**The Four *Hatikva* Questions Tour**

Hello and welcome to the Israel Museum’s Four *Hatikva* QuestionsTour. Over the next hour and a half, we’ll be visiting the permanent Israeli art exhibition in the Central Gallery. Please make your way there now.

The Four *Hatikva* Questions are a thought model developed here at the Jewish Agency’s Educational Laboratory. This model provides us with a comprehensive intellectual and critical framework, and seeks to obtain a profound understanding of Israeli society and the processes it has undergone by examining a single line of the national anthem. **“To be a free people in our land.”** What does it mean **to be**, or not to be? What is the significance, in terms of security or in terms of economics, of our being in the here and now? Who is the Jewish **people**? Who determines who constitutes part of it? **Free**. Who is free in Israel? Everyone? At all times? By whose reckoning? What are the limitations of this freedom, and who determines them?

**In our land** – what are the land’s borders? Who are we to whom the land belongs? What shall we do with the other inhabitants of the land, for whom it is also *their* land, and how are these questions presented in the exhibition?

Let’s begin. The Israel Museum opened in 1965, and in 2010, underwent extensive renovations that doubled the available display space. Take note of how the central hall is built in the style of a cardo – the Roman main street, lined by galleries and shops. Archaeology, Arts of Africa and Oceania, Jewish Art, and Israeli Art. Ninety-seven percent of the objects on display in the Archaeology Wing hail from the Israeli region. They occupy a span of time stretching from a million years BCE to the seventh century.

We’ve arrived in Gallery of Israeli Art. How does one date Israeli art? In 1960, Boris Schatz established the Bezalel Academy of Art – and that is the year customarily pointed to as the birth of Israeli art. This was no longer Jewish art that sought to take part in Jewish ceremonies, not Judaica in all its forms but modern art, an art integrated with the Western tradition, one that contended with local issues. Who is the New Jew? What does he look like, and what is the space in which he lives? What is his connection to Jewish tradition?

The New Jew is no longer bound by the Biblical injunction against graven images that appears in the Ten Commandments. Rather, this Jew is free to create as he sees fit. In 2015, in honor of the Museum’s jubilee, a new exhibition debuted, focusing on one central question: what is Israeli art?

This new exhibition will be on display in the Museum until 2020. It is neither didactic nor chronological. It deals with the question of what Israeli art is and what it should do, and offers six possible answers. Israeli art should concern itself with Israeli society, with Israeli politics, with art for art’s sake, immersing itself[?] in the Israeli landscape, the Jewish tradition, and the local space.

Note that the exhibition is political, and we regret that we could not include representations of the entire broad array of ideologies in Israel.

The chief artistic curator at the Israel Museum, Mira Lapidot, was asked whether it was proper to so prominently integrate politics and art, and she responded:

Politics here is woven into every aspect of our lives, and thus into our art as well, and it is impossible – and improper – to ignore the complex situation in Israel. That would be like writing without some of the letters of the alphabet.

The first work we’ll look at is **Nimrod**. This sculpture was produced by Yitzhak Danziger for the inauguration of the Hebrew University’s Department of Archaeology. What do we see here? The sculpture is egocentrically mediated and situated at such a height that it can be seen from 360 degrees. The sculpture is 95 centimeters tall, 33 centimeters wide, and 33 centimeters deep. As you can see, it is carved from reddish sandstone specially imported from Petra. The body is legless. From a design perspective, the sculpture depicts the figure of Nimrod as a naked hunter. Take note of the figure’s open eyes, which bulge outward and lack pupils. The nose is flattened, as in the forms of African sculpture that can be seen right here behind him, and he is uncircumcised. His body is lean and on his shoulder sits a hunting bird, a falcon. Take note of the bird carved on Nimrod’s thighs, which appears as the inverse, in a truncated form, facing downwards. Behind his back, as you can see, he holds a kind of sword, but his grip is irregular. The sculpture was not initially received with enthusiasm, and it took several years before it gained its place in Israeli art.

