nearby. However, unlike a natural burial, Gotesman's relief is positioned upright; a second glance reveals that what seems like a prehistoric find is actually a "fossilized futuristic burial" of a modern human skeleton surrounded by skulls of animals facing extinction.

The ancient burials displayed in the gallery tell the story of man's intimate relationship with nature in prehistoric times, demonstrating the significant role played by animals in everyday life, as well as in the funerary and spiritual realms. The dog bones buried alongside the woman's skeleton, for example, not only demonstrate their closeness but testify to the early stages of animal domestication, since it was during the Stone Age that humans began to use dogs for hunting and guarding purposes.

Our epoch, termed unofficially the "Anthropocene," is characterized by unprecedented human impact on the planet in the form of unrestrained hunting, environmental pollution, deforestation, and over-cultivation of the soil, leading to a catastrophic climate crisis and dramatic ecological changes that threaten our planet and the delicate life forms inhabiting it (each year, some 5,000 species become extinct). The dimensions of the human figure on the stone slab and its upright placement thus emphasize man's ambition to subjugate nature and the exaggerated domestication of animals, underscoring the inherent risks such ambition poses.

📍 **The Dawn of Civilization gallery**
The Stone Age, 1.5 million to 11,500 years ago
Neolithic period, 11,500–6,500 years ago
Chalcolithic period, 6,500–5,500 years ago



Woman buried with dog (cast)
Eynan, Natufian culture, 14,500 years ago
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem:
Gift of the French Research Center in Jerusalem
📍 Dawn of Civilization gallery



Burial of a youth with antlers of a red deer (cast)
Qafzeh Cave, Mousterian culture, 92,000 years ago
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem:
Gift of the French Research Center in Jerusalem
📍 Dawn of Civilization gallery

Rise and Fall, 2022

Basalt, 90x53 cm each

The work is comprised of two chiseled basalt blocks in the shape of “roly poly” dolls. The pair of sculptures – male and female – are ornamented with patterns and symbols that reference representations of deities and ceremonial artifacts displayed in the gallery, which were part of the religious ritual practiced in Canaan in the second millennium BCE. The religion of the land’s heterogenous society was a syncretic blend of local traditions and external influences. This society believed in a plurality of gods responsible for all spheres of life, including the forces of nature.

The uniqueness of the “roly poly” doll lies in its motion: whenever it falls over, it immediately springs back up. The fusion of the doll with the idol figures whose symbols decorate the sculptures is a metaphor for the cyclical nature of ideas and beliefs among the region’s cultures, the recurring rise and fall of city-states, and even the fall of the great powers of the Ancient Near East in ca. 1200 BCE, following which the first Israelites appeared on the historical stage.

The basalt that replaces the typical plastic material of which the doll is made echoes the dominant presence of the black rock in the gallery, while also highlighting the disparity between the lighthearted, amusing appearance of the toy and the anxiety its fall elicits. The sculptures inspired by a child’s plaything now appear as objects of adoration and religious ritual carrying spiritual significance.

📍 The Land of Canaan gallery
The Bronze Age, 3500–1200 BCE



Figurine of a naked woman from Cyprus
Deir el-Balah (?), 13th century BCE, pottery
The Israel Museum, Jerusalem: Gift of Laurence and Wilma Tisch, New York, purchasers of the Dayan Collection
📍 The Land of Canaan gallery



Basin with spiral decoration for liquid offerings
Orthostat Temple, Hazor, 15th to 13th century BCE, basalt
Israel Antiquities Authority
📍 The Land of Canaan gallery



Statue of the storm god on the back of a bull (detail)
Orthostat Temple, Hazor, 15th to 13th century BCE, basalt
Israel Antiquities Authority
📍 The Land of Canaan gallery



Reconstruction of the “Shrine of the Stelae”
Hazor, 14th to 13th century BCE, basalt
Israel Antiquities Authority
📍 The Land of Canaan gallery

Final Escape, 2022

Lebanon cedar wood, found camel bones, pigments, lapis lazuli, rubies, and gold leaf, 176x84x163 cm

The ejection seat of an F-35 fighter aircraft, carved in wood and inlaid with ivory carvings, is Gotesman's contemporary take on ancient royal thrones, which signified the elevated status and undisputed power of the ruler – whether divine or human. Our knowledge of the appearance of ancient thrones stems mostly from their depictions in ancient art. One magnificent example is the sumptuous throne depicted on an ivory plaque discovered in the palace at Megiddo. On the left part of the plaque, a Canaanite ruler can be seen seated on a throne decorated with sphinxes, resting his feet on a stool.

