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THE ART OF PEACE – CAN ARTISTS STOP THE WAR BETWEEN ISRAEL AND PALESTINE?

Abstract: In the face of constant threats, regardless of time, epoch, place or degree of civilization (de-civilization), human beings behave in ways that are primarily analyzed by doctors, psychiatrists and psychologists. The most relevant scholars to take up this problem are Lévinas, Ozick and Quignards. Such a state of affairs, involving extreme experiences caused by the forces of nature, technical failures, terrorist acts and wars, has become the object of attention of philosophers, cultural researchers and artists. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict – one of the world’s longest disputes – has been causing deep wounds to communities on both sides. In the midst of political and historical tensions, and the awareness of a lack of any consensus, there is a spring of thought and, consequently, of action, the conviction that art, through the expression of deepest experiences, can become a platform of understanding. The current (since 7 October 2023), another war in the history of the State of Israel since 1948, and the reaction of Israeli and Palestinian artists to it, is the subject of this article. The reaction of artists through works of art is a dramatic attempt to respond to a state of extreme threat (war, death, famine, kidnapping, rape). From the perspective of researchers (e.g. La Capra or Van Alphen), it is perceived as a “transmission of the affect that moves them”, which is reflected in the works created. Jewish and Palestinian artists reacted energetically to the events unfolding in Israel and Gaza. In this article, selected works by Israeli and Palestinian artists will be discussed, among others: Maya Freedman, Hadeel Nasser, Oren Fischer, Michal Worke, Rana Samara and Addam Yekutieli, directly related to current events, and critical philosophical and psychoanalytic commentaries on them. The artists represent a generation born several decades after World War II and 76 years after the establishment of the State of Israel on the territories of former Palestine (British Mandate for Palestine – Mandate territory from 1922 to 1948, formed from parts of the former Ottoman Empire territories in the Middle East), and they live in Israel, Palestine, France and the United States.

Keywords: art, artists, peace, war, fear, death, psychoanalysis, affect, Israel, Palestine

Regardless of the time, epoch, place and level of civilisation (de-civilisation), in the face of constant threats, human beings behave in ways that are analysed primarily by medical specialists, psychiatrists and psychologists. The problem has been the focus of Emmanuel Lévinas, Cynthia Ozick, Pascal Quignard and Ernst van Alphen, to mention the names most relevant to the discussed issue. Such states, involving extreme experiences triggered by natural forces, technical failures, terrorist actions and wars, have become the primary focus of attention for philosophers, scholars involved in cultural research and artists.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one of the longest in the world, has been inflicting deep wounds to communities on both sides. Amidst the political and historical tensions, the awareness of a failure to build any consensus, a thought starts to sprout which then turns into actions, a conviction that art can become a platform for mutual understanding through the expression of deepest experience. ‘Human creativity has the extraordinary ability to transcend borders, cultures and political ideologies, showing a specific path leading to understanding and reconciliation,’¹ write two (Israeli and Palestinian) artists and journalists. This article is devoted to the ongoing war (since 7 October 2023), another one in the history of the State of Israel, which has existed since 1948, and to the responses that Israeli and Palestinian artists have been giving to it. From the perspective of scientists (e.g. La Capra or Van Alphen), the artists' reaction through pieces of art, being a dramatic attempt to respond to a state of extreme danger (war, death, famine, kidnapping, rape) is a “transmission of *an affect* that moves them”, reflected by the artworks. Jewish and Palestinian artists have responded vigorously to the events unfolding in Israel and Gaza. This article will discuss some works by Israeli and Palestinian artists, including Maya Freedman, Hadeel Nasser, Addam Yekutieli, Rana Samara, Michal Worke and Oren Fischer, directly relating to the ongoing events as well as critical, philosophical and psychoanalytic comments concerning them. The artists, living in Israel, Palestine, France and the United States, represent a generation born decades after the Second World War.

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The State of Israel was established in Paris, based on the political idea of Theodor Herzl (1860-1904), a Viennese journalist, born in Budapest to a wealthy assimilated family speaking German. At the time of Herzl's death, a dream

¹ Maya Freedman and Hadeel Nasser, https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/universal-language-art-bader-simon-0s4ec?trk=public_post_main-feed-card_feed-article-content [accessed: 18.03.2024].

of a Jewish state seemed a phantasm². Before Herzl, the idea of Jewish emigration to Palestine and establishment of a Jewish state had already been postulated in 1887 by sculptor Alfred Nossig born in Lviv (1864/1868 (?)-1943)³.

The word “Zionism” was first used in 1890 by Natan Birnbaum, an Austrian journalist of Jewish descent, in his pamphlet *Self-Emancipation*⁴. Herzl refined Nossig's and Birnbaum's ideas in his book, *Der Judenstaat. Versuch einer modernen Lösung der Judenfrage / The Jewish State. An Attempt at a Modern Solution of the Jewish Problem*⁵. Herzl believed that the Jewish state could be established in either Palestine or Argentina; however, he advocated for Palestine, being the historical homeland of the Jews, their “cradle of existence”. In his views, the Jewish people were a nation and, as a nation, they had a right to their own state. In the following years, attempts were made to negotiate, also involving the vizier of the Ottoman Empire, which at that time ruled over the Middle East, to convince him to let Jewish people settle in Palestine. Herzl sought support for his idea from German Emperor William II, and negotiated with the British government, the Russian Tsar and the Pope. In the absence of agreement and understanding between the interested parties, he considered choosing another site for Jewish settlers, such as Cyprus or the Sinai Peninsula; Britain proposed Uganda. After the April 1903 Kishinev pogrom⁶, Herzl agreed on the Uganda Program, focusing, however, on Palestine as a priority⁷.

