Amir, Maayan. "Art for security: The weaponizing of Israeli art in times of emergency."
Visual Histories of Occupation: A Transcultural Dialogue. Ed. Jeremy E. Taylor. London,:
Bloomsbury Academic, 2021. 121–138. *Bloomsbury Collections*. Web. 26 Apr. 2023. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5040/9781350167513.ch-005>>.

Downloaded from Bloomsbury Collections, www.bloomsburycollections.com, 26 April 2023,
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Art for security: The weaponizing of Israeli art in times of emergency

Maayan Amir

Introduction

The Six-Day War (also known as the 'June 1967 War') was fought between Israel and its neighbouring Arab countries Egypt (which at that time was known as the 'United Arab Republic'), Syria and Jordan, from 5 June to 10 June 1967. Considered 'one of the shortest wars in recorded history', Israel gained a sweeping military victory in this conflict.¹ During the war, thousands lost their lives, with most of the casualties on the Arab side. In the war's aftermath, Israel expanded its national territory to 'three and a half times its original size'.² As a result, more than a million Palestinians came under Israeli rule in the newly occupied territories, consequently reshaping the Arab-Israeli conflict and the balance of power in the entire Middle East, and starting a period of occupation which has continued to the present day.³

It was claimed that 'in the days prior to the Six-Day War, the Israeli people were deceived by their leaders that the fate of the nation was in real jeopardy on a par with the Holocaust'.⁴ Israeli artists responded collectively to the war in a number of ways. One particular instance of this surge in national sentiment took place on 25 July 1967 – barely a month and a half after the end of the war – when the exhibition 'Israeli Artists for Security' (in English it appeared as 'Israeli Artists for Defence') opened at the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. Among the hundreds of artists who participated in this exhibition were Joseph Zaritsky, Yehezkel Streichman, Dani Karavan, Lea Nickel, Aviva Uri, Ziona Tajar, Anna Ticho, Ruth Schloss and Raffi Lavie. 'Israel's artists have donated 350 works of art to contribute to the national security effort', the official press release announced.⁵ It was 'the greatest of exhibitions for the most important of causes', a newspaper advertisement declared, urging the public to purchase the works with the slogan: 'Buy a painting – donate to our nation.' Another advertisement shrewdly appealed to the public to 'not stay out of the picture'⁶ (Figure 5.1).

The exhibition was organized jointly by the Association of Israeli Painters and Sculptors, the Israeli Ministry of Defense (under the auspices of the Public Committee of Defense Loan Bonds) and the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. According to the protocol of

תערוכת

"אמני ישראל למען הבטחון"

**הגדולה בתערוכות
לחשובה במטרות**

במוזיאון תל-אביב ביתן הלנה רובינשטיין מוצגות
למכירה 350 תמונות ופסלים שנתרמו ע"י אמני
ישראל ל"קרן הבטחון".

אגודת הציירים והפסלים בישראל, הנהלת מוזיאון
תל-אביב, המועצה הציבורית "בהתנדב עם", חוג
ידידות המוזיאון, קוראים לציבור לרכוש יצירות
אמנות אלו שתמורתן קודש לבטחון ישראל.

המחירים שנקבעו הם למטה מהמחירים הרגילים
וזאת כדי לאפשר את הרכישה לחוגים רחבים ולא
לאספנים בלבד.

התערוכה פתוחה מיום ג' 25.7.67 ועד יום ג' 8.8.67 בשעות 10-1

לפניה"צ ומ"ד 7 אה"צ.

הכניסה חופשית

Figure 5.1 'Israeli Artists for Security' advertisement in *Davar*, 27 July 1967.

a meeting held on 16 July 1967 at the home of the painter Reuven Rubin, the purpose of the exhibition was to 'sell 350 works donated by the artists, with all proceeds going to the Defense Fund'. The logistics were shared out between the three partner organizations: the Association of Painters and Sculptors committed itself to delivering the works to the museum; the Ministry of Defense dealt with all the invitations to the opening, collaborating with Geva Studios to film the exhibition and events, and

covering all the organizational costs; and the artists themselves volunteered to 'take shifts helping to sell the works'. The protocol was endorsed by the Director of the Tel Aviv Museum, Dr Haim Gamzo, as well as by Reuven Rubin, signing himself as 'the painter Reuven'.⁷

Largely forgotten over the years, this exhibition is now rarely mentioned in histories of Israeli art. Several of the original participants (with whom I have spoken) have no recollection of it. Nonetheless, a handful of records in the archives of the Tel Aviv Museum shed some light on the event. 'In early June,' one document recounts, 'the Central Committee of the Association of Painters and Sculptors urged Israel's artists to contribute to the national security effort by donating their works, in addition to their individual purchases of security loan bonds'. It was noted that the artists 'responded generously and donated high-quality works'.⁸ The press release also boasted: 'All art lovers in Israel must ensure that the works find their way to 350 Israeli homes', adding that many of the artists have lowered their fees for the occasion. A 26 July story in the daily *Ma'ariv* repeated the official release almost word for word, calling the exhibition 'a contribution to the war effort' and declaring it 'an opportunity to see works by Israeli artists of all schools and all groups side by side'.⁹

