

JOSEPH SASSOON SEMAH

On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) V

Between Graveyard
and Museum's Sphere



Magnum Opus: From the Diary of the Architect

Linda Bouws curator, director Metropool International Art Projects

INTRODUCTION

Arab-Jews who were expelled from Arab countries

For centuries, over a million Jews lived peacefully in the Middle East. However, the rise of Arab nationalism in the 1930s and the establishment of Israel in 1948 abruptly ended the harmonious coexistence between Jews and Muslims. From 1950 to the 1970s, a substantial and often forced exodus occurred from Arab countries in Middle East and North Africa. For many, this meant the loss of homeland, possessions, culture, traditions, and narratives.¹ This refugee flows involved a larger number than the Muslim Palestinian refugees, who were also victims: the two groups lost their homeland and became refugees. They were 'inter-linked, as two communities of suffering'.² Nowadays, the Jews scrapped the title 'refugees', while many Muslim Palestians still call themselves refugees.

Lack of Awareness and Knowledge

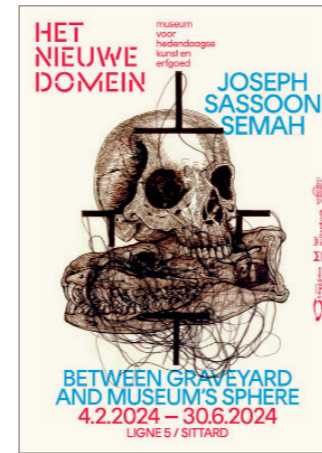
The Middle East lost one of its most creative and enterprising minorities. The story of the expelled Jews is often overlooked due to the emphasis on the Shoah, and the Arab-Jews/the Mizrahi, were unjustly regarded as inferior citizens in modern Israel. Now at this moment there is no way to resurrect the once-glorious Jewish communities in the Middle East, but knowledge and imagination can help recall that forgotten world. Acknowledging the injustice done to the Jews of the Middle East and understanding their rich history of peaceful coexistence can contribute to promoting peace and reconciliation in the Middle East and Europe and eventually between the two continents.

Joseph Sassoon Semah

Joseph Sassoon Semah was born in Baghdad in 1948, in the same year Israel was founded. He belongs to one of the last of a Babylonian Jewish family lineage. His grandfather, Hacham Sassoon Kadoori (1986-1971), a legendary, liberal chief rabbi of Baghdad, advocated tolerance between Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Iraqi Jew's first exile goes back to 597-530 BCE.³

The history of the Jews in Iraq is one of the most important Jewish communities, to play a significant role in Iraq public life. The Talmud Bavli was compiled in Babylon (modern Iraq) and during the British mandate in the 1920s, the well-educated Jews played an important role in public and political life. After Israel gained independence in 1948, many of the Babylonian Jews, including Joseph Sassoon Semah and his parents, were forced to leave the then cosmopolitan, culturally very diverse city of Baghdad, marking the end of a cultural history spanning more than 2,500 years. His grandfather refused to leave Iraq and stayed in Baghdad, where he died in 1971. Many Iraqi Jews, including Hacham Sasoon Kadoori, identified themselves as Arabs of the Jewish faith.⁴ Nowadays, many years and several wars later – including the Gulf War in 1991 – there is hardly anything left in Baghdad to remind us of the once flourishing culture of the Babylonian Jews. After traumatic experiences in Israelis wars, Joseph Sassoon Semah chose a self-imposed third exile (Galut), settling in Europe in 1976. He named himself 'the Guest'. His artistic/philosophical work over nearly five decades critically reflect on identity, history, and tradition, exploring the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in Western art and culture.

He offers an alternative reading about the position of the museums and the authority of art history. He merges text and image into a 'typography of tolerance': an open, harmonyseeking structure that leaves room for everyone. He shows the original meaning of symbols and claims the intellectual property to prevent others from wrongly using the symbols and imagery: the Jewish symbols which were adopted by Western art. But it is also this method of examination of established ways of thinking which leads to new and forgotten information, representations and interpretations, a re-orientation of Western art and cultural history.



