

Five Moments: Trajectories in the Architecture of the Tel Aviv Museum

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Exhibition

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The Architecture of the Tel Aviv Museum: Passages in a Nonlinear History

Yasha J. Grobman and Arielle Blonder

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The history of the Tel Aviv Museum has been shaped by several major turning points, which took place at five specific moments in time. These moments mark the inauguration of the buildings designed over the years to house the museum: Dizengoff House – the private home of the city's first mayor, Meir Dizengoff (1932); the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion (1959); the main museum building on Shaul Hamelech Boulevard (1971); the Meyerhoff Art Education Center (1996); and the new Herta and Paul Amir building currently being inaugurated alongside the main building.

These five moments may appear to constitute arbitrary points in time, which were determined by the interplay of different forces and the availability of the resources necessary to promote the museum and to construct each of the buildings. Yet seen from a historical perspective, which takes into consideration the intervals between these points and the processes that took place in these intervals, these moments may be taken to reflect the reciprocal relations between the museum institution and its buildings in relation to the evolution of both local and international architectural and cultural discourses. Each of the moments examined in this context thus represents a distinct historical, cultural and architectural period, both in Israel and in an international context: the International Style of the 1930s; the late modernism of the 1950s; the Brutalism of the 1970s; the post-modernism of the 1990s; and trends in contemporary, digital architecture.

Indeed, the attempt to undertake a process of induction¹ based on individual cases in order to reach general conclusions constitutes a significant challenge, which involves the risk of relying on partial information; yet the advantages of this approach are evident when it is applied to disciplines based on visual and perceptual information, which place great importance on the viewer's experience and sensations.² The exhibition "Five Moments" attempts to undertake this type of challenge. It presents, in a simultaneous and non-linear manner, two historical and historiographical readings of the Tel Aviv Museum's five buildings. The parallel presentation of these readings is designed to offer multiple possibilities for interpreting the ideas, discourses and processes that shaped the design of these buildings.

The first reading examines the evolution of these buildings from a historical point of view. It details the architectural choices and ideas that shaped the design of each building, the various stages in their development, the challenges faced by their initiators and designers, and their reception by professional and non-professional audiences both prior to and following their inauguration.

The second reading focuses on the evolving relations between these buildings, as well as on their relations to architectural practice and discourse in both a local and an international context. By historical synthesis of these moments, which participated in the a more general cultural identity.

buildings is examined is the reciprocal relations between the "life" of an exhibition and everyday life, and between the city's cultural center and the international cultural scene (a reciprocity addressed by Meir Dizengoff as early as 1935).

This exhibition marks the most recent turning point in the history of the museum, which is at once joyous and filled with sadness: it celebrates the inauguration of the first Israeli museum space in his private home. devoted to the exhibition of architecture and to the museum's of Prof. Mordechai Omer, the museum's director and chief curator since 1994. Omer, who initiated the design and creation of this new building and oversaw the entire design and construction process, did not live to witness the inauguration of this fifth moment. to his memory.

of the museum's new building – the product of the international architectural competition announced in 2003. The complex with Israeli Brutalism and Formalism, which were championed Hecker;³ at the same time, it also engages with the contemporary discourse on "performalism," digital materiality, and formalism.4 This fusion is embodied by the design of the building's envelope, the building's organizing axis and main lighting shaft. The choice external expression to its evolving definition. of concrete, meanwhile, gives expression to Preston Scott Cohen's perception of this material as the building's DNA - a temporal and years, the museum hosted a range of cultural activities, such as spatial means of forging a link between the surrounding city and a concerts and assemblies. Its central public function, which exceeded larger international context, as well as between the history of local the sphere of the city to assume national importance, was best architecture and recent technological developments.5

Since the site that is home to the new building is the museum's offering these two different readings, the exhibition creates a last reserve of land, the architectural program of this building reflects the museum's own vision of its character in the near consolidation of a local architectural identity – as well as in shaping future. The designation of special galleries for the exhibition of architecture and design, for the first time in the museum's history, The main prism through which the architecture of these and the definition of the museum as a center for Israeli art by means of a comprehensive permanent exhibition, reflect a contemporary understanding of the museum's role. At the same time, given the building's status as the "offspring" of the man who served as its director in recent years, and who tirelessly devoted himself to its realization, this contemporary project calls to mind the first moment in the history of the museum, which was founded thanks to the initiative of Tel Aviv's first mayor, Meir Dizengoff, and was housed

