

## Handle with Care

Art is born from constraints, and they can be of all sorts. A young man, born and raised in a kibbutz, coming of age in the mid-1960s, and who knew since his teenage years that he wanted to be an artist would face the following: mandatory military service of a minimum of two years right after high school; the rules of the kibbutz that imposed career choices in conformity with the community's needs; and the provincialism of Israel with regard to the international art centers. These constraints, judging from the radicality of Nahum Tevet's early works, were in his case blessings in disguise. In 1969, he was released from military service at twenty-three having experienced the Six-Day War. He obtained from the council of the kibbutz a one-day-a-week absence to attend an art school; the school soon proved too conservative for his aspirations, so that when he learned that the painter Raffi Lavie was taking students on a one-on-one basis in his private studio, he went to see him. Lavie's laid-back attitude encouraged experimentation with the medium, which he taught his students should be cheap and unthreatening. Tevet painted with house paint on cardboard and plywood under Lavie's supervision for about a year, after which Lavie ended his apprenticeship and, by way of a diploma—actually a true rite of passage—told him of a “secret” address in Tel Aviv where he could get a subscription to *Artforum*.

Tevet got his subscription, and the first issue of the magazine that came in the mail featured a Donald Judd interview with John Coplans.<sup>1</sup> It was an eye-opener: it gave the young artist a formidable sense of liberty and empowerment. It also gave him a glimpse of a technical perfectionism diametrically opposed to Lavie's improvisational aesthetic. The unique synthesis of minimalist conception and Arte Povera-like execution that his work would soon display was perhaps the outcome of this clash of styles. In any case, reading *Artforum* broadened his view way beyond the Israeli art scene, which in the early '70s was roughly divided between the old guard of the *New Horizons* group (Yosef Zaritsky, Yehezkel Streichman, Avigdor Stamatzyk), painters who had aligned themselves twenty years earlier with the most advanced *informel* tendencies practiced in Paris, and the self-proclaimed new guard gathered in the *10+* group, of which Raffi Lavie was the leader and the most vocal spokesman.<sup>2</sup> Moshe Kupferman, a much respected abstract painter and labor camp survivor living in the north, was a discrete outsider exercising an ethical as much as an aesthetic influence on the younger generation, while the painter Arie Aroch acted as the bridge between the *New Horizons* and the *10+* groups. Aroch was of the generation of Streichman and Stamatzyk and initially a member of *New Horizons*. In the '50s, he began a career as a diplomat, and in the early '60s served as an ambassador to Sweden, exactly at the time when Pontus Hultén and Ulf Linde were turning Stockholm's Moderna Museet into an avant-garde institution showing dada and neo-dada. Aroch would have a profound influence on both Lavie and his young protégé. Tevet says of him that he translated Jasper Johns and Marcel Duchamp into Yiddish—a sly compliment that doubles as an acknowledgement of Duchamp's looming presidency over whatever young artists were engaged with at the time, in Israel and elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

Needless to say, Tevet and his Israeli peers could access Johns and Duchamp only through reproductions of their works, and this was perhaps another blessing in disguise. If reading art magazines compensated for the isolation of Israel at the periphery of the Western art world, it also distorted the perception of the works reproduced; but it did so at a time when the most advanced artists everywhere were claiming the primacy of concept and information and were downplaying aesthetic effects. *Concept + Information*, by the way, was the title of an exhibition mounted in 1971 by Yona Fischer, curator of Israeli and modern art at the young Israel Museum, in Jerusalem. Fischer, who had worked under Willem Sandberg, the visionary director of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam, was (and still is) a major player in the Israeli art world. It was he who, in 1972, obtained the Sandberg Prize for Kupferman while also being in touch with advanced artists internationally and introducing the Israeli audience to minimal and conceptual art from Europe and the US. In 1974, he cocurated the important *Beyond Drawing* exhibition and in 1976 gave Tevet his first museum show—an interesting gesture of appeasement, given the cultural rivalry between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, but also of provocation, given the blindness of the then very conservative Tel Aviv Museum toward the young artists around Lavie (Michal Na'aman, Efrat Natan, Tamar Getter, and of course, Tevet).<sup>4</sup> Tevet saw the *Concept + Information* show, and it made a durable impression on him. He discovered that he had as much artistic affinity with the post-minimalists associated with Jerusalem, Joshua Neustein and Benni Efrat (who were in the exhibition), or Micha Ullman and Michael Gitlin (who were not), as with the “Tel Avivians.” To sum up the context in which Nahum Tevet came into his own as an artist, one might say that he found himself at the unlikely crossroad where Yona Fischer's informed rigorism met with Raffi Lavie's intuitive spontaneism.

Tevet was still living in the kibbutz when he began the glass works (he would leave in 1973, after the Yom Kippur War). He managed to avoid working in the fields by being a gardener and was only allowed to practice art part-time. By way of studio, he obtained a large nondescript space to share with a house painter, where he recalls jealously observing the “superior technique” of his non-artist colleague across the chicken wire partition that divided the space in two.<sup>5</sup> There he worked on large-scale objects and paintings. The glass works were not done there but rather in the small apartment where he and his wife, Neta, were living and whose intimate scale was conducive to the creation of projects and drawings. Interestingly enough, the glass works came out of Tevet’s drawing practice. Projects for paintings and sculptures rarely started as drawings: they originated from direct experimentation with the materials and were described after the fact in sketches that involved perspective or bird’s-eye views. Some stand-alone drawings became self-referential processpieces or conceptual instruction pieces awaiting enactment. Examples are a sheet of paper scribbled on, folded in two, stapled shut, and marked with the inscription “Drawing” on a strip of masking tape, or a page juxtaposing two squares marked 62×62 cm—the left one a sketch for a square of that size drawn directly with pencil on the wall, and the right one the image of an identically sized piece of plywood painted white and nailed to the wall. The title of the piece, inscribed on the plywood, was to be *Wall Hidden by Art*. And then there were drawings that saw no other future than being simply drawings, sometimes adorned—if “adorned” is the right word—with glued-on scraps of paper, photographs, clippings from newspapers and, most interestingly, pieces of tape whose sole function was seemingly to refer to themselves. Drawings and collages like these would be hung on the wall of the apartment for the artist to meditate on. They would be framed in a rudimentary way, sandwiched between a glass pane and a piece of cardboard held together with binder clips. The glass works evolved out of these private, temporary, makeshift presentation devices for drawings. As the artist explains:

The first glass (*Untitled #1*) emerged from a drawing of mine, which was hanging at my home. It was a small drawing from 1971, approximately 25×35 cm [actually, 35×50.3 cm], which I had framed simply by placing it between a glass in the size of the drawing and a piece of supporting cardboard at the back. It was held by simple metallic clips that one uses in drawing classes to attach and hold the paper to the wooden support. It was an inexpensive, common way to show paper works, avoiding the trouble of “framing” them. After a while, I perceived the whole as one object with which I could work.<sup>6</sup>

From drawing to object via a common, cheap, and rather conventional framing device, such was the path that led to the glass works. Tevet never isolated them from his other works and at first did not autonomize them; his paintings and sculptures were also tending to the condition of objects—of *specific objects*, to quote Don Judd’s phrase, as it might have struck the young artist when he received his first issue of *Artforum*.<sup>7</sup> Whereas with the concept of specific objects Judd had in mind a new breed of artworks, which he situated at the overlap of painting and sculpture but which he claimed was neither, Tevet makes no theoretical claim for a new breed.<sup>8</sup> He usually holds on to the medium-specificity of drawing, painting, and sculpture, or uses the generic appellation “works.” He even makes scant usage of the term “installation” when designating the later, room-sized constructions for which he is best known, as if he were keen on muffling their minimalist genealogy. It was only when he gave the glass pieces the pragmatic name, “Works on Glass,” that he sanctioned the specific relationship to objecthood, distinct from that of his paintings and sculptures, which I believe warrants this separate exhibition of his glass works and the effort of organizing them in a tentative catalogue raisonné.