And what is there to this sculpture? First, we should compare it to the Biblical Nimrod. Nimrod is mentioned in the book of Genesis, in Parashat Noach. He himself is a character unto himself, a mighty hunter. In the Bible, he is presented positively, but by the time of the Midrash, descriptions of him portrayed him negatively: the Nimrod who sought to rebel against God. There are those who assert that he was among the builders of the Tower of Babel. We can find the figure of Nimrod in Sumerian mythology. Danziger drew on the Biblical mythological figure and added to it elements of Mesopotamian culture: Nimrod the hunter, the falcon (a well-known figure in Mesopotamian mythology), the stylistic features. This sculpture expresses the desire to be indigenous. Pre-Jewish. He is uncircumcised. He is connected, independently, to the realm of what is “mine.” (? – Ed.) He is Canaanite. He belongs to the here and now. The sculpture is egocentric. It can be viewed from all sides. It is placed at the point connecting the Archaeology Wing, Arts of Africa and Oceania, Jewish Art, and Israeli Art.

He turns towards the light. Towards the firmly rooted olive tree. His very being says, “I belong, I am here, I am part of this space.” In this heroic figure, Neri Livneh wrote in the newspaper Haaretz, the new Israelis found a reflection of those whom they wished to see as our spiritual forebears. No longer exilic Jews, as their parents had been, but mythological figures. Ancient heroes of hunting and war. As the author Benyamin Tammuz wrote, “I found myself standing before Nimrod, I burst towards it in a run, I embraced the sculpture and kissed it. Only afterwards, through the veil of tears, did I wonder to myself if I had been caught in the act. That’s how much this sculpture represented something new.”

How do you think Nimrod is related to “being a free people in our land”? What does Nimrod represent? We are now entering the wing itself. I recommend that you take a few minutes to wander around. Five or ten minutes, to see which works grab you. It could be the colors, the shapes, some fascinating imagery. Together we’ll look over ten works here. Indicate to yourselves here in the notebook what interests you.

As we examine the works, we’ll ask ourselves four simple questions, symbolized by the Hebrew acronym “pardes” – orchard. The first is “pshat,” the simplest meaning: what is here? What do I see? The second, “remez,” means allusion: what cultural world is conveyed here, to what does the artistic work refer? What do I need to know in order to fully understand it? The third, “drash,” means interpretation: what is the meaning of all this? And the last, “sod,” is “secret”.” This can be two things: what is the meaning of all this to me, and what are the elements I still do not understand that draw my attention to this work?

The first work is on the wall to the left. **“An Allegorical Wedding”** from 1906. The artist is Ephraim Moses Lilien. This is actually a sketch for a rug. That is, it is not a work in and of itself, but rather an outline for what was meant to be a woven rug. We see here a triptych, that is, a work of art divided into three portions. The rug was meant to be a gift for the wedding anniversary of David Wolffsohn, president of the World Zionist Congress. On the right side is exile. Jeremiah bemoans the exodus to exile in Babylon. On the left, the pioneers blow the shofar of redemption, and in the middle a wedding takes place. The man wears red clothing, and recalls the figure of Tiglath-Pileser III, which we may not have intuitively known, but we *can* see that there is an undeniable resemblance to Theodor Herzl, the leader of the Zionist movement, who died in 1904, and to the groom David Wolffsohn himself.

The groom in this work weds a beautiful and demure daughter of Zion, and those holding the *tallit*, the wedding canopy, look like the ancient residents of the region. We see a link between the ancient Mesopotamian, Semitic past and a potential future. Lilien’s presence is apparent not only in the *tallit*, which is a recurring symbol throughout his work, but in the flowers appearing in the center. But what is Lilien trying to say to us? The renewal of the people in its land. Lilien seeks to remind the Jews of Europe, dejected by their status as a foreign, Semitic nation, that they are the inheritors of a culture prevailing within this land of the ancient East. They are not the exilic Jews depicted on the right side of the triptych, with Jeremiah blowing the shofar or the bowed woman. They no longer exist in the image of the exilic Jew; rather, they bear, with their very bodies, the tidings of a new kind of Jew. In this work before us, the return of the people to its land is a naïve and natural part. This is an outline for a political rug, but yet, because of the low level of weaving skill in the Bezalel of those years, the project was never fully realized.