The advent of this first moment took place in 1930, permanent collection of Israeli art, in a building which itself when - following the death of his wife, Zina - Mayor Dizengoff constitutes a significant architectural achievement. This celebratory began working towards the establishment of a municipal art moment, however, is also filled with regret for the untimely death museum. This process involved consultations with prominent artists and intellectuals - including Marc Chagall, Reuven Rubin, and Haim Nahman Bialik – and involved some significant differences of opinion on certain issues. Dizengoff subsequently vacated his living guarters on the second floor of his home on Rothschild Boulevard. This exhibition - one of the many museum projects conceived where the Tel Aviv Museum opened in 1932. As he remarked in his of by Omer - is dedicated to his professional achievements and will, "I hand over to you [...] my youngest offspring, the child of my delight, the Tel Aviv Museum [...] Take care to ensure its sustained The fifth moment examined in this context is the inauguration existence and future [...] for it is a blessing to this city, and will bring it much glory and pride. "6

Dizengoff House was originally designed as a single-story geometry of this exposed concrete structure, which was designed residential building, which was expanded and renovated numerous by the American architect Preston Scott Cohen, dialogues times over the years before attaining its current form as a threestorey building with three wings. 7 Its appearance, which was initially during the 1960s by architects such as Alfred Neumann and Zevi that of a rural, Eastern-European house, was transformed into that of a streamlined building in the International Style.8 Parallel to the creation of interior spaces designed for the exhibition of artworks, the building gradually came to define the identity of the city's which entertains a geometric affinity with the iconic space of the future art museum. The consolidation of its character as a museum "Lightfall" - the building's central atrium. This vertical space, which was accompanied by the addition of new spaces, and by endless forges a connection between interior and exterior, also serves as changes to both its exterior and its interior design, which gave

> As one of the city's most important public spaces during those emblematized by the historical role it played in the declaration

gallery on the building's ground level. Dizengoff himself, however, institution was awarded its own permanent building, which was did not live to see this important moment.

dominant personality, gave rise to numerous tensions, which reflected different and evolving conceptions of the museum institution. The tension between an exhibition policy centered on Jewish art, and between alternate policies centered on European art, contemporary Israeli art, or even on the exhibition of anthropological artifacts, was given expression in the evolving the changes introduced into it over time. nature of the collection, the range of exhibitions featured at the museum, and the physical changes introduced into the museum the new building, 10 the jury for this competition was composed building over the years.

marked by the inauguration of the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion in 1959. This event emblematized the new level of maturity attained by this institution, and its central role in the city's cultural life a role represented by the pavilion's location in the city's Culture stage of the competition included submissions from the six leading Square, alongside the Mann Auditorium and Habimah Theater. competitors; it ended, as noted above, with the selection of Eytan The pavilion constituted the first stage in the creation of a large museum building, which was designed to occupy the area between the pavilion and the theater. The competition for the design of this Culture Square was awarded jointly to the architects Dov Karmi and Zeev Rechter: Karmi's office was responsible for renovating the theater building and for introducing the required changes, while the Mann Auditorium was jointly planned by both offices. Rechter's office oversaw the first stage of the design process, which included the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion, while Karmi's office was charged with the design of the second stage, which involved the pavilion's expansion into a larger museum - a modernist building that bore a clear affinity to the Mann Auditorium. The connection of this museum building to the auditorium, to the adjacent Ya'akov Garden and to Habimah Theater was forged by means of the circulation paths between the buildings, as well as by the crisscross of horizontal beams that tie together their roofs, and underscore the unity of the complex as a whole. The exhibition galleries in this museum building were designed as a single, continuous, openplan space, which lent itself to numerous purposes. When the plan to expand the pavilion into an entire museum was rejected, the flexible character of this "Plan A" enabled the pavilion to function in both local and international architectural discourses. This period as an autonomous space.9

was defined by the inauguration of the building on Shaul Hamelech the building)¹³ – two styles characteristic of the regime of economic Boulevard in 1971, which marked the museum's attainment of a austerity that dominated Israeli life during the 1950s and 1960s¹⁴ –

of Israeli independence - an event that took place in the central new level of maturity and self-awareness. For the first time, this planned in advance in order to answer its needs in a coherent Dizengoff's vision of the museum, together with his manner. The design competition for this building was announced in 1964, following the rejection of the plan for a museum building in the Culture Square, and the decision to relocate it to a large lot in an area that was then on the periphery of the city. The First Prize was awarded to the architects Dan Eytan and Yitzhak Yashar, who designed the building and were subsequently also responsible for