Knowledge of the genesis of works of art rarely exhausts the heuristics of their interpretation, but it helps. For the present exhibition, Nahum Tevet has not only unearthed works that have long remained in storage or in private collections and have not been seen since the ’70s, he also put his memory to work in order to attempt a reconstruction of their chronology.<sup>9</sup>

I am indebted to his efforts, as well as to those of Jenn Bratovich, who double-checked Tevet’s recollections by consulting independent sources. As a result, dimensions aside, we can trust what the artist says of the first glass work (*Untitled #1*) and begin to understand what exactly transformed drawings into (specific) objects. Two photos subsist of works in progress that were lost or discarded, in any case never finished. They show an interesting intermediary stage between framed drawing and glass work. In one of them, a primitive hanging system consisting of a short piece of string and two strips of tape is stuck onto the glass—a device which, oddly enough, would put the glass pane behind the sheet of paper it is supposed to frame. In the other, a large X, two circles, two arrows, and a number 1 are drawn in wax pencil on the glass, and then superimposed with a vertical tape, which in turn is crossing the horizontal tape on the drawing behind the glass. A cartouche at the bottom of the drawing contains, in Hebrew, the technical information pertaining to the piece.<sup>10</sup> The dimensions of the piece appear there twice—once as measuring the paper and once the glass—and they are struck through by marks in wax pencil on top of

the glass. As the awkwardness of my description shows, even the simplest attempt to describe the work forces us to a narrative that addresses the work's history—and consequently, the history of the series. Let us thus turn to *Untitled #1*. If it were not for a strip of Bristol board pasted on top of the glass, framing a sheet of paper that shows a rectangle crossed with diagonals, we would simply be dealing with a drawing grossly framed with the help of four binder clips. But being on top of the glass, the Bristol board jumps out of the frame, which is therefore no longer simply a frame. Moreover, the clips are arranged in a non-symmetric way that aligns them with the borders of the traced rectangle: they become part of a composition. And so do the pieces of masking tape that affix the Bristol board to the glass or underline the contours of the drawn rectangle. Only the presence of a supporting cardboard at the back of the drawing—visible because it exceeds the paper's dimensions by a couple of millimeters—attests to the genesis of the piece having started “innocently” as a framed drawing. So far as we can judge from an old photograph, in the now lost *Untitled #2*, where the drawing behind the glass is partially obliterated by a sheet of paper on top of the glass, humorously pretending to be stapled to it, it is the removal of the supporting cardboard at the back that allows us—and presumably allowed the artist at the time—to see an object where there had been a drawing protected by a sheet of glass. That simple gesture opened a new avenue of experimentation, and from then on, things went fast. In *Untitled #3*, the drawing behind the glass has disappeared; the piece of paper on top has made way for a messy Kurt Schwitters-like collage of cardboard affixed to the glass by various sorts of tape; the glass itself has become the support for a few scribbles and small drawings executed in wax pencil on both sides of the glass; and the way the work is hung—a string passing through four binder clips and forming a pentagon with a nail in the wall—is conspicuously integrated as a formal, self-reflexive device. The truly uncanny detail then reveals itself to be the dangling metal wire in the upper left corner, from which hangs an utterly non-functional screw, known in hardware stores as a screw eye. The artist remembers that it probably landed there because it was the remnant of another hanging system, lifted from an old, dismantled wood frame, which was subsequently discarded in favor of the string pentagon. When we photographed this particular piece for the present catalogue, Nahum was adamant that the screw eye should be as close as possible to where it was in the photo taken when the piece was in Robert Rauschenberg's collection. Schwitters indeed: behind the sloppy bricoleur hides a formalist.<sup>11</sup>

Incidentally, the evocation of Schwitters might have been among the triggers that led Rauschenberg to buy five of Tevet's glass works on impulse when he saw them at the Sara Gilat Gallery in 1974. There were surely more personal reasons, too. The American artist must have recognized in the “Works on Glass” the art of a kindred spirit and admired a new sort of *Combine* done with a material he had not thought of using in his own work. Rauschenberg must have instantly liked the glass works' untidiness and remorseless quality. What's more, he must have been dumbfounded by their utter contemporaneity. They were as much of their time as anything the New York galleries were then showing, and brilliantly original, to boot. Let me pick quasi-randomly from the very same issue of *Artforum* in which Tevet discovered Don Judd's work: the section devoted to covering the New York galleries contained a review of a show entitled *Materials and Methods* featuring works by Eva Hesse, Richard Van Buren, Alan Saret, Keith Sonnier, and Dorothea Rockburne, where the glass works would have fit seamlessly.<sup>12</sup> The review was by Robert Pincus-Witten, who only a few years later would become very interested in Israeli art and embrace the work of Neustein and Efrat, as well as that of Pinchas Cohen Gan.<sup>13</sup>

The uncanny timeliness of Tevet's early work, and of the glass works in particular, is in my view something of a mystery that calls for an interpretive hypothesis. What prompts the question, of course, is the provincialism of the Israeli art scene at the time. If Tevet had been working in New York—or perhaps in Milan or Düsseldorf—the resonance of the glass works with the contemporary practice of artists living in these international art centers would have been much less surprising—but, I should add, not more easily explained for all that. Granted that Tevet was and is a gifted artist, his talent alone doesn't explain the congruence of his interests with, say, those of the artists in the *Materials and Methods* exhibition. Arguing that the distance between New York and Tel Aviv has shrunk doesn't help either. True, in the McLuhanesque '70s, information traveled fast and, as I surmised, accessing contemporary art through magazines and reproductions was perhaps a blessing in disguise. But invoking the speed of information begs the question of why that information would be persuasive, and instantly so. Yona Fischer recalls that when MoMA curator William Seitz visited Israel in 1963, “he realized that the context here is different and that our ‘now’ is different.”<sup>14</sup> Fischer's subtle phrasing is worth a couple of remarks, for what he doesn't say is as important as what he says. In invoking two different “nows,” by definition contemporary to one another, he avoids saying that Israel is lagging behind the US or that its art is retardataire or derivative. And yet by speaking in terms of timing rather than place, he eschews the classical defense of peripheral art by way of localism or regionalism, and consequently avoids the pitfall of identity politics. Don't get me wrong. There is ample reason for identity politics in Israeli art, and a lot of it is straightforwardly political. And there is no shortage of polar oppositions on which Israeli artists might sustain the imaginary and symbolic construct

we call identity. The Israeli/Palestinian divide is the most blatant and the most painful of these binaries, but inner

distinctions that do not posit a radical other carry considerable historical weight as well: Israeli/Jew, secular/orthodox, Mizrahi/Ashkenazi, Zionist/Canaanite, and the list goes on. To look at Nahum Tevet's work through the lens of identity

politics is certainly feasible. He himself sometimes hints at the fragile and non-heroic nature of his materials as carrying a discreet protest against the proud Sabra ideology and its militarism. And when he asks of a glass work, as he does in the interview published in the present catalogue, "How does this thing allow itself to occupy a place in the world?" one cannot help but hear a hint of doubt, or even guilt, if one thinks of the West Bank or the Gaza Strip before Ariel Sharon let it go. I don't feel qualified to decide which political reading of Tevet's work is closer to the truth of his subjective position in a national culture where politics is everywhere. And so I shall refrain from following that thread and focus instead on the *date* of Yona Fischer's two "nows."

