

A Journey into

P a R D e S

פרדס

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Ulco Mes

Journey into

פרדס

(PaRDeS)

4

‘Through this project an attempt is made at providing for this special target group access of their own to the body of work of one of the greatest artists of the twentieth century’, in the words of the organizers of the exhibition *Denken, praten, doen!* *Joseph Beuys voor kinderen en jongeren* (Think, talk, act! Joseph Beuys for children and youngsters), hereafter: *Denken*, included in the accompanying catalogue.¹ After Bedburg-Hau, Bonn and Duisburg, Museum van Bommel van Dam Venlo gave scope to the exhibition from 4th September through 14th November 2004. By appealing to their curiosity and exploratory nature the curators of *Denken* wanted to involve young visitors actively in the German artist’s oeuvre. The issue is here what significance Beuys’ works can have for children and youngsters.

How did the exhibition’s organizers approach Beuys’ oeuvre initially? How are his works positioned and how conclusive is this? What is the real meaning of providing for young people ‘access of their own’ to an artist’s work? Joseph Semah in his critique of *Denken* raises similar questions. They are the rationale behind a concurrent project of his realized in Museum van Bommel van Dam Venlo: *Journey into פרדס* (PaRDeS), hereafter: *Journey*.² The exhibition comprises sculptures, installations and works on paper by Semah himself, the poem ‘Todesfuge’ by Paul Celan and five of Joseph Beuys’ works.³

My aim for this article is not too high. I propose to show how *Journey* can be understood. My interpretations by no means exclude the possibility of supplementary or even completely different views on Semah’s project. They are only reflective of meanings applied to it by me. It is my hope that my reading of *Journey* is cause for wonder about the wealth of meaning contained in Semah’s work and thinking.

I

Although rarely discussed by the artist, events from Semah’s life are always present in his writings and sculptures. For those who interpret his work the memories of those events are therefore not to be ignored. This connection provides the impetus here to a quick survey of his biography.

Joseph Semah was born in Baghdad (Iraq) in 1948 in a Jewish environment.⁴ As a result of operation Ezra and Nehemiah in 1950, compelling practically all the Babylonian Jews to leave Iraq, his life in Israel began already at the age of two. He grew up in the early years of the State of Israel. After grammar school and military service – at the time of the Six-Day war (1967) – Semah enrolled in university for the studies Philosophy and Electrotechnics. Already in those early days as politically critical student he began to express his ideas in imagery and text. Semah’s experiences in the Yom Kippur war (1973) led to the decision in the mid-1970s to leave Israel; in his words: a voluntary exile. After six years spent in London, Paris and West Berlin, where he met Joseph Beuys, he settled in Amsterdam in 1981. Here together with his partner Hedie Meyling he set up the Stichting Makkom (Makkom Foundation), which up until the end of the 1980s organized projects based on interdisciplinary art research.⁵ The interest in the Netherlands for Semah as an artist took some

time to develop; it arose predominantly in alternative circles of artists' initiatives.

II

It is not easy to fathom Joseph Semah's work. This is caused primarily by the thinking that provides its substance, a manner of reasoning that as will be shown compares to a significant degree with the method of argumentation developed by scribes in the Babylonian Talmud.⁶

Both the Talmud and the Hebrew bible belong to the most important books of Jewish tradition.⁷ The work is an anthology, with its extensive text compiled between ca. 200 and 500 C.E. The Talmud, containing various precepts involving Jewish social and religious life, is built up around the Mishnah and Gemara. The Mishnah is formed by explanations of the Torah (the five books of Moses) passed down through the ages and compiled ca. 200 C.E. The Gemara comprises all later interpretations and commentaries. These stand grouped as detached blocks of text around a fragment of the original Mishnah text.⁸

Especially after his departure from Israel Semah immersed himself in a broad range of philosophical, religious and esoteric writings. It must be emphasized here that Judeo-Christian books such as the Hebrew bible and the Talmud, texts linking him to his Jewish roots, are not employed by him to nourish a religious life.

The core issue in Semah's work and thinking is the relation between the self and the other. His biography makes it apparent how his being-different affected him personally. He was banished from his birthplace as a baby and he saw how the establishment of the State of Israel was not able to provide guarantees against anti-Jewish sentiments and misanthropy. But it was not only in the Middle East that Semah became addressed by misunderstandings and points of contention emanating from the broken bonds of Judaism, Christianity and Islam. His living as a guest in the West did not do much either to safeguard him from the conflict of cultures. These experiences are not just side issues in his research into the other. In the artistic domain this has led to profound studies devoted to artists such as Piet Mondriaan, Marcel Duchamp, El Lissitzky, Barnett Newman and Joseph Beuys.

Semah's research becomes displayed in a self-propelled artistic oeuvre of inextricably bound-up textual and pictorial expressions. These underlie surprising and sometimes daring connections between religion, philosophy, science and art, in an overall attempt to contribute to mutual understanding. Such intriguing complexity is equally reflected in the exhibition project in Museum van Bommel van Dam Venlo.

III

Journey into פרדס (PaRDeS) seems at first to be a critical comment on *Denken*. What Semah criticizes is how the exhibition's organizers developed their intentions. He has no objections to the purpose of the Beuys exhibition: actively involving youngsters in the German artist's work and

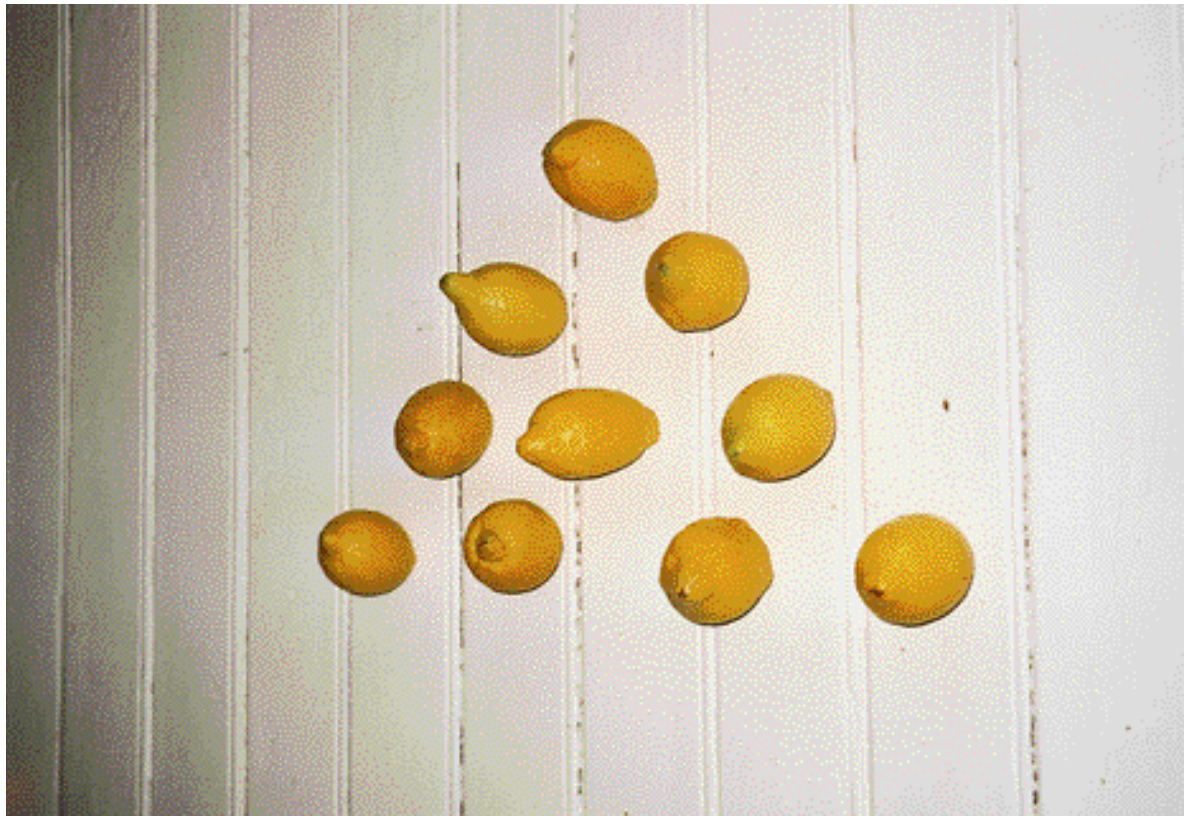
enabling them to secure an access of their own to his oeuvre. He does find that its initiators manage to meet their objective by submitting only conventional art historical interpretations. He objects to the fact that this would restrict what is known about Beuys. Furthermore, according to Semah every view proposed attests to just one perspective, typified by him as Western and Christian. Which begs the question whether the organizers of *Denken* would have been able to provide for the (young) visitors an access of their own to Beuys' works. The phrase 'of their own' is significant. After all, it implies the possibility of a freedom to have an opinion and a personal interpretation. To Semah such position leaves little or no room for development when views are missing that make it clear that Beuys' oeuvre is bound to prompt more than one interpretation. That is why he reproaches the curators of *Denken* for the lack of information, alternative opinions and non-conformist points of view, and why he feels that they are underachieving at producing their project.

Semah emphasizes that these shortcomings transcend the specific case of *Denken* and can be applied to western Beuys research in general. Similar shortcomings after all have addressed him time and again in the studies he is familiar with. But still, it would be wrong to do away with Semah's reservations about this as the emotional response from someone steeped in Jewish tradition. His criticism of research undertaken in the West is of a purely intellectual nature. He has serious objections about the shortcomings because deficiencies such as one-sidedness of approach and patchy information, whether arising from carelessness or malice, can prompt misunderstandings about Beuys, his thoughts and his work.

Semah himself has gone to great lengths to reach deeper levels of understanding the German artist. He has used a variety of pertinent Judeo-Christian sources, esoteric treatises and writings by secret societies. Starting from a meticulous reading of these texts, leading him along roads as various as those of association, comparison and kinship of sound and image, he has reached a level of understanding important to the interpretation of Beuys' oeuvre, yet pushed to the background by western thought.

Within the perspective of his research *Journey* therefore ought to be understood not so much as criticism but rather as an offer, a possible escape from the limitations of western Beuys research.