The bone inlays of *Final Escape* draw inspiration from ivory carvings made between the ninth and eighth century BCE, such as *The sacred tree* and *The crouching lion*, inlaid in wooden furniture and adorning the walls of the royal hall in the palace of the Israelite capital at Samaria. Ivory inlays were highly valued due to their rarity, and their use attests to the wealth and splendor of the palaces of the Israelites and the entire kingdom. According to the prophet Amos (6:4), the “beds of ivory” symbolized the corruption and decadence plaguing Israelite royalty and aristocracy.

Gotesman's work offers a Machiavellian allegory on the distorted values of the ruler, provoking thoughts about the legitimacy of the government and the pursuit of power. Replacing the royal throne with the ejection seat of one of the world's most advanced implements of war suggests the destructive potential inherent in attaining power through aggression, holding on to it by any means, and the danger that, in a crisis, the corrupt ruler will think only of saving his own skin.

📍 Israel and the Bible gallery
Iron Age, 1200–586 BCE
Babylonian and Persian periods, 586–332 BCE



Furniture inlay: sacred palm tree
Samaria, 9th–8th century BCE,
ivory
Israel Antiquities Authority
📍 Israel and the Bible gallery



Furniture inlay: crouching lion
Samaria, 9th–8th century BCE,
ivory
Israel Antiquities Authority
📍 Israel and the Bible Gallery



Inlay plaque depicting a Canaanite ruler
Megiddo, 1300–1130 BCE, ivory
Israel Antiquities Authority
📍 The Land of Canaan gallery (currently not on display.
The item will be displayed in the exhibition *The Feast*)

Sounds of the Syrinx, 2022

Carrara Statuario marble, 135x60x40 cm

The work is a loose replica of a Roman sculpture exhibited in the gallery, of a satyr with a panther and syrinx (panpipe). Satyrs were hybrid creatures, half-man half-beast, and were part of the ecstatic entourage of Dionysus, the god of wine and agricultural fertility and patron of the theatrical arts. They were usually depicted as creatures with a horse's tail, horns, hooves, and a shaggy beard. Though these beastly characteristics were refined in the Roman depiction, the sculpture can still be identified as a satyr by the syrinx, tail, and impish facial features.

Gotesman “reconstructs” the sculpture by restoring its broken limbs, although, unlike in an archaeological restoration, he reinterprets the original work, imbuing it with a new spirit. The lush vegetal motif sprouting from the limbs, resembling a vine or serpent, entwines the satyr's body and threatens to overpower it. Its chaotic movement echoes the frenzied character of Dionysus' wild company, as described in mythological texts, as well as the festivals and mystery cults held in the god's honor in ancient Rome.

Gotesman's satyr, now imprisoned by its own wild nature, seemingly revives his uninhibited disposition, which was gradually subdued in Roman art – a metaphor for the perpetual tension between man's primal instincts and culture's attempts to tame and repress them. The artist's choice of copying a Roman sculpture recalls the flourishing replica industry in Roman times, which took inspiration from Greece's famous sculptures. Like Roman artists, who changed and renewed the sculptures they emulated, Gotesman allows himself to play with the original, to the point of creating a new version.

Under Roman Rule gallery
The Roman period, 63 BCE–324 CE



Satyr with panther
Caesarea, 2nd century CE, marble
Israel Antiquities Authority
Under Roman Rule gallery

Them, 2019-2022

Four sandstone plates, 53x40x8 each

Territorial exchanges and cultural clashes have often led to rich artistic innovation, while also engendering fear and anxiety regarding the newfound “others,” sometimes resulting in racism and xenophobia. The four stone reliefs comprising this work address the human need to scapegoat the “others” during times of crisis, blaming them for all of society’s ills. The grotesque scenes in this work, depicting the alleged dangers posed to society by foreigners – disease, theft, assault, and abduction – highlight the irrationality and absurdity of placing the blame on the “other.”