Fischer might agree that if William Seitz had visited Israel in 1973 rather than 1963, he would have been immersed in a "now" no longer that different from the "now" of contemporary art in New York, Milan, or Düsseldorf.<sup>15</sup> In the decade that separates the two dates, something happened that seemed to have synchronized the "now" of artists on at least three continents—Europe and North and South America, not counting Israel (or Australia, for that matter). One of the signs of this new synchronicity is that whereas localism had been for the previous generation an embarrassing double-edged sword—both a symptom of lateness and the proof of genuine struggle with derivativeness—artists were now embracing it with pride and making it an essential parameter of an avant-garde aesthetic. Think of Hélio Oiticica's *Parangolés* and how their "Brazilianness" has been the best ambassador of their contemporaneity. They don't tap into carnival culture to "elevate" it to international avant-garde standards; they are avant-garde because they make no excuse for simultaneously *being* popular culture.

The concept of contemporaneity has enjoyed a certain critical success in recent years. It claims to solve some of the aporias of postmodernism, now that the latter seems more passé than modernism. And, like postmodernism, which was retro-projected on the '60s and '70s when the word emerged in the early '80s,<sup>16</sup> contemporaneity is an ambiguous and elastic concept. Its proponents (Terry Smith is the most prolific<sup>17</sup>) have filled the concept with a variety of contents that are either circular or contradictory and more confused than enlightening. When Smith defines the contemporaneity of contemporary art as "an interrogation into the ontology of the present, one that asks, 'What is it to exist in the conditions of contemporaneity?'" he has the serpent eat its tail and fails to address the fact that his concept of the contemporary is not contemporary with the phenomenon it seeks to grasp.<sup>18</sup> He is not entirely wrong to see contemporaneity reach back to the long decade of the '60s (which, some say, started a few years before 1960 and extended into the first half of the '70s), but he shifts his lack of art-historical explanation onto the shoulders of the artists: "The artists most thoroughly committed to making art in the conditions of contemporaneity know that they carry unresolved legacies from the history of art, especially those that shook art to its roots during the 1950s and 1960s."<sup>19</sup> I would argue that, as was the case with postmodernism, the most interesting thing about the concept of contemporaneity is the symptom of its appearance at a certain moment. As a tentative redeeming justification for it, I offer that it is a meritorious attempt to cope ideologically with the new synchronicity that seems to have seized the entire Western art world during the long '60s.

What would it mean to cope *art-historically* with that new synchronicity? To adduce the speed of information in order to explain the simultaneous advent of similar styles and artistic concerns across the globe is tautological. Information may circulate very fast, but not all information leaves a significant trace in its recipients. The question is thus: why is *this* particular piece of information influential while others are not? And *what* is—or was—this particular piece of information? The very existence of simultaneously and quasi-independently appearing art movements—the paradigm is the sudden diffusion of conceptual art around 1967, from Poland to Argentina—is a plea for a single, comprehensive answer. And a simple one, too. The relevance of a piece of information is proportionate to its persuasive power—not necessarily to its truth—and its persuasive power is proportionate to its simplicity and its generality. It is my contention that the piece of information that hit the art world during the long '60s (for some, it was earlier) was the news that art could henceforth be made out of literally anything: any material, any medium, any technique, any subject matter, any form, any style, any object. Thus formulated, this news has the simplicity of a headline; it is synthetic and brutal. I call it "Duchamp's telegram" or "Duchamp's message." He was indeed its messenger: in 1917, with the photo of a men's urinal published in the little art magazine *The Blind Man* and triply captioned, "Fountain by R. Mutt," "Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz," and "THE EXHIBIT REFUSED BY THE INDEPENDENTS," he posted the news that anything could be art. Or so the telegram was interpreted when it reached its destination with a delay of a good forty years. It was decoded by countless artists and critics of the '60s and '70s thusly: Duchamp's urinal is art. (If ever there was a consensus among advanced artists any time, it was this one.) And when a urinal *is* art, anything *can be* art. Some went further; they completed what I call "the Duchamp syllogism" with this

conclusion: when anything can be art, anyone can be an artist.<sup>20</sup>

Like innumerable works produced in the major art centers, but also in the periphery on at least three continents—by artists of the pop, Fluxus, Arte Povera, minimal and conceptual generations—Nahum Tevet's early works, and his "Works on Glass" in particular, acknowledge receipt of Duchamp's telegram. Which is not to say that they interpret the telegram correctly.

This is probably not within reach of artists because "peeling the onion" of a piece of news apparently so simple as "anything goes" has required (as I have experienced it, if I may) long empirical inquiries guided by trial-and-error hypotheses, which are the business of art historians and not of artists. The business of artists is to take intuitive shortcuts, to sense when something important is at stake, to be a kind of seismograph, and to respond in their art. The arrival of Duchamp's telegram was an earthquake in that respect, and every significant artist coming of age in the long '60s responded to it. We should not be surprised if the art movements the period spawned—I just enumerated some of them—were extraordinarily prolific in what Harold Bloom has called "creative misprisions."<sup>21</sup> Tevet calls them "mistakes in translation," and recognizes that they have been fruitful for him. It doesn't matter that he links them to the issue of national identity—"a question of 'digestion,' of 'translation into Hebrew,'" as he says in his interview with Sarah Watson.<sup>22</sup> That's his way of phrasing the Israeli perception that "our 'now' is different," even though by 1972 the difference had all but been washed away by the Duchamp-tsunami. Remember that Tevet said of Arie Aroch that he had translated Duchamp into Yiddish.

Committing mistakes in the translation of Duchamp's message is one thing, misinterpreting it is another thing, and acknowledging receipt of it yet another. Mistakes in translation are a wellspring of new art and the prerogative of a creative mind. Artists should not be chastised, they should be applauded for them. Errors of interpretation are for art historians to correct the best they can, but nobody is above them. One such error, and the most common regarding Duchamp's message, has been to blame or praise the messenger for the news he brought—and it's an error shared most democratically by artists and art historians alike. When made by artists, errors of this kind are sometimes detrimental to their art, and when made by art historians, always cause further errors down the road. The belief that with *Fountain* Duchamp has opened the door to the "anything goes," and that he is therefore responsible for this state of things, is so widespread that I find it necessary to somewhat deconstruct it. It has its grain of truth: Duchamp is indeed the author of *Fountain*, and *Fountain* has indeed set a precedent after which scores of artists felt authorized to make art out of anything they fancied. Blame or congratulate Duchamp for his influence, little matter. But what if we showed that when he made *Fountain*, Duchamp took stock of the *fait accompli* that anything could be art, as soon as 1917?

Then it would not be he who opened the door to the "anything goes"; he would simply have shown us that the door was already open.<sup>23</sup> His so-called influence—although undeniable as far as the concept of influence goes—would be demystified as a trick-mirror that got all the critics' and art historians' attention while another procedure, which concerned, as I said, every significant artist since the long '60s, whether under Duchamp's influence or not, went unnoticed. That procedure is the acknowledgment of receipt of his telegram, or message.

Acknowledging receipt of a piece of news is indifferent to both misinterpretations and mistakes in translation. It's simply recognizing that the news has arrived. Since the news that concerns us reads, "You are authorized to make art out of literally anything: any material, any medium, any technique, any subject matter, any form, any style, any object," acknowledgment of its receipt is best noticed in the explosions of boundaries displayed by the works of the artists who were perceptive enough to be tuned to the right news channel. That makes for a lot of people, so loudly was the news broadcast all along the long '60s. Not every acknowledgment of receipt is equally interesting or convincing: how many artists are there, whose work is no more than a footnote to the readymade? We must look at works of the period with two levels of attention in mind: a more general one that addresses the logical consequences of the fact that anything goes and imagines potential responses, and a narrower one, focused on the singular quality of the work of the individual artist—in our case, Nahum Tevet.

