

# A Restrained Poetics Works by Daniel Shoshan

By Hagai Segev

## Exploring the Artistic Syntax and its Meaning

Daniel Shoshan's recent work reflects the hybrid artistic and cultural environment in Israel. He brings together several distinct entities, each originating in a different cultural arena, to unite them in a single work of art, creating a hybrid reality. The use of the term hybrid is indicated when the object or subject do not possess a uniform meaning or content but are composed of several discrete elements that create an integral expression. The latest issue of "HaKivun Mizrah"<sup>1</sup> discusses the unique aspects of hybrid spheres in Israeli art. The journal editors describe Israeli hybridism as "Two identities – or more – that cannot co-exist in the cultural imagination, residing jointly in the same body: national, social, community, family or individual."

The hybridism in Shoshan's work exposes conflicts relating to questions of origin, cultural background, secularism and religion, and the assimilation of different cultures (Western, Eastern and different combinations of the two), which have influenced his life as an individual and as an artist. Shoshan's struggles as an artist reverberate with a complex and vibrant rhythm, searching for a secure framework in the act of artistic creation.

The artistic means that Shoshan utilizes in his work are based on a strict formal mechanism. The complex mechanism, cast in silver aluminum, cold and hard, establishes a sense of a rhythmic, orderly structure, fixed and well-defined, without deviations. The fixed structure radiates a cold rationality founded on a technical perspective. This structural element can already be clearly seen in the installation "Rashida", exhibited in the Artist's House in Jerusalem (2004). In that instance, it was a structural element that also functioned as an enclosing element, caging, separating and obstructing. In the current installation, "Intermittent Confession" that is displayed in the central gallery of the Artist's House in Tel Aviv (2008), the aluminum bars are frames of structures that resemble beds, altars or perhaps a grill.

The two installations of aluminum bars, created only a few years apart, create a feeling of architectural intensity, enveloping the viewer and inviting him/her to move within the constructed space, the space enclosed within the space of the gallery<sup>2</sup>. The positioning of the objects within the environment creates several additional sub-spaces, the viewer's sensory experience of these spaces is the catalyst for the artistic experience.

The installation "Intermittent Confession" deals with the disruption and breakdown of the viewer's communication with the art object, through the enclosure of the objects behind bars or screens. This strategy does not only produce a barrier, it creates a mechanism of alienation. The structure evokes a sense of alienation and

---

<sup>1</sup>Matti Shmuelof, Bat-Shahar Gurfinkel and Omri Herzog, "Challenging the Line-Up", *HaKivun Mizrah*, 14, Summer 2007, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup>The influence of architecture on Shoshan's work can already be seen in his earlier works. The dominance of this influence is perhaps a natural outcome of his position as Senior Lecturer in the Department of Architecture at the Technion, Haifa.

physical distance between the three components of the artistic process: the artist, object and viewer. Shoshan creates an intentional disruption that expresses his personal and artistic statement.

### **Intermittent Confession – The Biological Family**

“Intermittent Confession” is composed of two personal elements in addition to the constructed structural elements. The aluminum bars frame two series of photographs: the first depicts the landscape surrounding the town of Beit She’an, the scene of Shoshan’s childhood. The town itself, its buildings and people, is not presented; it is present only as secondary knowledge, the biographical background of the artist and his work. The second series documents a family reunion of the artist’s brothers. The artist invited them to participate in his life’s work for the sake of artistic creation. The narrative is the documentation of an immersion in the sea on a winter morning in 2007.

The family members, the artist’s brothers, who were invited to participate in the creation of this work, represent the structural foundation to be found in every individual’s character, and here they are transformed into an artistic element as well. Shoshan reveals a process of confession that accompanies the reacquaintance and reunion of the brothers. The private family gathering is a metaphor for the artist’s existence within the framework of his family of colleagues, the family of art. The isolation and separation that Shoshan creates in the barred structures, each standing alone, solitary, is a statement about the dissolution of the family. The colleagues are like brothers, without mother or father, (two family elements missing in the photo shoot on the beach). Removing the foundation of the family from the formal equation emphasizes the sense of alienation and the lack of a biological foundation. Moreover, the absence of the parents within the family narrative demonstrates that while Shoshan utilizes these myths, he does not accept them uncritically; he deconstructs and breaks them down before our eyes.