Taking a second look at the work, let’s consider the big questions of being a free people in our land. What nation does Lilien see before him? What is he trying to tell us? What is the significance of the triptych form? What is the vision? What message about our being part of this space does Lilien try to arouse from those viewing the piece?

The shofar of redemption here testifies to freedom. Who carries the shofar of redemption? The pioneer. Is this an explicit admission on Lilien’s part of who the pioneers are, or does he perhaps still feel that his artistic work, and that of Schatz and his founding of Bezalel in the same year, are also part of the awakening of the Zionist vision?

What does it mean to be? Why did there need to be an art school established in Israel in 1906? Here we see an explicit statement on the character of the Jewish people and its state of being. It is not just pioneers, not just draining swamps – part of being a free people in our land is to create schools for art as well.

On the central wall is the work **“For the Aid of Sailors.”** Naftali Bezem painted it in 1952. You won’t be surprised to learn that Bezem was a student of Diego Rivera, through his major works at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

In 1951, a sailor’s strike took place in Haifa, stemming from their desire to establish an independent labor union. The strike was aggressively – too aggressively – suppressed by Ben Gurion, who saw the strike as attempted sabotage and the strikers as enemies of the state. He attempted to break the strike by giving the sailors draft orders. In the image, we see a kibbutznik, a large-bodied man, separated from his wife; on the upper right side, as you can see, two kibbutzniks argue. One wonders whom to support. The workers striving to defend their rights and realize their freedom in their land, or the position of the then-prime minister, preserving sovereign authority and the power of the government?

On the left side of the image, we see Haifa. The workers, the tents, the steps.

This painting was completed a year after the uprising, and we see here a statement of identification with the strike itself. With the strikers’ desire to realize their right to be free. Many members of the public criticized the violence directed towards the strikers, and especially the fact that the army became involved in a civilian struggle. It wasn’t right, Bezem said, after thirty or forty years. Imagine such heroes in the country, who sacrificed themselves upon the waters of the Mediterranean, and here came the police to beat them. This demanded a response. I believed that this painting had a societal function.

This work asserts that art has a role to play in the reality in which we live, but not only there. Let’s consider together how this work is related to being a free people in our land. How is it connected to being? To the realm of security, to the realm of economics? A people – which parts of the people do we see here? Who took part on either side of this conflict? It was the people of the strikers, and the leader of the people, Ben Gurion. What does the network of relationships between them say about the power Ben Gurion wielded at that time? Freedom – free. What freedom was given to the sailors? What freedom was there within the social milieu occupied by the kibbutz members whom Bezem depicted in the work?

On the right wall is the work **“Beautiful Architecture,”** by David Reed, based on a photograph by Miki Kratsman, in 1997. The drawing is a diptych – a work composed of two parts. In this instance, as you can see, an upper part and a lower part.

In the upper part is a drawn depiction of the Israel Museum, behind olive trees. The Museum that was built according to the rhythms of the Palestinian village in the way it sat atop the ridge. In the foreground of the upper half, as we can see, there’s a profile of a not-so-young hunter, aiming his weapon at something beyond the bounds of the image itself, and in the depths of the image a blurry group of men hang about the landscape of the Palestinian village.

What is David Reed trying to tell us about this dichotomy? This dichotomy between the beautiful art and the beautiful architecture, the enlightened routine of the Museum – culture is what makes it possible. The occupation, the power, the violence.

There is a dichotomy here between an enlightened routine and routine injustice. One which we attempt to subdue and repress within our lives. Here there is both heavenly and earthly Jerusalem, both part of the same work and the same world, one existing by force of the other, but when viewed through an artistic eye disconnected from the political, only the upper portion is visible – but that’s only a fraction of the iceberg. What do this work, and the dichotomy between art and aesthetics and politics and strength, tell us about what it is to be a free people in our land?

We, as visitors at the Museum, realize what it is to be a free people in our land. We choose aesthetics, freedom, the Hebrew language, Hebrew art. In the museum here itself, and by going to the museum. But David Reed and Miki Kratsman seek to say something different: that this freedom of ours came at the expensive of someone else’s freedom to be free in their land. How can we look at this work and justify the existence of the upper half without giving any thought to the lower half?