Let's start where Tevet started, in Raffi Lavie's studio. A trait of Lavie's painting that several critics have highlighted is the apparent childishness not only of his characteristic doodles and scribbles but also of his inspiration. He himself played the part of the infant with shrewdness and complacency, for example when signing, at the very beginning of his career, "Raffi—20 year old child."<sup>24</sup> Let's take this claim seriously, but not on its own terms. "Anything goes" is the blissful condition a child is born into. It has not yet learned that there are rules, not yet experienced the limits of its fantasized

omnipotence, not yet bumped into the law-of-the-father. And so, acknowledging receipt of the news that anything goes is like rediscovering the innocence of one's childhood. God knows if that myth has had currency under modernism. But should the twenty-year-old child actually acknowledge that he has received the news via Duchamp's message, then his innocence would strike a less naïve, less utopian chord. Addressing the childlike style of his paintings, Lavie has quite candidly admitted: "I didn't invent anything. Everything in my paintings already exists, and I took it from Miró, Klee, Dubuffet, Alechinsky, and later from Rauschenberg."<sup>25</sup> Sarit Shapira comments:

The childlike style is also a sort of found object, a readymade element that does not express Lavie's childhood, but echoes a childhood imprinted in a specific language—the language of the community of artists without territorial borders who talk in a child's voice. [...] This child finds his childhood retroactively in its displacement from its familiar place, in the suspension of its "natural" time, in its mapping according to a strategy that impels the found objects of Duchamp and his successors.<sup>26</sup>

Since Lavie mentions Jean Dubuffet among the artists from whom he took his style, let me point out that Dubuffet, who invented *l'art brut* and was a master at playing the chord of childishness in his art, acknowledged receipt of Duchamp's message too when, quite suddenly, in 1962, he adopted a completely new, quasi-industrial vocabulary of white cell-like forms

contoured in black and hatched with blue, black, or red lines, with which he invaded every possible support, from drawing to painting to sculpture to architecture and even furniture. He called his new style *le Cycle de l'Hourloupe*, and a cycle it was, which not surprisingly came to its closure in 1974 (although Dubuffet would still sporadically work in that vein until 1983).<sup>27</sup> The years 1962–74: a period pretty congruent with the long '60s, during which every significant artist had to acknowledge Duchamp's message. Let me also point out that whereas Rauschenberg, and to a certain extent Pierre Alechinsky, were in a position to mediate Duchamp's message to Lavie because they had received it themselves, Joan Miró had no significant connection to Duchamp, and Paul Klee none at all. That doesn't mean they didn't get the message—from other sources. After all, if "anything goes" was a *fait accompli* in 1917, Duchamp must not have been the only artist who perceived it. In *The Cubist Painters*, dated 1913, Guillaume Apollinaire had already written: "You may paint with whatever material you please, with pipes, postage stamps, postcards or playing cards, candelabra, pieces of oil cloth, collars, wallpaper, newspapers."<sup>28</sup> Both Aroch and Lavie were enthusiastic adepts of the collage technique. It's much more probable that they got it straight from Braque and Picasso than mediated through Duchamp.

Nahum Tevet did not take over Raffi Lavie's strategic childishness but he assimilated a byproduct of it: the nonchalant execution, the refusal of accomplished craftsmanship, the flight away from technical perfection, the lack of finish—and, of course, like all the "Tel Avivians" who had been pupils of Lavie, the plywood and the cheap house paint. Sara Breitberg sees therein the adoption of a language she has called *the want of matter* and whose features, "including the use of such 'meagre' materials as plywood and others, and/or the intentionally 'poor' look of the work's surface—have been so intensively treated as to have *become* [my emphasis] our sensibility, the Israeli way of depicting the world."<sup>29</sup> Breitberg is not really convinced by the regionalist argument. She writes that "the unique quality of Israeli light" does not suffice to explain "the poor material look, the eschewal of colourfulness, and the consistent and stubborn refusal to paint seductive pictures."<sup>30</sup> And she goes on:

The "want of matter" as an ethical and aesthetic choice of language developed in the West for reasons we shall not explore here. The main thrust of my contention is that, for different reasons, that same language has settled into the local scene. There has been an inevitability about Israel's adopting precisely this language for its own use, an adoption so thorough that one might think it was born here.<sup>31</sup>

I hope Breitberg pardons me if I say the inevitability of that adoption in Israel is not so different as she thinks from the reasons the same "choice of language developed in the West." The ones I have in mind have to do with the synchronous arrival of Duchamp's message everywhere, Israel included. That's the general level of attention I mentioned above. They also have to do—and that's the narrow level of attention, which is focused on the singularity of the individual artist—with Tevet's unique aesthetic position among the "Tel Avivians." From the outset of his career (I'd say 1971, if not 1970), Tevet stood out. As Breitberg perspicaciously notes:

Nahum Tevet sought to abandon the language of Tel Aviv, to escape from what he terms "Israeli good taste," from that sloppy laying down of paint. He took the plywood and the confrontational element and transferred these, as primary materials, to the world of formal minimalism.<sup>32</sup>

The world of formal minimalism. We're back to the Don Judd epiphany. It doesn't explain everything but it points us in the right direction. Let's imagine ourselves in 1971, reading Judd's interview with John Coplans without prior knowledge of Judd's work (and of course without the hindsight that we now have over his entire career). The interview is illustrated with photos of early works spanning the years 1961–67—none more recent—which all get discussed in the text. The photos, black-and-white and of rather poor quality, make the works appear incredibly rough and expressive of the unwavering, unapologetic, almost ruthless decision process of their maker. The contrast to the three color photos also illustrating the interview—photos of much more polished works from 1967–68 *not* discussed in the text—couldn't be more striking. I can see Tevet immediately at home in the black-and-white photos and utterly perplexed by the color photos. How could he have understood from the vantage point of his kibbutz that in 1971 Judd, who definitely controlled the photo-layout, sought to project an image of his art dissociated from a minimalist movement grown academic and sympathetic to the post-minimalism of a Richard Serra or a Robert Smithson? Yet “the world of formal minimalism” whereto Tevet transferred “the plywood and the confrontational element” is closer to Serra's than to Judd's. It is in fact a world energized by the paradoxes and tensions of post-minimalism, all having to do with how to use or not use *systems*.

When anything can be art, that's when artists need systems. It is trivial to maintain that when anything goes, art making has become too easy, and just a tad less trivial to add that it is precisely when things are too easy that they become really difficult. Trivial or not, there is an important truth in that paradox. Sensitive artists who realize that anything goes—in other words, acknowledge receipt of Duchamp's message—instinctively know that in the absence of rules imposed from without they have to give themselves their own rules. They also understand that if they don't want to appear as monarchs abusing their right to legislate, they must project these rules outside of themselves, as if they were still imposed by the anonymous institution of *Art*. What results is a subjective decision to renounce subjectivity and to abandon oneself to the arbitrariness of a rule, which, although chosen, is embraced as ineluctable. This paradox—and not so much the recourse to mathematics or logic per se—is what the word “system” has entailed, not only for many artists of minimalist and conceptual persuasion, but also for kinetic artists and painters practicing “systemic abstraction.” The model for that sense of “system” has been laid down under the names “idea” and “concept” by Sol LeWitt in his celebrated “Paragraphs on Conceptual Art”:

In conceptual art the idea or concept is the most important aspect of the work. When an artist uses a conceptual form of art, it means that all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution is a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art.<sup>33</sup>