Much like the jury that chose Preston Scott Cohen's design for of prominent local architects (Werner Joseph Wittkower, Nachum The second moment in the history of the Tel Aviv Museum was Zolotov, Nahum Zelkind, and the city engineer Zalman Baron) and international experts (Professor Haldor Gunnløgsson from Copenhagen and Professor Bruno Zevi from Rome), as well as members of the museum staff and public figures. The second and Yashar's proposal.¹¹ In the course of the competition, Bruno Zevi presented the jury's requirements for this building:

> 1. The Tel Aviv Museum is a repository for artworks, and should constitute an artwork in its own right; 2. The architecture of the Tel Aviv Museum should encourage philanthropists and collectors to donate or lend their artworks to the museum. [...] The architecture must be expressive and aesthetically significant; 3. The museum building [...] is not a temporary pavilion, [...] it must be highly flexible and multi-functional, yet provide a sense of permanence: 4. The building's character should be simple yet filled with significance, and represent a clear set of values. [...] yet it should not appear as an anonymous, attractive cube that could be situated anywhere. The building's simplicity should be the end result, rather than the point of departure; 5. Given the surrounding urban landscape, the design of the museum building must unfold on a bold scale.¹²

This third moment, and the design of the building on Shaul Hamelech Boulevard, both took place at a meaningful turning point marked the gradual transition away from late modernism and The third moment in the history of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art Brutalism (or "soft Brutalism." as Dan Eytan defined his proposal for

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to a greater degree of formal and material experimentation during inaugurated by the new building is the third moment represented the 1970s and 1980s.

A comparison between the program for the Helena Rubinstein Hamelech Boulevard (the third moment) reveals the substantial shift self-perception: a shift from a program based on "quantity," which details volumes and functions, 16 to a program based on "quality," which reveals how the building defines the museum's identity.

of the Meyerhoff Art Education Center in the building formerly and adapted to its new use by the Tav Group, reopened in 1996. The renovation and re-designation of existing buildings constitutes an important stage in the evolution of Tel Aviv, and dialogues with the first moment in the museum's history, when Dizengoff's private Center – which centered on creating additions to the existing interesting early example of the local need to change the designation Ron Huldai. of buildings originally constructed in the International Style. The old and new elements, is shaped by an emphasis on complexity, in the late 1970s in the context of international architecture.¹⁷

education department expresses a recognition of the importance of educational activities as part of the museum's mission. At the same bespeaks a certain ambivalence. 18 This ambivalence is reiterated in and encompasses the constant need for change and growth. the new, currently inaugurated museum building: the program for for the education department within the main museum complex. In specific exhibitions. The fourth moment in the museum's history, which embodied an approach based on recycling and retrieval within a saturated urban environment, thus represents a separate From both a programmatic and a physical perspective, then, the enable its audience to offer additional interpretations and readings. most immediate and direct point of reference for the fifth moment

by the original museum building on Shaul Hamelech Boulevard.

This exhibition presents the five different moments that Pavilion (the second moment) and the museum building on Shaul have shaped the architectural history of the museum from a multidimensional perspective. The exhibition's central axis, which both in the status of the museum as an urban institution, 15 and in its examines the design and construction process of each building in a traditional, linear manner, includes the presentation of pertinent historical and architectural documents - models, plans, drafts, photographs, and so forth. At the same time, this book describes The fourth moment examined in this exhibition is the creation the history of each building from two additional perspectives – a scholarly, critical perspective, as well as the personal perspective of occupied by the Dubnov School. This building, which was renovated the participants in the design, construction, or renovation of these buildings: Dan Eytan; the Tay Group; Preston Scott Cohen and Amit Nemlich (the architect who oversaw the construction of the new building); Ram Karmi (who submitted several unrealized proposals for different museum buildings); and Amnon Rechter (the son of home underwent several phases of renovation in order to transform Yacov Rechter, who designed the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion), who it into a museum. The construction of the Meyerhoff Art Education is currently overseeing the renovation of the pavilion. An additional perspective on the new building and on the museum's original structure in order to cater to the building's new functions – is an location in Dizengoff House is offered by Tel Aviv-Yaffo Mayor