Just as in the past Shoshan called upon the image of Rashida from the cultural history of his past, now he calls upon his brothers from his personal family history, each of whom has his own individual existence. He inserts them in a situation foreign to them and compels them to take part in his art. He causes the people close to him to reflect anew on their place in the fabric of the family, their degree of involvement and self-exposure in the life of the brother who is different from the others.

The logic of the cold architectural structure, the foundation of Shoshan’s work, is shaken up and disrupted. The insertion of people who are the artist’s own flesh and blood as a subject participating in the artistic creation, disrupts the sense of cold, formal intellectualism. Intimate biographical details slowly emerge from among the waves, undermining the security to be found in the cold and distant architectural order.

### **Intermittent Confession – The Family of Colleagues**

Shoshan’s works draw on different sources and create a synthesis of philosophical and artistic ideas. The sources he draws on are derived from the coming together of East and West, religious and secular, intellectual and secular. These charged encounters offer a critical test of different world views, through which Shoshan navigates, creating an intellectual and emotional hybrid structure.

It is possible to discern a peripheral relationship to several artists in Shoshan’s

work. As a graduate student in Art at Columbia University in New York, he was exposed to the work of American Abstract Minimalists as that period came to its close. Donald Judd, Sol LeWitt and Richard Serra, three of the most prominent artists associated with this movement, constitute a dominant focal point for Shoshan. Shoshan's work reveals traces of their influence in the context of an ongoing dialogue, based on observation and investigation, with the formalist artistic philosophy underlying the work of these artists.

In terms of content, narratives and myths, we can discover in Shoshan's work Israeli colleagues who deal in different ways with some of the questions concerning the hybrid of Israeli reality located in a global culture that responds to a small number of central sources. Among these we can point out Oswaldo Romberg, Micha Ullman, Nahum Tevet and Reuven Berman Kadim. This correspondence is sometimes an outcome of direct conversation, and sometimes from observation and study of a particular work of art that awakens in Shoshan the desire to respond. As with the American artists, within the local Israeli connection it is difficult to point out with which works of these productive artists Shoshan has engaged in dialogue; but when one attends to all that lies beneath the surface, and examines the direction of his philosophical research, one can recognize a chain of connections between the artists.

Micha Ullman's far ranging body of work, for example, examines the myth and mythology of Israel within clear formal structures. His sculpture is based on formal architectural authority, into which he inserts sensual elements, using natural materials and evoking a sense of origins. Shoshan also explores ancient myths and symbols (the mythic figure of Rashida, sacred structures and family relationships) from the perspective that the myth and ethos are not accepted uncritically. He presents them, and negates them in so doing.

Ullman's works express the tension bound within them up to the breaking point while building towards a catharsis. Unlike Ullman, Shoshan conserves the tension and does not allow it to erupt. Shoshan's powerful sensuality appears in his work as introspective and repressed, the cold formalism and architectural quality of the work creates a sense of displacement and disruption.

The restrained tension also connects Shoshan to Oswaldo Romberg<sup>3</sup> and Reuven Berman Kadim. These two artists deal, each in his own way, with cultural sources: Romberg with Western culture and the ancient cultures of South America<sup>4</sup>; while Berman focuses on Eastern culture and its expression by means of Western formal technological expressions. Shoshan relates to both of these opposing cultures and merges them. In the installation *Rashida*, the sculpture of the Muslim mythological figure is caged behind aluminum bars. The imprisonment is not violent, but intended to define, to create a distinction and show, from a distance, the mythic figure and through her the sensual narrative she represents.

The sculpture of the girl *Rashida* is surrounded by a historical architectural review, sacred structures of the three monotheistic religions. On a continuous plane of 80 colorful wood blocks, that were also enclosed within aluminum bars, the blueprints of temples from around the world were depicted, with gold leaf design. This placement evoked an obsessive continuity between the human myth (*Rashida*) and the myth of sacred architecture.