Tevet is not a partisan of LeWitt's execution as “a perfunctory affair,” even though at first sight it may seem so in works like *Corner* (1973–74) or in his installations of later years. In the glass works, anyway, execution is everything. One would be hard put to try to separate the process of constructing the works from “the planning and decisions” LeWitt maintains “made beforehand.” Take *Untitled #11*, for example. The “concept” lies in a few basic decisions valid for all the glass works and indeed made beforehand (but then only if you forget the genesis of *Untitled #1*). First, to make autonomous works from sheets of glass of moderate dimensions reminiscent of the conventions of easel painting. Second, to hang these works on the wall as if they were modest-sized easel paintings or, alternatively, drawings framed behind glass. Third, to use standardized binder clips of a certain model, color, and size throughout the series (although there are a few exceptions) in order to devise a hanging system for the works. Fourth, to hang the works to a nail by way of a string (or a piece of wire) joining the clips—surely the most amateurish way to hang a work ever contrived. Fifth, to decide on the length of the string and on whether the nail in the wall will be above the piece or behind it. Sixth... Well, that's it. That's Nahum Tevet's *system* in the glass works. The rest is execution: pragmatic, ad hoc responses to the way the materials behave. Try to clamp a binder clip around a sheet of glass: the glass will slide through; or it might crack. A strip of packing tape wrapped around the edge (as seems to be the case beneath the clip on the right) might prevent the cracking. And then: how many scraps of paper squeezed inside the clip, of what thickness, in how many layers, will it take to hold the glass in place? What kind of twine will sustain the weight of the glass? Single or double? Or perhaps triple? If double is enough, why not let the third strand dangle? Why not indeed—as the work's most recent presentation shows? Where to sign and date the piece? To the last question, *Untitled #11* answers, in both Latin and Hebrew script: on a piece of silverish “Chatterton” tape—a gift of Rauschenberg, by the way—quite conventionally placed in the lower right corner. What you see is what you get. Except that what you get is not what you see. The handwriting in the signature, the artist explains, is too sloppy to have been meant for the front: “I must have flipped the glass over several times while working on it, and stuck that piece of tape on the front thinking it was the back.”<sup>34</sup> Another example: the transparency of the glass lets you see torn pieces of paper holding on to its back, but what you don't

see, because you don't know it, is that they are the traces of a sheet of translucent white paper of the size of the glass, which the artist glued to its back in 1974 and tore loose in the late 1970s. And now that I made you notice that, perhaps you'll also notice the torn pieces of paper *on top* of the glass, in the upper right quadrant. They are also the traces of a page the artist tore loose, but in 1974, as part of the original working process.

There is as much system in the day-to-day evolution of a piece under construction as there is little system in the initial "concept." Whatever systematicity the "Works on Glass" obey is in the nature of what Tevet ingenuously calls "little excuses," "stories," or "semi-fictive narratives." By this he means that he feels authorized to make this or that formal decision only if he can conjure up some justification for it, however anecdotal or silly. If that's his *concept* or *idea*, it's a far cry from LeWitt's "machine that makes the art." It's more like the nimble stubbornness (note the oxymoron) with which he subordinates his aesthetic decisions to "the want of matter"—read: to the desire manifested by the unfinished piece before his eyes. Rather than to LeWitt, let me turn to another conceptual artist—probably the most systematic of them all—for a call on systems more congenial to Tevet's practice. Here is how Hanne Darboven justified her reliance on systems:

A system became necessary; how else could I see more concentratedly, find some interest, continue at all?

Contemplation had to be interrupted by action as a means of accepting anything among everything. No acceptance at all = chaos.<sup>35</sup>

"Accepting anything among everything." Enigmatic as it is, this poetic turn of phrase is the most precise formulation I know of any artist's acknowledgment of receipt of Duchamp's telegram. It puts the emphasis on the receptive, "feminine" act of acceptance and steers away from authoritarian decisions à la Don Judd, or perfunctory execution à la Sol LeWitt. Anything goes—yes. Everything can be art—yes. The difficulty is to select, to choose anything out of everything—a contradiction in terms, for once something is chosen it is no longer anything. Darboven's answer to that difficulty is the gesture of abandonment that *accepts* that any thing, this thing, emerges on its own will from among every thing, all things. I don't believe it's entirely by chance that with the exception of Tevet, Raffi Lavie's students in those years were mostly women—I mentioned Michal Na'aman, Efrat Natan, and Tamar Getter, but there's also Yudith Levin and Dganit Berest. In Tevet's works from right after the Yom Kippur War, such as *Arrangement of Six Units*, or *Untitled*, an installation at the Kibbutz Gallery (both 1973–74), which, in spite of their abstraction, irresistibly evoke stretchers and hospital beds, one perceives a caring, nursing dimension that brings out the feminine side of the male artist as well. It's ironic that by a sort of symmetry, women artists who, for generational reasons, were bound to acknowledge the arrival of Duchamp's telegram, had to bring out their masculine side to the point of repressing their femininity. They needed systems just like men—or perhaps more than men, as Darboven's art admirably shows. Male prejudice tends to identify femininity with subjectivity and subjectivity with irrational whim. And so the striving for *objectivity* was for women artists a cultural imperative as compelling as the recourse to systems—and often the other side of the same coin. As Adrian Piper put it:

I think that a greater total involvement in one's work is possible when one attempts to be objective than when one does not. I have found that the limitations imposed by decisions based on my personal "tastes" are absolutely stifling.<sup>36</sup>

Piper is one of the many artists having emerged in the long '60s who expressed their profound distrust of taste—or *tastes*, an interesting use of the plural given that she meant by that her own "subjective likes and dislikes."<sup>37</sup> Tevet belongs to that breed of artists, and why is that so? When anything goes, taste and tastes are unjustifiable as a ground for artistic decisions. It's part of the same paradox that renders art making a lot more difficult when it's easiest: no serious artist wants to be caught making formal decisions on a whim for fear of being dismissed as indulging in what Piper called, not without a bit of self-beating, "a kind of therapeutic ego-titillation."<sup>38</sup> However, believing that the paradox is solved with a disclaimer has unfortunate theoretical consequences, for the truth is that the making of art, just as much as its appreciation, *is* a matter of taste and that taste *is* subjective—there is no way around that. Solving the paradox starts with recognizing that taste, although subjective, doesn't mean "subjective likes and dislikes" (that would be tastes) but rather the faculty of aesthetic judgment. Piper, who besides being an artist is also a philosopher with a mighty interest in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, knows this, of course. If I read her well, the antidote to tastes is not objectivity but the *subjective attempt to be objective*. In his own, non-theoretical way, Nahum Tevet says the same thing: he conceives of his "little excuses" as categorical ways of avoiding personal preferences and dodging taste; but he also admits that they are excuses and nothing more.

Why do I think that Tevet's "Works on Glass" are important works, situated at the juncture of minimalism and post-

minimalism? Why am I convinced that they shed light on this juncture—or that they would have shed such light if they hadn't been neglected because of Israel's peripheral situation in the art world? The short answer is: because the *subjective attempt to be objective* that they embody invites us to have a fresh look, not at objectivity as opposed to subjectivity, but rather at *objectness*, the recognition that works of visual art are primarily objects. It is trivial to note that the condition of being an object is shared by works of art of all times and places, and only a tad less trivial to add that works of art must have a je-ne-sais-quoi beyond objectness that sets them apart from mere objects. Two truisms piled up don't deliver us from platitudes, however. The objectness I have in mind is not a trivial generality valid for works of art of all times and places. It is—and we should not be surprised—a highly paradoxical and specific state of affairs resulting from the arrival of Duchamp's telegram during the long '60s. Philosophers have been curious about the evasive je-ne-sais-quoi that sets artworks apart from mere objects since the seventeenth century. But when did they start looking for an answer precisely there, at artworks' apartness from *mere objects*—objects from the real world, such as chairs and tables? Arthur Danto published an initial article on that apartness, titled "The Artworld," in 1964.<sup>39</sup> His second article on the topic, "Works of Art and Mere Real Things," is from ten years later.<sup>40</sup> Their dates bracket the long '60s nicely. Both articles were prompted by the 1964 exhibition of Andy Warhol's *Brillo Boxes* at the Stable Gallery—a true primal scene for Danto, which he revisited in book after book during the rest of his life. The question that obsessed him was how to distinguish a Warhol *Brillo Box* from its supermarket counterpart—a pair of objects which, for the sake of his argument, he construed as absolutely indiscernible from one another, as if the *Brillo Box* was an unassisted readymade. The objectness I have in mind is another name for that indiscernibility. It is the condition works of art are in when they *are* things from the real world, like chairs and tables, or risk being taken for them. We are dealing, again, with a paradox: there is no discernible difference between Duchamp's bottle-rack and the one in the cellar, and yet there *is* a difference. To explain the difference and undo the paradox is the task of philosophers and theorists of art. But what should artists make of it? How would you, as an artist, treat objectness if you came to your own during the long decade when Duchamp's message reached its destination, and you had to acknowledge receipt of it?