The technique used in the reliefs and the schematic form of the human figures, animals, monsters, and vegetal motifs recall Romanesque stone sculpture from the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Europe, as well as architectural sculptural elements characteristic of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem during the Crusader period, displayed in the gallery. Some examples are *Corbel shaped as a monster with protruding tongue*, *Part of a cornice shaped as the head of a laughing youth*, and *Corbel shaped as the head of a man*. Though manifesting a unique blend of cultural influences, including the Romanesque style, Crusader art is today considered a local style in its own right.

Gotesman’s *Them* offers a mirror reflecting the voices of incitement and exclusion in a period of raging nationalism, which are as strong and dangerous today as ever.

📍 **Muslims and Crusaders gallery**
 Early Islamic period, 750–1099 CE
 Crusader period, 1099–1291 CE
 Medieval and Late Islamic periods, 1187–1516 CE



Corbel shaped as a monster with protruding tongue
 Acre, 13th century, stone
 Israel Antiquities Authority
 📍 Muslims and Crusaders gallery



Corbel shaped as the head of a man
 Acre, 13th century, marble
 Israel Antiquities Authority
 📍 Muslims and Crusaders gallery



Part of a cornice shaped as the head of a laughing youth
 Belvoir castle, 12th century, marble and pigment traces
 Israel Antiquities Authority
 📍 Muslims and Crusaders gallery

Foothold, 2022

Polymers and pigments, diameter: 160 cm

A huge ball, covered entirely with dozens of lions (or other felines) depicted in relief, is poised in the center of the Archaeology Wing, at the intersection between the Neighboring Cultures galleries. The lion is a common motif in many cultures, from antiquity to the present day. It was frequently integrated in representations of gods, heroes, and rulers as an expression of authority and power, and likewise symbolized guardianship of the living and the dead. In Jewish culture, the lion represents the tribe of Judah, following Jacob's blessing, "Judah is a lion's cub" (Genesis 49:9), and also serves as the emblem of Jerusalem.

Covering the ball in a densely packed composition, the lions crowd together, huddled next to and on top of each other, engaged in play, fighting, or courtship. They reference the diverse iconographic and stylistic repertoire exhibited in the Archaeology Wing. Together they create a wild stylistic configuration that echoes both the power struggles and the mutual influences characterizing the interactions among the neighboring cultures and between them and the ancient land of Israel.

The gigantic ball, which has seemingly rolled into the intersection, sweeping the dozens of lions in its way, retains the potential for movement. Looming threateningly over the nearby artifacts, it suggests the volatile nature of the land of Israel, which occupies a strategic junction between neighboring cultures from antiquity to the present day.

Neighboring Cultures gallery

Egypt of the Pharaohs, The Ancient Near East, The Greek World, The Peoples of Italy, 7th millennium BCE – 7th century CE
The Islamic Near East, 7th century CE – 19th century



Coin showing a lion and a male head

Philistia, second half of the 5th century BCE
Drachm (silver)
Gift of Jeannette and Jonathan Rosen, New York, to American Friends of the Israel Museum
📍 Coins in Context gallery



Lion-shaped handle

Provenance unknown, 2nd century CE, bronze
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Arne Glimcher, New York, to American Friends of the Israel Museum
📍 Neighboring Cultures gallery >
The Peoples of Italy



Gutter terminating in a lion's head

Ashkelon, 12th century CE, marble
Israel Antiquities Authority
📍 Muslims and Crusaders gallery



Pair of lions dedicated to the god Athtar of Adhanan by Yada'ab and Yashhurmalik, kings of Nashshan

Inscribed in Minaeo-Sabaeen in South Arabian script
Nashshan (as-Sawda, northern Yemen), ca. 6th century BCE, bronze
Shlomo Moussaieff Collection
📍 Neighboring Cultures gallery

Zohar Gotesman (born 1979) is a graduate of the Department of Fine Arts at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem and holds a BA degree in Archaeology and Art History from the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev. Gotesman specialized in traditional marble sculpting techniques in Carrara, Italy. He is a lecturer at Bezalel, at the Shenkar College of Engineering, Design, and Art, and at Hamidrasha, Beit Berl College.