Beyond the idea of imprisonment, situating the object behind sterile bars represents

---

<sup>3</sup>Oswaldo Romberg was Head of the Fine Arts Department at Bezalel during the years that Shoshan studied there.

<sup>4</sup>Observe for example, a series of works dealing with ritual structures of the Roman culture, which were exhibited at the Israel Museum in 1991.

the alienation and existential isolation of the protagonist. The discussion of the spaces – and here we can see the connection to Nahum Tevet – is a discussion of the spaces themselves, their manner of presentation and their effect on both the viewer and object. Tevet and Judd represent a stern minimalism, modest to the point of asceticism. But the asceticism of Tevet is monk-like, while that of Judd is an asceticism of elegant display. Both examine the artistic form devoid of narrative. Shoshan adds to this formal element a narrative content laden with layers of meaning, creating an artistic language that is at once unrelenting and sentimental.

### **Neutralized Sentimentalism**

The rigid formalist structures that Shoshan places around his subjects serve to neutralize the sentimentalism that threatens to erupt at any moment (mythological or familial). Family and myth are the emotional illumination; language and form are the intellectual source. The abstract language that penetrates the work through the aluminum is the clean, pure, artistic illumination.

Despite the preoccupation with family, not one of the photographs depicts the family in its entirety. The brothers appear only as individuals, each frame reveals one brother. The sense of imprisonment and enclosure created by the metal enhances the sense of loneliness that rises from these gray photographs set against the background of the sea. For Shoshan, the distance, imprisonment and loneliness transform the work from an outpouring of sentiment to an authoritative poetics. In the current installation the choice of artistic medium assists in creating this restrained effect: all the photographs remain in shades of gray against a metal background.

The artistic language chosen by Shoshan is formal and clean, executing its intentions and neutralizing the verbal potential for sentimentality, that the situations he creates might otherwise suggest. He chooses to merge opposing elements, to release the works from facile classification, and cast his lot with hybrid constructions, whose verbal formulation is complex and tortuous.

## Figuring Displacement – Postminimalism, Israeli contemporary art discourse and the work of **Dani Shoshan**

Writing about postminimalism in an essay titled “What was Postminimalism”, Stephen Melville discusses the works of Robert Smithson.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on Smithson’s *Cayuga Salt Mine Project*, comprised of installations both at the mines and in the gallery, Melville describes the work and the potential relations between its different sites. Both the installations at the mines and in the gallery in New York included mirrors positioned amongst natural materials, but while in the mines the mirrors were placed within the salt rocks themselves and in the snowy landscape, in the gallery the mirrors were positioned amongst piles of salt removed from the mines and brought into the exhibition space.



Robert Smithson, *Eight Part Piece (Cayuga Salt Mine Project)*, 1969.  
Rock salt and mirrors 28 X 76 x 914 cm. James Cohan Gallery, New York.

The relations between the site of the mines and the "non-site" of the gallery were conceptualised as dialectical by Smithson, says Melville – the non-site of the gallery referring to the external, and in some ways “original” site of the mines, while the mines themselves designated as a site only through their exhibition within the gallery space. But rather than as dialectical, Smithson’s work, argues Melville, could be better described by using the concept of displacement, as it is the shifting and re-presentation of the site, both through the intervention and reflection of the mirrors positioned within the mines, and through the non-site of the gallery where the "original" site was once again performed and its traces displayed, that Smithson’s work is carried out. Unlike the Hegelian dialectic in which oppositions sublimate each other to form a new moment, Smithson’s work, argues Melville, proceeds through a continuous process of shifts and re-locations, in which multiple sites are performed and transformed, creating a lateral spiralling structure, rather than the Hegelian vertical one which revolves around a constant axis and maintains a consistent thematic centre.

---

<sup>1</sup>Melville S., “What Was Postminimalism”, in: Arnold D. & Iversen M. eds., *Art and Thought*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 156-174.