When art can be made from anything—any material, any medium, any technique, any subject matter, any form, any style, any *object*—then all works of art that don't take explicit refuge in a traditionally defined medium threaten to be contaminated by the condition of objectness. Even painting—especially painting—flirts with objectness as soon as it takes its own conventions for subject matter and deduces said conventions from the material characteristics of the support. The canonical modernist view recognizes the ambiguity of this threat when it notes that advanced modernist art engages in a deep flirtation with the literalness of the medium but stops short of completely surrendering to it. According to this view—Michael Fried's is exemplary—outstanding modernist works acknowledge contamination by objectness the better to resist and defeat it.<sup>41</sup> They do so by seeking absorption in the specific history of their medium, down to its latest modernist avatar. That's what Fried meant when he reportedly quipped that Frank Stella painted stripes because he wanted to paint like Velázquez.<sup>42</sup> In the opposite camp—Fried's nemesis was mostly Don Judd—works that let themselves be not just contaminated but *corrupted* by objectness embrace the literalness of the medium wholesale, display the shallowest memory of the medium's history, and as a result betray modernism. *Literalism*—in Fried's view congruent with minimalism—was the name he gave to this betrayal, and *objecthood* was his name for objectness, tinted with his negative judgment.

The irony of Fried's position is that Judd, in both his art and his critical writings, also acknowledged contamination by objectness the better to resist corruption by it. Fried was convinced that he was countering Judd; in truth, he failed to see their common modernist ground. And Judd may have thought that he was merely commenting journalistically on the new three-dimensional work when he coined the expression "specific objects"; in truth, he hit a theoretical jackpot of sorts. In that expression, the word "specific" resists the objectness that the word "objects" acknowledges,

and "specific" has the upper hand.<sup>43</sup> The thrust of Judd's usage of "specific" was that the artists he praised for having made works that were "neither painting nor sculpture" were not, for all that, surrendering to a Duchampian kind of objectness—one that would seek indiscernibility of artworks from objects of the real world. On the contrary, what Judd valued in the works of artists as diverse as Claes Oldenburg and Dan Flavin was the odd quiddity that set them apart from readymades as well as from painting and sculpture. To his eyes these works formed a new kind, a new species of objects, whose specificity could not be subsumed under one definite set of criteria but could only be posited, in all appearance tautologically, with the epithet "specific."<sup>44</sup> What opposes Fried and Judd proves in the end to be less important than what reconciles them in spite of themselves. Both stuck to the modernist principle of medium-specificity, even if it took inventing a new species of an art-medium, as Judd did, or denying dogmatically that there was art between the mediums, as Fried did.<sup>45</sup>

Nahum Tevet's "Works on Glass" are specific objects. But it is as if they inverted Judd's priorities: the word "specific"

is unimportant, and the word “object” is a magnet with great attractive power. I noted earlier that Tevet did not autonomize the glass pieces or isolate them from his work in painting or sculpture. He himself has said that he was less interested in what was happening on the canvas than in the painting as an *object*.<sup>46</sup> In his work of the '70s, he was completely indifferent to medium-specificity, whether it was to defend or subvert it. He was moving flexibly between drawing, painting, and sculpture, and his works were not unlike those of artists elsewhere who were experimenting with the boundaries of mediums—except that they never focused on issues of boundaries. The painting propped against the wall by a wooden board recalls similar pieces by Richard Serra, but the complex layering of sheets of plywood, Plexiglas, paper, and plywood again moves it away from issues of weight and prevents its identification as a sculpture. Some of the whitewashed paintings on plywood recall Robert Ryman, but their spirit is very different. To this day, Ryman has displayed an exacerbated awareness of his medium being painting, and every single one of his works probes one region or another of painting's immense territory, testing its borders. Tevet bluntly takes for granted that if a flat surface bears a coat of paint, it is a painting. He likes asking, “What can a painting do?” not “What are the limits of painting?” And the question he favored in the '70s was “How does a painting take its place in the world?”—a question that starts with “How does it hang on the wall?”<sup>47</sup> The glass works would ask exactly the same question—proof that the question was not medium-specific. But it prompts the comparison with Ryman again. There is no artist who has devoted more attention to the braces, bolts, and struts that fasten his works to the wall than Ryman. But whereas these props in Ryman's paintings border on design (sometimes even a little too exquisite), the hanging devices in Tevet's glass works are slapdash expedients that shamelessly affirm their lower-class pedigree: cheap binder clips straight from the office supply store, a lot of tape, a piece of string or wire, a nail in the wall, and that's it. Even the panes of glass he used were often chipped leftovers found in the kibbutz's workshop and clumsily cut at not quite 90 degrees by the artist himself. Tevet exploited their transparency with great ingenuity, in a game of hide-and-seek with the wall and the sheets of paper behind or before the glass.<sup>48</sup> Still, one wonders if the main function of the transparency was not to reveal the contraption that hung the works on the wall. More than anything else, it was the variations played on that contraption that made the “Works on Glass” a family of fragile objects literally dangling on a wire and defending their precarious place in the world.

Rather than a species in Judd's sense, the glass works form a family. They look familiar after a while. I believe it is not by chance that their birthplace was the family living room in the kibbutz—this fragile utopia supposed to have replaced the family institution. Yet something in them resists their familiar looks; they instill strangeness into the family living room; they don't quite fit among the middle-class furniture. They long for the outer world where they risk the kind of indiscernibility that would threaten—really threaten—their perception as art. In the kibbutz, you are an artist as long as the community respects your vocation. Outside, you are an artist if the art world recognizes you. Sooner or later, Tevet would leave the kibbutz. In September 1973, he found a teaching job in Petach-Tikva, a city close to Tel Aviv. A few weeks later, the Yom Kippur War broke out and, immediately drafted, Tevet was sent to the Sinai. Although the war was brief (October 6–25, 1973), the army kept him stationed in the Sinai for several months, with enough free time to do some drawings but without the facilities to paint or make large works. When he was released, the world had changed. He, his wife and his son left the kibbutz for good and moved to a suburb of Tel Aviv, where he resumed work on the glass pieces.

The year 1974 saw the artist working mostly on a series of more abstractly formal and less rickety works than those preceding the war. Then his interest shifted back to the jerry-built, amateurish look of the very first glass pieces. *Untitled #14* (1974) is the first work that hangs with the help of a metal wire from a nail *above* the glass, embarrassing the sophisticated viewer who at first doesn't know what to do with such an unprofessional way of hanging a work. It's corny but also homely; perhaps it carries a bit of nostalgia for the living room in the kibbutz. But the work is also interesting for another reason: its lower part shows the sketch of what appears to be a square coffee table, drawn on the glass with wax pencil and half scraped away with a cutter. A similar table reappears in *Untitled #28* and again in *Untitled #29* (both 1975), on drawings affixed with tape to the glass. *Untitled #29* has a drawing in the lower right corner, in which a table makes three appearances in clumsy perspective views, one with its four sides marked A, B, C, D. It is a diagram for a future table rather than the depiction of an existing one. Is it meant for a carpenter commissioned to build it? Strips of black tape with half-erased indications of the same letters delimit a rectangular area on the glass. Is that area destined to become the tabletop? The artist recalls that before the days of Formica, tables in the kibbutz were often protected with such glass panes. The next numbers, *Untitled #30*, *Untitled #31*, and *Untitled #32* (1975), revive the embarrassing triangular string above the work and also contain the sketch of a coffee table—round, this time. They, too, provide the potential glasscutter with the material from which to cut the protective tabletop. It's not glass in this case, it's Plexiglas.