My interest in this seemingly marginal event in the history of Israeli art is prompted by several factors. Firstly, a study of this exhibition can help us rethink the complex relationship between artists and the state, and between art and ideology, offering another unique entry – currently missing – to the existing historical narrative of Israeli art, while also shedding new light on a period considered to be the moment when Israeli political art first started to bloom and come into its own. Secondly, it can help us observe the mechanisms that produce social, conceptual, cultural and ethical conformity, mechanisms whose mode of operation in the exhibition – viewed decades later with greater hindsight with regards the war's long-term outcomes and the ongoing occupation of the West Bank and other areas – offers some fascinating insights. I wish to return then to a visual event instigated by this war, an artistic endeavour in which Israeli artists aligned themselves with the state in a show of 'active citizenship' by offering their art as a contribution to the 'war effort'. And while Israeli art since the Six-Day War has become known more for its overt criticism of 'the Occupation', my focus on this specific exhibition aims to offer a rather different beginning to the history of the visual response to the war and its grave ramifications. In a sense, my intention is to show how the moment which marked the onset of the current state of affairs was also identified with the objectification of art for the nation's 'sacred' security. Notably, by enmeshing artistic production with national security issues, the exhibition provides a unique vantage point from which to examine urgent contemporary questions regarding the ties between art and declared *states of emergency*, whereby the latter is posited as an irrevocable condition for guaranteeing national security.

It is important to mention that my point of departure is the exhibition's Hebrew title, which, unlike its English parallel, which included the word 'defence' (as if to justify the use of force) – implying that the exhibition endorsed the moral necessity of impeding a one-sided invasion – should instead have been translated more literally as 'Israeli Artists for Security'. This strategic skewing of meaning is what interests me in particular. Not only does the Hebrew title refrain from specifying the funding goal

of the initiative – making the title generic for an exhibition rather than an art sale – more importantly, it cites the much more contested concept of *security*, now widely viewed by scholars of international law as a pointedly political term that denotes ‘the alleviation of threats to cherished values.’¹⁰ In what follows, my aim is to respond to this title and its provocative pairing of the two ostensibly remote concepts of art and security. This chapter will attempt to unravel the issue of the limits between art and life when the latter comes under threat, a threat this particular exhibition resuscitated. Specifically, my objective is to show that, though quite blatant, the exhibition’s rhetoric betrayed some of the subtle ways in which art can position itself vis-à-vis the social and body politic.

The title itself, ‘Israeli Artists for Security’, slyly twisted the modernist slogan ‘art for art’s sake’, exposing the aggressive and nationalist potentialities concealed by the underlying discourse.¹¹ I will first point to the way in which differentiating life from art is central to this exhibition’s peculiar historical absence from the nation’s cultural memory. I will then challenge the purpose of creating such a clear-cut distinction between life and art by drawing upon the origins of the notion of ‘art for art’s sake’ to show that while substituting ‘art’s sake’ for ‘security’s sake’ is patently inconsistent with the founding principles of the doctrine, it is these same principles that seem to have made this swap possible. Moving from the exhibition’s title to the titles selected for the works on exhibit, I will then show how, despite the organizers having foregrounded a diversity of artistic styles, the captions applied to the artworks reveal a striking conformity and similarity, as manifested in a sizeable number of titles dedicated to landscapes. I will suggest that the tendency of the works towards abstract representation is contradicted by titles that instead portray the pre-war, divided Jerusalem as a singular entity; at the time, the public perception of the state’s boundaries was hazy and indeterminate, and this contrast turned the exhibition into a third space in which the viewers/citizens oscillated between slogans and images, between nostalgia and a more concrete perception of territory, between hard boundaries and their elusive, boundless abstraction. This perplexing artistic representation of reality was orchestrated in a state of emergency such that inalienable moral values were rebadged in the ‘spirit of national unification’. Furthermore, since the citizen attending the exhibition was induced to purchase a depiction of state-land to assist the national security effort, in a sense, she/he was also co-opted to secure the land at a representational level.

A ‘most important cause’

A press gathering took place on 25 July 1967 at the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion with the participation of representatives from all the institutions involved (i.e. the Artists Association, the museum itself and the Ministry of Defense). Significantly, the press release at the time exalted the historic role of the exhibition and lauded its cause. However, the exhibition is now hardly ever mentioned in art literature on this period, regardless of the extensive advertising campaign for it that was conducted by an external professional public relations company, A. Tal & Co., and which widely promoted the exhibition on a daily basis from 26 July to 4 August 1967 in all of Israel’s

major newspapers, mainly in the news section, along with regular commercials on two radio stations¹² (Figure 5.2).

In their catalogue for the 2008 exhibition *The Birth of Now: Art in Israel in the 1960s* – created as part of a collaborative initiative led by Israel's six leading museums, and aiming to offer 'a decade-by-decade' exploration of Israeli art from the establishment of the State of Israel to the present – curators Yona Fischer and Tamar Manor-Friedman describe the period between the end of 1967 and the end of 1968 as 'not long enough for the artists to collect their bearings and react'.¹³ According to these curators, it was too early to 'readjust and respond', and at the time Israel's 'mainstream artists devoted more attention to individual and aesthetic concerns than to political or social issues'. The curators briefly mention that a few artists' immediate reply to the conflict was to contribute to war albums marking victory in 1967 battles, but they also argue that, by doing so, artists were merely 'carried away' by their feelings, rather than actively responding to events. 'The impact of the war', the authors claim, 'with all its symbolic and critical significance, would become pervasive and would break forth only in the 1970s'. That said, the curators do discuss other exhibitions, including one held at the Tel Aviv Museum a year later, which attempted to respond in a more critical way to the war's consequences.¹⁴

Similarly, writing about the war's aftermath, Yigal Zalmona, in his book *A Century of Israeli Art* – written at the time when Zalmona was the chief interdisciplinary curator of Israel's museum network – omits any mention of the 1967 exhibition and its affirmative all-encompassing response to the war, preferring instead to focus on the occasional early artistic endeavours aimed at criticizing the militaristic atmosphere

Figure 5.2 Israeli Artists for Defence Fund Leaflet, 1967. Courtesy of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art.

