

Yalla.

Arab-Jewish Encounters

The history of Jews in North Africa and Western Asia is characterized by the close cultural proximity to a diverse Arabic environment and by mutual enrichment, just as much as by fractures, exclusion, and violence. It tells of neighborly relations and exchanges, of common languages, musical traditions and ways of thinking. In the course of the 20th century, however, this divided past was increasingly idealized or suppressed ideologically. It has only been through the growing self-confidence of the Mizrahim—Jews from Arab-influenced cultural and linguistic regions in present-day Israel—that an awareness of this past has grown once again in the public consciousness.

These questions of self-image and historical memory form the starting point of the exhibition. Seven artists of Jewish origin with family roots in different regions in North Africa and West Asia—including Egypt, Iraq, Lebanon, and Morocco—explore Jewish identities between these poles in their oeuvres.

Their works combine personal memories with historical experiences and tell of exile and loss, of social marginalization and discrepancies in the historical narrative. This has created a resonance space in which many voices can be heard and in which history is not a closed chapter, but continues to reverberate to the present day. Belonging emerges as a fluid and frequently contradictory experience—between cultures, languages, and memories.

Eliyahu Fatal_Eli Petel

Eliyahu Fatal (aka Eli Petel; b. 1974 in Jerusalem) lives and works in Tel Aviv-Jaffa. On his mother's side, his family roots can be traced to Sephardic refugees from Spain who settled in Hebron and Jerusalem. On his father's side, his family comes from Iraq.

Fatal is a conceptual, multidisciplinary artist who combines painting, sculpture, sound, video, and printmaking techniques. His works explore visual perception as well as cultural and social behavioral patterns. He examines the history of Western art and Israeli society, and addresses topics such as Western perspectives on the "Middle East," Jewish identity, social norms, law, media, and technology.

His works, which can be found in a number of different collections, have been exhibited internationally. He has received several awards.

Hori Izhaki

Hori Izhaki (b. 1986 in Tel Aviv-Jaffa) is a multidisciplinary artist living in Berlin with family roots in Morocco and Iraq. In her work, she explores how identity and memory are negotiated within the context of personal experience, the collective memory, and social rituals. A particular focus lies on trauma, body politics, and the colonial imprint on the body seen from a female perspective.

Inspired by social mechanisms and rituals, Izhaki develops situations and systems that are deliberately instable and could fail—like any utopia.

For Izhaki, working in different disciplines is a conscious decision and part of her artistic approach. Starting from the irresolvable question as to what comes first—the subject or the medium—both emerge reciprocally from one another. Her work includes performances, installations, language, videos, and sculpture, as well as temporary participatory formats.

Dana Flora Levy

Dana Flora Levy (born in Tel Aviv-Jaffa) is an artist and filmmaker. Her work has been shaped by her transcultural biography: as the daughter of an Egyptian-German couple, she grew up in the US, the UK, and Israel. Shifting between languages, memory spaces, and cultural contexts forms the central starting point of her artistic thought.

In her video work, installations, and photographic collages, she explores how history, migration, and belonging are inscribed in images, objects, and archives. Through her meticulous handling of collated historical material, family documents, and cultural artifacts, she creates multi-layered narratives about memory and identity. Her works are exhibited internationally and have received numerous awards. She lives and works between New York and Tel Aviv-Jaffa.

Dor Zlekha-Levy

Dor Zlekha-Levy (b. 1990 in Tel Aviv-Jaffa) is a multimedia artist whose work includes audiovisual installations, videos, and live performances. Sound is the central element of his work and regularly leads to collaborations between musicians and performers.

In his more recent work, he deals intensively with the history and cultural heritage of Arab Jews, and renders voices and memories audible that have long been marginalized in the Israeli cultural canon. His own family history has roots in Iraq. Zlekha-Levy himself lives and works in Tel Aviv-Jaffa.

His works have been exhibited internationally at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art and the Israel Museum, for example, as well as at international festivals, and have received numerous awards. They can be found in both private and public collections.

Joseph Sassoon Semah

Joseph Sassoon Semah (b. 1948 in Baghdad) is a visual and conceptual artist living in Amsterdam. He is the grandson of Hakham / Rabbi Sassoon Kadoori, a key religious authority of the Iraqi-Jewish community in the 20th century and the last Chief Rabbi of Baghdad up until 1951.

Semah grew up in Israel from 1950 onward before moving to London in the 1970s, then to Berlin, Paris, and finally to Amsterdam in 1981. His oeuvre encompasses drawings, sculptures, installations, performances, and texts, and focuses on questions of identity, exile, memory, and cultural belonging. Semah references Jewish traditions of thought and imagery that have also influenced European culture but are often not explicitly mentioned in Western art history. Many of his works are reminiscent of the composition of pages in the Talmud, with a central motif surrounded by comments and counter voices, its meaning emerging through dialogue. In addition, Hebrew letters appear not only as writing but as bearers of memory and interpretation. He sees his work as an attempt to make these hidden layers visible.

Mona Yahia

Mona Yahia (b. 1954 in Baghdad) fled with her family to Iran in 1970 and reached Israel in 1971. She studied psychology at Tel Aviv University and, from 1985, art at the Universität Gesamthochschule Kassel. In her artistic work, she examines memory, exile, and identity, particularly with regard to questions surrounding the German culture of remembrance of the Shoah, which she reflects in objects, installations, and performative projects.

In addition to her work in the visual arts, Yahia is also an author. Her novel *When the Grey Beetles Took over Baghdad*, 2000, received international acclaim and has been translated into several languages. This was followed by further novels, essays, and short stories. In 2025, the novel *Vier Tage: Eine nahöstliche Tetralogie* was published by Salon LiteraturVerlag Munich—an excerpt of which was also published that year in English as *First Soldier in the Family*. Mona Yahia lives and works in Cologne.

Tamir Zadok

Tamir Zadok (b. 1978 in Holon) is an artist living in Tel Aviv-Jaffa who works with video, photography, and installations. His art focuses on examining images in mass media and popular culture, as well as their relation to truth, witnesses' statements and political narratives. Many of his works deliberately seize on the aesthetic strategies of popular culture and "disguise" themselves as part of it in order to make social and political issues accessible to a wider audience.

Taking a photographic perspective as his starting point, Zadok explores how images shape reality, influence memory, and can act as evidence or an ideology. His works are often to be found at the intersection to documentation and staging, and address the subjects of identity, power relations, and visual representation.