Another dimension of the exhibition is concerned with a less design of this center, which underscores the contrast between familiar aspect of building design – the alternatives that were not chosen and the roads not taken, as well as plans whose future contradiction, and deconstruction – concerns that came to the fore realization is anticipated. This point of reference presents the design process as a non-linear practice that involves a range of possibilities, The dedication of an entire building to the museum's influences, and contrasting forces. From this perspective, the final product is one of numerous possible options, which represents the common understandings reached by various forces at a given time, the location of these activities in a separate site, at a distance moment in time. This product is thus perceived as an organic from the museum's central core on Shaul Hamelech Boulevard, creature, whose vitality represents a constant process of evolution

An additional dimension exceeds the focus on a single building, the competition required the architects to designate a specific area and offers several comparative readings of the museum buildings and of their relations with other buildings, which resemble them reality, however, the museum's educational activities will continue from a programmatic or typological point of view. This comparative to be held at the Meyerhoff Art Education Center; the new building gaze gives rise to a range of readings across space and time, and includes only a restricted area for educational activities related to frequently reveals intriguing changes and processes that exceed the sphere of museum design and reflect social, economic, cultural and ideological changes in Tel Aviv, as well as in Israeli society more generally. Nonetheless, the exhibition refrains from pointing to trajectory than that embodied by the other museum buildings. these processes in an explicit and didactic manner, in an attempt to

This set of readings is spatially embodied by the exhibition

design. The historical continuum is represented by means of continuous, undulating strips of paper, which feature five isolated moments: these five central strips of data constitute the main point of reference. The spatial orientation of these central strips, which present a range of events and detailed documentation concerning the different buildings, dialogues with the new building's physical axes. An additional series of diagonally oriented strips presents the alternative history of each of the five moments. This secondary series of strips responds to the building's secondary set of axes, which define the exhibition space and are embodied by the diagonal wall at one end of the gallery. These two systems of axes - the central one and the secondary one – are accompanied by a synthetic, lateral space that extends across the entire exhibition gallery, and presents a comparative reading of the buildings. This space is informed by the data presented in the central space, and constitutes an inseparable part of it; at the same time, its examination allows for a transversal, historiographical reading of historical processes. The viewer's free movement through the space and among these different strips of paper is not limited by any one trajectory, and allows for endless possibilities that create new meanings and personal interpretations.

For the fifth time in the history of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, the last wish of its founder, the city's first mayor, is endowed with new meaning. This exhibition celebrates this fifth moment, yet presents, in its own unique way, the history of the entire city through the prism of its museum buildings. And as history has already taught us, the inauguration of this new building and of this exhibition also marks the countdown towards the next, sixth moment.

Notes

- On the advantages of the inductive method, see the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, on the website of the Metaphysics Research Lab, Center for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/ induction-problem/#CanIndJus
- ² On taking a non-linear approach to history, see Manuel De Landa, A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History (New York: Zone books, 1997).
- ³ See Aba Elhanani, The Struggle for Independence: The Israeli Architecture in the Twentieth Century (Tel Aviv: Ministry of Defense Publishing, 1998), in Hebrew.
- ⁴ On digital architecture, see Antoine Picon, Digital Culture in Architecture (Zürich: Birkhäuser Architecture. 2010); see also Yasha Grobman and Eran Neuman, Performalism: Form and Performance in Digital Architecture (exh. cat., Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2008).
- See Preston Scott Cohen's article in this volume
- ⁶ Excerpted from Meir Dizengoff's will, January 1, 1935; Archive of the Tel Aviv-Yaffo Municipality.
- ⁷ For a discussion of the succession of physical changes introduced into Dizengoff House in order to accommodate the Tel Aviv Museum, See Batsheva Goldman Ida's article in this volume
- ⁸ For the opinion of figures such as Bialik and Haim Gliksberg on the International Style in Tel Aviv. see ihid
- On the design and construction process of the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion, see Maya Vinitsky's article in this volume.
- ¹⁰ On the competition for the design of the new building, see Meira Yaqid, Nathalie Kertesz and Zeev Maor (eds.), A New Building, Tel Aviv Museum of Art:The Herta and Paul Amir Architectural Competition (exh. cat., Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 2004).
- 11 See Alona Nitzan-Shiftan and Shira Sprecher-Segalovitz's article in this volume. See also Batsheva Goldman Ida, "A Dramatic Struggle for the Tel Aviv Museum of Art Building on Shaul Hamelech Boulevard," in Tel Aviv Museum of Art Review 8 (2001-2003), pp. 51-70, in Hebrew.
- ¹² Protocol of the jury meeting, public competition for the design of the Tel