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The State of Israel became the only realised political utopia of the 20th century. The idea turned into a movement, the movement into a community, the community into a state⁸. The realisation, or rather “realisation?”, came at

² As news of increasing persecution of Jews started to come from Tsarist Russia in the 1890s, the Dreyfus Affair began in France in 1894: an officer of Jewish descent was accused of spying for Germany on the basis of falsified evidence. In the face of anti-Semitism as well as persecution and discrimination against Jews spreading in Europe at the time, Herzl decided to express his views, saying that assimilation and collective conversion to Christianity would not eradicate the problem of anti-Semitism.

³ A. Nossig, *Próba rozwiązania kwestji żydowskiej*, Lwów 1887; M. Śliwa, *Idea państwa żydowskiego Alfreda Nossiga na tle kształtowania się doktryny syjonizmu politycznego*, “Athenaeum. Polskie Studia Politologiczne”, 2018, no.58, p. 35.

⁴ N. Birnbaum, *Selbstemanzipation!*, Vienna 1890.

⁵ T. Herzl, *Der Judenstaat: Versuch einer modernen Lösung der Judenfrage*, public domain in the USA, <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/28865> [accessed: 12.04.2024].

⁶ On 20th April 1903, the day after the end of Passover, the pogrom in Kishinev began. The slaughter was preceded by anti-Semitic articles in the local daily “Besarabiec”, which falsely accused Jews of kidnapping and murdering a non-Jewish boy (so-called ritual murder).

⁷ Cf. P. Batorski, “Wizjoner państwa. Theodor Herzl, twórca syjonizmu” <https://www.jhi.pl/artykuly/wizjoner-panstwa-theodor-herzl-tworca-syjonizmu,3735> [accessed: 12.04.2024].

⁸ Cf. K. Gebert, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

the price of suffering, a sense of injustice, bitterness of those whose *only fault was that they lived in that one place on earth where this utopia could be realised – leaving no place for them*⁹. Israel was established in war and as a result of war. In 1947, the United Nations adopted a resolution on the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. In line with the UN decision, the establishment of the State of Israel was proclaimed on 14 May 1948. Meanwhile, the surrounding Arab states refused to accept the plan and declared war¹⁰.

Israel was created during war and, at least in part, as a result of war. In seventy-five years of independence, it has fought five major wars¹¹, and for more than thirty years it has been trying, with changing fortunes, to quell the uprising, which has not been suppressed to this day. Before that, however, a third of the Jewish people was murdered and, before that, when the utopia was only a plan and a project, constantly experienced violence¹².

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War is present in Israel on a daily basis: armed men and women, sometimes in plain clothes, can be seen on the city streets, in cafés, on the beach in Tel Aviv, Jaffa or Haifa. Years ago, when the artist Moshe Kupferman (1926–2003¹³), a friend of ours (my husband's and mine), was awaiting our arrival (it was 1993)¹⁴ in Israel, where he had lived since 1948, he wrote: 'Our country is

⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁰ In Hebrew, the 1948–1949 Israeli-Arab war is called the War of Independence or the Liberation War. In Arabic, it is called the Catastrophe. It was the first (not the last) armed conflict of modern Israel with its Arab neighbours.

¹¹ Including the ongoing (sixth) one, triggered on 7 October 2023 by the Hamas (the Gaza Strip) attack on Gaza's neighbouring Jewish settlements and which has already lasted for seven months.

¹² K. Gebert, *op. cit.*, p. 10.

¹³ Moshe Kupferman, one of Israel's most prominent artists, was born in Jaroslaw, Poland, 1926, to an Orthodox Jewish family. He survived the Holocaust in exile in Kazakhstan and the Urals. In 1948, after returning to Europe, he emigrated to Israel. He was one of the pioneers of the LohameiHaGeta'ot (Ghetto Fighters) kibbutz in the Galilee, near the border with Lebanon. Cf. E. Jedlińska, *Kształty pamięci. Wybrane zagadnienia sztuki współczesnej*, Łódź 2019. Chapter: *Moshe Kupferman: homelessness of art / homelessness of memor*, pp. 131–149.

¹⁴ The First Intifada (also known as the Stone Intifada), a Palestinian uprising aimed at winning the right to declare the State of Palestine, lasted from December 1987 to 1993. The leadership was taken by clerics from the Islamic Centre; it was the first time when Hamas appeared as a militant wing supported by radical Islamic organisations and the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organisation) led by Yasir Arafat from 1969 to 2004. Cf. K. Wasilewski (ed.), S. Nowacka, M. Wojnarowicz, S. Zaręba, *Konflikt wczoraj. Report of the Polish Institute of International Affairs: Konfliktizraelsko-palestyński 2020: rok złego przełomu*. Warszawa 2020. <https://www.pism.pl/upload/images/artykuly/c30b634a-9d56-4732-88f2-ee3dcd78e05/1593524372457.pdf> [accessed: 20.04.2024].

still restless...'. In my eyes, the extent of this "restlessness" has taken the form of scant, distant, inaccurate newspaper and television reports. The friends and acquaintances met during our successive stays in Israel have made the Palestinian-Israeli problem clearer, more acute, more and more painful, and increasingly impossible to solve.