Since 2015 Joseph Sassoon Semah and curator Linda Bouws are closely involved in the large-multi-year project entitled: *On Friendship / (Collateral Damage)* in which Sassoon Semah supplements Western art-history with the missing information, the 'empty page': the missing information about Jewish iconography in Western art history.⁵

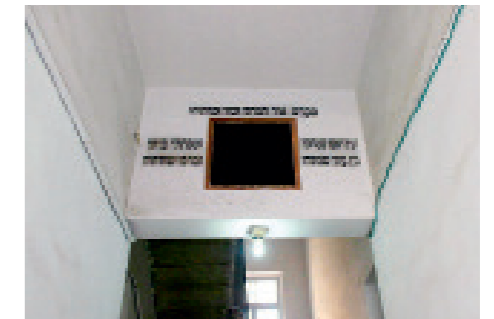
On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) V - Between Graveyard and Museum's Sphere (Museum Het Nieuwe Domein, 4 February - 30 June 2024)

Joseph Sassoon Semah guides visitors through significant moments in Jewish history, culture, and the relationship existing between the West and the East. Simultaneously, he explores his personal Galut (diaspora) - the complex identity which is given and created by traditions in Baghdad, Jerusalem, and Amsterdam. The exhibition title alludes to life in exile (Galut) no motherland or physical cultural heritage to return to (personal graveyard), as well as the Western concept of museum, which already erased the knowledge of the layers of Jewish imagery/meaning that are being used by the Western art production (universal graveyard). Each of Sassoon Semah's artworks in Het Nieuwe Domein serves as a witness to the profound loss, and at the same time reclaiming the lost world and making Jewish culture, symbols, tradition, and identity visible in a different cultural environment.

He demands recognition and acknowledgement of the lost knowledge of Judaism; in this way he is trying to liberate himself from his dis-placement. This is the ultimate task of Joseph Sassoon Semah, to be 'The Guardian(s) of the Door of the Museum' and by that the artworld, i.e. *The Guardians of the Door, 1989, Correction Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam 1991.4.363 (1-5)*, collection the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam, in Het Nieuwe Domein.⁶

1. THE DIARY OF THE ARCHITECT The Black Square - reference Kazimir Malevich

As one enters Het Nieuwe Domein, one sees a painted black square on the wall, symbolizing the memory of the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem. In Western art history, Malevich's *The Black Square* (1915) has been interpreted as the early period of abstract art, with no regard to the layers of Jewish symbolism concerning the black square. (ref. 'Black upon white in the memory of destruction')



Joseph Sassoon Semah interprets Malevich's *The Black Square* differently, by emphasizing the image itself as the absence of architecture in Galut. As a symbol of the great loss of his motherland. There is a precept within Jewish laws that when the interior walls of a house are being painted, a square (50 cm) must remain unplastered in order to recall the destruction of the Second Temple.

According to Joseph Sassoon Semah 'the black square upon white in the memory of destruction' gave birth to the perfect typography of Talmud Bavli, as a readable text and at the same time as a useful architectural drawing. Hence, from the moment when the black square has been painted on the wall of the museum, the future discourse with the Guest is no longer non-committal. The Guest becomes part of the institution.

Talmud Bavli ⁷

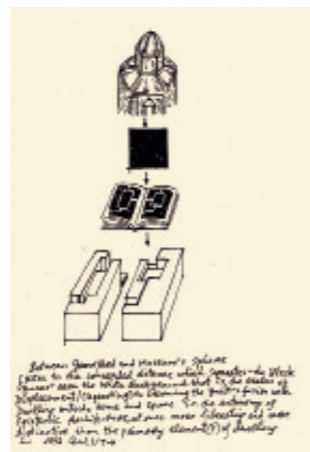
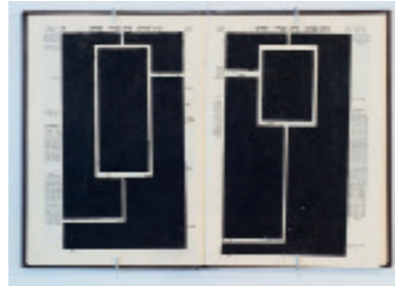
Joseph Sassoon Semah, rooted in the content and visual representation of the Babylonian Talmud Bavli: the process of studying, analysing, commenting, and adding to the Talmud Bavli's conversation is crucial to him. Therefore, as he himself being the Guest of the Western art world, he will make his knowledge 'readable' and 'visible'.