Museum van Bommel van Dam Venlo is the first museum to allow Semah the opportunity as well as the freedom to reach out to a wide audience with his views side by side and in relation to the work by Beuys. His choice for a development of *Journey* in an immediate relation to *Denken* has been deliberate. This explains why in his project he demonstrates for example that underneath the lemon, the hare, the halved cross, fat and margarine unsuspected layers of meaning are to be found; pictorial elements and motifs after all also visible in the Beuys exhibition at Venlo. It is important for us to realize however that Semah through *Journey* draws our attention to a manifold of uncovered and concealed layers of meaning in all of Beuys' thoughts and works. Even if his views are made to bear almost exclusively on *Denken* we



Joseph Semah

6

...after Etrog

And you shall take of yourselves on the first day the fruit of a goodly tree...., 1982

Ten nails, ten lemons

should therefore come to an understanding of *Journey* explicitly in a wide context.

IV

That artistic motifs can hold unsuspected layers of meaning is illustrated by Semah with the help of his '*... after Etrog And you shall take of yourselves on the first day the fruit of a goodly tree ...*' Hereafter: *after Etrog* The work dates back to 1982 and consists of ten specimens of the lemon, a fragrant fruit related to the etrog, fixed to the wall in a triangular composition.⁹

To say that *after Etrog* plays an important part in *Journey* is not saying too much. Semah has assigned a prominent place to the work in his exhibition, displayed it on the back of its invitation card, and it can be seen at the back cover of this publication.

By providing *after Etrog* with such logo status Semah expressly connects *Journey* with *Denken*. A striking feature of this exhibition happens to be an object also formed with the lemon at its centre: Beuys' *Capri-Batterie* (Capri Battery), which is a multiple from 1985 composed of the citrus fruit and a wedged-in yellow light bulb.

We have seen that *Denken* concerns the possible significance of Beuys' works to children and youngsters. The question

then is what the organizers of the exhibition wanted to teach the visitor about *Capri-Batterie*. From the catalogue it appears that this multiple only served to draw attention to Beuys' interest in the origin and flow of energy. *Capri-Batterie* is significant because the work refers to physical and chemical processes generating electricity. By pushing two different metal objects into a lemon such process commences because metals will act like positive and negative poles and the lemon juice will become a conducting fluid. It must be mentioned



Etrog

here that educational material was provided to inform visitors to the Beuys exhibition on how to discover this for themselves.

V

Whereas the curators of *Denken* grant significance to the lemon in the light of Beuys' interest in (potential sources of) energy and transformation processes, Semah in *after Etrog* points out other meanings of the citrus fruit. In Jewish tradition the etrog is primarily associated with the Feast of Tabernacles: Sukkoth. In combination with the lulav, consisting of a palm, two willow twigs and three myrtle shoots, the fruit features prominently in rituals performed at this important occasion.¹⁰ The title of the work itself is expressive of how Semah uses *after Etrog* to refer to Sukkoth. The words 'and you shall take of yourselves on the first day the fruit of a goodly tree' derive from Leviticus 23:40, the biblical passage which forms the support for the Feast of Tabernacles. The precept in so many words connects the etrog with the transcendental.

In Semah's opinion those who are familiar with the passage can interpret *after Etrog* and *Capri-Batterie* in the light of the Sukkoth. And as regards Beuys' multiple he adds to this that Italy at least in the Jewish world is known as an important supplier of the etrog and that in his youth the best specimens were imported from Capri. The association with the Feast of Tabernacles therefore not only results from the use of the lemon, but from the name of Beuys' multiple as well.¹¹

At issue now is whether Beuys had already foreseen this interpretation of *Capri-Batterie*. Was the German artist aware of this interpretation of the etrog in the light of Leviticus 23:40? Semah claims that he was. In the early 1960s the Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen in Düsseldorf acquired *Festtag* (Feast Day), an oil painting made by Marc Chagall in 1914.¹² The man portrayed in the painting is immediately identifiable as a Jew by his prayer garment: the tallith. In his protruded right hand he holds a yellow citrus fruit; in his left hand, equally visible, the lulav. Tallith, etrog and lulav, Chagall takes pains to leave no doubt that his portrayal is of a believer celebrating Sukkoth. Beuys, who taught at the art academy in Düsseldorf since 1961 and for quite some time lived and worked in that city, must have been familiar with this painting so important to the museum and the symbolism it depicts. Especially given that Beuys made the work in September 1985, that is to say: at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles.¹³

Semah is of the opinion that *Capri-Batterie* can also be read as a metaphor for the 'circumcision of the heart'. What he refers to here is the notion of chashmal occurring in Ezekiel 1:4. In this biblical passage חשמל chashmal is given to mean 'the mysterious substance or entity illuminating the heart of Ezekiel's chariot vision'.¹⁴ In the Septuagint chashmal is replaced by the Greek term *elektron*; in the Vulgatio by the Latin term *electrum*. In modern Hebrew chashmal means electricity. The conclusion drawn from this by Semah is that the meaning of chashmal is embedded in the contemporary use of the term 'electricity'. Further, Hebrew language science teaches that the word can be split into 'chash' and 'mal', in Semah's translation among other things 'feeling' and



Joseph Beuys
Capri-Batterie, 1985
Yellow light bulb and fresh lemon

'Brith Milah' (the bond with the Word).¹⁵ Chashmal can therefore be read as an energetic experience, securing and expressing the true meaning of Brith Milah. With reference to among others Deuteronomy 10:16 and 30:6, Jeremiah 4:4 and Romans 2:28-29 and 6:4-6 'circumcision' ought to be understood not as something physical, but spiritually: as a matter of the heart. Semah reads *Capri-Batterie* figuratively, making the electricity generating combination of lemon and yellow bulb stand for 'the circumcision of the heart': a spiritual process in which impurity is done away with in favor of a (new) bond with the Word (JHWH). To substantiate this he

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Marc Chagall
Festtag 1914
Oil paint on canvas
104 x 84 cm



Joseph Semah

8 *From the diary of the Architect, Milat ha-Arnav / ha-Shafan, The Word / The Circumcision of the Hare, 1982*
Watercolor washes and ink on paper
30 x 21 cm

draws our attention to Beuys' visit to Capri in September 1985. At the time of Sukkoth, therefore, a feast concluded by saying the prayer Hoshannah Rabbah, a plea for more salvation and bliss. Is it a coincidence, Semah wonders, that the by then already terminally ill German artist visited the Italian island at exactly the time of the Feast of Tabernacles?

Aside from this western art historians, too, point to the mystical meanings of *Capri-Batterie*. In a commentary on the multiple Beuys expert Joan Rothfuss, for example, reports of magical powers: 'Electricity seems to flow from the fruit, lighting up the bulb and producing a curative "charge" for Beuys' own weakened system. With its bright yellow color alluding to the sunny landscape of southern Italy, the battery suggests that a marriage of art, science, and nature can nourish and heal an ailing culture (or individual) with an almost magical energy.'¹⁶ Interpretations like these result from detailed art historical research into Beuys' evident interest in religion, theosophy and mysticism.¹⁷ Unfortunately the initiators of *Denken* remain aloof from this.

VI

Semah is right in concluding that the curators of *Denken* have not gone beyond a very limited commentary on the works by

Beuys. There are good grounds for his objection that this would make a single explanation into an acceptable proposition. Through his *Journey* he allows us to find a way of supplementing this lack of information. Semah uses this deficiency to point out to us a way of interpreting which is like exploring time and again what might be contained in a text or an image on the surface or within.

This is expressed in the title of his project: *Journey into פָּרְדֵּס* (PaRDeS). The key notion in the title for the exhibition is Hebrew פָּרְדֵּס (PaRDeS), which is etymologically related to our word paradise. This means among other things garden, orchard, idyllic spot, park and citrus plantation. Taking what was mentioned earlier a step further the title of the exhibition seems to be an allusion to *after Etrog* and even more so because the etrog in Jewish tradition is also mentioned as paradise apple.¹⁸ But there is more to add to this obvious interpretation, for Hebrew פָּרְדֵּס happens to be an acrostic regarding the interpretation of texts such as the Talmud. Here the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas in his studies of the Talmud speaks of 'the four famous levels of reading: *peshat* (apparent or obvious meaning), *remez* (meaning referred to), *darash* (the meaning to look for) and *sod* (the secret meaning), leaving the first letters together to form the word *pardes* (garden).'¹⁹

Semah by allowing the acrostic פָּרְדֵּס into the title of his exhibition appears to emphasize that we should not stop at literal and too obvious interpretations of a work of art on exhibit; there are various levels to explore for implicit and secret meanings hidden within it. In this sense his *Journey* contains a clear message.

It has been made clear earlier that when this becomes our objective *after Etrog* also appears to consist of different layers of meaning. The etrog is more than just a citrus fruit. Jewish tradition attributes several hidden meanings to the paradise apple, varying from 'the heart of man' to 'orb of the world'.²⁰ It connects the etrog in various ways with the history of the Jewish people, Adam, Jacob, and the precept written into Leviticus 23:40. What is more, we should realize that to the believer heeding that command is within the scope of a relationship with JHWH.

In addition it may be said that the composition of *after Etrog* also contains a 'concealed' reference to JHWH. Semah's work is built up in four ranks of respectively 1, 2, 3 and 4 lemons. Anyone familiar with Judeo-Christian symbolism will recognize in this triangular shape the pattern of the tetragrammaton. When the letters JHWH are positioned in a proper order the tetragrammaton becomes a word for the unutterable name of God. Semah sets great store by the history and use of this shape. What is more: he mentions the possibility that among other artists Beuys, too, used the tetragrammaton for inspiration in certain of his works.²¹

VII

The unmistakable call for an interpretation of art on more than one level makes *Journey* into an appeal to the observer for his active participation in the positioning of art.

At first sight this appeal appears to agree with the thought underscoring the Beuys exhibition. The initiators of *Denken* after all see to the significance of Beuys' works to young people by actively involving them in his art. Primarily educational materials and tasks should respond to youthful exploratory urges. Semah by comparison is interested in what thoughts result from all these activities. In all objectivity the meanings pointed out for young people should be typified chiefly as (western) explanations. This is meant to make it likely that Beuys' work has become self-contained and time related.²²

According to Semah there is more to it than that when reading art. The question what a work of art can be to young people is an issue first of all of how they see the work with their contemporary eyes. He uses *Journey* to appeal for an active way of interpreting such that art becomes studied for its meaning and significance by everyone and in any period. It is this way of directing that evolves in a direct line from Levinas' opinions on Talmud exegesis.