that prevailed in the aftermath of that conflict. Zalmona suggests that these outbursts may have been influenced by parallel resistance movements that developed in response to the war in Vietnam.¹⁵

In his blog summarizing year-by-year trends in Israeli art, the art critic Gideon Ofrat expands on the euphoria that swept through the local art world, galvanized by the territorial gains of 1967. Ofrat stresses the lack of direct artistic responses to the war, adding that the Israeli art world was largely oblivious to the war's complex implications. Interestingly, Ofrat singles out the 'exemplary bravery' of artist Ruth Schloss, whom he indicates as 'the social-humanistic conscience of Israeli art'. For him, in June 1967 Schloss was the first to react with a series of ink sketches depicting Palestinian refugees crossing Allenby Bridge (which connects the West Bank to Jordan). He notes that Schloss had travelled to Jordan's bridges right after the fighting subsided, making rapid sketches on the battlefield. Citing curator Tali Tamir, he adds that Schloss was 'one of the first to resist the occupation from day one'.¹⁶ Ofrat was another who refrained from including the 'Artists for Security' exhibition in his retrospective of the art scene. To have actually mentioned this exhibition would have raised the issue that, despite her having witnessed the combat zone and the victims' flight first hand, Schloss had soon afterward taken part in an exhibition which basically advocated military force. That said, the oil painting that Schloss submitted to the 1967 exhibition embodied a rather different theme from the one mentioned above, and was titled *Women in Landscape*.

Although it remains a mystery as to why such a wide-scale national effort ended with this strange amnesia, it is nevertheless clear that the 'Israeli Artists for Defence' exhibition is not consistent with the historic Western art narrative, and is also at odds with the so-called international art scene – the very same narrative that the aforementioned writers declaredly deploy as their model for sampling, organizing and conceptualizing local trends in the Israeli art field, and thereby recommending what will be remembered and preserved. Broadly speaking, the history of Israeli art is usually narrated and studied through a timeline that complies with dominant trends governing Western art, albeit somewhat delayed in the case of Israel. In 1967 (though also earlier), while Israeli art was still following the trajectory of modernism, Western art had moved away from formalist abstraction to become far more overtly political and 'socially engaged'. Viewed in retrospect in terms of both the political implications of the Six-Day War and the growing mood of socially critical postmodernism spreading across the Western world, the exhibition disrupts the writers' attempts to narrate contemporary art's progress towards a more critical stance, to follow the Western storyline which the curators both embrace and strive to confirm. In these circumstances, it is only logical that this exhibition would become historically insignificant and consequently be rebutted, ignored or simply forgotten.

What is more, I suggest that this peculiar amnesia over an exhibition that manifested the war's influence on the Israeli art arena is actually an outcome of the theoretical stance taken by the abovementioned art critics themselves. The critics' ideological stance is one of severing the artists' lives from their works – and even their public endeavours – and viewing these as detached and external, when instead they sought ways in which the war's ramifications would affect the form, content and very nature of the artworks. In this sense, the way the artists were aligned to the national community

– even though it was presented in an exhibition in one of the state's most important museums – would paradoxically become irrelevant, because it would be as if they adhered to the view that 'life is one thing, art is another ... let us keep the two apart'.¹⁷ My view is that even if this were so, much can be learnt from this case of art serving an external purpose – some scope outside and beyond itself – especially in times of violent conflicts or acute national security concerns.

We need to look into this act of shifting the onus from art in its own right to the issue of security. This shift seems to stem from an art scene focused on modern tendencies and the point at which art sought to enforce its autonomy from events and contingencies.¹⁸ This political engagement emerges in the 'Security' exhibition, which seemed to embody the links between art on the one hand, and occupation and militarism on the other. This manoeuvre essentially implies that this involved art 'for the nation's sake', a further variation of the formula whereby art was abruptly detached from its social function. In this way, the common idea of art created for 'the pursuit of pure beauty – without any other preoccupation', 'without confounding ... with patriotism and alike', was hijacked for reasons of state security and defence. With this in mind, I wish to return briefly to some selected examples of 'art for art's sake', and in particular ones that complicate the idea that art can be detached from moral obligations.¹⁹

Art for art's sake?

Interestingly, the invocation 'art for art's sake' plays an influential role in art's route towards self-determination. The origins of this concept have been traced to the Enlightenment as part of the dominant ambition to liberate science, law, morality – and all forms of art – from the grip of religious authority.²⁰ Despite the diverse interpretations ascribed to the phrase from the eighteenth century up until the first half of the twentieth century – interpretations that have migrated, merged and transformed across a variety of cultural arenas in Europe and beyond – 'art for art's sake' has become a staple for any discussion on the political heft of art, of its autonomy and the ultimate limits of its impact. In contemporary times the idea of 'art for art's sake' is commonly considered a refuge in which artists can secure their interests when they feel themselves 'threatened from one direction or another, and have had to justify themselves and their activities ... by insisting that art serves no ulterior purpose, but is purely an end in itself'.²¹ Basically, they advocate art's independence and reject the need for any usefulness or moral justification.