This process, termed "waiting for the Guest's gesture of *Reading while Writing* - a physical journey through the horizon of Talmud Bavli - the Perfect Typography", is exemplified in his series of 55 painted pages from the TaLMUD BaVLI, Tractate PeSaChIM: *An Introduction to the principle of relative expression* (1979). The Talmud Bavli is a collection of two books – Mishnah and Gemara, as the central text being surrounded by rabbinic commentaries. This source of Jewish Law is a never-ending process, always moving in time, searching for the essence.

But Joseph Sassoon Semah also reads the Talmud Bavli as a perfect typography, as a representation of the memory of the destroyed Second Temple, handed to him by the unknown architect. In this way he illuminates his concept of epistemic architecture, namely the transformation of text into an architectural plan. He explores how the complex religious and philosophical concept of the Talmud Bavli can be translated from reading to the realm of architecture; into an architectural drawing, which serves as the basis for building houses and even an entire city.

Epistemic Architecture – the architecture of knowledge

Dwelling in Galut is always dwelling in the absence of architecture. In other words: dwelling in Galut is dwelling in Talmud Bavli. The German Jewish writer Heinrich Heine called the Torah 'the portable homeland'. A place of shelter, a home, connecting Jews worldwide. Without a physical motherland, the Jew can relate to dwelling through the written text. For Joseph Sassoon Semah the Talmud Bavli is the architecture of the temporary MaKOM of shelter (house and a place); the symbolic Galut. A house that refers to the destruction of King Solomon's Second Temple, the lost temple, the beginning of the Jewish exile. The wooden installation *Epistemic Architecture* (2024) has been raised up in Het Nieuwe Domein. Through this installation, Joseph Sassoon Semah explores the intersection of religious wisdom and architectural design, offering a tangible connection to cultural heritage and redefining the relationship between religion and secularisation, culture, traditions, social laws and the law of architecture, allowing himself to dwell in a vanished cultural heritage.



The installation can be viewed as a singular house, as well as a model of a city, with all its different cultures, identities and traditions.

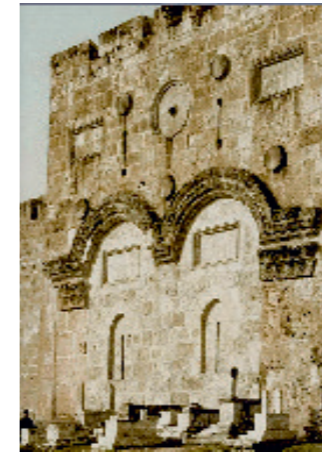
By transforming textual knowledge into tangible architectural forms, Joseph Sassoon Semah manages to express a union between the Talmud Bavli and the realm of architecture. This union of religious wisdom and architectural design allows the artist (Jew) to connect with his veiled cultural heritage. The daily search for his (future) graveyard and his lost birthplace. 'Epistemic Architecture' becomes a tangible construction.

2. A UNIVERSAL GRAVEYARD

The entire exhibition evokes the image of a universal graveyard, referencing the lost Jewish cultural heritage, Jewish exile, and the lack of knowledge about Jewish iconography in Western art and art history (the 'empty page'). At the same time, several works in Het Nieuwe Domein explicitly refer to historical graveyards.

The installation *The Gate of Mercy* שער הרחמים *The Golden Gate Bab al Rahmah [Muslim] GraveYard* (2024) is placed in a separate room. It all began with the destruction of the Solomonic Temple, marking the start of the Jewish Galut. The destruction changed the topography of the city and its walls. The Gate of Mercy

(Jewish) or Golden Gate (Christian) is the center of the ancient conflict. Jews, Christians and Muslims relate to this place as being essential to their faith. In the installation, the three-meter-long upside-down M refers to The Golden Gate, the bricked-up gate in the eastern part of the city wall surrounding the ancient city of Jerusalem. It is the oldest gateway Sha'ar Harachamim (Gate of Mercy) to the Jewish Temple.