Melville describes another of Smithson's works – *Incidents of Travel in the Yucatan* (1969), in which the chain of displacements is even more pronounced than in the *Cayuga Salt Mines Project*. He writes:

*A car full of texts, notably including John Stephen's 1843 Incidents of Travel in the Yucatan, as it were, underwrites Smithson's trip to Mexico, where he proceeds to place mirrors at a number of sites, photograph those mirrors in each of these sites, and then take those photographs up into a text, entitled "Incidents of Mirror Travel in Yucatan", that is, in the end, all there is of the piece, and that understands itself explicitly as the last in a chain of displacements – of nature into mirror, mirrored nature in to photograph, photographed mirror into text, and into text which knows itself to be a displacement also of the initial text or texts that set the whole chain of incident into motion<sup>2</sup>.*

In this work, it is thus the succession of dislocations, the transformation of one event into the other, and the reiteration of the aesthetic and political significance of these events which forms the key to Smithson's work.

Displacement also underlies the work of Israeli artist Dani Shoshan. Shoshan, born in Israel in 1957, has been exhibiting his work since 1984, and in his latest piece – *Intermittent Confessions* (2008), he installs in the gallery numerous geometric structures made of aluminium, inlaid with black and white photographs of landscapes and bathers.



Dani Shoshan, *Intermittent Confessions*, 2008, gallery view  
Aluminium structures, photographs printed on aluminium plates, Beit Ha'Omanim, Tel Aviv

The aluminium structures, which show a clear affinity to minimalist art such as Sol LeWitt's cubes and Donald Judd's wall pieces, encase the photographic prints, often partially obscuring the image itself with vertical or horizontal bars. Even without the bars however, the images are almost impossible to capture from a single aspect. Placed at different heights, both on the floor and on the wall, and facing different directions, they can be seen fully only if one walks through the crowded gallery space, turning, kneeling and even tiptoeing amongst the structures.

<sup>2</sup>ibid, pg. 167.

This viewing process precludes the viewer from arresting the exhibition at any one time, and stops the images from forming coherent series, turning the gallery into a dense but slightly incongruent array of sites. The content of the imagery also remains somewhat obscure, at least at first glance, as the landscape photographs often depict nondescript sites marked by traces of forgotten ruins, signs and overgrown vegetation, and their relation to the images of the bathers is not immediately comprehensible. In two of the photographs, both floor pieces, we see abandoned landscapes and empty lots marked off by wire fences and signs. Stating “parking for locals” and “parking for visitors” respectively, the signs demarcate the role of the empty lots, but also point to the structuring processes of the landscape, as well as those of the photographs and their viewers, underlining both the traces of human activity and the felt absence of human presence. This is not a “natural” place which we are witnessing in all its “wild” glory, they declare, but a layered and marked site, which distinguishes between visitors and locals, assigning them different loci and perhaps also different roles.



Dani Shoshan, Intermittent Confessions,  
\*detail \*\*Dimension

The complexity of these and other landscape photographs in the installation intensifies once we learn that they have all been taken in Beit Shean – a small peripheral town situated not far from the Israel-Jordan border, and Shoshan’s home town. Beit Shean is known in Israel for its extensive archaeological excavations which have uncovered Scythopolis – a large Greco-Roman-Byzantine city now located in the centre of the modern town. But by the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Beit Shean, or Beisan as it was known then, was a much smaller Arab village of approximately 5,500 people, who in 1948 fled the village following the growing tensions between the Arab and Jewish population at the end of the British Mandate

in Palestine, and the more direct expulsion campaign of the Israeli forces.<sup>3</sup> The village's buildings were confiscated and many demolished, those remaining serving to house Jewish Holocaust survivors from post war Europe and from North Africa. One of these buildings can be seen in Shoshan's photograph hereinabove on the left. Perched on a hill, what once served as a local mosque, and was later turned into the local archaeological museum, now lies in ruins after being set alight a few years ago. The conspicuous hill top location, as well the cypress, date and palm trees, suggest that this was once a focal point for the communities which lived here, while the overgrown vegetation, the low angle from which the photograph is taken, and the vertical bars across the image place this site beyond our reach – a place of memory and loss rather than one of communal activity. Shoshan's work addresses his personal biography in a complex and seemingly paradoxical manner. For although Shoshan himself strongly convey the crucial role growing up in Beit Shean has had on his life and art, and identifies himself in many respects as a Beit-Shean'er, the town itself is barely visible in his images, and its photographs could easily be attributed to any peripheral town in the Mediterranean or Middle-East.<sup>4</sup>