However, a closer look at the real outcomes reveals a much more active engagement in life. The roots of the phrase precede the modernist ethos, and have been traced to the Christian doctrine which contends that 'nothing exists wholly for its own sake, since everything is always also in relation to Christ'.²² Therefore, it seems to stem not from ideas of autonomy as such, but rather from a theology that emphasizes total attachment. As early as the seventeenth century, the political thought of English philosopher John Locke was identified with the notion of 'truth for truth's sake'. In a 'Letter to Anthony Collins' (an English thinker and a government official in Essex)

dated 29 October 1703, Locke famously wrote: 'Believe it, my good friend, to love truth, for truth's sake, is the principal part of human perfection in this world, and the seed-plot of all other virtues.'²³

Locke's proclamation was understood to express the hazards of submitting oneself to the authority of tradition in a society divided by competing doctrines of faith. By placing truth itself at the centre, he aimed to replace adherence to an 'innate' morality with a more developed system of active rational negotiation of moral values.²⁴ Locke's adherence to truth for truth's sake, as a means to resist obedience to external authority, actually predates 'art for art's sake' and might have provided the conceptual humus for the field in which this idea materialized. According to Bell-Villada, it was Anthony Cooper, the Third Earl of Shaftesbury – privately educated by Locke himself and later influenced by the German philosopher Immanuel Kant – who is considered to have introduced the idea of 'art for art's sake'.²⁵ While Bell-Villada does not elaborate on Locke's specific influence on Cooper, he expands on Kant's contribution and particularly on his *Critique of Judgment*, which posed an aesthetic judgement and analysis of beauty associated with a notion of 'Purposiveness Without a Purpose'.²⁶ Viewing 'art for art's sake' through the Kantian conceptualization of 'disinterested beauty' prompted a new perception of the formula as 'aesthetic separatism'.²⁷ Against this, Bell-Villada asserts that Kant's conception of beauty must be regarded in light of his overall ideology, in which he does not explicitly call for the separation of beauty from morality. He cites Kant: 'If the beautiful arts are not brought into more combination with moral ideas ... the spirit can become dual, and the mind disconnected with itself and peevish.'²⁸ Moreover, according to Bell-Villada, Cooper himself presented a dual doctrine which defined the aesthetic experience as something both independent from personal desires yet at the same time tied to moral conduct.²⁹ The discrepancy between the two positions relates to a contemporary perspective which pitched beauty versus utility, whereas for eighteenth-century thinkers the two concepts were complementary.³⁰

An interpretation of Kant's ideas also shaped the French '*l'art pour l'art*' – a maxim that arose from a series of lectures given in 1818 by Victor Cousin, the chair of philosophy at the Sorbonne, and first published in 1836. Cousin is quoted as saying: '*Il faut de la religion pour la religion, la morale pour la morale, comme de l'art pour l'art.*'³¹ A year later, in his *Französische Bühne* (Letters Concerning the French Stage) (1837), the German poet Heinrich Heine declared: 'I am for the autonomy of art. It is not to be regarded as handmaiden of religion and politics, it is its own definite justification', later adding: 'My motto is Art in the purpose of art, as love in the purpose of Love, and even life itself is the purpose of life.'³² Heine's biographer Philip Kossoff points out that it would be a mistake to conclude that Heine separated the world from life itself:

He considered art that was aloof from life as being just as hostile to art as to life. He insisted that art must not be subordinated to religion or politics or the government. Art must be autonomous but it retains validity only if it is connected to life. Just as the giant Antaeus remained invincible so long as his feet touched the earth, so the poet remains strong and mighty so long as he stands on real ground, but he loses his strength at once when he rises ecstatically into the blue.³³

Even the French nineteenth-century poet and critic Théophile Gautier warns against abandoning reality: 'Artists should understand that they are wrong to isolate themselves ... in some sort of ideal abstraction outside of any possible application.'³⁴ Interestingly, it seems that to whatever extent the notion of 'art for art's sake' was understood as including a commitment to moral values, already in the eighteenth century it gave rise to ideologically contradictory forces, such as the alliance between advocates of romanticism and '*art pour l'art*' and militant liberals cultivating a mood of resistance to the Bourbon crown and towards the monarchy in general.³⁵ Moreover, it was claimed that the freedoms to be gained from '*art pour l'art*' and the notion that art should follow laws of its own could resolve what until then appeared to be opposing aesthetics views. 'The critic, whose duty it is to understand everything', noted Gautier, 'can without contradicting himself, accept points of view which are in appearance contradictory. Therefore, one must not be astonished to see us praise works opposite in character. We must judge them in relation to the principles chosen by the artists themselves.'³⁶

While such historic examples may complicate the relation between 'art for art's sake' and its social role, whose possible manifestations would continue to emerge, in France this '*art pour l'art*' sentiment was identified with the anti-monarchist Left, but is now commonly seen as representing its opposite. That is, today 'art for art's sake' is linked not only with a retreat into aestheticism, but also with cultural and political conservatism.³⁷

Taking place towards the end of the heyday of modernism in Israel, the 'Israeli Artists for Security' exhibition resonated with the dying echo of a dual agenda that invoked art's autonomy while simultaneously calling for moral commitment, even if such commitment would most likely be perceived today as 'immoral'. More importantly, the exhibition illustrated an ideological quagmire whereby Christian values blurred with truth, with art, and eventually with (national) security, exposing a slippery path that led to viewing security as a sacred value – or at least establishing the ground for clustering all these disparate values as interchangeable on the same representational plane.