When I asked Tevet about these pieces, he laughed and told me that he had a two-tiered “little excuse” for them, a whimsical set of instructions whereby he told himself to follow either of two “stories”: 1) Draw the project of a circular

table on a piece of paper and attach it to a sheet of Plexiglas; trace a circle on the Plexiglas; give the Plexiglas with the attached drawing to a cabinetmaker and tell him to cut the circle from the material and build a table, following the model in the drawing. Or: 2) Trace a circle on a piece of Plexiglas with no further intention; then decide that it would be a tabletop;

draw the table on a sheet of paper; attach the drawing to the Plexiglas; give the whole to the cabinetmaker, etc. Tevet swears he doesn't care if one story is truer than the other, and chuckles at the idea that his *system* of "little excuses" allows for both to be equally true—or equally fictitious. Both have the same two endings anyway, one virtual, the other real. The making of the table has remained virtual. As we know, since we have *Untitled #30*, *Untitled #31*, and *Untitled #32*, no cabinetmaker was ever commissioned and no tabletop was ever cut from those sheets of Plexiglas. The making of a work of art, on the other hand, has become real: the glass works family has grown by three units. I cannot help but see in these "stories" or "excuses" an allegory of Tevet's position toward objectness. In story number one, the project of making an object of the real world comes first; the artist avails himself of the means to realize his project, then subcontracts its realization to the cabinetmaker. Finally he changes his mind, renounces producing an object, and adds a (Plexi)-glass work to the family. In story number two, art comes first, and it is abstract art with a history that goes back to those days of Russian or Dutch constructivism, when the transparency of the picture plane was a big issue and artists were discovering Plexiglas; the artist then changes his mind, and the end becomes the means: a Malevich-like circle, tangential to the sides of a transparent rectangle, becomes the material from which to construct an object of the real world. At the end of the story the artist changes his mind again, suspends production of the table, and settles for art.

Allegories always have something to teach, and the fact that systems—even when they boil down to little excuses—assume an allegorical allure is in itself a lesson. I wouldn't be surprised if we discovered, as Craig Owens intuited, an "allegorical impulse" behind every system sustaining the work of the generation of artists that had to acknowledge Duchamp's telegram.<sup>49</sup> Owens suggested that it was the case with Darboven, and I agree.

Let's further unfold the allegory of Tevet's position toward objectness in *Untitled #30*, *Untitled #31*, and *Untitled #32*. In story number one, the artist's priority is to acknowledge the objectness of his work. He goes as far as handing over the fabrication to a contractor, just like Judd. Resistance to objectness comes later, in the decision not to have the table built. In story number two, the artist's priority is to defeat objectness at all costs. Wasn't Malevich's dream world a world without objects, a *gegenstandslose Welt*?<sup>50</sup>

Acknowledgement comes later, when the artist abandons the modernist dream and surrenders to a world where artworks are indiscernible from mere real things. Story number one looks like a rationale for specific objects as laid down by Judd, and then disavowed. Story number two looks like the history of modernism down to its literalist capitulation as told by Fried, and then rejected. Both are equalized in Tevet's decision not to build the table. There would be no discernible difference in the resulting artwork if story number one proved truer than story number two, or vice versa.

Danto was right: the Leibnizian indiscernibility problem is at issue.<sup>51</sup> But he was wrong in being obsessed with a pair of indiscernible *objects*. The lesson we gather from Tevet's allegorical, two-tiered little excuse in *Untitled #28* to *Untitled #32* is that the difference, or lack thereof, between these works and objects from the real world is not at stake. The important thing is that there is no discernible difference *within* these objects if we opt for story number one or story number two. As an allegory, story number one is an art-historical narrative that praises Don Judd for having moved beyond canonical modernism—the one that sticks to the medium-specificity of painting and sculpture—only to disavow him in the end for clinging to the medium-specificity of his *specific objects*. As an allegory, story number two is an art-historical narrative that praises Michael Fried for holding on to the qualitative exigencies of modernism—constrained as they are by the medium-specific history of painting and sculpture—only to reject him in the end for not making room for art in the interstices between the mediums. The indiscernibility problem doesn't run between two objects, it runs within one and the same object accounted for by two art-historical narratives.

The bottom line of Tevet's allegory is this: there would be no discernible difference within *Fountain* should *Fountain* be interpreted as a transgressive gesture opening the door to the "anything goes" or as the acknowledgment that the "anything goes" was a *fait accompli*. And yet there is a difference, and it is a huge one. To praise or blame the messenger for the news he brought is to grant him an agency in the events that led to the present situation which he doesn't really deserve. It also leads to an art-historical narrative that is obsessed with the transgression of limits where, in fact, there are no limits. To accept as a *fait accompli* that anything goes—in Hanne Darboven's beautiful phrasing, *accepting anything among everything*—leads to an art-historical narrative light years away from the modernism/postmodernism/contemporaneity conundrum. It's a narrative that largely remains to be written. We should be grateful—I am—to Nahum Tevet for putting us on the right track.

One of the works that illustrated Don Judd's "Specific Objects" article was Richard Artschwager's *Table and Chair*

(1963–64), a Formica-on-wood duo of objects from the real world ironically stylized to fit the mandatory “box-aesthetics” of minimal art. It’s a work that indicates a juncture of minimalism and post-minimalism which I think is highly relevant to Tevet’s “Works on Glass” when viewed in light of his later work. His installations from the ’90s onwards aspire to the condition of furniture while retaining an abstract uncanniness that keeps them just this side of sheer objectness. And some of his recent works, in particular the *Tables* from 2013–14, while being actual, functional tables, as well as systemic variations on the concept of table, are complex allegories of themselves and of their situation in the world. In a way, they realize the tables which had remained virtual in *Untitled #28* to *Untitled #32*.

1 John Coplans, “An Interview with Don Judd,” *Artforum*, June 1971, pp. 40–46.

2 The 10+ group was active from 1965 to 1970 under the leadership of Raffi Lavie. During this period, the group held ten exhibitions, with as many as seventy-five artists being invited. Members of the group include Buky Schwartz, Siona Shimshi, Yoav Bar El, Henry Sheleznyak, Batya Apollo, Yair Garbuz, Ran Shechori, Rita Alima, Aviva Uri, and Yigal Tumarkin. See Osmat Zuckerman Rechter, “In Between Past and Future: Time and Relatedness in the Six Decades Exhibitions,” in Richard I. Cohen, ed., *Visualizing and Exhibiting Jewish Space and History*, vol. XXVI (Jerusalem: Institute of Contemporary Jewry, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2012), pp. 180–203. See also Ruth Direktor, “Six Exhibitions, Six Decades: Towards the Recanonization of Contemporary Israeli Art,” *ibid.*, pp. 159–179.

3 In her book on Raffi Lavie, Sarit Shapira confirms Tevet’s view on Aroch in less metaphorical terms: “But Aroch’s decisive contribution to Lavie’s work is no doubt the way he mediated Marcel Duchamp’s work to him. Duchamp, and the turning point in avant-garde history associated with his figure, supplied Aroch—and Lavie in his wake—with a bank of images.” Sarit Shapira, *Raffi Lavie, Works from 1950 to 2003* (exh. cat.) (Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 2003), pp. 343–342.

4 The then director of the Tel Aviv Museum, Haim Gamzu, was vehemently opposed to the new trends, even when espoused by Tel Aviv artists such as Raffi Lavie and Moshe Gershuni. Two of the museum’s curators, Yigal Zalmona and Ilan Tamir, resigned in 1974 over Gamzu’s refusal to present the works of Joshua Neustein, Benni Efrat, Michael Gitlin, Nahum Tevet, and others. See Yigal Zalmona, “Impressions from the 1970s + Comments from the 2000s,” in *D.I.Y.\* The Michael Adler Collection and Israeli Post-Minimalism in the Seventies and in Contemporary Art* (exh. cat.) (Herzliya: Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art, 2008), p. 96.