Military service is an essential life experience of every citizen of the State of Israel. An average European visitor is confronted with kindergartens, schools, concert halls, museums and bus stops, each with its own concrete shelter. Concrete walls and barbed wire entanglements demarcate zones that separate Arab and Jewish lives. The university campus in Jerusalem (Hebrew University on Mount Scopus) is guarded by a "complicated" maze of gates and entrances. Armed soldiers check anyone who wants to enter the area¹⁵. The Palestinians, opposing the occupation of their territories by Israel, have been waging a constant struggle, more or less successful, but often bloody, paid for with fear, terror and death taking its toll on both sides of the conflict.

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It is neither the ambition nor the purpose of this article to analyse the source of contention, the successive wars or clashes between Palestinians and Jews, ongoing since at least the mid-nineteenth century, when the first settlers arrived in the Holy Land from Europe teeming with anti-Semitism. The reason for writing this text is the war between Israel and the terrorist organisation Hamas¹⁶ waged since 7 October 2023 in the Gaza Strip *de facto* controlled by Hamas, and the way a group of young artists reacted to it. The war began when Hamas-led militant groups launched an attack on Israel. Hamas named this operation "Al-Aqsa Storm". In response to the Palestinian attack, the Israeli army launched the "Operation Iron Swords"¹⁷.

Between 7 October 2023 and the day on which I am writing this text (5 May 2024), both Hamas and Israeli military actions have led to the deaths

¹⁵ On 31 July 2002, at 1:49 pm, a bomb planted by a terrorist exploded in the Frank Sinatra university cafeteria, killing seven people and injuring ninety-nine. Among the injured were ten Israeli Arabs.

¹⁶ Hamas –the Islamic Resistance Movement, a Sunni Islamist political and military movement and a fundamentalist Palestinian terrorist organisation. The military wing of Hamas is Izz ad-Din al-Qassam Brigades. Although the Gaza Strip has remained under the administration of the Palestinian Authority, it has been under the *de facto* governing authority of Hamas since 2007.

¹⁷ Israel's operation (in theory) consists in air strikes against military targets, civilian targets and humanitarian facilities located in the Gaza Strip. <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2023/10/gaza-un-experts-decry-bombing-hospitals-and-schools-crimes-against-humanity> [accessed: 17.04.2024].

of thousands of people on both sides. In the face of Russia's war on Ukraine, which has been fought across our eastern border since 2022, the ongoing conflicts in African countries, war on drugs in Mexico, the Philippines and Pakistan, and the civil war in Syria¹⁸, the voice of artists, an attempt of intellectuals to respond, often seeming inadequate in relation to the tragedy of the unfolding events, is perhaps one of the few crying out for reconciliation, for the peace of daily life; one of the few speaking about the tragedy of *individuals* – events which, above all, claim civilian lives and which we seemingly have no influence on. It is a state of threat, which, in the areas of so-called occupied (by Israel) Palestinian territories and in Israel itself, has prevailed almost continuously since 1948. Successive generations, from both sides of the conflict, torn apart by mutual hatred, tormented for years by bloody terror, bombings and suicide attacks, have abandoned hopes for a peaceful life.

Israeli settlements in the occupied territories continue to expand, writes Konstanty Gebert. Israeli repression for terror is becoming more and more brutal, and the concrete wall that Israel is putting up to prevent the infiltration of terrorists (Hamas and Jihad from the Gaza Strip – E. J.) poses a threat of ghettoisation of the Palestinian territories¹⁹.

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Affect – emotion – memory – piece of art

A long- or short-lived state of threat triggers an attitude that modern psychology refers to as “affect”²⁰, which means a peculiar, “immediate” response (transmission) of the extreme emotion/feeling of events that one experiences, witnesses or knows about. Such a transmission may be the act of creating a piece of art, which is a reaction to something that cannot be opposed to, as an act of fear, helplessness, anger or despair. In human nature, affect is inextricably associated with cognition, an emotional and rational way of dealing with the world around us. Affect is omnipresent in our lives. It is decisive for the scale and scope of human responses. In the analyses of philosophers and artists, the

¹⁸ Cf. <https://zpe.gov.pl/a/konflikty-zbrojne-we-wspolczesnym-swiecie/DtXFb0BZ>[accessed: 17.04.2024].

¹⁹ K. Gebert, *Pokój z widokiem na wojnę. Historia Izraela*, Warsaw 2023, p. 578.

²⁰ Affect (Latin *affectus*) – a term used in the area of psychology and psychoanalysis – an expression of emotion observed by a researcher, which does not always correspond to the description of emotion presented during an interview with a patient.

relationship between cognition (thinking) and affect (feeling)²¹, is linked to the attempt to understand the basic relationship between reasoning and emotion, which would give us the opportunity to explore the human nature²². In Western civilisation, there used to be a long-standing belief that affect destroys thought processes – such a view was expressed by Plato, for example, but centuries later also by Sigmund Freud and Gustave Le Bon. In social psychology, affect is nowadays seen from the perspective of its importance and influence on the thought/cognitive processes responsible for processing information. Research carried out by American and European psychologists²³ in the 2000s on the basis of a series of experiments, showed that negative affect (which is what we will be referring to in relation to a piece of art created in the face of war trauma) triggers more analytical, in-depth and creative thinking. Thus, according to Herbert Bless and Klaus Fiedler, it should have the impact on *the quality of persuasive messages*²⁴. Experiments in which subjects were introduced to negative emotions confirmed the thesis that people in states of, for example, anxiety, disagreement, or stress are able to

produce much more concrete, and ultimately more effective, persuasive arguments. (...) Negative sentiment triggers styles of information processing that make it possible to generate that are more appropriate to complex situations and that are more appropriate to the requirements of specific social situations²⁵.