Security and the language of opposition, or 'art for life's sake'

Contrary to the complexity that 'art for art's sake' entails, and despite the seeming tautology of the phrase itself, the entire argument around 'art for art's sake' is riddled with dichotomies and contradictions. These include influential statements such as Gautier's 'everything that is useful is ugly, for it is the expression of some need, and the needs of men are ignoble and disgusting'.³⁸ And 'for all time there has existed, in painting, two schools, that of the idealists and that of the realists. ... The former has soul, the latter has life.'³⁹ Some critics have emphasized that 'art for art's sake' applies mainly to sight, while 'all the rest of the senses relate to literature, music etc.', identifying 'art for art's sake' with visual data, as opposed to other narrative forms.⁴⁰ Flaubert's declaration – 'I feel an invincible repulsion to putting on paper anything from my heart' – implies a sort of opposition between self-alienation and intimacy.⁴¹ Additional extensions of this binary view include individualism versus altruism;⁴² form versus content;⁴³ artistic

achievement versus ethical goals;⁴⁴ symbolism versus representation of reality;⁴⁵ beauty as opposed to realism;⁴⁶ unpopular versus popular;⁴⁷ dehumanization versus humanization;⁴⁸ and, most strongly, juxtaposing art in opposition to life. Viewing the circumstances that led to the 1967 exhibition 'Israeli Artists for Security' through this polarizing lens, it would seem that the show embodied the direct, utilitarian opposite of 'art for art's sake'. And while the notion of art's autonomy was coupled with expressions of resistance to 'dominant or administrated realities', the resulting exhibition was paradoxically an act of dire conformity and an expression of unflinching support for the institution of the nation-state.⁴⁹

At this point we also need to consider the origins and meaning of the word 'security', which stems from the Latin *securus* (lit., 'free from care'),⁵⁰ and compare it to the common understanding of the notion of 'art for art's sake' as meaning 'an emphasis upon form and beauty to the expressed exclusion of all other concerns'.⁵¹ Ironically, the two notions seem to share this spirit of disregard for context, and even defiance. On this basis, one might see a strange consistency in the alignment of 'art for art's sake' with the fight for independence – in the face of war's threat. While the original slogan 'art for art's sake' is hinted at in the 1967 exhibition's title, recalling also the expression of 'life for art's sake', the exhibition itself might well be described as an event of 'art for life's sake'.⁵² An entire community of artists (perhaps fearing extinction?) aligned themselves around the objective of security (safety) and in so doing promoted the 'national interest'. It appears that swapping 'art's sake' with 'security's sake' for the exhibition's title effectively jeopardized art's autonomy and resistance to utility, and turned the event into a deadly resource for warfare. This is proof that in times of emergency, art can be conveniently repurposed for fatal material ends. Notably, a document signed by the Tel Aviv Museum's then director expresses his pride at having raised a total of 50,000 Israeli pounds through the sale of the artworks, and of having the 'great honour' of assigning this sum to the military.⁵³

The spirit of national unity and the 'writing on the wall'

Unlike the sublime horizon often invoked by modernist paintings, and regardless of the exhibited artworks' supposed aspiration to varying levels of abstraction, the paintings presented at the 1967 exhibition did, however, touch 'real ground'. We can see this from the 'writings on the wall' – of the museum – that is, from the titles of works themselves. Despite the claimed diversity in styles alleged in the exhibition press release, the 'List of Exhibits' conveyed a common artistic choice for their labels. Oddly enough, while the Tel Aviv Museum failed to keep any visual documentation of the exhibition, it nonetheless did preserve a detailed record of the participating artists, the titles of their works and the prices of the works themselves.

Titling an artwork has been described as 'a signifying technique', and 'a textual strategy' that has the power to shape the experience of the viewer.⁵⁴ 'The title of a painting often provides the first and even the only language by which the image will be constructed,' notes the philologist Ruth Bernard Yeazell.⁵⁵ Specifically, for the modern period, historian John C. Welchman has identified

three non-distinct categories of titular activity ... First, the continuation of broadly denotative titles, where the words are presumed to stand in direct and untroubled relation to which is represented. Second, the set of titles that can be said to provoke connotative, allusive, or even in Dada and Surrealism, absurd and non-consequential references to an image. And third, the conclusively modernist practice of advertising the absence of a title through the description 'Untitled' or through numbering or other systemic, non referential designations.⁵⁶

To illustrate the title's relation to the work, Welchman cites Marcel Duchamp's description of the modern title as an 'invisible color'.⁵⁷ The art historian Ernst Gombrich goes as far as to claim that 'unlike images, language can make ... [a] vital distinction ... between universals and particulars'. For him, the title of an artwork 'is also an instruction to adopt a given mental state'. In regard to modern titles, Gombrich emphasizes that 'studying the two-volume catalogue of the Guggenheim Museum collection by Angelica Zander Rudenstine, one finds that among the 252 paintings from the period 1880–1945 there is not one comparable title'.⁵⁸ He also takes into consideration the fact that with modernist works it is not always clear whether the artists have personally chosen the titles themselves, or if titles were assigned by exhibition organizers.

In the case of the 'Israeli Artists for Security' exhibition – and in any case within the specific ideological context – the titles are to some degree instructive.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the importance of naming the works in the exhibition – either because the purpose was to sell the works and they therefore needed tagging in some way, or because failing to provide a title would imply letting the painting 'speak for itself' – is perhaps confirmed by the fact that not one of the works in the 1967 exhibition bore the label 'Untitled'.⁶⁰

Normally, the titles of modern artworks vary considerably. However, in 'Israeli Artists for Security' there is a glaring similarity among the titles chosen. Of the 350 works included, forty-six paintings were titled after Israeli landscapes, with a significant number depicting Zfat, Haifa, Tel Aviv, Jaffa and Ein Hod, among other sites. Strikingly, at least thirty-two artists chose titles referring explicitly to Jerusalem, and employed an assortment of media such as oils, watercolour, and even ink and gouache drawings to capture views of the city. Many of these works were titled simply *Jerusalem* (e.g. those by Gad Ullman, Coca Lapidot, Rita Most and Avraham Naton, to mention only a few). Considering that prior to the war Jerusalem had been divided, with the western part of the city under Israeli rule and the eastern part under Jordanian rule – a partition known also as the pre-1967 border (which became irrelevant after the Israeli victory, an event which was perceived by the Israeli state as marking the unification of the city, but by others as marking the start of the occupation of the eastern part of the city) – the artists' invocation of Jerusalem as a single, unified whole must have acquired a new political meaning. Other artists favoured alluding to the burden of the pre-war territorial border-partition arrangement. For instance, the artists Haya Alperovitz and Elhanan Halpren titled their works *Mount Zion*, being the closest vantage point from which Israelis could previously view Jerusalem's Old City and the Temple Mount under Jordanian rule. Others embraced the newly annexed, most contested area of the Old City as their point of reference. For instance, Shaul Ohaly and Kurt Singer titled their works *Jerusalem's Old City*, and Zvi Raffeli