The exploration of the personal and the biographical in Shoshan's work continues with the images of bathers. Depicting men bathing in the sea, the photographs present us with Shoshan's seven brothers. The images are subtle and nuanced; some of the men photographed seem almost naked while others are fully clothed, some are entering the water while others are nearly submerged, and some are photographed at a distance while others are close up. But in none of the images are we given even the faintest clue as to the bathers' identity. As with the images of Beit Shean, Shoshan clearly conveys the importance of photographing his own brothers, relays the events surrounding the photographing event, and tells anecdotes of the brothers and his relations with them. But again, as with the images of Beit Shean, one may only learn of the subjects' identity and significance through the curatorial and other texts addressing the exhibition.

The juxtaposition of minimalist forms such as Shoshan's aluminium structures with references to the personal and biographical was not a prevalent practice in the minimalist or even postminimalist art and discourse of the late '60s and early '70s. Indeed the art and discourse of the time often seemed to revolve around the de-personalisation of art making and viewing, what Hal Foster described as the

---

<sup>3</sup>As with all historical literature addressing the Palestine War of 1948, there are widely conflicting accounts of what happened in Beisan and its immediate environs during the war and preceding hostilities, and what were the respective roles played of the Israeli forces, local villagers, Arab leaders and the British officers in the area.

A detailed study of the Beisan region in 1948 may be found in:

Forman G., *The Transformation of the 'Emeq Yizre'el / Marj Ibn 'Amer and 'Emeq Beit Shean / Ghor Beisan: changes in Population, Settlement and Land Tenure due to the Palestine War and the Establishment of the state of Israel*, M.A. thesis, (Haifa: University of Haifa, 2000).

For a more general account of the 1948 war and the issues of dispossession and the Palestinian refugees and villages see:

Morris B., *The Birth of the Palestinian Refugee Problem Revisited*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 2004).

Kadman N., *Erased from Space and Consciousness: Depopulated Palestinian Villages in the Israeli-Zionist Discourse*, (Jerusalem: November books, 2008).

<sup>4</sup>Several conversations between the author of this essay and Dani Shoshan were held in the first half of 2008.

“sever[ing] of art... from the subjectivity of the artist” and the opening up of “a new space of object/subject terms”.<sup>5</sup>

It could be however, that the distinction between minimalist and postminimalist practices lies, at least partially, in the uptake of issues and practices concerning the personal, the body and the autobiographical. Artists such as Eva Hesse for example, who is considered one of the main protagonists of postminimalism, is known for her address of the personal and autobiography, including the making of her private diaries a part of her artistic activities – a site of personal/public contemplation. However, as Stephen Melville notes in his essay, the distinction between minimalist and postminimalist art has remained quite vague, and postminimalism is now often known through the range of artistic activities associated with some of its key players, which include Eva Hesse as well as Richard Serra, Mel Bochner, Robert Smithson, and perhaps Gordon Matta-Clark.<sup>6</sup>



Dani Shoshan, Intermittent Confessions,  
\*detail \*\*dimensions

<sup>5</sup>The quote is taken from Hal Foster’s essay “The Crux of Minimalism”, as it appears in Anna Chave’s essay: Chave A., “Minimalism and Biography”, in: Broude N. & Garrard M. D. eds., *Reclaiming Female Agency*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pg. 387.

<sup>6</sup>Melville S., pg. 157.