This gateway has a special meaning for the Jews: when the Messiah will come, he will enter through this gate, the prophet Elijah will announce his coming. In the Christian tradition Jesus Christ (Messiah) entered Jerusalem through this gate on Palm Sunday, and he will

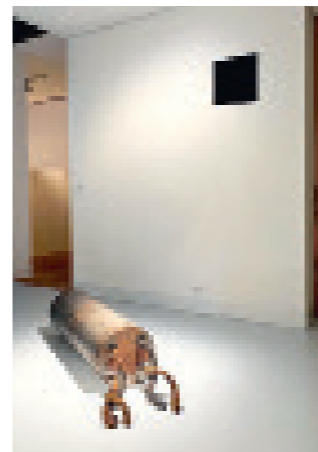
return through this gate on his Second Coming. According to Muslim tradition, Muhammad at the end (Night Journey) entered the Temple Mount, Haram a-Sharif, through this gate. Around sixteen hundred, in the Ottoman Empire period, the Muslims decided to brick and seal the gate. A Muslim graveyard appeared in front of the bricked-up gate, with the purpose of preventing the second coming of Christ. The modification of architectural forms is the only way left to come closer to the Gates of Eden.

The Guardians of the Door, 1989, Correction Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam 1991.4.363 (1-5)

Joseph Sassoon Semah's artwork *The Guardians of the Door* (1989), as the guardians of the museum's gate, facing ten cypress trees in a diagonal line. Ten is a reference to the minyan, the quorum of ten Jewish adults, minimum number required for a service in Jewish tradition.



The empty graveyard signifies Jewish vanished graveyards. They have disappeared altogether, just like the two Jewish graveyards in Sittard. In Het Nieuwe Domein the disappearing serves as a monument and as a memory.⁸

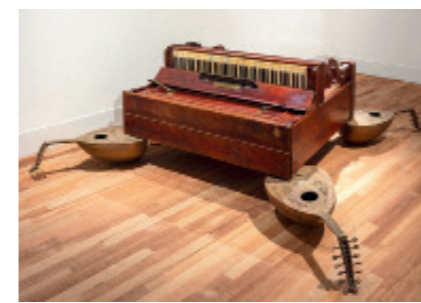
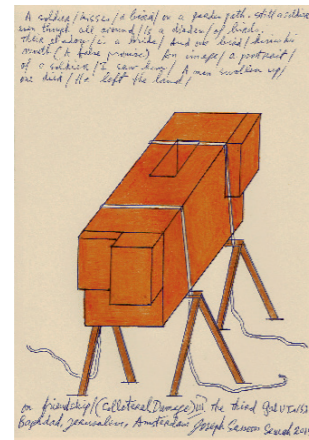
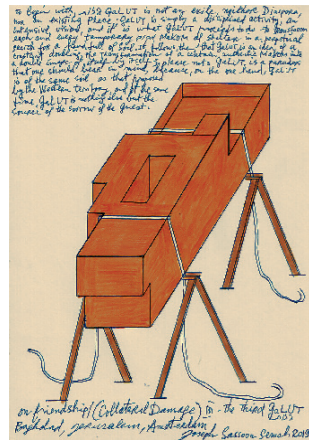


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On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) III - The Third Galut: Baghdad, Jerusalem, Amsterdam (2019)

The 36 wooden scale-sized unique architectural wooden models of houses, cultural institutions, are all based on memory, on photos took prior to 1948 representing the former Jewish quarter in Baghdad, symbolising a universal graveyard.

Among others a train station (1928), the Tigris Palace Hotel, the Salman Masudah School, the Roxy Cinema and Al Zwara Cinema, the Meir Elias Hospital, houses and the Meir Tweig synagogue of rabbi Sassoon Kadoori. There are also the tombs of Ezra in Al-Uzayr and of Ezekiel in Al Kifl and a model based on a mass grave of murdered Jews, killed in Baghdad during the Farhud, the pogrom (violent dispossession). For a moment, the lost culture of Jewish Baghdad comes to life through a symbolic picture of death.



on ten ShOFaROT. This synagogue held great significance for the local and international Jewish community and was the last functioning synagogue in Baghdad, until closing its gate in 2003. The building still exists but is no longer functioning as a synagogue.

Artworks in this saba cabinet explicitly refer to his grandfather's vanished world, such as *BETWEEN THE SOUND OF TWO ShOFaROT* (2022), a model based on his grandfather's turban cast in bronze, rest upon two large ShOFaROT, the artwork named *CARPET (REINCARNATION) ROLLING* (1983), hanging on the wall, consists of an old Persian carpet rolled together with a Talit and the artwork *A shared shrine / the Tomb of Ezekiel [the beginning of a long road to Redemption: the combined effect of the initial symbol, and the despair of Rolling* (24-2-2024).