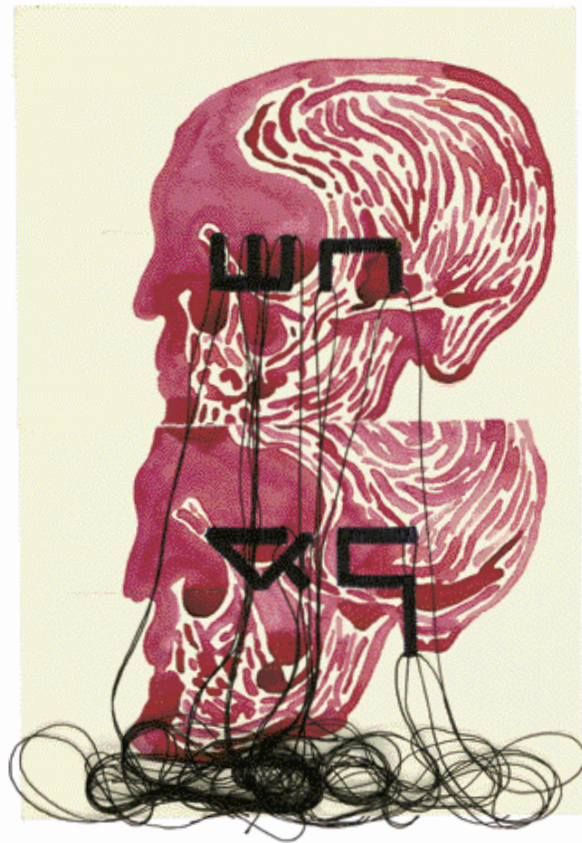
VIII

'The Torah speaks the language of the people', Rabbi Jishmael says. According to Levinas the important thought behind this line is that 'the Word of God can be inherent to all creatures' communications.'²³ The presence of the Infinite in the finite is what explains the implicit exegesis which runs parallel to reading Bible and Talmud. Implicit, because the essence providing meaning is indirectly visible in its contours in the text. It is precisely because the text exudes more than is immediately made clear that in his Talmud studies he advocates a special hermeneutics that would recommence a search for meaning time and again.²⁴

Levinas opinions that the presence of the Infinite in the text will challenge the reader in his personal inimitable uniqueness. 'Everyone has an irreplaceable part to play, every moment of receiving the message – or even the precept. Its wealth will then only come to light in the manifold of people and generations. This is the basis for the incomprehensible or absolute value of every I, all receptivity; its revelation resting on everyone at all times and recurrently as a non-transferable responsibility for life', Levinas says.²⁵

He adds to this that what each of us contributes to the disclosing of the message ends up opposite the lessons from all others and the entire past. This is what in his opinion explains the unabated referencing of the sources of centuries: 'Hence the commentaries on commentaries, the structure of the Torah of Israel itself, having found its off-set in the typography of these treatises: additions can be found on all sides.'²⁶

What is important is that Levinas extends the thought that the Word of God can be present in all human communications to include all forms of language. He writes: 'The Scripture begins with the line drawn in a particular way, and in the flow of language – everyone's language presumably – it thickens or widens to become a text.'²⁷ If language is essentially inspirational this means that every text is prepared for or is mindful of the religious essence of language, 'whether



Joseph Semah
חַשְׁמַל *ChaShMaL*, 1982
Watercolor washes, paper, thread
30 x 21 cm

sanctifying or profanating', in the words of the philosopher.²⁸ If this is true, literary texts for instance would have 'a meaning providing capacity across from their obvious significance. They require an exegesis, straight or meandering – anyway, not superficial'.²⁹

IX

Be this what it may, Semah knows of no essential difference between text and image to begin with and projects these thoughts on art.³⁰ Where Levinas for instance points out the implicit meanings of language, Semah refers to hidden meanings in expressions of art. Both of them therefore invite us to a reading at multiple levels. And both also emphasize the uniqueness of the interpretation. Levinas suggests that the reader is challenged 'in the inimitable uniqueness of his persona'; Semah underscores the uniqueness of the access to art. Such particularity of meaning providing has in both cases for result that the wealth of the message latent to language or (visual) arts only comes to light in the continuity of acknowledging and recognizing meanings. Its interpretation is a task for everyone and at all times. Furthermore, both Levinas and Semah suggest that their own explanation ought to be seen against the background of all other readings. The former speaks here of a confrontation of the individual reading with

the lessons from others through the ages. Semah argues that each of us should take historical sources, diverging opinions and (non-conformist) points of view to heart. Aside from the religious implications of Levinas' corpus of thought we may therefore conclude that his views on Talmud exegesis and the active way of interpreting Semah argues for by way of *Journey* are unmistakably akin.

X

Let us now focus in on the relation between *Journey* and Semah's comprehensive research into the relation between the self and the other. How is this relation put forward, and how does a mutual understanding benefit from this?

In *The Wandering Jew/The Wondering Christian*, a large-scale project the LAK Gallery Leiden organized around his ideas and work in 1998, Semah explicitly draws parallels between his research and tolerance. In this context he refers to the concept as 'a slowing down of the hatred of the voice of the other, against the other'.³¹ In this light it makes sense to see whether and how Semah expresses aspects of tolerance in *Journey*. But first we need to respond to another question: What is tolerance?

Hoogerwerf defines tolerance as 'the voluntary allowance for something objectionable, but against which no available means of power are employed'.³² This description as such is sufficient indication that tolerance is a complex virtue. It implies a tension between the self and the other that 'leaves room for the other though not as equal to the self', Storme says.³³

Both by overrating and underrating the self the boundaries of tolerance are crossed. The classic form of intolerance is an overrating of the self. Here a person or group acknowledges only one, absolute truth. Means of power are employed against the other – individual or group – because of resentment against his deviating view, behavior or nature. This may take on different shapes, varying from the projection of a negative image and a degrading treatment to stigmatization and demonization; from discrimination and marginalization to exclusion, banishment and annihilation. A second way in which boundaries are crossed is by underrating the self. An attitude based on a powerful relativism, allowing for no single view to be better than the other, degrading tolerance to complete indifference. As much as intolerance indifference means a repudiation of the other in his being-different.

With tolerance self-respect and respect for the other go hand in hand. Tolerance presupposes that someone holds an opinion as his own and acknowledges the other in his being-different. This also means a recognition of the other's rights, even if put to practice in a less than pleasant manner.³⁴ Walzer comes right to the point when he says: "Tolerance makes it possible to be different; being different makes tolerance necessary."³⁵

As already apparent from the above-mentioned biographical data Semah's being different has undoubtedly been lived through intensely. He has personally experienced irritation, aversion and even hostility as a result of differences of opinion among cultures and religion. Because of his identity he

has been confronted repeatedly in the past with forms of intolerance, including exclusion and banishment. This makes it understandable why he seriously objects to his portrayal as a 'Jewish' artist. First of all it is unclear what exactly is meant by that. Is it a reference to the Jewish people, Jewish religion or those who are in support of a Jewish State of their own?³⁶ In the context of tolerance it is however more important that the qualification 'Jewish' can have a stigmatizing effect. Whether that is true or not can be decided upon only by being extremely careful and by handling this on a case by case basis. Unfortunately the stigmatizing use of the term 'Jewish' has had a long tradition. Semah, too, still finds himself face to face with forms of intolerance, such as the creation of a negative image and marginalization.

Given also his own experiences Semah argues for tolerance in the relation between the self and the other. He expressly asks for mutual understanding, not only in everyday life but also at a political-ideological level. After all, it is up to us not to forget that differences of opinion between cultures and religions can also involve mutual fascination.

XI

In *Journey* Semah gives expression to his plea for tolerance in different ways. The positioning, composition and lay-out of his exhibition among other things testify to that. First of all it is remarkable that Semah casually positions his project side to side with *Denken*, deliberately choosing an open connection between his project and the Beuys exhibition. We have seen that he has his reservations about what the curators of *Denken* have done. He even asks himself whether the apparent information deficit should not be qualified under circumstances as a violation of the right to information, a right that under a legal aegis derives from the fundamental right of freedom of speech. In view of Semah's objections to the Beuys project we may qualify the creation of an open connection between *Journey* and *Denken* as an act of tolerance. Instead of turning his back on them he allows the curators to be as different as they are and he leaves the door open for debate and discussion. Moreover, we find that Semah in *Journey* has included not only his own work but that of Beuys' and Celan's as well.



Talmud Bavely
Tractate Sukkah

To that end he has arranged the available space in such a way that his own sculptures, installations and drawings are found freely grouped around Beuys' works and Celan's poem. Again he is creating space for an open dialogue. Contributions by others elsewhere in this publication not only clarify how Semah is reading certain works by Beuys but also his reservations about the ideas propelled by them. Because of these serious objections the inclusion of Beuys' works in *Journey* may also be qualified as an act of tolerance.

The connections between Semah's general research into the relation between the self and the other and *Journey* is therefore expressed among other things in the respect repeatedly shown by Semah in his project for the other in his being-different. In his heart-felt plea for tolerance he wants to contribute to more mutual understanding.

Aside from this we find that Semah's spatial design is akin to the typography of the Talmud. In the way that later commentaries in the book have been grouped around a core text as separate blocks of text he has arranged his art around *Todesfuge* by Celan and the five works by Beuys. In the same way *Journey* is seen as a note in the margins of the Beuys exhibition. This Talmud-like spatial typography is not only expressive of tolerance, it also contributes to a concrete challenge for us to search for meaning in the works put up for exhibition in *Journey* and *Denken*, both separately and in relation to one another.

XII

The connection between *Journey* and Semah's general research into the relation between the self and the other is not only expressed in his plea for tolerance and mutual understanding, but also in the implications of his hermeneutics.

Earlier we have seen that Semah's *Journey* serves as a plea for an active way of interpreting, meaning that an artistic expression should be fathomed for its meanings by each of us at all times, from various starting points and at more than one level. A text or image challenges the reader in the inimitable uniqueness of his persona as meaning provider. Every individual has an irreplaceable part to play in the revelation of the message concealed within it. Its wealth only comes to light in the continuity of readings, in acknowledging and recognizing interpretations.