According to psychiatrists, an affect, understood as a short-term reaction of the body and at the same time a pleasant or unpleasant emotional state of strong intensity constituting a response to a sudden change, does not exceed the threshold of consciousness and cannot be “elaborated on” by the person’s cognitive system. An affect understood in this way is an activity in which thought/reasoning is not involved. From this perspective, an affect may be regarded as being equivalent to an emotion. Understood in this way, an affect can

21 The relationship between cognition and affect, the impact of thinking on feeling was explored in antiquity, among others by Aristotle, Socrates and Plato, and in modern and contemporary times by Descartes, Blaise Pascal and Emmanuel Kant.

22 Cf. J. P. Forgas, *Feeling and Thinking: Affective influences on social cognition*, Cambridge University Press, New York 2000; <https://www.psychologia-spoieczna.pl/artykuly/197-rola-afektu-w-mysleniu-i-relacjach-spoiecznych.html?showall=&start=1> [accessed: 20.04.2024].

23 E.g., H. Bless and K. Fiedler, J.-P. Forgas, P. Vargas and S. Laham. Cf. R. Greifeneder (University of Basel), H. Bless (University of Mannheim), K. Fiedler (University of Heidelberg), *Social Cognition: How Individual Construct Social Reality*, A Psychology Press Books, New York and Hoven 2017.

24 (ed.) J. P. Forgas, *Affect in Social Thinking and Behavior*, Psychology Press, Washington 2006. Article in the book of H. Bless, K. Fiedler, 0, pp. 65–84.

25 Ibidem, p. 18.

be considered an automatic activity, determining to a great extent the course of further cognitive processes, such as perception, reasoning, valuing, decision-making, memory processes, anticipation and relations with others. Emotions, on the other hand, are characterised by arousal, the ability to interpret events and give them meaning, linking them, for example, to biographical or cultural experience. ‘*An affect is not a judgement,*’ writes Alina Kolańczyk, “‘*about*’ an object, whether it is good or bad, although this judgement can be (and most often is) strongly connected with the experienced affect”²⁶. According to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, affect is a state in which the boundary between the human and the non-human, between the body and the mind, the being and its environment, gets blurred.

Affects are no longer feelings or affections; they go beyond the strength of those who undergo them. Sensations, percepts, and affects are beings whose validity lies in themselves and exceeds any lived. They could be said to exist in the absence of man because man, as he is caught in stone, on the canvas, or by words, is himself a compound of percepts and affects. The work of art is a being of sensation and nothing else: it exists in itself²⁷.

Recent psychological research emphasises the role of events triggering affects and emotions. Due to stronger involvement, experience that occurs during these events is better remembered. Emotional memory, according to Joseph LeDoux, is not the same as the memory of an event, but *the memory of emotions*²⁸. In his 1964 book *Proust and Signs*²⁹, Gilles Deleuze associates involuntary memory with affective, extra-semantic events that develop meanings. He relates memory to the process of knowledge acquisition and to the future. Yet, involuntary memory, which Deleuze writes about, occurs at the level of *the function of sensory signs*³⁰; its essence is difference from the past (not similarity):

²⁶ A. Kolańczyk, *Świadomość afektu w procesie psychicznym*, “Czasopismo Psychologiczne”, 1999, vol. 5, no. 1, p. 43. Distinguishing affect from emotion is disputed by researchers who consider emotions to be synonymous with affects: P. Ekman, R. J. Davidson, *The nature of emotion: Fundamental questions*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 1994, pp. 19-21 (13-49); S. Moyano Ariza, *Affect Theory with Literature and Art: Between and Beyond Representation*, in: “Athenea Digital” July 2020, no. 2 (20), e-2319.

²⁷ G. Deleuze, F. Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* transl. from French H. Tomlinson, & G. Burchell, Columbia University Press, New York, 1991/1996 p. 164; S. Moyano Ariza, *Affect Theory with Literature and Art: Between and Beyond Representation*, in: “Athenea Digital” July 2020, no. 2 (20), e-2319, p. 3.

²⁸ Cf. J. LeDoux, *Mózg emocjonalny. Tajemnicze podstawy życia emocjonalnego*, transl. A. Janowski, Poznań 2000, p. 267 et seq.

²⁹ G. Deleuze, *Proust et les signes*, Press Universitaires de France, Paris 1964.

³⁰ G. Deleuze, *Proust i znaki*, transl. M. P. Markowski, Gdańsk 2000, p. 54

The essence of involuntary memory lies neither in similarity nor in identity, which are merely its conditions. The essence consists in an internalised immanent difference. This is why recollection is the analogue of art and involuntary memory the analogue of metaphor³¹.