The other artworks in the saba cabinet depict the confrontation of the West with the Middle East, where original Jewish knowledge, traditions, and culture are rejected and rendered invisible.

As a witness to this process, Joseph Sassoon Semah created *The Fragmented TaLIT* (1999), paper, black ink and thread. In the installation *This is the memory on which the true cycle of two different sounds is built* (2021), consisting of an upright piano resting on three ouds cast in bronze. He tries to enquire into the domination of the West and its Christian culture over the culture of the Middle East: the piano symbolising Western music and the oud representing Arabic music. The West, which is based on Christian thinking, silencing as it were the Middle East, in this context, then the Jew.

Dürer cabinet

The serie of 15 drawings *From the Diary of the Architect* (1983 - 1985) examines in details Albrecht Dürer's engraving *Melencolia I* as the representative of the misunderstanding between Judaism and Christianity, concerning the problem of representation.



Joseph Sassoon Semah introduces the original meaning of symbols (source: Judeo-Babylonian tradition, knowledge and culture) and claims back the intellectual property of others who have forcefully

appropriated his historical symbols and imagery. To this end, he compares the thinking model of Judaism – 'a culture of the word' – with those of Christianity, 'a culture of the image'.

This research leads to new and forgotten information, re-presentations and interpretations, prompting a re-orientation of Western art and cultural history. In this process he fills the 'empty page' with the erased information.

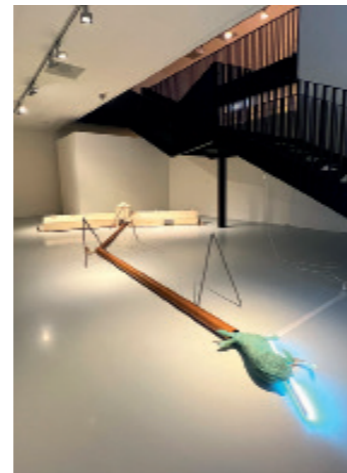
The installation *How to Explain Hare Hunting to a Dead German Artist - [The usefulness of continuous measurement of the distance between Nostalgia and Melancholia]* (2021) features 2 copper tubes, a bronze hare, a light tube, a wooden model of the main gate into the Nazi concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, 12 ShOFaROT (ram's horn), and 4 steel passers, are placed at the end of the corridor, underneath the metal staircase. As a footnote to Western history, symbolizing the universal Western graveyard, the image of total destruction.⁹

3. EAST & WEST

Saba cabinet

One of the two cabinets in Het Nieuwe Domein is dedicated to Joseph Sassoon Semah's grandfather (saba), rabbi Hacham Sassoon Kadoori (1886-1971). On 1st and 2nd of June 1941 a Farhud (pogrom) erupted against the Jewish population in Baghdad; more than 300 Jews were killed and 1.000 Jews were injured. Jewish homes and properties were set on fire. It was the beginning of the end of Iraq's old Jewish community. Between 1950 - 1952, 120.000 – 135.000 Iraqi Jews were transported to Israel, which led to the dis-placement of Baghdadi Jews who were forced to leave behind everything they hold dear, their culture and possessions. Meir Tweig synagogue was the registration point for departure from Baghdad. Sassoon Semah refers to this museum's cabinet as the waiting room of his saba. Although he has no active memory of his grandfather, his legacy rests on his shoulders.

The installation *Between Graveyard and Museum's Sphere* (2019), a model cast in bronze - stands as a memorial to his grandfather's synagogue Meir Tweig- is placed

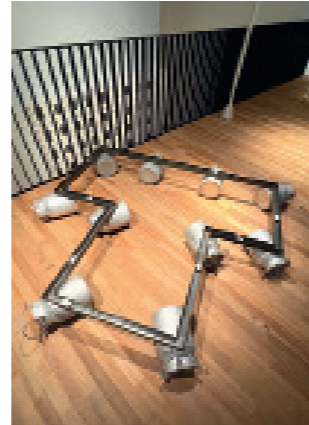


4. HOPE

The two installations . . . *a land flowing with Milk and Honey* (2022), represent the longing of the Jew in Galut for his homeland - the promised land, the land of milk and honey.

