

# We Shell Dress You Up in a Dress of Concrete and Pixels

## Gilad Melzer

**The wall holds a place of honor in the history of the visual arts. As kids say, it was there first. Art, as far as we know, started on the wall. Directly on the wall, with hands, with pigments. In terms of human culture, art had mostly stayed on the wall until very recently. Directly on the wall, with pigments, by carving – as in Babylon, Persia, or Ancient Greece – in frescoes, graffiti, and, of course, with things hung on it. Right until one hundred and fifty years ago – painting.**

**The wall holds a place of honor in the history of visual art; all the more so when speaking about walls in exhibition spaces or museums. A wall in a museum is meant for works of art to be hung on it. It supplies the supposedly neutral flatness demanded by the modernist protocol, which continues to reign supreme in most exhibition venues: walls that are mostly white. If the mirror (hanging on a wall) and the window (an opening in the wall) are metaphoric of the artist's gaze, then the wall accommodates its product.**

**But not this wall. First, it is not really meant for exhibits to be hung on it. It is installed in the lobby, opposite the entrance ticket stand. Second, it is gray, rough, composed of fragments attached together in visible, crude form. It has an aesthetic all its own. And a museum wall, a wall in a white cube, mustn't have an aesthetic per se, it is supposed to be like a blank, white sheet of paper; uniform, invisible, not calling attention to itself.**

**The concrete wall in the Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art lobby, which was built as part of the museum's extension in 2000, is made of molded horizontal, rectangular slabs of concrete. It epitomizes an Israeli wall, echoing on the one hand the birth of the museum as a guest**

in the adjacent commemorative building (Beit Yad Labanim) and the commemorative walls typical of such institutions and, on the other hand, the history of Israeli architecture in the years following the state's establishment, which frequently used concrete and concrete molds, especially in public buildings. Nowadays, this typical Israeli aesthetic also resonates, of course, with the largest wall in the Middle East, the Separation Wall, which is also made of molded slabs of concrete.

Irit Tamari's unique way of tackling the harsh wall at the Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art's entrance lobby led to the exhibition "Interior Gaze" (curated by Dr. Aya Lurie). The exhibition called on four contemporary artists (Rotem Balva, Shibetz Cohen, Irit Tamari, and Noa Zait) to turn their gaze on the museum itself. Tamari does so in her own gentle, uniquely critical way. Although the wall "fathered" her curtain, the work born of it is a bastard – barbed, foreign to its source, a hybrid.

Whether due to its being so different within the museum's context, or because it is so common in the context of Israeli architecture and construction, this wall demanded Tamari's profound, patient, deconstructive, observant gaze. The Zionist ethos expressed in Nathan Alterman's poem "Morning Song" (1932), promising the land of Israel, "we shall dress you up in a dress of concrete and cement," is replaced in Tamari's work by a curtain weaved of pixels; composed, in fact, of four thousand uniformly sized photographs (18x13 cm) of small areas, corners, gashes in the concrete, joints and protrusions – micro-events – that together create a composition of beauty such as only photography's technological obstinacy may extract from the seemingly nondescript concrete attire. Tamari's *Screensaver*, a floating, light attire composed of pixels, is a feminine response to the masculine harshness of the concrete. The fabric composed of thousands of small images performs a dual action: most of the photographs focus on flaws in the wall, but together they form a huge surface which hides the wall behind it.

Tamari does not use the wall as a wall. She does not hang anything on it in the usual sense of the word. In fact, she hides most of it. She addresses it like a landscape and

**uses its gray opaqueness to create a screen which unstitches the industrial, self-assured, concrete uniformity of one of the salient hallmarks of Israeli modernism. She installs in front of it a construct which is entirely made of patchwork, pointing to its temporariness (she weaves the photographs together by hand, using loops behind the prints) as well as to its being fictive.**

**With her photograph+cut+attach technique, Tamari reintroduces new options for bridging between mediums. While the seam between photography and painting has been part of the century-old history of the photographic collage, Tamari succeeds in creating a language which is a cross between photography, painting, and three-dimensional arts. The seemingly banal naivety of the nondescript photographs becomes, on being attached together, a monumental work which, in the best modernist tradition, explores the notion of flatness. Through this unique tripartite encounter between photography, painting, and sculpture Tamari also makes tangible the new, contemporary, fresh options offered by the horizontal and vertical lines of the grid so identified with modernism.**

**Possibly, the most important element in *Screensaver* is the slit. These unavoidable gaps within the huge puzzle, these spaces through which the light penetrates, through which passes a soft flow of air, of freedom, of all that is lacking when standing by a concrete wall. All that art – that which is on, by, or alongside the wall – may remind us of.**

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Translated by Einat Adi