For Anna Chave however, who writes on the work of Eva Hesse and others, as well as the juxtaposing of minimalist practices and biographical and personal ones, the distinction between minimalism and postminimalism remains somewhat inconsequential, and she refers to the work of Hesse within the framework of minimalist art and discourse.<sup>7</sup>

Addressing the minimalist art and writings of Robert Morris, Carl Andre, Eva Hesse, Yvonne Rainer, Rosalind Kraus and others, Chave challenges the minor role biographical and personal practices are portrayed as having in the art of the late '60s and early '70s. Chave explores the ways in which these issues and their denial played a part in structuring the field of minimalist art, and highlights the often un-explicated and overlooked links between the canonisation of artworks and their depiction as “a-personal” and “non-biographical”, despite ample evidence to the contrary. For example, Chave writes that:

*As early as 1968 he [Carl Andre] prepared a self interview for the catalogue to his Mönchengladbach solo show, replete with Whitmanesque paeon to his native Quincy, “City of granite quarries and ship building yards great uncut blocks of stone acres of steel plates.” Yet Dan Graham would characterize Andre’s art around the same time as “disencumber[ed]... of the weight of personal and historically evolutionary determination”.*<sup>8</sup>

Chave continues her argument and demonstrates that while works such as Carl Andre’s, which were quickly becoming the canonised, were regularly associated with a non-biographical and a-personal stance, works in which the “weight of the personal” was more present, such as those of Eva Hesse, were deemed as less original and of inferior aesthetic quality. The divide between the canonical and more minor works, says Chave, was often gender based, deeming women’s art, such as Hesse’s both self centred and overly reliant on colleagues’ input, while Robert Morris who most likely benefited from his close personal relation with Rosalind Kraus and other powerful women, and also photographed his naked body, was seen as an accomplished and a-personal artist.

Comparing the selective reception of Hesse and other women with that of their male contemporaries Chave writes:

*Such a selective construction of history [one which omits the personal and relational aspects of an artists work] was never available to Hesse, whose critical fortunes have all along been colored by attention to her biography. Accounts of Hesse’s career habitually extend credit to a network of enabling colleagues, usually without acknowledging the extent to which the stream of influence ran both ways.... The erasure of artistic subjectivity that seemed such a radical prospect to certain male artists in the 1960s could hardly portend the same for their female contemporaries, for whom erasure was almost a given.*<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup>Although Chave does not refer or discuss the notion of postminimalism, she does read minimalist art itself, as a conglomeration of various and often incongruent practices and discourses, and like Melville’s reading of post minimalism as the juncture of modernism and post modernism, Chave, following Hal Foster, delegates minimalism itself the same historical role. See: Chave A., pg. 385.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid. pg. 396.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid. pg. 392.

Although since the late '60s, various artists, amongst them quite a few women, have used minimalist practices to address personal and biographical concerns, perhaps the most notable of whom is Mona Hatoum, the juxtaposition of personal and minimalist practices continues to be an intriguing issue, and one which is highly relevant to Shoshan's work and the current Israeli art field. The theoretical discussion of both minimalist and postminimalist art in Israel has been quite sporadic, and none of the available literature on the subject has addressed Shoshan's work. A recent exhibition and catalogue on postminimalist art published by the Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art is thus a welcome addition to the rather limited literature available, and sheds some light on how practices of minimalism and postminimalism are being conceptualised in today's discourse.<sup>10</sup> Adi Englman who curated the exhibition and wrote one of the essays in the catalogue titled "Post-Minimalism: 'It is what it is': on the quest for content and sites of meaning", elaborates the use of postminimalist practices in Israeli art both in the '70s and in contemporary art. Referring to the work of Robert Pincus-Witten who first coined the term postminimalism in the early '70s and who wrote about some of the Israeli artists included in the exhibition, Englman defines postminimalism as "the artistic current which was, at once, the successor and the most pungent critic of 'pure' American minimalism".<sup>11</sup> Englman claims that although postminimalism broke with the minimalist tradition and its rigid conceptualisation of the object and of objecthood, it did continue to develop some of minimalism's most basic tenets. She writes:

*Following the neo-avant-garde minimalist tradition which emerged and crystallised in the first half of that decade [the '60s], the post-minimalist expressions too were based on a set of principal reservations and negations: negation of referential contents, negation of expression, negation of emotion, negation of image, negation of illusionism, negation of the subconscious, negation of the optical, and negation of the metaphysical.*<sup>12</sup>