First installation

Five bronze casts of Bee Skep, a closed copper water pipe, symbolise the ground plane of the first Solomon's Temple in Jerusalem, two bronze water pumps - i.e. Jachin and Boaz - an electricity wire of 104 meters, the scope of the temple. Pressing the foot switch produces the sound of water flowing through the closed circuit made of copper pipes. The water supply is mixed with water from Jerusalem.



Second installation

Ten metal farmers' milk jugs, and a metal frame based on an architectural plan of Solomon's Temple (a silhouette of TeFILIN), filled with 8 marble eggs (birth of new life), represent the connection to Israel, a land of milk and honey.



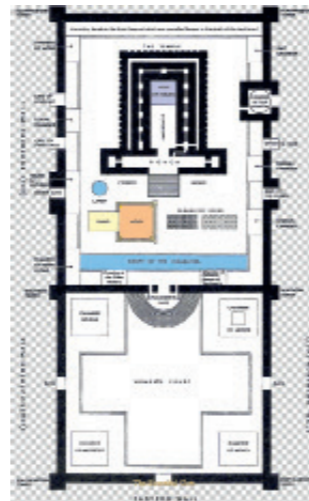
The form of the Tefillin (phylacteries, praying boxes) can be often seen in Joseph Sassoon Semah's work. Even in the artwork *Read Full Text - MeLeChet MaChaSheVet* (1983), placed in the bookshop of Het Nieuwe Domein, the chess pieces are based on the form of Tefillin.

At morning prayers on weekdays, two leather straps, to which small black leather boxes are wrapped around the head and around the arm and hand. One box is to be worn on the center of the forehead and the second is laid on the inner side of the bare left arm.



The boxes contain texts written on parchment from Exodus 13:1-10 and 13:11-16. In Hebrew, the boxes, which have the same shape as the pawn of chess, are called singular bajit (house) and plural batim (houses). On the chess board, earthly and heavenly Jerusalem rise. *Read Full Text - MeLeChet MaChaSheVet* (1983) revives the ancient war game, full of Islamic and Christian variants, with elemental Jewish wisdom.

In the main hall, the installation *Jerusalem Surrounded by Mountains [The History of Plumbing: in this case Jerusalem remains the source of that energy which drives our intellectual engagements with culture and politics]* (1987) takes possession of the entire floor space and enters into dialogue with the eighty-six drawings of human skulls combined with fauna skulls of Iraq - 86 was the age of Sassoon Semah's grandfather when he died - which cover the entire wall in Het Nieuwe Domein.



The drawings symbolise the lost paradise: the straight fragmented lines are based on the layout of the destroyed Jewish quarter in Baghdad, the threads stand for size and territory, the sewing itself symbolise the function of textiles as a carrier of information.

The copper pipes in the installation represent the Jewish exile, the Jews which were scattered around the world. According to a Jewish tradition the buried Jews in Galut will return to the holy land when the Messiah will come. The dead bodies would roll through underground tunnels to return to the holy land, where they will be reunited with their souls. The installation is placed between the two columns of the

museum, to remind us of the two pillars JaCHIN and BOAZ, which stood on the porch of the First King Solomon's temple, signifying the grandeur of the vanished temple.

The two pillars were destroyed at the first exile along with the rest of the Solomonic First Temple in Jerusalem, however since then only the names of the two pillars live on.



Performance

At the opening event a performance took place on 3 February. The participants were Peter Baren, who painted first a tetragrammaton and then covered it with the black square directly on the wall, Masja Austen laid on the floor repeating out loud the following sentence in Hebrew "Shachor Al Lavan, Zecher La Churban" ("Black upon white, in the memory of the destruction"- of the Solomonic Temple in Jerusalem) and Jom Semah, who cycled through the public. Four people carried four wooden bricks carriers, which at the end of the performance the four objects became part of the installation *GaN-BeEDeN MiKeDem [Garden of Eden] - And he built a city and called the name of the city after the name of his son-Enoch* (24-II-2024). It was placed in the corridor next to the 36 wooden architectural models, a reminder of the vanished Jewish quarter in Baghdad.

A hopeful confrontation!



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AFTERWORD

Joseph Sassoon Semah's 'Magnum Opus' transcends a mere act of preservation; it becomes a living tribute to the 'buried' Jewish cultural heritage of Baghdad and the broader Middle East. In metaphorical terms, he resurrects the essence of a lost culture, inviting us to join in on a dialogue about the intersectionality of different cultures and the importance of preserving cultural diversity.