indicated the monumental site of the *Wailing Wall*. More bluntly, as if to foreground the physical presence at the only recently excluded areas, artist Ruth Arion named her work *In the Old City of Jerusalem*, and Ephraim Lifshitz labelled his *Impression from an Ancient Wall in the Sanhedrin Catacombs*. An additional thirty-one works resorted to the generic and non-specific title *Landscape*, though some did include references to specific sites in the Israeli countryside. With regard to the exhibition's circumstances, a handful of artists donated works celebrating the military triumph; for example, the head of the artists' union and the exhibition organizer, painter Reuven Rubin, titled his work *Victory Bouquet*, while artist Shlomit Hermoni's submission was titled *Yenentie Women Victory Dance*.⁶¹

Nevertheless, it should be noted that other titles betray a greater detachment from the exhibition's context. For instance, the theme of 'flowers' recurred in such works as *Tulips* (Malka Ventik) and *Water Plants* (Joseph Zdroyevich), along with blossoms in general (Joab Bar-el). Several other titles are peculiarly divorced from the reasons behind the exhibition. Examples include *Eggplants* by Hedwig Lehmann-Grossman and *A Couple of Monkeys* by Lehmann Rudolf. Interestingly, both of the artists whose titles seem least relevant to the occasion were not content with donating a single work – as their colleagues had done – and instead both made available no fewer than ten works, their presence conspicuous on the museum's walls.

Nevertheless, the substantial amount of works with abstract representations of the country's landscapes – submitted under the urgent pretext of a state of emergency and for national security ends that likely prompted viewers to push aside or at least postpone questions of personal style – recontextualize the disconnect between the title and the abstract depiction of the territory itself, creating a virtual space for the collective political imagination to inhabit. The dynamic between the names given to individual works and the title of the exhibition suggests a phantom space mirroring newly occupied territory that now required national defence. In a sense, the conversion of those 'cherished values' that replaced Christ with truth, with art, and later with security, once viewed in interaction with the works' titles, is dilated to include the state's territory, reflecting the conservative agenda by which national security is equated with rigorous territorial control. Moreover, it is in this impalpable space between the captive titulars accompanying the exhibition and the elusive territory that the darkness of insecurity finds a peculiar endorsement for military force where citizenship appears to be equated with land ownership, not only in a concrete sense, but also symbolically. Various slogans urged the exhibition's visitors to acquire these landscapes as an act of national importance, marketing private purchases as vital for ensuring national security. By doing this, the meaning of land ownership was extended to the representation of that territory. As such, the exhibition 'Israeli Artists for Security' was artfully branded as a manifestation of national unity.

Interestingly, also at the representational level (since it was the fuzzy, indefinite borders of the territory that fomented the sense of insecurity), one has to question where exactly in the exhibition this spirit of national unity resided. While the diversity of the artworks and artistic genres in the exhibition was beyond dispute, including lyrical abstraction, post-impressionism, primitivism, expressionism, to name only a few, the organizers appear to have been indecisive regarding where exactly this spirit

arose from. Was it from the works of art themselves, from their being displayed collectively at the museum, or perhaps from the initiative itself?

Several versions of the exhibition press release kept in the museum archives reveal that this quandary also preoccupied the organizers. The handwritten version of the document – presumably its first draft – stated:

Today, having finally been able to view all the works at the exhibition ... we can say that artists with diverse aesthetic views, from various schools and currents, are presented here side-by-side ... contributing together to our country's awakening and unity. The spirit of national unity permeates the halls of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art.⁶²

However, a printed version with handwritten annotations expunged the original statement, presuming to locate the source from which 'the spirit of national unity' sprang. Instead of the 'halls of the Tel Aviv Museum' the text was revised to read: 'The spirit of national unity is reflected from the execution of the initiative "Israeli Artists for Security."' Furthermore, in an abridged version of the text relayed to the Geva News Company, the sentence was amended as follows: 'For the first time since the formation of the Association of Israeli Painters and Sculptors, all of its members join forces, their participation symbolizing the perfect unity created by this sacred objective.'

Despite the final version that put the 'national spirit' back into the initiative and its objective, it might be that 'Israeli Artists for Security' presenting their works thus side by side – modernist paintings and sculptures – shows that, in a moment of crisis, these artworks generated a virtual and physical space capable of harbouring the output of an entire community of creators, albeit impromptu. However, one might say that the exhibition epitomizes the pitfalls of the institutionalization of experimental ideas in times of emergency. And when an art fair endorsing warfare suddenly poses as an accepted reaction – basically weaponizing art – the question of separating art from life (and life from art) instantly becomes much more convoluted and even sinister.

The weird oblivion clouding the 'Israeli Artists for Security' exhibition held in 1967 remains, and the event coincides with the moment commonly perceived as marking the birth of Israeli conceptual and political art. This moment has been variously described as 'essentially political'; and 'intrinsically linked the rejection of traditional art forms of painting and of sculpture, which concealed and also naturalized the political questions'.⁶³ However, the exhibition rather suggests another view of the end of high modernism at the local level. Moreover, it is precisely the peculiar disconnect between the ties between the war and its implications, between social values and aesthetic values, and between the narrative of Israeli art history and that of Western production that underscores the frontiers between life and art in a state of emergency.