**“Jericho First”** is the work located to the left side of the entrance. You’ll see here twelve squares, a game in red and white, and on the adjoining wall, a large work, a white square containing a sort of red circle.

“Jericho First” is a work by Sharif Waked, and its source of inspiration was a description of the eighth century mosaic floor in Hisham’s Palace, Khirbet al-Mafjar, in Jericho. The mosaic in Jericho includes a lion seizing a gazelle. Waked took this image from the Jericho mosaic and, almost in a comics- or animation-like process, he thickens the gazelle and lion, turning them into a single body, with only the leg of the gazelle remaining outside.

This work is marked by the influence of Japanese art, of imagery from comic books, and there are two figures here engaged in a frenetic struggle that come together to form a novel image – but we, of course, understand that this work has a political meaning as well – Jericho first. In the framework of the Oslo Accords, it was determined that Jericho would be the initial stage on which the vision of a Palestinian state would be realized. A casino was built, authority was handed over to the Palestinian government, so the work is necessarily connected to the conflict – but what’s interesting here is that it appears that, in any event, the lion is overpowering the gazelle. In Palestinian art, the gazelle is a symbol for the Palestinians. Is Sharif Waked trying to say that at the struggle’s end, the lion will prevail, or perhaps that this is no longer a lion and a gazelle at all, but rather one giant bomb with a grenade’s pin on one side, and even the slightest movement here might blow us all up.

The work turns towards the here and now, and presents the eternal struggle between weak and strong, between innocent and cruel, between good and evil, and we, who know that the gazelle is also a Jewish symbol, and that the lion is the symbol of Judah, can consider whether there is an additional level to this work, beyond that of Israelis and Palestinians – a statement on power, on powerlessness, on the desire for justice, on conflicts. Sometimes we are the swallowed, and sometimes we are the swallower. Sometimes we are too weak, and sometimes too strong. This is a work that deals not only with the here and now, but with identity. With what do I identify as an Israeli; with what does the Palestinian other identify?

On the right side of the room is the piece “**Tillers”** by Yohanan Simon, from 1952. What do we see? We see the new Jew, the new Israeli. He is faceless; he is collective. Take note of his colors; he too is rendered in earth tones. He is part of the earth. His body is not pale, his hair is neither black nor white, he is entirely brown, like the earth. He is one with the earth. Meaning, the new Jew, the people, is one with the land. We see here the complete unification of people and land, but something in the physicality here is wrong. When we till, we bend our knees so as not to injure the back. Could the artist not have known this? Do the tillers not know this? Is this a critique leveled by Yohanan Simon against the new workers? Who tried to appear as part of the earth, as if the nation and the land were one, but in whom, in fact, something of the exilic Jew remained?

To the right of “Tillers” is a piece by Yisrael Zaritsky, from his years on Kibbutz Yehiam. Here is a kibbutz, and here is a kibbutz as well, but pay attention to the differences. While one can see people on Yohanan Simon’s kibbutz, there is something concrete. Zaritskys work establishes new horizons; it is entirely metaphysical. It refers to the spiritual. It does not seek to say anything on the concrete; it tries instead to say something about comprehensive experience. What do feel being on a kibbutz was for him? Freedom, escape from limitations, becoming part of the landscape, becoming part of the land. Can Zaritsky’s Kibbutz Yehiam be anywhere? Have we sensed a kibbutz, or is it that we suddenly saw and discovered towers in the mist? To what extent is this piece connected to the land, and to what extent to the notion that being a people is a state of mind?

Larry Abramson, post-1967. This piece was created in 2012. After the death of the artist’s father, when cleaning out his house, Abramson found boxes filled with old editions of the Jerusalem Post from June 1967, the month of the Six Day War, fifty years earlier. The work is divided into twenty-four portions. Only some of them are only display here.

What is Abramson doing? He takes old newspaper issues. He paints reality white and erases it. He draws lines. What is he trying to tell us about this war, and about being a free people in our land? In his eyes, looking back, this was Israeli society’s breaking point. Reality could no longer be seen eye-to-eye. There was a screen over it. There was white paint and lines drawn over it. What are the black blocks? Are they gravestones? Are they skulls? Are the white zigzags lines of breakage? Are they attempts at unification?