In his hermeneutics the relation between the self and the other affects several levels. Among other things this is borne out by the fact that what I as meaning provider contribute to the revelation of the text is confronted with what Levinas describes as: 'the lessons from all others and the entire past'. But in his Talmud studies he adds to this: 'On yonder side of what language wants to let me know it tunes me in to the other I am addressing; it provides meaning proceeding from the countenance of the other, veiled yet unforgettable in every exposition: proceeding from the expression preceding the words my responsibility-for-the-other is involved, deeper than a few images could show, a responsibility giving rise to my responses. My being-tuned-in to the other in language is the rendition of received instructions: script is always precept and ethics', Levinas says.³⁷

Aside from the religious context of these words by Levinas the corpus of thought put forward in this text bears a striking resemblance to Semah's views. He, too, attaches an ethical responsibility for the other to the role of the self as unique provider of meaning of expressions of art. After all, the provider is meant to share his knowledge, his explanation of the text, with the other in order to facilitate the confrontation with 'lessons from others'. Right to information and freedom of speech go hand in hand here. This is illustrated further by Semah's comparison with reference to his project in Museum van Bommel van Dam Venlo of art with a heaven prompting rain to come down: 'a precipitation of words, veiling, judging our intellectual concern for the other'.³⁸ The connection between *Journey* and Semah's research into the relations between the self and the other knows of more than one perspective therefore.

Finally, after *Journey into פָּרְדֵּס* (PaRDeS) Museum van Bommel van Dam Venlo will organize a large-scale exhibition project in 2006, in which Semah reflects on how the world (of art) is interpreting the oeuvres of El Lissitzky and Barnett Newman. Its title is *Read Full Text*. A paradisiacal invitation?

Notes:

1. A. Theyhsen a.o. (ed.), *Denken, praten, doen! Joseph Beuys voor kinderen en jongeren*, Kerber Verlag, Bielefeld 2003, p. 5. The exhibition of the same name, after an idea by Michael Kröger and Annette Theyhsen, was produced and realized by the Stiftung Museum Schloss Moyland, Bedburg-Hau, the Kunstmuseum Bonn, the Stiftung Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum Duisburg and Museum van Bommel van Dam Venlo.

2. In Hebrew only consonants are used. To express this Semah has emphasized the consonants in 'PaRDeS'.

3. The photos on pages 2 and 3 give an impression of Semah's project in Museum van Bommel van Dam Venlo. This publication contains all the works presented in *Journey into פָּרְדֵּס* (PaRDeS).

4. Semah's grandfather, Chacham Sassoon Khedori, was Chief Rabbi of the Babylonian Jews in Baghdad.

5. The Hebrew word 'makkom' – from which Dutch 'Mokum' derives – means 'place'. The archive of the Stichting Makkom has been deposited with the Koninklijke Bibliotheek at The Hague.

6. In theory a distinction is made between the Babylonian Talmud (Talmud Bavli) and the Jerusalem Talmud (Talmud Jerushalmi). (See a.o. www.izynews.com/nl_e/talmoed). Where in this publication the Talmud is mentioned, what is meant is the Babylonian Talmud.

7. The Hebrew bible is called the Tenach. The word is formed from the first letters of Torah (the five books of Moses), newie'em (Prophets) and ketoewiem (Scriptures). The Tenach contains the same 24 books as the Old Testament of the Protestant Christian churches, only in a different order. See: www.jhm.nl/woordenlijst.

8. B. Baanders, 'Dialoog met de dialoog. Over de hermeneutiek van Levinas' Talmoedinterpretatie', in: H.J. Heering a.o. (ed.), *Vier joodse denkers in de twintigste eeuw: Rosenzweig, Benjamin, Levinas, Fackenheim*, Kok Agora, Kampen, 1987, p. 54.

9. The etrog probably originates in India and was brought to the Mediterranean countries via Media or Persia. The Jews may have brought the citrus fruit with them to Palestine after the Babylonian

exile. See: www.jewishencyclopedia.com.

10. For Sukkoth, see a.o. www.jhm.nl/woordenlijst and www.jewishencyclopedia.com.

11. The organizers of *Denken* stop at an explanation of the title *Capri-Batterie*. The art historian Joan Rothfuss connects the name of the multiple to its place of construction. See www.walkerart.org/beuys.

12. A photograph of the work can be found in a.o. W. Haftmann, *Marc Chagall*, DuMont Schaubert, Cologne, p. 20 (Ill. 23). Nota bene: in art-historical literature the fruit rendered in the painting is usually incorrectly(!) given the name lemon or lime.

13. '... in September 1985 Beuys visited his beloved Capri for the last time. He was staying at Villa Quattro Venti as my guest. At the time he was already very sick and rarely left the house (...). One day I found him extremely excited with a small object in his hand that he had invented the day before: a fresh lemon directly connected to a yellow light bulb (...). At the last moment, with his usual irony, he dictated a sentence to me to add to the title of the piece: *Nach tausend Stunden Batterie auswechseln* (after 1000 hours change battery).' See: L. Amelio, *Joseph Beuys – Ideas and Actions*, Hirschi & Adler Modern, New York, 1988, p. 106. It is important to note that the positiveness of Semah's conclusions is to be considered within the scope of his entire Beuys research.

14. 'The Talmud treats the word as a notarikon (a word that can be broken into multiple words), the division of which reveals two words, 'words' and 'quiet'. Thus the heart of divinity is a matrix of silence and speech from which creation emanates (Chag. 14b)'. See: Encyclopedia Mythica Online, www.pantheon.org/articles/c/chashmal.html.

15. Hebrew Brith Milah is usually translated as circumcision. In Dutch circumcision is 'besnijdenis': the religious ritual of surgically removing the foreskin. Hebrew Brith Milah has a wider, diverging meaning.

16. See: www.walkerart.org/beuys.

17. For a first acquaintance, see a.o.: *Kreuz + Zeichen, Religiöse Grundlagen im Werk von Joseph Beuys*, Suermondt-Ludwig-Museum, Aachen, 1985; Friedhelm Mennekes, *Christus Denken, Thinking Christ*, Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, Stuttgart, 1996 and W. Zumdick, *Über das Denken bei Joseph Beuys und Rudolf Steiner*, Wiese Verlag, Basel, 1995.

18. See a.o.: www.jewishencyclopedia.com.

19. E. Levinas, 'Over het joodse lezen van de Schriften', in: E. Levinas, *Aan gene zijde van het vers: Talmoedische studies en essays*, Gooi & Sticht, Hilversum, 1989, p. 131.

20. See a.o. the Jewish Heritage Online Magazine: www.jhom.com.

21. Information about the tetragrammaton can be found in Charles Ponce, *Kabbalah: achtergrond en essentie*, Ankh Hermes, Deventer, 1976, pp. 154-156. Texts from Pico della Mirandola testify to an extension of the pattern of the tetragrammaton in the Renaissance. By addition of the Hebrew letter 'Shin' the name JHShWH (Jehoshua, Jesus) is positioned beneath that of JHWH (Jehovah, God).

22. In traditional art historical research it is customary to examine as accurately as possible what the meaning could have been of a certain image or motif at the time of its coming into being. Such research, aimed at the genesis of a work, treats the oeuvre of an artist as if fixed within itself and its time.

23. Levinas, *op. cit.* (see note 16), p. 7.

24. *Ibid.*, p. 7.

25. *Ibid.*, p. 10. The Hebraist Bas Baanders writes that text according to Levinas primarily wants to be read: 'The first purpose of a Talmudic text is *not* mediation of historical data (...); of primary importance is what the text wants to convey (...). It also wants to be read and realized

in the future'. See: B. Baanders, *op. cit.* (see note 6), pp. 56-57.

26. Levinas, *op. cit.* (see note 16), p. 11.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

28. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

29. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

30. Semah's reservation concerning the essential difference between image and text becomes apparent a.o. in the question: 'Where lies the breaking point between the written text and the image drawn and what will then the touchstone be?' See: M. van Koppel, Hedy Meyling, J. Semah, *A Priori Tekenen*, Stichting Makkom, Amsterdam, 1987, p. 7.

31. J. Semah, F. Villanueva (ed.), *The Wandering Jew/The Wandering Christian*, LAK Galerie, Rijksuniversiteit Leiden, 1998.

32. A. Hoogerwerf, *Wij en zij: Intolerantie en verdraagzaamheid in 21 eeuwen*, Damon, Budel, 2002, p. 26.

33. M.A. Storme, 'Tolerantie' (lecture given at the Davidsfonds congress on 20th April 2002 at Leuven), see: www.storme.be/tolerantie.pdf.

Storme: 'This means first of all considering our own least in some way or another to be "better" than the other – "better" not necessarily in an absolute sense (...) but in a relative sense, that is to say: better for me but not necessarily also for everyone, or better here but not also elsewhere in the world, or again: better today but not also therefore in another age, etc.'

34. With regular practice in mind Hoogerwerf's argument is that in a democracy based on legal principles anything is impermissible which is contrary to the democratic legal order, the law and human rights, such as the right to life, physical integrity, privacy, freedom of religion, personal philosophy and freedom of speech and the principle of equality before the law.

35. M. Walzer, *Tolerantie*, Ten Have, Baarn, 1998, p. 8. He warns that a defence of tolerance should not have to be a defence of being different.

36. For the concept 'Jewish' see a.o. S.Ph. de Vries, *Joodse riten en symbolen*, De Arbeiderspers, Amsterdam, 1968, pp. 181-182.

37. Levinas, *op. cit.* (see note 16), p. 9.

38. Fax from J. Semah to U. Mes, 17th November 2004.

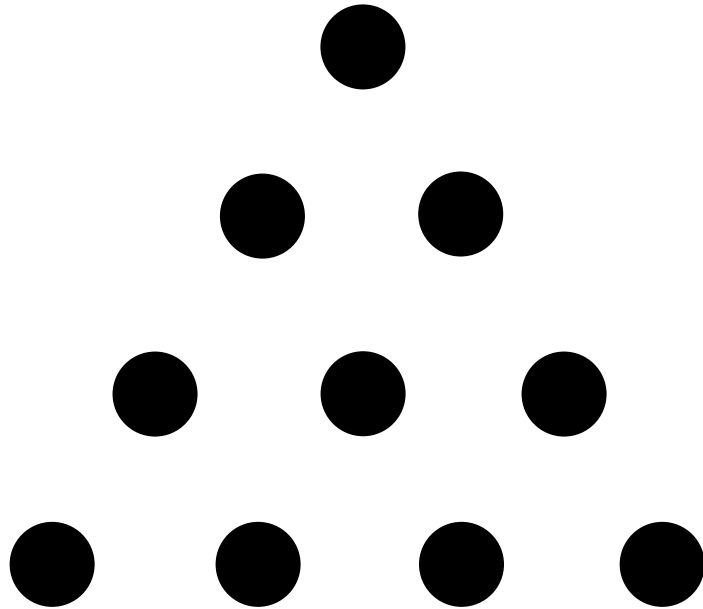
A Journey into

P
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Joseph Semah

Pythagoras (6th century BCE)
Tetractys

Pythagorean oath: "By him [Pythagoras] that gave our family the Tetractys, which contains the Fount and Root of everflowing Nature". Sextus Empiricus, *Adversus Math.* VII, circa 200 C.E.