After traversing through the pages of Joseph Sassoon Semah's profound journey of nearly five decades of research and artistic expression, one cannot help but be captivated by the courage and perseverance with which he has illuminated the rich tapestry of Jewish history in the Middle East. At the heart of his exploration lies a deep commitment to unearth the forgotten narratives, particularly those of his grandfather, Hacham Sassoon Kadoori, the last chief rabbi of Iraq, whose legacy serves as both anchor and inspiration for Sassoon Semah's intellectual and artistic pursuits.

As a 'Guest' in Western society – so Joseph Sassoon Semah called himself - he assumed the role of a cultural messenger, determined to fill the void created by traditional Western art history—the 'empty page' that conceals the vibrant and diverse Jewish layers of meaning. His artworks and texts serve as a bridge, connecting us to the multifaceted dimensions of Jewish culture, symbols, tradition, and identity within a different cultural context and in particular with the well-established Western project.

Not being content with merely preserving the past, Sassoon Semah's distinctive approach involves injecting new knowledge via his artworks.

Even though many art works bear the same title, they are marked by different years of creation. This dynamic process reflects his unwavering dedication for keeping alive the history of the (Babylonian) Jews and the painful chapter of ethnic cleansing in the Arabic world. Despite the absence of Jews in present-day Iraq and the historical oversight in Iraq, Israel, and Europe, Sassoon Semah compels us to acknowledge and confront ourselves with his neglected cultural heritage.

Through his critical lens Sassoon Semah challenges cultural institutes of the Western Museum world to set open their identity and to accept the richness of diverse voices.

His influence as an organizer, teacher, and of critical stand points resonates across generations of artists, encouraging a collective reckoning with the overlooked and indispensable divers' Jewish cultural legacy.

Ultimately, Joseph Sassoon Semah's profound contribution extends beyond reclaiming the erased knowledge of symbols by the Western Museums; it proposes a new understanding of the meaning of identity, history, and tradition. His work stands as a testament to the enduring significance of the Jewish experience in shaping the intricate and interconnected cultural tapestry of our Western world. As we reflect on his legacy, we are reminded of the power of art to transcend time and place, and of the importance to preserve and to breathe new life into the narratives that would otherwise be consigned to oblivion.



QR *Reminders Revisited: An Exilic Journey from Hakham Sasson Khadhuri to Joseph Sassoon Semah* by Ella Shohat
<https://ayinpress.org/reminders-revisited/>

1 Jewish immigration to the state of Israel from 1948 on, has been viewed as a 'Returning Diaspora'. So, with a population of only 600.000 Jews, Israel was faced with the difficult task of absorbing millions of Jewish immigrants. The first group of immigrants came from Europe; the Jews from the Middle East and North Africa arrived much later. In modern time the region of Palestine was first ruled by the Ottoman Empire. Between 1920 and 1948, a period referred to as the 'British Mandate', Britain administered the region of Palestine-Erets-Israel on behalf of the League of Nations. On 14-15 May 1948, the Mandate for the region of Palestine expired, and the State of Israel came into being. At the same time, among others, the Lebanese, Syrian, Iraqi, and Egyptian troops, invaded the new-born state of Israel. The war ended in 1949. Because of the war, Israel expanded its territory, creating a new wave of Muslim immigrants in the surrounding region. In 2005 Israel withdrew from the entire Gaza Strip (which it had occupied since the Six-Day War of 1967 with Egypt). Hamas (Islamic Resistance Movement) is on the EU list of terrorist's entities and has been in control of the Gaza Strip since 2007. On 7 October 2023 following Hamas' bloody attack on Israel, Israel declared war on Hamas in response.

2 "The Palestinians were unquestionably the victims in the 1948 war: they lost their homeland and 750.000 of them became refugees. Yet, in Edward Said's apt formulation, they were the 'victim of victims'. Both victors and vanquished, as he poignantly put it, were inter-linked as 'two communities of suffering'. Avi Shlaim. *Three Worlds, Memoirs of an Arab-Jew*, Oneworld, 2023, pag. 46.