Deletion of normative irregularities in regard to artistic grand narratives might lead again to a failure to recognize the distance between artistic ideology and political action. Moreover, it might blur the blind spots related to the act of conforming to and absorbing internationally acknowledged radical ideas. In terms of contemporary art, the modernist rhetoric seems to have been replaced by a discourse which stressed art's potential to emerge from these zones of discomfort, a discourse in which

instability itself becomes a central value, fuelling creativity. However, one might say that one consensus was merely replaced by another equally restrictive regime, at least when understood through translated slogans. My belief is that this historical event demonstrates how in modern times security can become a sacred value, and art a legitimate means to ensure it. It shows that in times of emergency, even though it may have fallen into oblivion and disappeared from the national radar, art can abruptly become a form of 'ammunition' for the state agenda. This fact forces us to re-examine the ways in which art risks abetting and endorsing prevailing power relations. In the 'Israeli Artists for Security' exhibition, it was no longer a case of art for its own sake, but art for the sake of power and force, for this was an event that marked the beginning of an ongoing occupation.

Notes

- 1 Michael B. Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Presidio Press, 2017), 305.
- 2 Ibid., 307.
- 3 Ibid.
- 4 Simon Dunstan, *The Six-Day War 1967: Sinai* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2012), 91; see also Gideon Ofrat, '1967: Was There Art?': <http://gideonofrat.wordpress.com/?s=1967> (accessed 17 October 2018).
- 5 Details are taken from an undated, untitled and unattributed press release (hereafter 'Press Release: Israeli Artists for Security'), in Hebrew, held at the Tel Aviv Museum Archive.
- 6 'Israeli Artists for Security', *Davar*, 27 July 1967; see also 'Do Not Stay Out of the Picture', *Maariv*, 3 August 1967.
- 7 L. Kaplan to Ministry of Defense, Israeli Artists for Security Meeting Protocol, 17 July 1967. Tel Aviv Museum Archive. So far, Rubin's familiarity with 'art for art's sake' has remained unexplored; yet, his biography provides multiple pointers that suggest he had a close acquaintance with the literature relating to this concept, and also knowledge of the principal artists identified with its diverse applications. For example, as a young art student at the École des Beaux-Arts in 1913–14, Rubin recalled an influential portal inscription by Ingres ('*Le dessin est la probité de l'art*'), an artist described as the closest exponent of Théophile Gautier's 'conception of art'. In his biography, Rubin moreover underlines his close friendship with 'art connoisseur and critic' Alfred Stieglitz in New York, sealed when Stieglitz first commissioned him to exhibit in the Anderson Gallery in 1920. Stieglitz has long been considered the vehicle for the secessionist 'art for art's sake' revolt. Furthermore, Rubin notes that he read Baudelaire and Victor Hugo. Interestingly, upon his return to Palestine in 1923–24, Rubin was proud to see a poster he had designed 'printed by Zionist organization after the Balfour Declaration, appealing for funds for Palestine', and later declared: 'I threw away all the ideas I had derived from Bezalel Art School and the Paris Beaux-Arts ... life was starkly primitive'. This ideological volte-face, along with his overt endorsement of art in the promotion of political ideals, seems to fit well with the stance expressed in the exhibition 'Israeli Artists for the Defense Fund', and the replacement of 'art's sake' with that of 'security'. Reuven Rubin, *My*

Life, My Art (New York: Sabra Books, 1974), 69, 139–41, 46, 48, 60; Anita Brookner, *Romanticism and Its Discontents* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2000), 102; Helen Thomas, *Dance, Modernity and Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 76.

- 8 This is taken from an undated, untitled and unattributed document (hereafter ‘Document: Israeli Artists for Security’) in Hebrew held by the Tel Aviv Museum and the Public Committee for Defense Loan Bond.
- 9 ‘Press Release: Israeli Artists for Security’.
- 10 Paul D. Williams, ‘Security Studies: An Introduction’, in *Security Studies*, ed. Paul D. Williams (London: Routledge, 2012), 1–12.
- 11 In Hebrew, ‘art for art’s sake’ is usually translated as ‘art for art’, and therefore the substitution with ‘art for security’ is clear. Though there is no research which explores the history of the translation of the notion of ‘art for art’s sake’, note that the phrase ‘art for art’ can be linked to Victor Hugo. On ‘Art for Art’ by Victor Hugo, see Editorial, ‘Art for Art’s Sake: Its Fallacy and Viciousness’, *The Art World* 2, no. 2 (1917): 98–102.
- 12 A. Tal & Co. (Public Relations) to the Tel Aviv Museum, 6 August 1967. Tel Aviv Museum Archive.
- 13 Yona Fischer and Tamar Manor-Friedman, *The Birth of Now: Art in Israel in the 1960s* (Ashdod: Ashdod Art Museum/Monart Center, 2008), 12.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 4, 7, 13, 76–8.
- 15 Yigal Zalmona, *A Century of Israeli Art* (Farnham: Lund Humphries, 2013), 279.
- 16 Ofrat, ‘1967: Was There Art?’
- 17 Ortega Y. Gasset, cited in Kelly Comfort, *Art and Life in Aestheticism: De-Humanizing and Re-Humanizing Art, the Artist and the Artistic Receptor* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 6.
- 18 In the 1960s in Israel, art was described as a process of ‘transition from the absolute, autonomous ideology of the abstract artists of the “New Horizon” group, to open, multi-dimensional, and, above all, individual channels of expression’. This affirmation also indicates a process of ‘retreat from the absolute control of the abstraction which started already at early 60s, when artists of “New Horizon” return to landscape painting’. See Fischer and Manor-Friedman, *The Birth of Now*, 8, 28.
- 19 Gautier, cited in Editorial, ‘Art for Art’s Sake’, 98.
- 20 Precedents to this modern invention lead far back to Greece; see, for example, Editorial, ‘Art for Art’s Sake’, 98–102.
- 21 Iredell Jenkins, ‘Art for Art’s Sake’, *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* 1 (1973): 108–11.
- 22 Stephen Cheeke, *Transfiguration: The Religion of Art in Nineteenth-century Literature before Aestheticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 45.
- 23 John Locke, *The Works of John Locke in Nine Volumes*, vol. 9, 12th edn. (London: Rivington, 1824). On Collins, see William Uzgalis, ‘Anthony Collins’, in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2014 edition), ed. Edward N. Zalta, <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/collins/>
- 24 Greg Forster, *John Locke’s Politics of Moral Consensus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 61.
- 25 Gene H. Bell-Villada, ‘The Idea of Art for Art’s Sake: Intellectual Origins, Social Conditions, and Poetic Doctrine’, *Science & Society* 50, no. 4 (1986): 415–39, esp. 420.
- 26 *Ibid.*, 423.
- 27 *Ibid.*, 420.
- 28 *Ibid.*, 424–5.