13



Sefer Yetzirah, the Book of Formation,
Babylonia, 6th century C.E.

Please note: At the centre of this diagram one reads the 'Ha-Shem Ha-Meforash' enclosed within a triangle and marked at the corners by the three mother letters, those of א (air), ב (water) and ש (fire).

יהוה
Tetragrammaton



השם המפרש שם הוי"ה שם המיוחד

Ha-Shem Ha-Meforash, Shem Havayah,
Shem Ha-Meyouchad.

Ha-Shem means The Name. This is used in place of the not to be pronounced name of God יהוה.



A Jewish gravestone in Szydlowiec, Poland. The hands indicate that the deceased was a Kohen.

Please note: The hands held in benediction are the symbol of the Kohen members of the priestly family of the tribe of Levi. The space created between the thumbs and the index fingers signifies the "Ha-Shem Ha-Meforash": a triangle, or a heart.

14 **אֲדֹנָי** Adonai: this word is originally an appellation of God. The word became a definite title, and when the Tetragram (יהוה) became too holy for utterance Adonai was substituted for it, so that, as a rule, the name written יהוה receives the points of Adonai and is read Adonai,

except in cases where Adonai precedes or succeeds it in the text, when it is read Elohim אֱלֹהִים. The vowel signs given to יהוה the Tetragrammaton in the written text therefore indicate this pronunciation: Adonai, while the form Jehovah, introduced by a Christian writer in about 1520, rests on a misunderstanding. The translation of יהוה by the word Lord in the King James's and in other versions is due to the traditional reading of the יהוה Tetragrammaton as אֲדֹנָי Adonai, and this can be traced to the oldest translation of the Bible, the Septuagint. (Jewish Encyclopedia)

יהוה

The Tetragrammaton

Etymology: Middle English, from Greek, from neuter of tetragrammatos having four letters, from tetra (four) gramma (letter).

The four Hebrew letters יהוה usually transliterated YHWH or JHVH that form a biblical proper name of God. (The Webster's Dictionary)

Giovanni Pico della Mirandola (1463-1494)

Conclusio xiv: Per litteram (ש) id est scin quae mediat in nomine Iesu significatur nobis cabalistiche quod tum perfecte quieuit tanquam in sua perfectione mundus cum Iod coniunctus est cum Vau, quod factum est in Christo qui fuit uerus dei filius et homo.

Conclusio xv: Per nomen Iod he uau he, quod est nomen ineffabile, quod dicunt Cabalists futurum esse nomen Messiae, euidenter cognoscitur futurum eum Deum Dei filium per spiritum sanctum hominem factum, et post eum ad perfectionem humani generis super homines parclutum descensurum. (Pico della Mirandola, secundum opinionem propriam)



Cover of a Haggadah, Germany 1740

Hands performing the Kohen (priestly) blessing "...May HaShem bless you and protect you. May HaShem shine his face upon you and be gracious unto you. May HaShem lift up His face to you and may He grant you peace." Numbers 6:22-26.

The 'Nomen Iesu' in the fourteenth thesis can only be ישו (YSW, Yesu), because it is the only form of the name of Jesus in which *shin* is the middle letter. Nomen Iesu is thus quite different from nomen messiae, which is the ineffable Tetragrammaton, YHWH.

Seeing that Johannes Reuchlin read Pico's thesis, we ought to reckon with the possibility that Pico's fourteenth and fifteenth theses inspired Reuchlin's pentagram יהשוה (YHSWH), which is the Tetragrammaton with the letter *shin* inserted in the middle.

(Chaim Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, 1989, p. 218.

See also: Chaim Wirszubski, *A Christian Kabbalist Reads the Law*, 1977)



Design used by Reuchlin's printer, combining the Pentagrammaton יהשוה with his initials.

Johannes Reuchlin (1455-1522)

"When the Tetragrammaton shall become audible, that is effable. (...) it will be called by the consonant which is called shin, so that it might become YHSVH, which will be above you, your head and your master."

Johannes Reuchlin, *De Verbo Mirifico* (On the Wonder-Working Word), book 3, 1494.

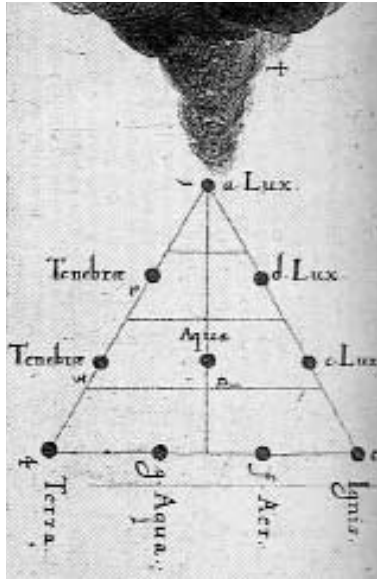


יהשוה YHSWH Pentagrammaton

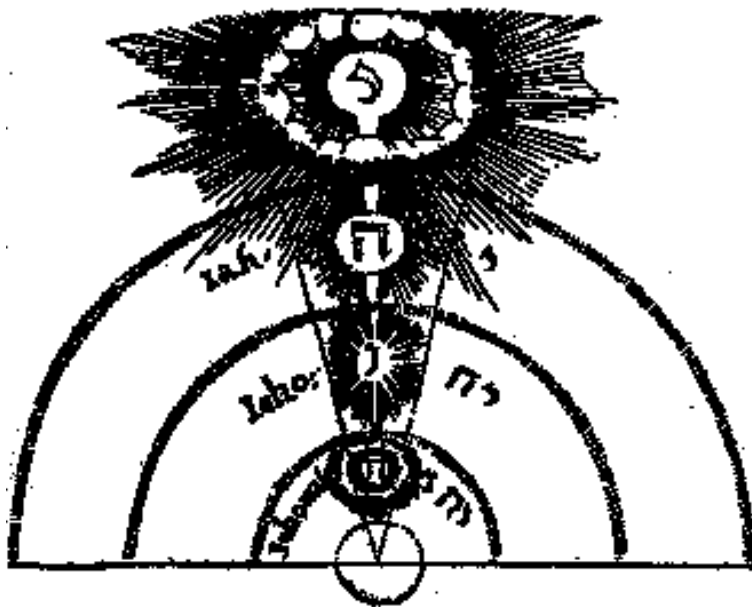


St. Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556)
The vision of Ignatius on the road to Rome in 1537.

Please note: The disc-shaped halo and the circle of light have been transformed into a tetragrammaton in association with the Godhead.



Robert Fludd (1574-1637)
 "Progress from oneness to the number four
 and the ten emerges, the mother of all
 things."
Philosophia Sacra, Frankfurt 1626



Robert Fludd
*Tomi Secundi Tractatus Secundus: De Praeternaturali
 Utriusque Mundi Historia*, Frankfurt, 1621

The Tetragrammaton in the Macrocosm.

Please note: the letter " (yod) is designed with dots and placed above the clouds. The four letters יהוה, the tetragrammaton so to speak, is the higher knowledge therefore, above the manifested universe. Psalms 83:18, יהוה is described as 'Most High over the earth', and Isaiah 14:14 states the position of יהוה as follows: 'I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will make myself like the Most High'.



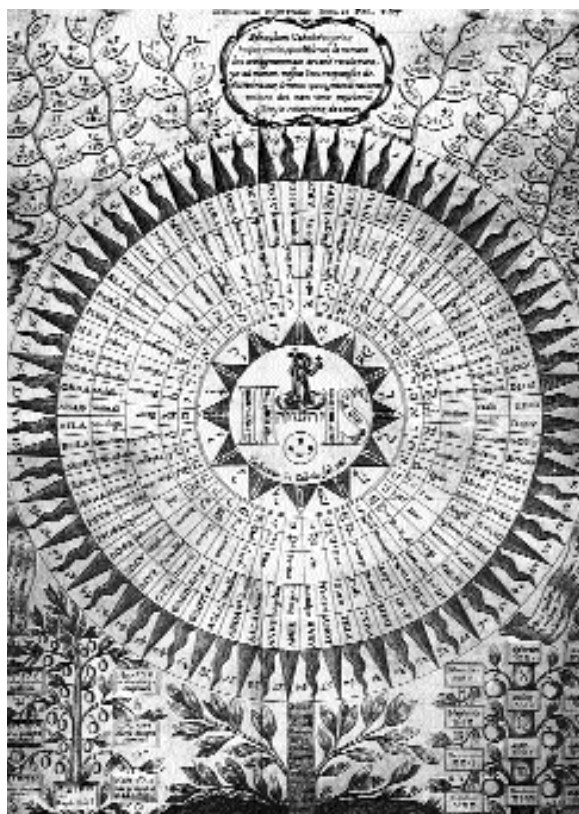
Jakob Böhme (1575-1624)
 The Tetragrammaton in the human heart,
 frontispiece.
 IESUS IMMANUEL CHRISTUS
 Jakob Böhme, *Libri Apologetici, Schutz-Schriften
 wieder Balthasar Tilken*, published in 1764.

Please note: This image has been conceived by an artist some 140 years after the death of J. Böhme.

"The father baptizes with fire, the son with light". Jakob Böhme, *Theosophical works*, 1621-3.

"For we men have one book in common which points to God. Each has it within

himself, which is the priceless Name of God. Its letters are the flames of His love, which He out of His heart in the priceless Name of Jesus has revealed in us. Read these letters in your hearts and spirits and you have books enough. All the writings of the children of God direct you unto that one book, for therein lie all the treasures of wisdom. This book is Christ in you". Jakob Böhme, *Libri Apologetici*, 1621-24.