In another fragment, Deleuze invokes the notion of trauma understood as a wound or a trace of past experience, but also violence turned towards the viewer/observer. The trace can be embodied in a piece of art. This aspect of the philosopher's thought will guide the author's attempt to present selected pieces of contemporary art by Palestinian and Israeli artists, referring to the current situation in Israel, the Gaza Strip and Gaza. This disquisition attempts to present the uniqueness of art seen from the perspective of its affective quality, being an emotional response to the so-called "Middle East conflict". "Affective" understanding of art (and creation of a piece of art under the influence of affect), argues Jill Bennett³², may contribute to a new understanding of the experience of trauma and loss.³

Art and trauma: the role of art in thinking about and experiencing trauma

A piece of art which is created in response to borderline experiences, ongoing hostilities, or places inhabited by people who were direct participants or witnesses to those hostilities, should be understood as an affective reaction of the artist. In 2001, the exhibition entitled *Trauma*³³ was presented at several British centres. It featured works of over a dozen contemporary artists from different regions at war, ruled by violence, where people "disappeared" in unknown circumstances, where terror, humiliation and suffering reigned (e.g. Doris Salcedo, Mona Hatoum, Guillermo Kuitca, Kendell Geers and Tracey Moffatt (an Australian artist of Aboriginal origin) – artists from Colombia, Palestine, Argentina, South Africa, Northern Ireland, Albania and the Balkans states. 'Trauma gives rise to intriguing, moving art,' say the exhibition curators (Katrina Brown, Fiona Bradley and Andrew Nairne). We might ask at this point: does interesting art have to arise from suffering and be the fruit of trauma?

³¹ Ibidem, p. 60.

³² In her book *Empathic Vision. Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2005, J. Bennett extends the concept of empathy by also showing how, through art, we can establish contacts with people from distant parts of the world, whose experiences differ from ours.

³³ The exhibition was shown in 2001 at Dundee Contemporary Arts (Scotland) and Firstite in Colchester, and in 2002 at the Museum of Modern Art, Oxford. <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/%22Trauma%22%3a+Dundee+Contemporary+Arts.+%28Dundee%2c+Scotland%29.-a080856223> [accessed: 24.04.2024].

Can only such art be attractive? A conviction that art is capable of capturing and conveying real experience, all the more so when the artist is a witness or participant of the events, leads to the expectation that the work will be a document. It may be assumed to be a testimony of some kind, but it is a “testimony of affect”.

Jill Bennett raises the problem:

How should contemporary art approach trauma while maintaining respect for and influencing the politics associated with it? Representing trauma as an expression of personal experience always exposes it to appropriation, reduction and mimicry. Given this situation, can we conceive of art concerning trauma and conflict other than as primordial experience (always belonging to “someone” and unconveyable despite being communicated)?³⁴

Art that refers to traumatic experience does not communicate, or “report”. Instead, it arouses a feeling of dissent in its audience, a desire to take “any” kind of action, to draw politicians’ attention. It always “takes the side” of the wronged. The artist is left alone with their affect (reflected in a piece of art), while their individual experience is “enclosed” within the boundaries of their own thoughts and feelings.

Art and War: Israeli and Palestinian artists reflect on 7 October 2023 and the crisis in Gaza

I believe that being far from understanding the causes and course of the Arab-Israeli / Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the Middle East, we remain in the clinch of impossibility of its resolution. The Jews are fighting over the same land as the Palestinians. The Jews want to negotiate, the Palestinians (with the fundamentalist Hamas organisation in Gaza, Iran, Lebanon and Jordan, etc.) want to reclaim the land of their ancestors without the Jews. Every rationale has its counter-rationale, every war has its grim toll, *for every date there is another date and so ad infinitum*³⁵. Let us leave the analysis of the real causes of the accumulating tensions to experts. Yet, communities around the world, informed by journalists of various political stances about the escalating events in the

³⁴ J. Bennett, *Empathic Vision. Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, transl. Ł. Mojsak. <https://www.pismowidok.org/pl/archiwum/2020/26-empatyczne-obrazy/widzenie-empatyczne.-afekt-trauma-i-sztuka-wspolczesna> [accessed: 24.04.2024].

³⁵ K.Fokin, *Oto pięć najważniejszych dzieł sztuki o konflikcie izraelsko-palestyńskim*. <https://kultura.onet.pl/oto-piec-najwazniejszych-dziel-sztuki-o-konflikcie-izraelsko-palestynskim/e62j2xs> [accessed: 24.04.2024].

Middle East, remain petrified by Hamas's terror against the Jewish people, by recognition of the Palestinians' right to a dignified life and a state of their own, by dissent against Israeli retaliatory attacks in which Arab civilians are killed.

The history of the conflict, dating back to 1948 (I wrote more about it in the first pages of this article), has been referred to in numerous historical³⁶, literature³⁷ and art studies. There are comic books, feature films and musical works devoted to it. The nature of these seventy-five years of the military and political history of the State of Israel fits perfectly into the issues of ethics, trauma, affect, taboo and its limits, loss and deficiency, willingly analysed by contemporary humanities. From a Polish perspective, this conflict does not seem very distant; after all, it involves universal problems concerning such issues as the laws and morality of war, what is the same and what is different in human behaviour. It refers to the relationship between religion and politics, the same fear for the lives of loved ones and one's own. It is used *to illustrate and deconstruct such popular themes as the role of the individual*³⁸.

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On 7 October 2023, over 1,200 people were killed in Israel and hundreds more were kidnapped by Hamas. In response, Israel started the war in the Gaza Strip, which has been fought to this day (May 2024). It has resulted in the slaughter of over 30,000 Palestinians and displacement of more than two million people.

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In this paper, I would like to present a few of numerous pieces of art recently created by Palestinian and Israeli artists of different generations, which are an affective response to yet another armed Arab-Jewish conflict. Israel's ongo-

³⁶ Among others: M. Gilbert, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict. Its History in Maps*, Eidenfeld and Nicholson, London, 1984; T. Segev, *Siódmy milion. Izrael - piętno Zagłady*, transl. B. Gądomska, Warszawa 2018 (the title of American edition: *The Seventh Million. The Israelis and the Holocaust*, Hill and Wang, New York 1999); T. Segev, *One Palestine, Complete. Jews and Arabs Under the British Mandate*, Henry Holt and Company, New York 1999; E. W. Said, Said Edward W. (1986) *After the last sky: Palestinian lives*. London: Faber & Faber; E. W. Said, *Za ostatnim niebem. Palestyńczycy*, Warszawa 2002; K. Kubiak, *Pierwsza wojna bliskowschodnia 1947-1949. Studium polityczno-wojskowe*, Wrocław 2006.