According to Englman then, Israeli postminimalism continued to shun referential content, imagery or expression, and focused instead on linguistically oriented practices, such as those found in Joshua Neustein's work, "concrete", process based and ephemeral practices such as those of Benni Efrat, and the "home made", "amateurish" approaches of Pinchas Cohen Gan. Englman's reading of postminimalist Israeli art, and specifically the works of Neustein, Efrat and Cohen Gan, could of course be challenged, and the referential contents of their works, as well as the works' specific imagery and aesthetic made manifest.<sup>13</sup> But more relevant to this essay, is the explication of the ways in which such definitions as Englman's serve to marginalise practices such as Shoshan's, contributing to a less reflexive and less politically conscious structuring of the Israeli field of art. Indeed, when one analyses the reception of Shoshan's work within the Israeli art field, it is clearly evident that this reception is based less on the work's immediate

---

<sup>10</sup>Avital L. et al., *The Adler Collection and Israeli Post-Minimalism in the Seventies and in Contemporary Art*, (Herzliya: Herzliya Museum of Art, 2008).

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, pg. 114. Most of Pincus-Witten's essays on postminimalism have been collected in his book *Postminimalism into Maximalism*. See: Pincus-Witten R., *Postminimalism into Maximalism: American Art 1966-1986*, (Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1987).

<sup>12</sup>Avital L. et al., pg. 114.

<sup>13</sup>Add references

art historical context and potential contribution to the art field, and more on Shoshan's cultural identity as a Mizrachi Jew. Mizrachi, or "eastern" Jews, are those Jews whose family had immigrated to Israel from Arab speaking countries (such as Morocco where Shoshan's family came from), and the term is used to differentiate their cultural identity from that of the Ashkenazi Jews, who originated in Eastern and Western Europe.<sup>14</sup> Historically Mizrachi Jews have been excluded from the financial, political, social and cultural centres in Israel in a myriad of ways, both explicitly and implicitly, and although in some respects the situation has improved in the last decades (there are many more Mizrachi politicians for example, and some aspects of Mizrachi culture have been accepted into the mainstream Israeli culture), the economic, social and cultural marginalisation of Mizrachi Jews in Israel continues. The presence of Mizrachi culture, history and artists within the Israeli art world and art history also remains limited, and thus Shoshan's work, not unlike that of women artists in the '60s and early '70s, has often been labelled or assumed to be a "Mizrachi" work of art, one, which for better or worse, attempts to come to terms with the complex identity of a Mizrachi artist living in "western country" and engaging with "western" art.<sup>15</sup> As Chave suggests in respect to women artists whose employment of the personal deemed their art inferior to that of the "a-personal" work of men, so is the case here, where the work of the Ashkenazi postminimalist artists is seen as non referential, un-emotional and content free, while the work of Shoshan is read as essentially personal and based in a specific cultural identity.

As Chave notes in her essay, the role and esteem of the personal and biographical has changed in the last decades and is now held in a much higher esteem than it was in the '60s and '70s. So much so that artists such as Robert Morris who earlier overlooked the crucial contribution of his personal affiliations with women artists and theorists, as well as his idiosyncratic and biographical predilections, now acknowledges these much more openly referring to his childhood experiences at the stockyard where his father worked as an important influence on his minimalist and "a-personal" works.<sup>16</sup> The field of Israeli art, has also undergone major changes since the postminimalist work of the '60s and '70s, and identity politics, postmodernist criticism, political and social change outside the field of art and other factors, have all rendered the personal and biographical a much more crucial role in the production and reception of art.<sup>17</sup> However, although Shoshan's uptake of the personal, as well as the cultural and political issues embedded within his biographical pursuits, is now often applauded, it is still being read in some cases as formulating an essentially "mizrachi" identity which operates within a fundamentally "western" art world. Consider for example what Hagai Segev, the curator of Shoshan's *Intermittent Confessions* exhibitions writes about his work:

*Shoshan examines the culture he is part of from two different, seemingly adversative perspectives: the eastern one (or should we call it Arab) and the western one, by which he had acquired his professional skills and from which he works as a professional artist.*<sup>18</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup>Insert relevant references.

<sup>15</sup>Insert relevant references for mizrachim in Israeli art.

<sup>16</sup>Chave A., pg. 392.