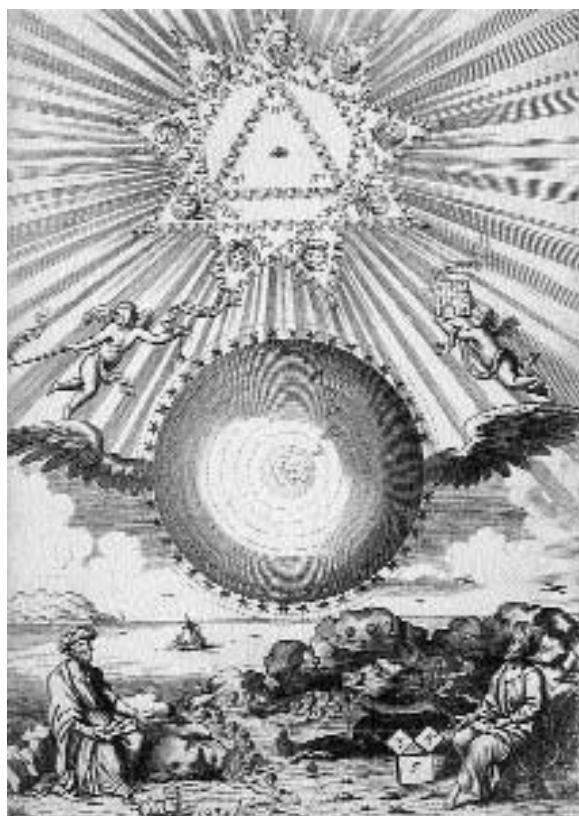


Father Athanasius Kircher (1602-1680)
The 72 names of God, Athanasius Kircher,
Oedipus Aegyptiacus Roma, 1653.

Please note: in the center of the diagram
one reads יהוה (pentagrammaton).

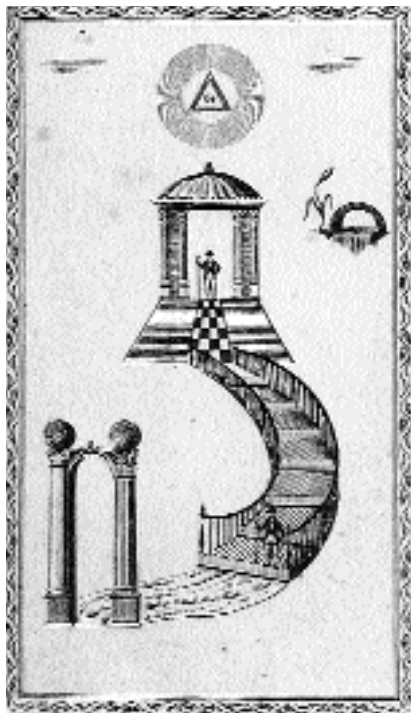


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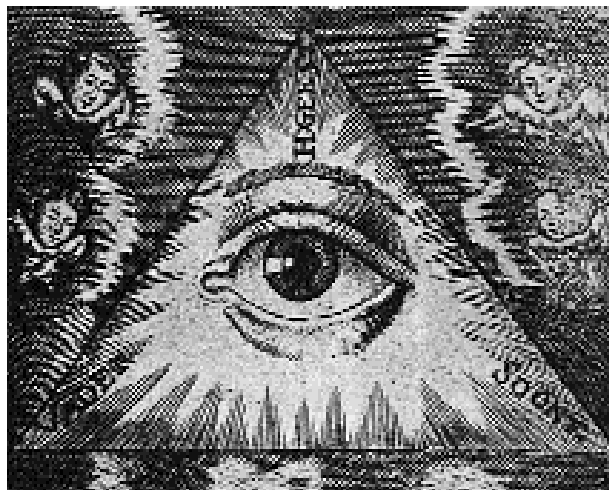


Father Athanasius Kircher
Frontispiece to *Arithmologia*, Roma 1665

The Tetragrammaton depicted as an eye
within a triangle of flames, marked by the
Hebrew letters יה (Yod Heh).



F. Curtis, engraved tracing board,
(Freemason, second degree), 1801



The All-Seeing Eye, etching 19th century from:
C. W. Monnich and Michel van der Plas,
*Het woord in beeld, Vijf eeuwen bijbel in het
dagelijks leven*, Baarn 1977.



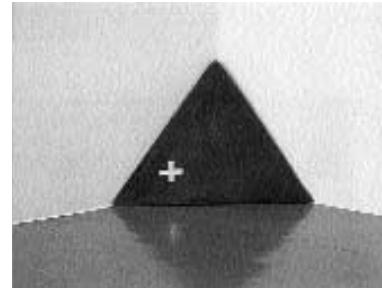
Marcel Duchamp (1887-1968)
Fountain 1917 (first version, lost)
Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz
From *The Blind Man*, No. 2 (May 1917)



Fountain, 1964 (fourth version).
Porcelain, Height 60 cm.
Re-fabricated by Galleria Schwarz,
Milan, supervised and signed by
Duchamp.



Piero Manzoni (1933-1963)
Merda d'artista, 1961



Joseph Beuys (1921-1986)
Rostecke, Iron Corner, 1963
Iron, ferric oxide, lacquered
50 x 50 x 50 cm



Niele Toroni

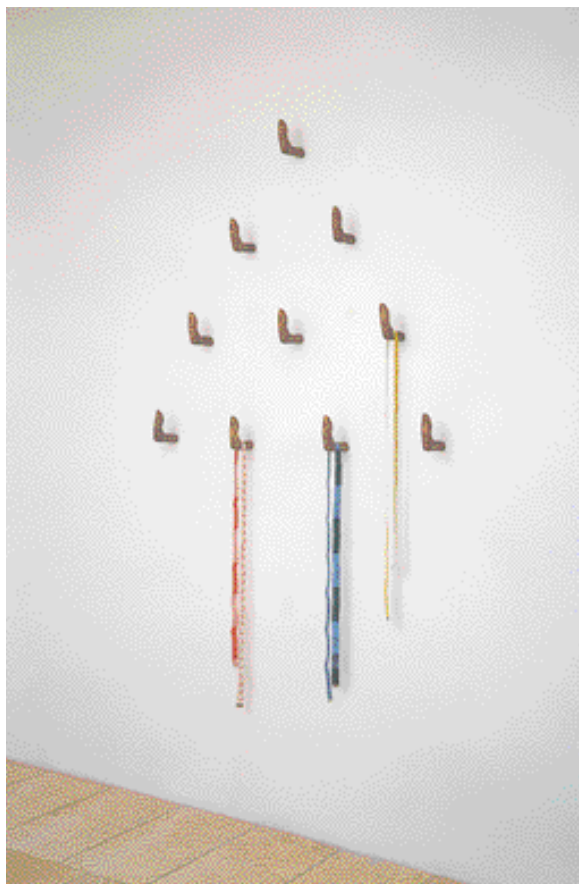
By invitation of Rudi Fuchs the director, the artist Niele Toroni painted, in the year 1994, this image with red paint on the wall of the Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam 1994-(2004).



יהודה Pentagrammaton



Roland Van den Berghe
L'ABBRACCIO (10/248), 2004
Edition Libreria Bocca, Milan, Italy
Closed envelope 32 x 22 x 2 cm stamped with red ink
Collection: Eldert Willems, de Koog, Texel

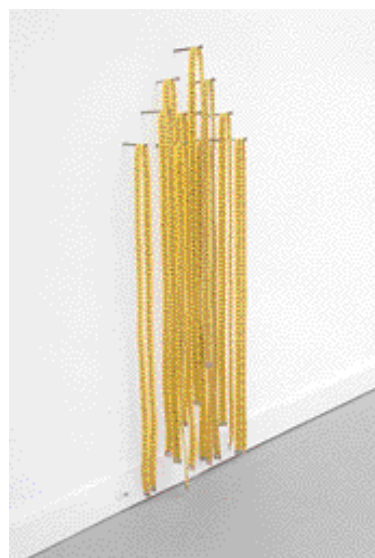


Joseph Semah
ChaShMaL
The birth of perspective
(*Between Relic and Icon*), 1984
Ten animal feet cast in bronze, three
tailor's tapes (red, yellow and blue)
175 x 100 x 14 cm

20



Joseph Semah
A perfect corner, 1979
A certain amount of dice placed in a
corner



Joseph Semah
*Here again one tries to preserve some
ontological autonomy of the Other*, 1979
Ten nails, ten yellow tailor's tape



Joseph Semah, *Shem Ha-Meforash*, (The female organ of reproduction), 1979
Blue and black ink on paper, 30 x 21 cm

Arie Hartog

The journey from Eurasia to Pardes

Some comments on Joseph Semah and Joseph Beuys

22

On several occasions in his work Joseph Semah refers to the oeuvre by the German artist Joseph Beuys (1921-1986). In his performance and installation *Wie man einem toten deutschen Künstler das Hasenjagen erklärt* (*How to explain hare hunting to a dead German artist*) Semah mirrors in very direct terms Beuys' famous action *Wie man einem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt* (*How to explain pictures to a dead hare*) from 1965. According to the German artist the hare is among other things a fertility symbol, but equally an animal that is permanently on the run.¹ Semah has pointed out that the animal can also refer to the 'Jew'.² Symbols are ambiguous. That is their strength. Semah's comments on Beuys show that the content of signs may shift, disappear and may be rediscovered.

I

In art historical research into Joseph Beuys' work the mix of layers of meaning is frequently pointed out that plays a part in his personal iconology. But the problem here is that this extremely personal approach makes every sign or object in his work into a possible content carrier, and the only one who could be sure about the references would be the artist. With his death in 1986 Beuys' works lost their main exegete and also a not unimportant part of their magic. In his work everything can be symbolic, but equally, conversely, undefined, deprived of content and empty. Beuys' works of art do not derive their deeper meaning from their symbolic nature, but from an intuitive understanding of those symbols and their complexity on the part of his generation. Even if the meaning was incomprehensible, it was understood that these works had meaning. Atmosphere and mood are therefore essential elements of Beuys' art.

Beuys' art has a clearly transcendental pretention. Even the rubbish that he used assumed a higher, even 'holy' significance, which is first and foremost a pattern originating from religions, since here, too, spectators are expected to be susceptible. It is questionable whether an explanation of single motives can re-open this work, but the cultural context in which they appeared may hold a key.

