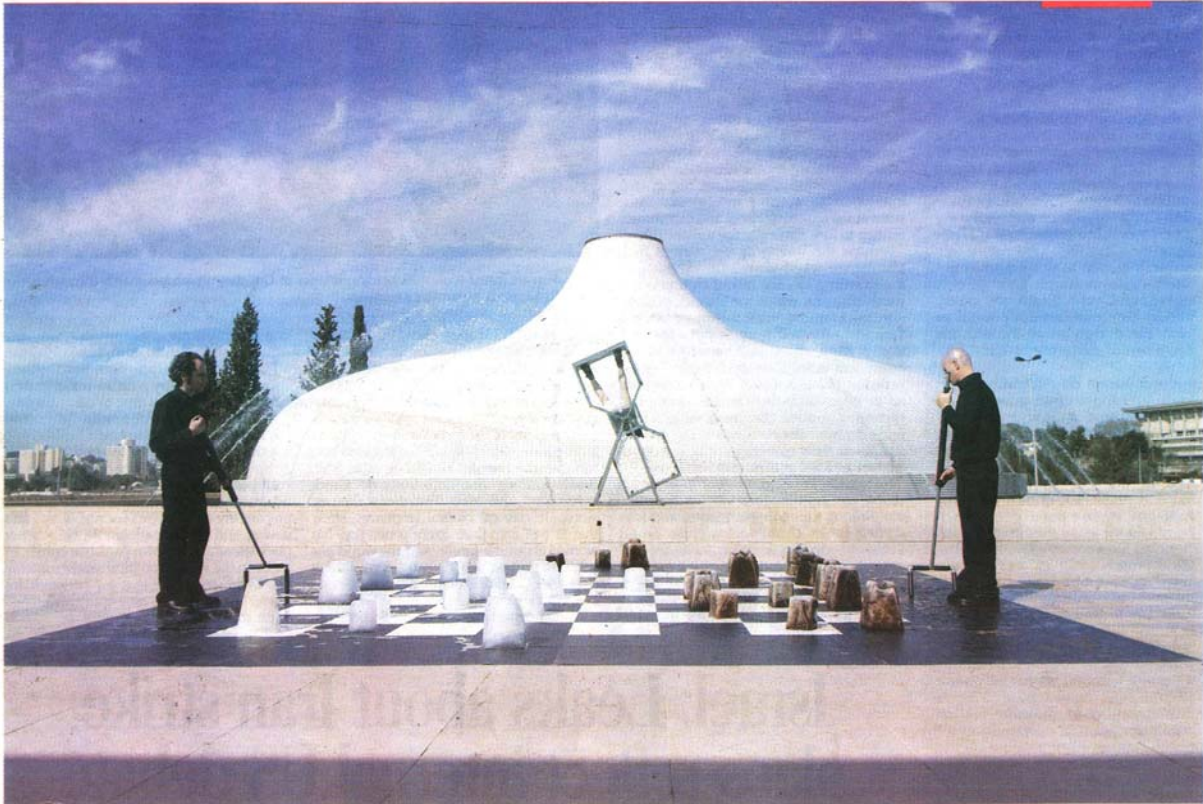


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'OPENING LINES'



'Freeze' by Shahar Marcus at the Israel Museum's Real Time exhibition is a sign not just of our times. (Courtesy, the Israel Museum/Meidad Suchowolski)



By LIAT COLLINS

I took time out this week for a trip to the museum. The museum, in this case, being the Israel Museum, a mere 20-minute bus ride from my Jerusalem home. Mixing business and pleasure – one of the occasional perks of journalism – I participated in a guided tour of an unusual exhibition. “Real Time” (*Zman Emet*) is one of a series of six shows at different museums around the country, each concentrating on a separate decade of Israeli art (which often mimics the country’s life). The Israel Museum chose the last decade, 1998-2008, for its particular project which, by chance, was the first to go on public display. I now have a yearning to go back in time, as it were, and spend the summer visiting the other museums participating in the Sixty Years of Art in Israel series – which would take me not only on a voyage in time, but a trip around much of the country since the participants are found in Ashdod, Ein Harod, Haifa, Herzliya and Tel Aviv.

But since time waits for no man, as they say, I suspect I will end up making do with a

look at the catalog, without seeing the fuller picture, as it were.

Real Time (each exhibition has a catchy title) is more than a look at the “here and now.” As becomes the modern, angst-ridden zeitgeist, the theme is more the “here, there and everywhere.” Jerusalem, the center of my world, is a mere dot.com in the global village in an age of globalization and commercialization. Both themes are evident in the exhibition. In a fitting aside, one of the video works on consumerism is housed in the pavilion’s bomb shelter. Video exhibits are very much in evidence in Real Time although in another decade I suspect artists will look back in derision at this particular art form, having produced a different medium for their message.