We can guess that in Larry Abramson’s opinion, the Six Day War cast a heavy shadow over being a free people in our land – for our land was no longer the same land. Its borders expanded. The people was no longer the same people, for now we ruled over another. Free? Do we make the same amount of freedom available both to us and to them? And being? What is the meaning of being, from a security standpoint, an economic standpoint, a cultural standpoint, in 2012, as opposed to 1966?

**“Song of the Dying Lake”** by Peter Merom is a minor work on the right side of the exhibition. This is a photograph of Lake Hula after the departure of the British from the country. Merom wanted to express through the photograph a political ecological protest against the drying of the lake. In the photograph, pieces of iron sunk into the lake by the British can be seen. This is a side of the drying of Lake Hula not told to us in either the Israeli educational system or Israeli culture. That is, it was not merely a fight against swamps and mosquitoes; by drying the swamp, it was revealed that it had been a kind of lake of British junk and scrap iron. This piece emphasizes the harm we do to nature. The double wound we inflict upon it. We toss out trash thinking that by doing so, it will be forgotten forever – but the land always remembers.

**“Landscape,”** Uri Reisman. Reisman uses four colors in this piece, laid down in a minimalist style that recalls extremely well-known Israeli landscapes. The simplicity of the application of colors and the composition turn this work into something lyric and local. We have here a view familiar to us from almost any trip in the area of the Sharon, Hadera, the northern Negev. The piece also reminds us of the logo of the Israeli cottage cheese, created based on another work by Uri Reisman. That is to say, there is something here that is very, very much “our land.” We feel at home, but why? There is nothing here that brings to mind Jerusalem or Tel Aviv; there is nothing urban here whatsoever. There is only simple nature, which almost makes us want to enter the image and be this point here in the middle.

**“The Pilgrimage,”** Joshua Borkovsky. In this piece is a truncated square. There is some sort of black geometric form, and stripes of gold. What do we have here? Borkovsky takes the Kaaba in Mecca and turns it into a cosmopolitan symbol, stretches it out and transforms it into a universal symbol that raises questions of religion and belief.

In this abstract representation, it is easier for us to turn our attention to discussing sanctity and pilgrimage. What is the place of pilgrimage in the Israeli public? What do we know about those parts of Israel that are holy to other religions? They too are part of our land. Do we feel like a people there? Do we make sure that everyone in Israel feels as if he can be free in the places holy to him?

**“Sabra,”** Assam Abu Shakra, 1988. What do we see before us? A potted prickly pear in a can. The prickly pear, the sabra of Israeli and Palestinian mythology, is the border marking the divisions between different fields, but in actuality, it is a plant imported from South America. In this piece, the artist places the prickly pear in a pot. There is an uprooting from nature here, from the field into culture. There is an allegory for the War of Independence, the Nakba, the thing that shrunk Palestinian territory, making it impossible now to be a Palestinian with fields – but one can remind oneself by way of the prickly pear in the pot. There is a tribute to Van Gogh here. It connects the personal to the political, but it also reminds us that this prickly pear, this representation of nationalism, was not always found here. In other words, we have here a conversation about nationalism that is not only Palestinian nationalism; it also projects itself onto Israeli nationalism.

As much as the Israeli feels that he is a sabra, like Kishkashta the Sabra from 1970s educational television who represents the Israeli, and as much as we Israelis believe we are like sabras, prickly outside and sweet within, the fruit is the Palestinians’ symbol too.

In the left corner of the room is **“Moses”** by Michael Sgan-Cohen, 1977-78. Moses appears here from behind. There is the contour of his body. At his feet is Mount Nevo, indicated by the half circle and the name of Moses itself. Thus Moses, as we can see, looks towards the Promised Land laid out before him in its fully glory in the frame of an image, or through a window, in a form he cannot access or march to. Because he has his back to us, the viewers, it seems that we, in fact, stand behind him, and join with him in gazing towards the unreachable Promised Land.

Moses’ flattened body constitutes a tablet or stone upon which is written a portion of the text appearing in Deuteronomy 34.

What does Moses see? Moses stands on the black Mount Nebo. On the far edge stands the ultimate sea. Take note of how it is written, very lightly, above the sea: and all the colorful Promised Land was spread out before him.