- 29 Ibid., 421.
- 30 Ibid., 422. Bell-Villada notes in 'The Idea of Arts for Art's Sake', 420 that Shaftesbury's 'major work, the *Characteristics*, enjoyed remarkable success, going through eleven editions from 1711 to 1790'.
- 31 Cousin, cited in Bell-Villada, 'The Idea of Arts for Art's Sake', 427.
- 32 Philip Kossoff, *Valiant Heart: A Biography of Heinrich Heine* (Cranbury: Cornwall Books, 1983), 151.
- 33 Ibid.
- 34 Lynette Stocks, 'Théophile Gautier: Advocate of "Art for Art's Sake" or Champion of Realism?' *French History and Civilization* 2 (2009): 49.
- 35 Ibid., 428.
- 36 Gautier, cited in Stocks, 'Théophile Gautier', 41–60.
- 37 Bell-Villada, 'The Idea of Arts for Art's Sake', 428. It should be noted that 'art for art's sake' was considered conservative much earlier. See, for example, Gustave Courbet, 'The Realist Manifesto', 1861: <https://arthistoryproject.com/artists/gustave-courbet/realist-manifesto-an-open-letter/> (accessed 23 January 2020); see also Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction' (1936), in *Visual Culture: Critical Concepts in Media and Cultural Studies*, ed. Joanne Morra and Marquard Smith (London: Routledge, 2006), 114–37.
- 38 Théophile Gautier, *Mademoiselle de Maupin* (London: Penguin Classics, 2016).
- 39 Gautier, cited in Stocks, 'Théophile Gautier', 41
- 40 Ibid., 16.
- 41 Ibid., 99.
- 42 Editorial, 'Art for Art's Sake', 99.
- 43 Ibid., 99.
- 44 Stocks, 'Théophile Gautier', 37.
- 45 Comfort, *Art and Life*, 2.
- 46 Ibid., 44.
- 47 José Ortega Y. Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art, and Other Writings on Art and Culture* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 66.
- 48 Gasset, *The Dehumanization of Art*. Kelly Comfort uses the term to describe the process of eliminating the human from art's subject matter; the method of isolating art in its own autonomous sphere, the desire to free art from human utility or usefulness. See Comfort, *Art and Life in Aestheticism*, 2.
- 49 Despite discussing the concept of 'life as art', Simpson mentions in this context writers identified with ideas of 'art for art's sake', such as Baudelaire and Adorno. See Zachary Simpson, *Life as Art: Aesthetics and the Creation of Self* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 7.
- 50 P. G. W. Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1968), 1722.
- 51 On sensualism, see Stephen Cheeke, *Transfiguration*, 49.
- 52 Comfort, *Art and Life in Aestheticism*, 2.
- 53 M. Ben Haim to M. Kashti, Israeli Artists for Security, 10 September 1977, Tel Aviv Museum Archive.
- 54 J. C. Welchman, *Invisible Colors: A Visual History of Titles* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1997), 323–4.
- 55 Ruth Bernard Yeazell, *Picture Titles: How and Why Western Paintings Acquired Their Names* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 4.
- 56 Welchman, *Invisible Colors*, 8.
- 57 Ibid., 8.

- 58 Ernst Hans Gombrich, 'Image and Word in Twentieth-Century Art', *Word & Image* 1, no. 3 (1985): 213–41.
- 59 Although instructions to the participating artists were not found in the archive, it may also be assumed that since it was a sale exhibition and the works were designated to be in circulation in the art market, and the labels were meant to facilitate the exchange, the Tel Aviv Museum and the organizers requested the artists to title their works. Yeazell adds that 'even in the twenty-first century, many art lovers are probably unaware how often the titles they consult on museum walls testify to a work's reception history rather than the words of the painter'. However, in our case, whether the works' titles were given by the artists or by the exhibition organizers, their meaning in the context of the exhibition is instructive. Yeazell, *Picture Titles*, 4, 13 and 14.
- 60 On the practice of omitting titles, see Yeazell, *Picture Titles*, 19.
- 61 In using the word 'Yenentie', the artist was referring to Yemenite Jews.
- 62 Press Release: Israeli Artists for Security.
- 63 On the political orientation of conceptual art, see Mordechai Omer, 'Foreword', in *Ha-'Enayim shel ha-medinah: omanut hazutit bi-medinah le-lo gevulot*, ed. Mordechai Omer, Uri Ram and Ellen Ginton (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 1998), 7–10.