³⁷ E.g., A. Oz, *Judasz*, transl. L. Kwiatkowski, Poznań, 2015; A. Oz, *Na Ziemi Izraela*, transl. M. Sommer, Warszawa 2016; P. Smoleński, *Balagan. Alfabet izraelski*, Warszawa 2021; P. Smoleński, *Izrael już nie frunie*, Warszawa 2024; Etgar Keret, *Siedem dobrych lat*, transl. A. Maciejowska, Warszawa 2014; E. Keret, *Tęskniąc za Kissingerem*, transl. A. Maciejowska, Warszawa 2016; E. Keret, *Usterka na skraju galaktyki*, transl. A. Maciejowska, Kraków 2020.

³⁸ Cf. K. Fokin, *op. cit.*

ing military operation directed against Hezbollah and Hamas is considered one of the deadliest conflicts of the 21st century.

In Tel Aviv, near Jaffa and Haifa, young Israeli and Palestinian artists, as well as Israeli Palestinians are demonstrating their opposition to the drama of the conflict by “exhibiting” their works on walls, façades of building, large enterprises and banks. Their projects express the horror of war, rage, grief, mourning, dismay, anguish of living under threat and hatred. The works created in the studios have been shown in various public spaces in Tel Aviv.

The “Hostages Square” is the name given to the place where people gather to demand the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas since 7 October 2023. The square is located in front of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art (TAMA) and has become the site of rallies and protests. The museum director, Tania Coen-Uzzielli, called the site “*a direct and open line between the general public and the museum*” due to the different art installations in the square and the displays in the museum³⁹. Palestinians living in the diaspora publish their work on social media, claiming that this form of display is safer for them. Israeli and Palestinian-Arab artists: painters, sculptors, singers, composers and musicians gather at the Hostages Square, demanding the release of the hostages and expressing their resentment towards the government.

Addam Yekutieli, an Israeli artist born in 1985, responding to the question of how far the creation of a piece of art is an affective activity, here understood as a compulsive reaction to trauma, replied: *I think that if art can function as something, not only for the viewer, but for myself, it's to create a space for reflection and reassessing and trying to dissect and process and understand*⁴⁰. Yekutieli lives in Tel Aviv and works at the intersection of various disciplines. In his current works, he deals with issues that are somewhat an everyday part of life in Israel: the question of memory (the experiences of his grandparents, refugees from Europe), unhealing wounds of the past, scars and their impact on people: *I've always dealt with kind of like political or social themes, but for a very long time, they were much more metaphorical than they are now*⁴¹. The horror of war has deeply impressed him, annexing his thoughts, perception and creative possibilities:

I think that I just feel more comfortable with asking questions more than making statements. They feel more honest. It feels more of an authentic place to be in. And,

³⁹ N. N. *New exhibits at Hostage Square make Tel Aviv Museum a healing space*, “The Jerusalem Post” January 21, 2024[retrieved:04.04.2024].

⁴⁰ A. Yekutieli - interview for NHPR (News from New Hampshire). <https://www.nhpr.org/2024-01-07/art-and-war-israeli-and-palestinian-artists-reflect-on-oct-7-and-the-crisis-in-gaza>[accessed: 29.04.2024].

⁴¹ Ibidem.

I think that it also allows more reflection. [...] I think that there are parts of me that feels very nad've. But it feels like everything is spiralling out of control, and becoming progressively worse and worse⁴².

Palestinian Rana Samara was born in 1985 in Jerusalem. She graduated from the International Art Academy in Ramalla. She has devoted some areas of her art to exploring social norms, sexuality and gender roles: issues related to contemporary women's lives in Palestinian families. Using the medium of art in her projects, she focuses her attention on the lives of women in overcrowded refugee camps and rural communities. She deals with the issues of Palestinian females humiliated by both conservatism and life under the Israeli occupation. She creates large-scale, colourful, visually beautiful metaphorical paintings focusing on ultimate issues: death, violence, war and fear. When the war in Gaza broke out, she began to use photographs which have been published in the press, television and social media. After October 7th, Samara's paintings started to "manifest themselves" with unnaturally bright colours; their bright colourfulness is her affective response to trauma: *I found that now, my stress has come out with very, very, very bright colors*⁴³. She started to create brightly coloured, red-pink paintings-posters depicting various objects belonging to children, such as piggy banks, toys that children were holding in their hands when leaving homes, etc: *My idea was a piggy bank and inside a tank. At first look, it's an attractive, colorful, bright picture, but when you get close to it, it's the bleak image. It's the tank*⁴⁴.

Michal Worke, born in 1982 in Ethiopia, is a Jewish Ethiopian, who immigrated to Israel in 1984 within the Moses Operation⁴⁵; she lives and works in Tel Aviv. Before 7 October, her paintings were characterised by rich vibrant colours based mainly on purples and blues. They represented the story of her travels to Ethiopia and South Africa. After 7 October, Worke's paintings became dark, their colours oscillate between greys and blues: *It started with the shock of the kidnappings, and the murders and disasters, she said, referring to*

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ R. Samara, the interview for NHPR (News from New Hampshire). <https://www.nhpr.org/2024-01-07/art-and-war-israeli-and-palestinian-artists-reflect-on-oct-7-and-the-crisis-in-gaza>[accessed: 29.04.2024]. The artist is connected with a group of Palestinian artists working within the Zawyeh Gallery in Ramallah. They intend to donate the money raised from the sale of their works to humanitarian aid in Gaza.