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- P. 36 no. 3; pp. 38, 42, 44 Archive of Preston Scott Cohen Inc., Cambridge, MA
- P. 51 photo: Zoltan Kluger, National Photo Collection, Jerusalem
- P. 52 Tel Aviv Museum Guide (1934), Archive of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art
- P. 53 above 16 Rothschild Boulevard file, Civil Engineering Archive, Tel Aviv-Yafo
- P. 54 photo: Avraham Soskin, Soskin Collection, Eretz-Israel Museum, Tel Aviv
- P. 57 above photo: Israel Zafrir, Meir Dizengoff's Personal Collection, Eretz-Israel
- P. 57 below photo: Studio Ze'ev Blutinger, Meir Dizengoff's Personal Collection, Eretz-Israel Museum, Tel Aviv
- P. 58 above photo: Rudi Weissenstein (Prior), Meir Dizengoff's Personal Collection, Eretz-Israel Museum, Tel Aviv
- P. 58 below photo: Zoltan Kluger, National Photo Collection, Jerusalem
- P. 61 above Tel Aviv Museum Guide (1951), Archive of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art
- P. 61 below Photo Schwarz, Archive of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art
- P. 62 above photo: Avraham Soskin, the Soskin Collection, Eretz-Israel Museum, Tel Aviv
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- P. 67 photo: Israel Zafrir, Archive of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art
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- P. 78 photo: Yosef Lior, collection of the Eretz-Israel Museum, Tel Aviv
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- P. 85 below photo: Avraham Hay, Archive of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art
- Pp. 86-87 photo: Ran Erde, Archive of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art
- Pp. 88-89 Dan Eytan Archive
- Pp. 90, 93 photo: Ran Erde, Archive of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art
- P. 96 below photo: Giora Shalmi, Archive of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art
- P. 97 above photo: Israel Zafrir, Archive of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art
- P. 97 below photo: Yael Rosen, Archive of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art
- P. 100 photo: Rachel Hirsch, Archive of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art
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- P. 104 Civil Engineering Archive, Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality
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- P. 106 Archive of the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality
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- P. 111 Tav Group Archive
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- P. 122 no. 3 photo: Avraham Soskin, the Soskin Collection, Eretz-Israel Museum, Tel Aviv
- P. 122 no. 4 Archive of the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality
- P. 124 no. 5-6, 8 16 Rothschild Boulevard file, Civil Engineering Archive, Tel Aviv-
- P. 126 no. 9 Tel Aviv Museum Guide (1939), Archive of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art

- P. 126 no. 11 Archive of the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality
- P. 128 no. 12; p. 130 no. 15 Meir Dizengoff's Personal Collection, Eretz-Israel Museum, Tel Aviv
- P. 130 no. 16 Archive of the Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality
- P. 136 no. 1 Library of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art
- P. 136 no. 2-3 Journal of AEAP (February 1947)
- P. 136 no. 4 Helena Rubinstein Pavilion file, Civil Engineering Archive, Tel Aviv-Yafo Municipality
- P. 138 no. 5 Rechter Archive
- P. 138 no. 7-8 The Architectural Review (May 1959)
- P. 140 no. 8 private photography collection
- P. 144 no. 13 Karmi Archive
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- P. 148 no. 16 above photo: Shlomo Ben-David
- P. 152 no. 3 Handassa Veadrichalut [Engineering and Architecture] (February-March 1969)
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- P. 166 no. 1-3 photo: Ran Erde, Archive of the Tel Aviv Museum of Art
- P. 168 photo: Marina Gal

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