Pay attention to the shape of the Star of David formed by the small colored triangles. The opposition between the black color that defines Moses and Mount Nebo and the portions of text defining the land in color illustrates Moses’ pain. Moses is in black. In a kind of mourning. Pay attention to the frame around Moses, which looks like an obituary compared to the flourishing land. The colorful land. The land of dates, palms, sea, light.

Michael Sgan-Cohen created this piece while he was in New York. What does he see about us from a distance? What do people see about us at a remove? What do they think about our central question of being a free people in our land?

In this small room is a table, upon which is the piece **“Bedouin Women”** by Hedwig Grossman Lehmann. Here is a piece detailing three figures, with a connection between them. There is a sheikh standing with his back to two women walking behind him. One appears pregnant. The piece is made of sandstone, like *Nimrod*, and raises questions about belonging, and about connections.

The figures seem to be part of the earth, part of the land. They feel very, very local. The figure of the Bedouin, the Bedouin women, as Hedwig Grossman Lehmann called it, is a local figure indeed. Did it precede us? Is it part of the earth, is it part of the land, and do we give Bedouin men and women their rightful place in our state? Are these free women? Does the representation of the sheikh at the head of their caravan already gives us an answer about their level of freedom? Do they feel comfortable in their land? Have they found a home there?

**“Mother,”** David Tartakover. In this piece, we see a soldier with a weapon, and behind him a Palestinian woman with her hands up. Pay attention to the division between black and white in the piece, and the word “mother” that appears in it.

Why was the word “mother” chosen to appear? We have here the photo, and on it the manipulation, the stamping of the word “mother.” Of course, this is not the soldier’s mother. This is a different mother. Does the Palestinian woman see her son in the soldier? Does the artist seek to remind the soldier that this woman before him is a mother, and that she has a son like him? Is there a reference to the waiting mothers? To Rachel? Does the contrast between black and white seek to tell us something about this reality in which mothers are cut off from their children? Where is the son of this Palestinian mother? Where is the mother of the Israeli soldier? Can these mothers effect a dialogue? Does the word “mother” turn the soldier into someone emotionally disconnected, establishing him as alone, a soldier without identity, biography, or history? Is the soldier free? Does he allow others to be free? What is the story of being in the sense of power and control? Did the soldier choose to be in this situation?

This is a political work that tries to make us ask questions about our place. In my view, it is also a work that allows us to feel compassion for the other. Next to “Mother,” we have the painting **“Soldier”** by Marcel Janco. We see a weakened soldier, wounded, crumpled, fetal. The piece was painted during the 1950s, when this was not the desired image for a soldier. We wanted to see them as strong, as heroes, as masculine; Jews were weak, and here was a weak and wounded soldier.

What does this piece tell us about being a free people in our land? Does even the weak soldier have a place to be here?

Our tour is drawing to an end, and we’ll exit above the work **“Inversion of the World”** by the artist Anish Kapoor. Anish Kapoor is an artist living now in London. He is of Indian origin. He is Jewish, and lived in Israel on Kibbutz Givat Shmuel. He left Israel after not gaining acceptance to Bezalel, and today is an artist known around the world.

This piece, called Inversion of the World Jerusalem, is made of stainless steel. It is five meters tall, and what we see in it is reflection. Down is up, and up is down. Where are we? In Jerusalem? In heavenly Jerusalem or earthly Jerusalem? We here see Mount Herzl, Sha’arei Tzedek, Beit Yad Sarah, the Knesset, the Supreme Court, Nahla’ot, Rehavia, the Holyland building. What is up, and what is down? The institutions of authority and justice of the Supreme Court and the Knesset, the corruption of Holyland. The day-to-day life of Nahla’ot and Rehavia. The bereavement of Mount Herzl, the distress of Sha’arei Tzedek and Yad Sarah. What happens above the surface, and what happens below it? What allows us to be a free people in our land, and what do we seek to forget?

The closer we try to get to Jerusalem, the more it slips away from us. The more we try to approach and understand our identity, the more it tries to evade us. We hope this tour helped us, helped you, to come to know the true depth of Israeli art, and to more deeply consider what it means to be a free people in our land from a different perspective. Thank you.