⁴⁴ Ibidem.

⁴⁵ The Moses Operation was the covert evacuation of Ethiopian Jews from Sudan during a civil war that caused famine in 1984.



1. Rana Samara (1985) with her pictures, 7 October 2024. Photograph by Tanya Habjouqa/NOOR for NPR

the attack by Hamas militants⁴⁶. During the first days of the conflict, the artist, according to her statement, had to leave her studio, stop painting in order to shut herself away, to gather her thoughts and emotions. She wanted her paintings to become a trauma “fixed” in her mind, which could be “tricked” through creation. Analysing Christian Boltanski's work relating to the Holocaust, Ernst van Alphen wrote:

It is clear that for him art is a method of deception. Art, even autobiographical, does not represent reality. Instead, it is a way of transforming unbearable reality into something normal – something bearable. Art is not mimetic, but performative⁴⁷.

⁴⁶ M. Worke, the interview for NHPR (News from New Hampshire). <https://www.nhpr.org/2024-01-07/art-and-war-israeli-and-palestinian-artists-reflect-on-oct-7-and-the-crisis-in-gaza> [accessed: 29.04.2024]. The artist is fighting for the release of Avery Mengistu, her friend, an Israeli of Ethiopian descent held by Hamas for nine years. Mengistu and his family are the constant subject of Worke's paintings. The artist posts the paintings online. She follows videos and all accounts of the released hostages, yet Avery Mengistu is not among them. She wants her works to consolidate the face of her friend: *So, in response she's worked to continue to amplify Mengistu's story so that he isn't forgotten.*

⁴⁷ E. van Alphen, *Zabawa w Holokaust*, “Literatura na Świecie” 2004, no. 1-2, p. 222.

I think we can apply Van Alphen's statement as much to the work of Michal Worke as to the other artists mentioned here. The experience of the war in Gaza has changed the emotions, thinking and the subject matter of Worke's paintings: *I think I responded like everyone to the trauma that we saw. It was really hard for me. I started having dreams that they are coming for me, and they start shooting and I didn't know where to hide or where to go*⁴⁸.



2. Interior of Michal Worke's (1982) studio in Tel Aviv, 7 October 2023. Photograph by Tanya Habjouqa/NOOR for NPR

The theme of war, constantly present in Israeli history, has dominated Michal Worke's oeuvre. The wars fought by the State of Israel also represent tensions between different ethnic groups of the Jewish faith. The artist draws attention to the rather unknown issue of the presence of Ethiopians in the Israeli army. *Many Ethiopian soldiers have died*, she said. *Ninety percent of Ethiopians [in Israel] go to combat units. It's the highest percentage of any community. So many have died*⁴⁹. The fate of these soldiers, often undescribed, has become the theme of the artist's paintings.

⁴⁸ M. Worke, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ *Ibidem.*

Oren Fischer, born in 1984 in Los Angeles (USA), is one of the best-known contemporary artists. He is also an art curator, illustrator, performer and initiator of social and political activities in Israel⁵⁰. The war unleashed on 7 October 2023 triggered his conviction that words have no value, no words can express what happened, or what is happening continuously, but still: *So, I started painting*⁵¹. Like many people throughout the world, he has obtained information on what has been happening in the Gaza Strip through TV broadcasts and social media. In his work, Fischer uses a variety of media: drawing, textiles, paint and crayons. He describes his paintings as “childish”, but according to what he says, it was the only way that he could express the affect caused



3. Oren Fischer's political cartoon of the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. Photograph by Tanya Habjouqa/NOOR for NPR

⁵⁰ Like many Israeli artists, Oren Fischer is involved in, among others, a social movement calling for the release of Israeli hostages held by Hamas since 7 October 2023; they also demand the overthrow of Benjamin Netanyahu. Read more about this in: K. Chernick, *For many in Israel's art community, protests have replaced practice*, "The Art Newspaper", 05.04.2024, p. 1. <https://www.theartnewspaper.com/2024/04/05/israel-art-community-protests-hostages-netanyahu-hamas-war>[accessed: 29.04.2024].

⁵¹ O. Fischer, the interview for NHPR (News from New Hampshire). <https://www.nhpr.org/2024-01-07/art-and-war-israeli-and-palestinian-artists-reflect-on-oct-7-and-the-crisis-in-gaza>[accessed: 29.04.2024].

by the horror of the October 7th attacks and the war: *It helped me to heal myself. I made sort of a routine that I wake up and for a few hours I paint and upload on social media [...] So I created my own world inside the catastrophe*⁵². Like most of his previous works, the series of drawings created after October 7th is a sharp criticism of the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, and his government. It is this government that the artist blames for the current situation, for the attack by Hamas being a last resort.

The drawing depicts the Prime Minister of Israel raising his hands splattered with blood. The artist depicted the politician in bright colours in the convention of graffiti found on building façades in Tel Aviv and Gaza. Hamas attackers, visible in the background, are shooting at distraught people and houses are burning. Fischer's work was featured on the cover of one of the newspapers published in Israel.