Joseph Semah suggests an approach to Beuys' work from a Jewish perspective. This means not a strictly orthodox perspective, but one prompted by the knowledge that it was and is an essential yet hardly appreciated part of Western-European culture. In his works Joseph Semah reads and interprets Beuys. As a result of this approach the German artist's work has regained some of its magic, perhaps (probably) not in accordance with the intentions of the artist, but still while retaining cultural significance.

II

The dead hare played an important role in a number of Joseph Beuys' performances in the early 1960s. In his *Siberian Symphony, I. Satz* (1963) a dead animal was suspended from a blackboard next to a grand piano. At the end of the play the heart of the animal was removed.³ In the aforementioned *Wie man einem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt* (*How to explain pictures to a*

dead hare) the artist with honey spread over his head was seen mumbling to the dead animal. Here the hare had become man's symbolic counterpart: Beuys had no wish to explain his paintings to people; he refused to satisfy the desire for rational explanations of his definitely non-rational art. He spoke to the hare to illustrate the impossibility of communicating about art.⁴

In two versions of the *Siberian Symphony* (1966) the paws and spinal column of a dead hare were extended by sticks. The action started off by mounting on a blackboard a halved cross with the text 'DIVISION THE CROSS'. Beuys picked up the animal and walked through the room while producing sniffing movements with it. He then set the animal down on the floor, erased the text from the board and wrote 'EURASIA' on it. The action was terminated by having the hare rest on stilts against the blackboard. This became the object treated with felt and grease as displayed at several exhibitions from then on.⁵

In the latter performance the significance of the hare according to Beuys was one of a swift agile animal, capable of bridging all obstacles and differences. The artist's interpretation of this was one leading to his own new, extended art concept capable of swiftly crossing all known borders and boundaries. In interviews Beuys pointed at possible substantive connotations of the used signs, at the same time implying that it would be impossible to become aware of this in one dimension. In his work the hare is not an exclusive fertility sign, but a symbol having the layer of fertility among many other layers of meaning. In contemporary semiotics the connection between sign and substance is described in two different ways. Several two-piece models prevail, where on the one hand stands a sign and on the other a meaning (hare = fertile). These views dominate everyday interpreting. Much more usable is the theory stemming from Charles Sanders Peirce that describes the interplay between sign, substance and interpretation, giving rise to a cumulative definition of an object.⁶ Such definition will always remain bound up with the object and is corrected by it: it is therefore not interpretation for the sake of interpretation, but a search for answers by involving works of art. The participation of the observer who is able but especially wants to interpret is essential.

III

In mediæval Europe the hare stood as a symbol for homosexuals and Jews.⁷ In Bugs Bunny, the most famous hare from recent memory, both meanings have been combined. He is the hunted, the little one, the vulnerable. But he is just as quick and smart. Even so, such interpretation will reduce the symbol again to a simple sign and it would not be right to want to interpret the hare within Beuys' work only in this respect.

The hare emerges in different ways in specifically Jewish iconography and this provides a clue to a subversive symbolic mechanism. In illustrations to the Hagadah the hare hunt relates to YaKNeHaZ, a famous Talmudic contraction that lays down the order for certain religious procedures (yayin, kiddush, ner, havdalah and zeman) when Passover and



Joseph Beuys
Eurasia Siberian Symphony
1963, 1966

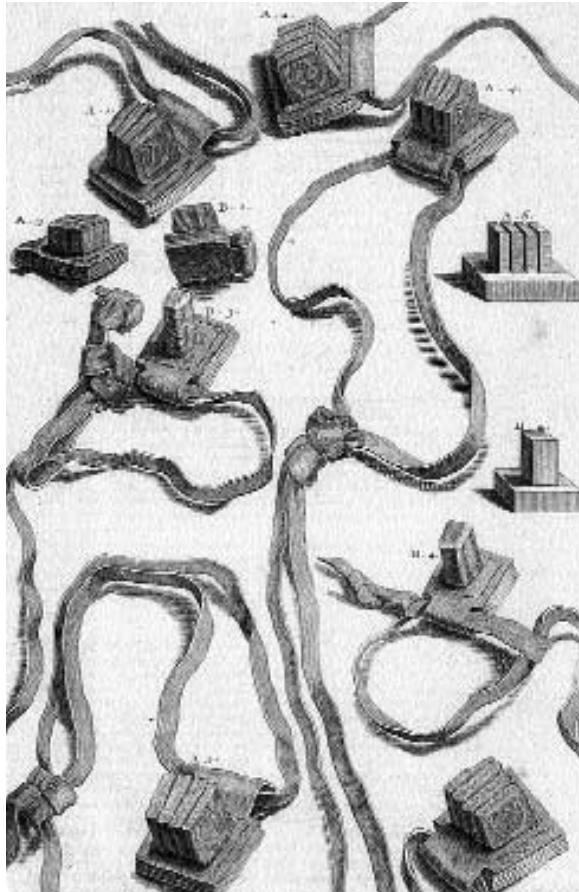


Joseph Beuys
Eurasia, 34th section of the Siberian Symphony, 1966

Sabbath are celebrated on the same day. In German-speaking countries this acrostic sounded like 'Jag den Hasen' and its illustration is alleged to have been a visual gag for German-speaking Jews.⁸ But hare hunting can hardly be funny since the hare can also symbolize the Jew and Jewish tradition mostly disapproves of hunting. In a Christian setting an illustration of a hare hunt would therefore assume a subversive significance to Jews because the hunted has become the subject.⁹ The hare hunt is representative of the status of the people of Israel.

In Jewish mediæval manuscripts the hare also features within the context of the story of Jacob and Esau. Jacob through shrewd machinations acquires his brother Esau's birth right and his father's blessing. Jacob is forced then to flee for fear of his brother's revenge and this flight is often considered a prefiguration of the exile of the people of Israel. The brothers stand for the fathers of two peoples: Jacob for Israel, Esau for Edom. To mediæval Jewry Edom functions as a precursor for Christianity.

Even so, in Christian Europe this biblical story is interpreted differently. Christian doctrine has made Jacob into a prefiguration of its own religion. The biblical story and its interpretation are therefore of political significance to Jewry living in a Christian realm. In Jewish illustrations to this story the hare, a non-kosher animal, emerges as Esau's take from the hunt, and this while in Christian iconography – for that is where he represents Jewry – there is always a kosher



Tefilin (prayer box), Etching, 17th century, 30 x 21 cm

animal to accompany him. In Jewish iconography it is implied that Esau is hunting hares. This only makes sense if he is not a Jew. It also emphasizes the hare's function as a symbol for Jewry.¹⁰

If it is true that the hare can signify Israel at different levels this would also be of consequence to the cumulative interpretation of how a German artist Joseph Beuys used a dead hare in the wake of the mass murder of European Jews. Beuys used different living animals for his performances (coyote; horse), but the hares are dead. When Joseph Semah in his performance explains the hare hunt to the dead German artist, he points out that traces of Jewry and its annihilation may also be recovered in works by this artist who consistently refused to give evidence of the broader structures sustaining his work. Semah is aware of the canonical interpretations of Beuys' work, but he points out those layers the majority of the audience cannot and often does not want to see.

The hare in Beuys' Eurasia complex can arguably have two layers of meaning. The first is one of the human spirit that transcends all borders and boundaries. The second is of a historical nature. Beuys thought in categories such as East and West; he spoke about 'Ostmenschen' and 'Westmenschen'. To him the hare stood for what could bridge all known differences. He used the animal as a metaphor for his wider

concept of art. But there existed a group of people who in the course of history had always managed to jump across East and West borders: the Jews. Beuys was aware of these Jew and border associations: he himself for example used the parable of the Wandering Jew to clarify the free-roaming intellectual aspect of his artishood. Anyone reading the hare in the Eurasia complex as symbolic for Jewry would interpret the death of the animal as referring to the mass murder of Jews, and the halved cross perhaps even to the prayer box.

This purports to be not another new, elegant interpretation of Beuys' works. Without giving it a second thought the artist made use of an anti-Semitic stereotype such as the Wandering Jew. This leaves little doubt that Jewry to him existed as an obvious part of his life, regardless of further connotations.

IV

To the generation of Beuys Jewry had been part of the culture of their early years. Any knowledge was based on cursory contacts and mostly prejudicial. Anyone who might look for traces of this in Beuys' life, work and works would find a number of remarkable elements.¹¹ The German artist regularly gave voice to the anti-rational and anti-materialistic aspects of this art concept and combined these for his criticism of capitalism, but also of liberalism and communism, or psychoanalysis. Rational and materialistic thought to him constituted the root of all evil and he suggested an alternative in a spiritual, natural way of thinking.¹² On reading these thoughts expressed by Beuys anyone with some knowledge of German cultural history would recognize a (national) tradition to which an extra element had been added already often enough prior to 1945, namely that the root of all evil was to be found in Jewry. After 1945 Beuys' 'romantic' realm of thought may have seemed attractive for its continuation of old patterns in an adapted form. The loss of admiration for Beuys in recent years could therefore result from the vanishing from the earth of the bearers of these patterns.

Both the symbol of the hare within his art and the rational world view Beuys made a stand against in his works may therefore be associated with Jewry. This double and paradoxical identification terminates simple explanations and augments the spectators' responsibility. Instead of perhaps wallowing in the thought that society must be organic and spiritual simultaneously, at issue would be what is really comprised in a so-called organically structured society. And then also what crimes were committed under the guise of such a society. Beuys' work appears to be of relevant substance, less to be found in its referential qualities than in the overlap of layers of meaning capable of leading to a cumulative interpretation.

V

When Joseph Semah explains 'hare hunting' to the dead German artist, he alludes to the structural ambivalence in his work. Beuys' oeuvre is not to be collected in simple categories, but this does not imply a lack of meaning. Beuys



Joseph Semah, *Techelet* (Bands of many colors) *Blue Band*, 1979, 104 metres of colored bands, Iron, 50 x 100 x 120 cm

defined his art concept antithetically, opposite the dominant flows of modern art history. He opposed dominant rationality and confronted this with mysticism with its roots in the German tradition of irrationalism. And while Beuys mourned the loss of profound human qualities in the process of modernization, Semah points out that there were victims as well.¹³

Where are the Jews? is the embarrassing question Semah puts to his German colleague and exegetes and their works. He uncovers layers in Beuys' work also comprehensible with respect to the Jewish element in history and how such approach would mean a subversive reversal of contemporary readings. Anyone who would dare pursue this thought further might achieve remarkable results. In European history Jewry had become a group of people clearly distinguishing itself from the majority by their rituals. When modern (non-religious) notions of nation and state began to emerge this group of people officially acquired rights, but they were also expected to renounce their identity in favor of their new status. Progress also meant uniformity and assimilation meant recognition of mainstream society's superiority. Whereas Beuys took a stand against this uniformity proceeding from an irrational 'German' tradition, Semah raises a protest from a different perspective, questioning this so-called irrationality as well.