5 In conversation with me, June 22, 2016. In a video interview with Nicola Trezzi, Tevet even joked that this house painter was “a better painter than Robert Ryman.”

6 Nahum Tevet, “Some Notes on the Glass Works Series,” unpublished manuscript, 2002, p. 1.

7 Actually, when Coplans brings up the “Specific Objects” article, Judd brushes it aside as just “a report on three-dimensional art.” Coplans, “An Interview with Don Judd,” p. 44.

8 “Half or more of the best new work in the last few years has been neither painting nor sculpture.” Donald Judd, first sentence of “Specific Objects,” *Arts Yearbook VIII*, 1965, rpt. in D. Judd, *Complete Writings 1959–1975* (Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 1975), p. 181.

9 I say “attempt” because, to the best of his recollections, Tevet is unable to assert with certainty the chronological order in which the first glass works were made. He remembers that he was working on more than one piece at a time. The numbering he and I have agreed on for the present catalogue therefore reflects a narrative that allows for a logical development but which, for this very reason, may be partly fictitious.

10 Here is the translation of that information: “Bristol paper (46 x 38) / 2 mm glass (46 x 38) / AB pencil on paper, on glass / Wax pencil on glass / Various masking tapes on glass / 72.”

11 A formalist, or a scrupulous restorer, which in this case amounts to the same. The screw eye and its metal wire are actually a restoration done by the artist during the preparation of the present exhibition. Noticing that they were missing from the piece, he replaced them taking the photo from the Rauschenberg collection, where it is clearly visible, as his guide.

12 *Artforum*, June 1971, p. 80.

13 Robert Pincus-Witten, “The Sons of Light: an Observer’s Notes in Jerusalem,” *Arts Magazine*, New York, September 1975; Pincus-Witten, “Six Propositions on Jewish Art,” *Arts Magazine*, New York, December 1975; Pincus-Witten, “The Neustein Essay,” in *Neustein* (exh. cat.) (Jerusalem: Tel Aviv Museum of Art, 1977). On Pincus-Witten and Israel, see Adi Englman, “Post-Minimalism, ‘It is what it is’: On the Quest for Content and Sites of Meaning in the Works at the Show,” in *D.I.Y.\* The Michael Adler Collection and Israeli Post-Minimalism in the Seventies and in Contemporary Art*, p. 109.

14 Y. Fischer, in Yona Fischer and Tamar Manor-Friedman, “Foreword,” *The Birth of Now, Art in Israel in the 1960s: The Second Decade: 1958–1968* (exh. cat.) (Ashdod: Ashdod Art Museum, Monart Center, 2008), p. 8\*.

15 I put the question to him. He answered that the gap between the two “nows” diminished incrementally, but would always remain, like in Zeno’s paradox of Achilles and the tortoise. Yona Fischer in conversation with me, July 22, 2016.

16 Although the first appearance of the word “postmodern” in an art context goes back to the 1870s, it is only a hundred years later that postmodernism became “hot.” I choose the early ’80s as the relevant date because of three influential articles: Jürgen Habermas, “Modernity versus Postmodernity,” *New German Critique* 22 (1981); Jean-François Lyotard, “Réponse à la question: Qu’est-ce que le postmoderne?” *Critique* 419 (April 1982), English translation “Answering the Question, What Is Postmodernism?,” in *The Postmodern Condition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984); Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 146 (July–August 1984).

- 17 See Terry Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). For a critical review of Smith's book, see Andrew McNamara, "Contemporary Art and Contemporaneity," *Critical Inquiry* 32, no. 4 (Summer 2006): 681–707.
- 18 Smith, *What Is Contemporary Art?*, p. 2.
- 19 *Ibid.*, p. 246.
- 20 On "Duchamp's message" and "the Duchamp syllogism," see the series of six articles I published in *Artforum* in 2013–2014, in particular the first two: "Pardon my French," October 2013, and "Don't Shoot the Messenger!," November 2013.
- 21 Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973).
- 22 See p. 53, p. 54.
- 23 See my article, "Don't Shoot the Messenger!," *Artforum*, November 2013.
- 24 Shapira, Raffi Lavie, *Works from 1950 to 2003*, p. 400.
- 25 *Ibid.*, p. 373.
- 26 *Ibid.*, pp. 373–372.
- 27 Dubuffet coins the word "hourloupe" in 1962. It is found on the title page of a hand-written text illustrated with drawings in black, red, and blue on a black background, entitled *L'Hourloupe* (16 × 12.5 cm), realized between July 15 and 25, 1962.
- 28 Guillaume Apollinaire, *The Cubist Painters, Aesthetic Meditations* (New York: Wittenborn, 1962), p. 23. Translation slightly modified.
- 29 Sara Breitberg-Semel, "The Want of Matter—A Quality in Israeli Art," in *The Want of Matter: A Quality in Israeli Art* (exh. cat.) (Tel Aviv: The Tel Aviv Museum, 1986), p. 186.
- 30 *Ibid.*
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 176.
- 33 Sol LeWitt, "Paragraphs on Conceptual Art," *Artforum*, June 1967, quoted by Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (New York: Praeger, 1973), p. 28.
- 34 Nahum Terev in conversation with me, August 2, 2016.
- 35 Hanne Darboven, "Statement to Lucy Lippard," 1968, in Alex Alberro and Blake Stimson, eds., *Conceptual Art: a Critical Anthology* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1999), p. 62.
- 36 Adrian Piper, "A Defense of the 'Conceptual' Process in Art," 1967, in Adrian Piper, *Out of Order, Out of Sight, Vol. II: Selected Writings in Art Criticism 1967–1992*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), p. 3.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 *Ibid.*
- 39 Arthur Danto, "The Artworld," *Journal of Philosophy* 61, no. 19 (1964).
- 40 Danto, "Works of Art and Mere Real Things," *Theoria*, 1973; rpt. in *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981).
- 41 Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum*, June 1967, rpt. in Fried, *Art and Objecthood* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).
- 42 The quip was reported by Rosalind Krauss, "A View of Modernism," *Artforum*, September 1972, p. 48.
- 43 The word was a mantra for Judd; it appeared in almost every one of his texts of the period. For example: "I'd like my work to be somewhat more specific than art has been and also specific and general in a different way." D. Judd, Statement that appeared in Barbara Rose, "ABC Art," *Art in America*, October–November 1965, rpt. in *Complete Writings*, p. 181.
- 44 The specificity of the word "specific" is only apparently tautological. In my view, the appellation "specific objects" behaves, exactly like "painting," "sculpture," or "art," as a proper name, that is, as a "rigid designator" in Saul Kripke's sense. See my book, *Kant after Duchamp* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), and in particular Chapter 1, "Art Was a Proper Name."
- 45 "The concepts of quality and value—and to the extent that these are central to art, the concept of art itself—are meaningful, or wholly meaningful, only within the individual arts. What lies between the arts is theatre." Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," rpt. in Fried, *Art and Objecthood*, p. 164.
- 46 See his conversation with Sarah Watson, p. 54.
- 47 *Ibid.*, pp. 54–55.
- 48 Forget Duchamp's *Large Glass*—the glass works have none of its symbolism.
- 49 I am alluding to Craig Owens's essay, "The Allegorical Impulse: Toward a Theory of Postmodernism," *October*, Part I, Spring 1980, Part II, Summer 1980.
- 50 *The World Without Object* was the title of Malevich's manifesto published in 1927 as a Bauhausbuch. See Kasimir Malevich, *Die Gegenstandlose Welt* (Berlin: Bauhausbücher, 1927; rpt. Berlin: Kupferberg, Neue Bauhausbücher, 1980.)
- 51 G. W. Leibniz argued that if two things were indiscernible in every respect, then they are one and the same thing.