<sup>17</sup>Add relevant references.

<sup>18</sup>Segev H., *Daniel Shoshan, Incarcerating Culture or Setting it Free*, (Place: Publication, year).

Segev's binary opposition of eastern vs. western culture and of personal identity vs. a professional one is based in essentialised conceptualisations of both identity and the art world, ones which assume that "professional art" is solely grounded in "western" practices, while Shoshan's personal identity is undeniably a "Mizrachi" one, overlooking the subtle and complex meaning these terms take on in Shoshan's work. Segev's text continues to employ binary oppositions throughout, contrasting the more traditional and often religious "mizrachi" identity to the secular and modern one, and differentiating the Muslim culture in which the "mizrachi" culture is grounded and the "Judeo-Christian" basis of the "western" civilisation. While I disagree with Segev's essentialising approach to issues of identity and culture in Shoshan's art, his text does highlight many of the concerns Shoshan's work addresses. Thus for example, one of the bathers/brothers depicted by Shoshan wears a head cover, signifying his religious adherence – an image which despite the significant portion of religious Jews in Israel is still un-common within Israeli art. The issue of Mizrachi Jews and their cultural and political identity is also to be found in Shoshan's work; for the town of Beit Shean is not only known for its ancient history and the role it played in the Palestine war of 1948, but more recently as the home town of David Levi – Beit Shean's former union leader who became a member of parliament, a foreign minister and the deputy prime minister. Levi was one of the most vocal politicians in Israel of the '80s and '90s addressing issues of Mizrachi culture and its marginalisation, and became a symbol of the new and empowered Mizrachi identity in contemporary Israel, a symbol which also invoked much ridicule and racism.<sup>19</sup> Yet despite highlighting all these issues and many others, as Segev suggests, Shoshan's work is far from depicting the "fusion" of cultural opposites Segev argues for. Consider for example Segev's claim that: *Shoshan puts forth a fascinating expression of almost impossible fusions, an expression only conceivable and sustainable in places where spontaneous cultural mergers are brought about by and stem from personal drives. He has consciously chosen the simultaneous presence in parallel territories.*

The fusion Segev finds in Shoshan's work, the "spontaneous cultural mergers" he sees, are never fully present in *Intermittent Confessions*. For, as the title of the work suggests, the "confessions", those of identity and culture, but also those of artistic practice and history, are always partial, interrupted and deferred. As in Smithson's work, the meanings of Shoshan's work cannot be pinpointed at any one or even several points; they are continuously shifting, repeatedly displaced. Thus the ruin in Shoshan's photograph of Beit Shean, which is easily read as a romantic image, recalling the many drawings of the holy land circulated by 19<sup>th</sup> European pilgrims, takes shape as the former Beisan mosque once we learn of its history, attesting no longer to an ancient and unknown past but to the dispossession of the Beisan Palestinians and the near erasure of Palestinian memory. But the ruin also functioned as a museum – another mnemonic vessel, and had contained the remains of the Roman-Byzantine city, a city destroyed by earthquake, but whose memory had been resurrected as a means to lend an ancient (rather than a historic) appeal to the struggling new town. The same image however, also functions as a photographic document, one which could easily fit within the conceptualist photographic tradition, in which the taking of the photograph, as well as the performative aspects of the events and sites portrayed (which often

---

<sup>19</sup>Add references.

look like the peripheral “non-places” of Shoshan’s work) are of crucial importance. Yet, Shoshan’s photographs are shifted away from the conceptualist performative contexts to those of their contemporary minimalist and post minimalist practices through their juxtaposition with the numerous geometric structures of the installation. The stark contrast between the subtle and complex photographs and the simple minimalistic structures highlights the personal aspects of the work, in which complex cultural and political issues are embedded, but also a specific moment of art history and practice, one verging on the cusp of postmodernism. But it is with the positioning of the Beit Shean images amongst the many images of bathers/brothers, that the work reaches its fullest (but not final) figuration, bringing into play the personal and autobiographical, minimalism and historical memory, specific localities and the image of the other. Perhaps it is from here that we carry on the journey of dislocations on our own.