Gotesman's works have been displayed in numerous exhibitions in museums, galleries, and in the public realm in Israel and abroad, including: the Tel Aviv Museum of Art; MoBY – Museums of Bat Yam; The Petach Tikva Museum of Art; The Israeli Center for Digital Art, Holon; Beit HaGefen, Haifa; The Tel Aviv University Gallery; Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv; Chelouche Gallery for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv; the Bolzano Museum for Modern and Contemporary Art; the House of Arts, Brno, Czech Republic; and Kunsthal KAdE in Amersfoort, the Netherlands.

He has been awarded numerous grants, including the Israeli Ministry of Culture and Sports Award for a Young Artist (2014), a scholarship from the America-Israel Cultural Foundation (2008), and grants from the Outset Contemporary Art Fund (2017 and 2022), the Israel National Lottery Council for Culture and the Arts (2017, 2018, and 2022), and the Foundation for Independent Creators at the Israeli Ministry of Culture and Sports (2022).

The Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Archaeology Wing

The land of Israel has been the home of peoples of different cultures and beliefs for some one and a half million years. It is to these people and their cultures that the exhibition galleries of the Archaeology Wing are dedicated, serving as an exemplary showcase of the rich and fascinating local archaeological heritage. The archaeological collection is considered among the best of its kind in the world in both scope and quality.

The Archaeology Wing's permanent exhibit takes the visitor on a journey of unparalleled depth into the historical course of ancient Israel – the birthplace of the Bible and the cradle of the three monotheistic religions. This is a journey that stretches from prehistoric times to the beginning of the Ottoman period. Historical events of prime importance, cultural achievements, technological innovations, and

artistic creativity are all displayed in the galleries through thousands of rare and unique ancient artifacts. These objects offer a close look at the lifestyle, beliefs, and worldviews of the peoples of this area.

Broadening the scope are the galleries devoted to neighboring cultures: Egypt, the Ancient Near East, Greece, Italy, and the Islamic Near East. They tell the story of the civilizations that left deep imprints on the land of Israel over the centuries. The exhibition is further enriched by thematic galleries: Early Hebrew Writing, Coins in Context, and Glass Through the Ages, which shed light on some of the important achievements of local culture. All these offer the visitor a comprehensive overview of the history of the region and an extraordinary experience.

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

Disrupted Layer: Contemporary Art by Zohar Gotesman in the Archaeology Wing

Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Archaeology Wing
Opening: December 2022

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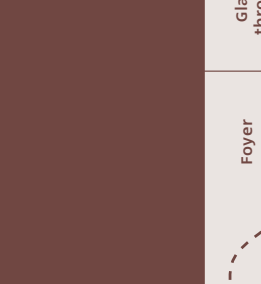
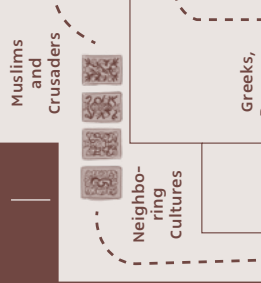
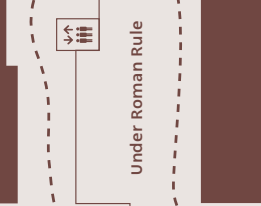
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Contemporary Art by **Zohar Gotesman** in the Archaeology Wing

Sounds of the Stryx, 2022

Them,
2019-2022



Foothold,
2022



Foyer

Glass
through
the Ages

Dawn of Civilization

Temporary
Exhibitions

*Good
Morning
Sunshine*,
2022

No Relief,
2022



Neighboring
Cultures

The Land of
Canaan

Early
Hebrew
Writing

Israel and
the Bible

Greeks,
Romans,
and Jews

Under Roman Rule

Muslims
and
Crusaders

Neighboring
cultures

The Holy Land

Coins in
Context

To the
Youth
Wing

*Final
Escape*,
2022



Rise and Fall,
2022

Archaeology Wing
Entrance