3 The origin of the Jewish community in Iraq is the oldest Jewish community in the world outside the holy land. Its roots are from the Babylonian exile (598 BCE - 538 BCE). The destruction of the first Temple took place in 586 BCE. *Hereafter, we were told about Ezekiel as the prophet of the Babylonian exile, and later on, we shall read that the Talmud Bavli has been compiled in Babylonia (modern Iraq).*

4 In 1947 the Chief Rabbi of Iraq Sassoon Kadoori, strongly condemns the Zionism ideology: "Jews and Arabs have enjoyed the same rights and privileges in Iraq for 1.000 years", he added. "The Jews do not regard themselves as a distinctive part of this nation. The Zionist press has tried to create differences of opinion between Jews and Arabs, but I and every Iraqi Jew oppose and

will fight such an aggressive attitude. Iraqi Jews are not Zionists and never will be." His statement followed reports that the Palestine Zionist press has said that the Iraqi Government was dismissing Jewish officials. In: *The New York Times*, 9 April, 1947.

5 Since 2015, Joseph Sassoon Semah and curator Linda Bouws are being committed to organise the major multi-year project titled *On Friendship / (Collateral Damage)* in which Sassoon Semah supplements Western art history with the missing information, the 'empty page', the veiled Jewish iconography. The critical reflection included works of art, artistic interventions, performances, lectures and publications.
See <http://www.josephsemah.nl/projects.html>

6 The title of this installation was changed by Sassoon Semah after he discovered that the Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam had applied the inventory number into the work five times in black permanent ink, a very embarrassing addition. *The Guardians of the Door, 1989, Correction Stedelijk Museum Amsterdam 1991.4.363 (1-5).*

7 The Talmud Bavli which has been compiled in Babylonia, the center of Jewish learning, is no doubt the source text of Rabbinic Judaism. At a certain time, it turned to be the primary text of Jewish religious law based on the MiShNaH and the GeMaRa. The MiShNaH [c. 200 CE] is a compilation of (mostly) halachic rulings that comprise the Oral Law, and GeMaRaH (c. 500 CE).

8 The former Jewish graveyard at Fort Sanderbout. "The area that nowadays makes up the municipality of Sittard-Geleen has a history that is as rich as it is turbulent in relation to Judaism. The first pogrom on current Dutch territory took place in Born. During the so-called Crusade of the Poor in 1309, Jews from Sittard and Susteren, taken into protection by Jan van Valkenburg in the castle in Born, were massacred there by a mob, and the castle set on fire. Over the centuries, and certainly from the seventeenth century onward, the present Sittard-Geleen had a thriving Jewish culture – reflected among other things by a house synagogue on the Molenbeekstraat (in use from 1725 to 1853) and a larger successor on the Plakstraat (1853-1947). Immediately after the German occupation of Sittard in May 1940, the synagogue on the Plakstraat was closed and the interior gradually destroyed.

During the Second World War, about 120 Jews from Sittard, many fleeing from nearby Nazi Germany, were deported to Sobibor and Auschwitz via Westerbork and Vught. The two synagogues that Sittard counted did survive the Second World War, but they fell prey to urban renewal in the post-war years: the former shul in the Plakstraat was demolished in 1953; the house synagogue on the Molenbeekstraat in 1963. The same was true of the Jewish cemeteries at Fort Sanderbout and on the Wal, which were cleared in the fifties and sixties. Nowadays only various plaques, a collection of Judaica in the municipal collection, and the so-called Stolpersteine still remind us of the Jewish community in Sittard." Roel Arkesteijn, *Being Touched by an Angel Just Before Birth*, 2020, text exhibition De Domijnen, Sittard.



9 For more information, see: Rick Vercauteren *Another Take On Friendship / (Collateral Damage)* in *On Friendship / (Collateral Damage) IV - How to Explain Hare Hunting to a Dead German Artist*, pp. 86-112.



A Coin / A Stamp – used during the British mandate for Palestine 1927/1948 – for the Hebrew lettering Palestine one reads the following : פלשתינה (א״י) . The acronym (א״י) is shortened for ארץ ישראל Land of Israel Erets Israel.

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Joseph Sassoon Semah
Read Full Text

(תלאכת מחשבת) MeLEChET MaChSheVeT Work of Art) 1983
educational pull-down Dutch school map - Palestina at the time of the Bible,
wooden chess pieces (the chess pieces are based on the form of Tefilin phylacteries),
height 12 cm, black ink, wood folding table, 2 school chairs, height 89 cm
Collection Musée van Bommel van Dam, Venlo, the Netherlands.