I’m not a fan of contemporary art and I have an aversion to obscure works which are

left “untitled” as if the artist couldn’t even be bothered to give the visitor a clue as to what the all-white/all-black/childlike squiggles they have paid to stare at might mean.

I surprised myself, however, by taking a real liking to the first video we saw as we entered the pavilion. Shahar Marcus’s *Freeze* (2008) is performance art filmed outside the Israel Museum’s Shrine of the Book which houses the Dead Sea Scrolls. In a combination of the modern and the timeless, Marcus depicts the passing of time through a chess game played with huge blocks of gradually melting ice as he himself swings, sometimes upside down, in an hourglass marking each move. Global warming, outside; the scrolls with their warnings of cosmic conflict between the forces of light and darkness, inside.

Perhaps we tend to see things in black and white.

“Real Time explores the ways in which Israel’s young artists have engaged with the growing phenomenon of the global artistic village,” said Israel Museum director James Snyder, whose arrival at the Jerusalem museum from New York’s Museum of Modern Art just over a decade ago is itself, perhaps, the sign of a shrinking world.

The artists, all of whom have made their mark on the Israeli scene in the last 10 years, are a product of a reality in which local events – the second intifada, the Second Lebanon War – merge with world events: from global jihad to global warming. There was something very Israeli about their works although all could be viewed in the broader cosmic context, as co-curator Amitai Mendelsohn pointed out.

Ohad Meromi’s *The Boy from South Tel Aviv* – a huge and somewhat menacing statue of

Time will tell

A trip to the museum provides a glimpse of the essence of our era

a naked African refugee – silently speaks to anyone concerned with the plight of Darfurians or economic refugees, but conveys a dual message of misery and poverty along with a threat implied by its very size.

“Many works in Real Time express dread of global catastrophe, alongside a yearning for escape to distant borders, real or imagined – to fantastic, mythological worlds; to wild, primordial or sublime landscapes. And at the same time, the choice is often made in the conscious knowledge that real escape is impossible,” says Mendelsohn. “Those works that deal with local contexts do so either as if from above, framing the political present in mythical time, or by revealing hidden currents beneath the impassive, self-satisfied surface of Israeli society.”

Tardemon (a strychnine-like poison) is the name Adam Rabinowitz gave his striking installation in which a monkey-like figure stares at the moon, suddenly and disturbingly turning to look directly at the visitors instead.

Perhaps the timing of my visit in itself affected the way I viewed the exhibition – the scorching sun and talk of an immediate water crisis (for which we characteristically were not prepared) made it clear we live in a time when the heat is on. It was a few days after a terror attack in Jerusalem and just before Iran tested the Shihab 3 – and global patience. The G-8 leaders were wasting hot air in Japan discussing climate control and expressing concern that rising oil and food prices threaten global economy. The demonstrators in their costumes could be considered an art form in their own right.

No wonder I needed time out to enjoy the simple pleasures of life: a visit to the museum, finding time to meet friends, and later sharing an ice cream with a child. As Art Buchwald once put it: “Whether it’s the best of times or the worst of times, it’s the only time we’ve got.”

Although the exhibit was on such a heavy theme, I left the museum in surprisingly



A modern art form? Protesters holding images of G-8 summit leaders march through a street in Sapporo, Japan. (Shuji Kajiyama/AP)

good spirits. For a start, many of the artists had used a universal humor and as long as we can still laugh at ourselves, there’s still hope for humankind.

The handling of the subject was contemporary: The amount of papier mache evidently used in many of the installations suggests an artistic form of recycling is the decade’s bon ton. But the message of Real Time is, well, timeless. Even the reflections of Greek mythology and New Testament themes, alongside classical biblical references, show that it was ever thus: Every generation has worried about the future. And the world just keeps on turning, leaving another generation to clean up the mess of the previous one and obsess about an apocalypse.

I found myself humming Pete Seeger’s ver-

sion of Ecclesiastes:

“To everything (turn, turn, turn)
There is a season (turn, turn, turn)
And a time for every purpose, under heaven
A time to be born, a time to die
A time to plant, a time to reap
A time to kill, a time to heal
A time to laugh, a time to weep.”

All I can do is, in my tiny way, try to practice a more environmentally friendly lifestyle; prepare my son for life’s inevitable ups and downs; and try to make the world a better place starting in my own particular corner. In short, in the spirit of political satirist supreme Buchwald, to realize that for better or for worse, I’m having the time of my life.

Just live it. Real Time. ■