Maya Freedman is Jewish and Hadeel Nasser is Palestinian – two artists and journalists whose sense of life and art is reconciliation. Believing that art, in the midst of political and historical turmoil, mutual injuries and traumas, hatred and anger, can become a cause for building understanding, they embarked on a project that aims to bridge the boundaries that divide people of different religions, cultures and ideologies. *Against misunderstanding, alienation and otherness, says Tamara White, there is one language that unites people; it is art, which speaks a universal language beyond words, politics and borders. It is music, dance and image.*

Art as a universal language transcends words. It has no language barriers. It can be understood not only by art critics trained in deciphering the meaning of its symbols, but by any human being who cares enough to engage with the image⁵³.

Within their March 2024 publication in *The World Art News*, Freedman and Nasser presented the not so new and revolutionary after all, but still necessary concept that by engaging with art, people are encouraged to see beyond surface-level differences and recognize the shared humanity that unites them, potentially paving the way for mutual respect and coexistence⁵⁴.

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ T. White, *The Universal Language of Art*, 11 March 2024. https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/universal-language-art-bader-simon-0s4ec?trk=public_post_main-feed-card_feed-article-content[accessed: 29.04.2024].

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

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Repeated questions and incantations seem more valuable than false words of consolation or untrue reconciliation. Biblical Job's questions seem to be appropriate to the times that seek the hope of *tikkun* – a Hebrew word which, according to Geoffrey Hartman, means repair rather than reconciliation⁵⁵. The artists mentioned in the article do not bear witness to the events that are happening in their land. Their works are the voice of their affect: pain and suffering.



4. Maya Freedman, Hadeel Nasser, *Israel and Palestine*, "World Art News", Monday, 29 April 2024. <https://worldart.news/2023/10/19/the-art-of-peace-how-art-can-help-stop-the-war-between-israel-and-palestine/> [accessed: 29.04.2024].

⁵⁵ G.Hartman, *Bitburg*, "Literatura na Świecie", 2004, no. 1-2, p. 339.

Their art shows the extent to which expressing their feelings has become a way of building relationships with events, a way of making contact with different kinds of trauma in the present: the horrors of conflicts whose escalation overwhelms us, and towards which we remain distant witnesses, empathetic (?) recipients of the “news from the world”⁵⁶.

Transl. from Polish: Małgorzata Likus

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⁵⁶ Cf. C. Ozick, *Prawa historii i prawa wyobraźni*, transl. Z. Batko, “Literatura na Świecie”, 2004, no. 1-2, pp. 81-125.

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SZTUKA POKOJU. CZY ARTYSTA MOŻE POWSTRZYMAĆ WOJNY MIĘDZY IZRAELEM A PALESTYNĄ? (streszczenie)

Życie ludzkie w obliczu ciągłych zagrożeń, niezależnie od czasu, epoki, miejsca czy stopnia cywilizacji (de-cywilizacji), generuje zachowania, które analizowane są przez lekarzy, psychiatrów, psychologów. Emmanule Lévinas, Cynthia Ozick, Pascal Quignards, podejmują ten problem, by wymienić nazwiska najbardziej istotne w odniesieniu do podejmowanego problemu. Ten stan rzeczy, dotyczący ekstremalnych doświadczeń spowodowanych siłami natury, awariami technicznymi, aktami terroryzmu, wojny, stał się przedmiotem zainteresowania filozofów, badaczy kultury i artystów. Konflikt izraelsko-palestyński – jeden z najdłuższych sporów na świecie – jest źródłem głębokich ran społeczności po jego obu stronach. Pośród napięć politycznych i historycznych, świadomości braku konsensusu, pojawia się zarzewie myśli, a w konsekwencji działania, przekonanie, że sztuka, poprzez wyrażanie najgłębszych doświadczeń, może stać się platformą zrozumienia. Tematem niniejszego artykułu jest obecna (trwająca od 7 października 2023 r.), kolejna wojna w historii państwa Izrael od 1948 r. oraz reakcja na nią izraelskich i palestyńskich artystów. Odpowiedź artystów, wyrażana poprzez dzieło sztuki, jest dramatyczną próbą reakcji na stan skrajnego zagrożenia (wojna, śmierć, głód, porwania, gwałty, strach, ból). Z perspektywy badaczy (np. La Capra czy Van Alphen) owa, zwykle gwałtowna, reakcja artystów postrzegana jako „przekazanie afektu, który ich porusza”, co znajduje odzwierciedlenie w tworzonych pracach. Artyści żydowscy i palestyńscy natychmiast zareagowali na wydarzenia rozgrywające się w Izraelu i Strefie Gazy. W artykule omówiono wybrane prace izraelskich i palestyńskich artystów m. in. Mai Freedman, Hadeel Nasser, Orena Fischera, Michala Worke, Rany Samary, Addama Yekutiela. Przedstawione zostały dzieła tematycznie związane z aktualnymi wydarzeniami w Izraelu i Strefie Gazy, wypowiedzi twórców oraz komentarze filozoficzne i psychoanalityczne na ich temat. Przywołani w artykule artyści reprezentują pokolenie urodzone kilkadziesiąt lat po II wojnie światowej i 76 lat po ustanowieniu Państwa Izrael na terenach byłej Palestyny (British Mandate for Palestine – Mandate territory form 1922-1948, utworzono z części terenów byłego Imperium Osmańskiego na Bliskim Wschodzie) i mieszkają w Izraelu, Palestynie, Francji i Stanach Zjednoczonych.

Słowa kluczowe: sztuka, artyści, pokój, wojna, strach, śmierć, psychoanaliza, wpływ, Izrael, Palestyna.