Beuys' Eurasia concept proves to be a fantasy lodged deep

within German cultural history. The concepts of 'Ostmenschen' and 'Westmenschen' as revealed in his descriptions of his ideal continent can be traced back immediately to Rudolf Steiner, with the former holding an intuitive and the latter an intellectual principle. In a mystical sense Eurasia becomes the quest for a future unification of both principles, transcending the oppositions that Beuys saw in the world and therefore possessed paradisiacal connotations.

Joseph Semah's response to that is PaRDeS. The word 'paradise' presumably derives from this, but in Jewish tradition it is also an acronym of the four most important interpretation methods of the Scriptures: Peshat, Remez, Derash, Sod; meaning: literally, by reference, preaching and esoteric. Semah's comments on Beuys and the cumulative interpretation they set forth are stages in a never-ending journey from Eurasia to PaRDeS.



Joseph Beuys
Vakuum-Masse, 1970
 Photo, linen cloth
 edition: 27/100
 125 x 175 cm
 Collection Becht, Naarden

Joseph Semah
Techelet (Bands of many colors)
Blue Band, 1979
 Iron, 104 metres of colored bands
 50 x 100 x 120 cm

Joseph Semah
ShaMaleM ChaDaShIM (New Sky)
or a natural history of Zero, 1979
 Blackboard, a horse tail
 138 x 55 x 30 cm

26

Notes:

1. For a summary, see: 'Bettina Paust: Dieser Hase ist sicherlich ein Ergebnis einer lebenslangen Arbeit. Das Wirken der Tiere im Werk von Joseph Beuys', in: Wendelin Renn (Ed.): *Joseph Beuys. Pflanze, Tier und Mensch* Cologne 2000, pp. 73-83.
2. Compare: Joseph Semah, Felix Villanueva: *The Wandering Jew/The Wandering Christian*, Leiden 1998.
3. Uwe M. Schneede: *Joseph Beuys. Die Aktionen. Kommentiertes Werkverzeichnis*, Stuttgart 1994, pp. 20-26.
4. *Idem*, pp. 102-107.
5. *Idem*, pp. 126-132.
6. Compare: James Hoopes (Ed.): *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic by Charles Sanders Peirce*, Chapel Hill 1991.
7. For the hare as a symbol of homosexuality, compare: John Boswell, *Christianity, Social Tolerance and Homosexuality. Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, Chicago 1980.
8. David Heinrich Müller, Julius von Schlosser: *Die Hagadah von Sarajevo. Eine spanisch-jüdische Bilderhandschrift des Mittelalters*, Wien 1898, p. 237.
9. For the meaning of animal symbolism in Jewish art in the Middle Ages, compare: Marc Michael Epstein: *Dreams of Subversion in Medieval Jewish Art and Literature*, Pennsylvania 1997.
10. The personification of Jewry in an unclean animal seems problematic, but what is involved here is a reversal. The hare was symbolic of Jews, and mediæval Jews appropriated this element and applied it for their own purposes.
11. This theme is the subject of an exhibition project initiated by Joseph Semah and foreseen to take place in the Netherlands and

Germany. See for a number of possible keywords the text by Paul Groot elsewhere in this publication.

12. For an exegesis, compare: Martin Müller: *Wie man dem toten Hasen die Bilder erklärt. Schamanismus und Erkenntnis im Werk von Joseph Beuys*, Alfter 1993.

13. It is remarkable that after 1945 to many Germans the cause of their calamitous past was to be found in a modernization pushed to extremes. This phenomenon may also serve to explain the high esteem Joseph Beuys was held in.

A Journey into

P

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Joseph Beuys
*Wie man dem toten Hasen die
Bilder erklärt (How to explain
pictures to a dead hare)*
Action at the Galerie
Schmela, 26 November
1965, Düsseldorf

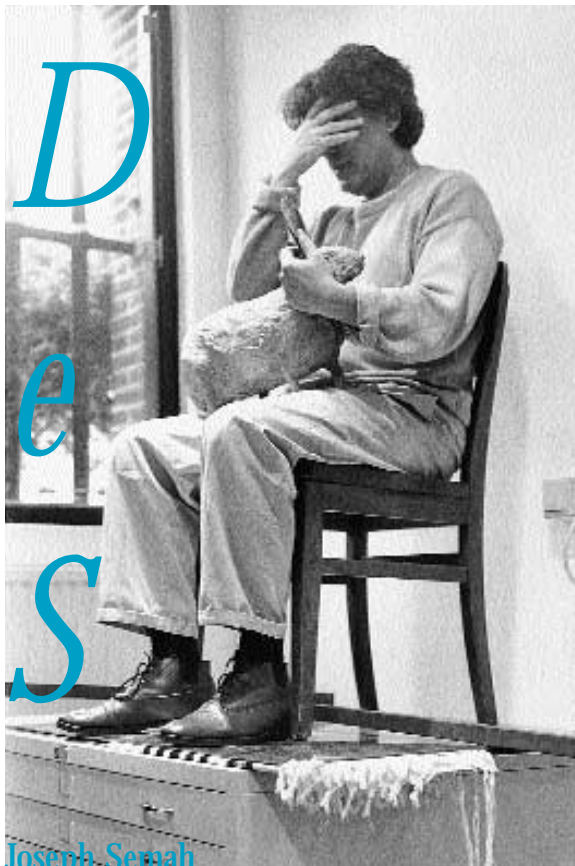


Joseph Semah
*Wie man einem toten deutschen
Künstler das Hasenjagen erklärt
(How to explain hare hunting to a dead
German artist)*
– Comparative Performance –,
22nd May 1997, Amsterdam

On top of a dresser at the entrance of a room two copper plates have been positioned, which jam in a Jewish fringed prayer garment, TALLIT. A wine glass and a plate of corten steel in the form of a T have been placed on the top plate. On this plateau rests a 1930s chair coming from Germany. Joseph Semah took place in the chair and reads out in Hebrew, with a bronze hare on his lap, the passage YaKNeHaZ from treaties Pesachim (Talmud Bavely), with the text transmitted to him through a walkman. In a corner of

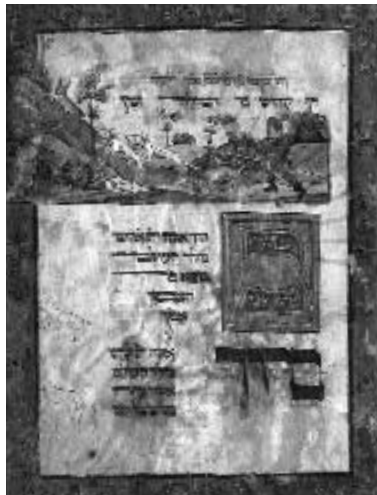
the room 36 framed Letters to Albrecht Dürer have been set up in line against the wall. In the center of the room one counts 12 leather saddles.

In this Comparative Performance the hare (of Beuys) has undergone a material transformation. Cast in bronze the animal has been given the status of the work of art which has by definition become embedded in Christian tradition.



Joseph Semah





Cincinnati Haggadah
Germany, 15th century
YaKNeHaZ



The Sarajevo Haggadah, Barcelona, circa 1350
Esau returns with a hare to be blessed by his father Isaac.

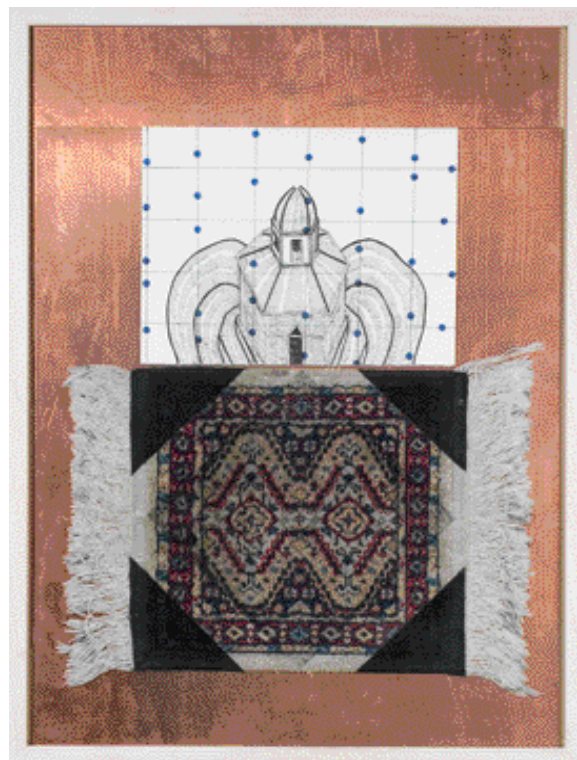


The Golden Haggadah, (near Barcelona) Spain
ca. 1320. The blessing of Jacob by Isaac,
on the right side Esau returns with a hare.



The Ryland Haggadah, Spain 14th century

Text above: Moses was a shepherd
Take off the shoes
Text under: What is that in your hand?
And it became a snake
And it became a staff in the palm of his hand



Joseph Semah
From the diary of the architect
Jerusalem of above, Jerusalem of below, 1981
Copper, persian carpet, paper, ink, oil paint
84 x 57 cm



Joseph Semah
Made in Germany, 1979
 J.S. Bach, Die Matthäuspassion
 Boxed set of 4 records accompanied by
 text, mould of a hare
 27 x 32 x 32 cm

Joseph Semah
EURASIA
Gog from Magog from Har-Megido
Parousia, Antichrist and the rest, 1981
 Persian carpet, black oil paint, a school
 map depicting the area of Eurasia
 350 x 240 x 60 cm





30

Joseph Semah

כפר

(K. P. R.)

To deny, be heretical, to pitch, tar, to
pardon, forgive, ransom, fine, henna, alcanna,
village, country, 1980

104 m of colored bands, tar, wine glasses

25 x 100 x 400 cm

Joseph Beuys,

*Das Schweigen von Marcel Duchamp wird über-
bewertet (The silence of Marcel Duchamp is
overrated)*

11.12.1964, Fluxus Demonstrationen

Paper, brown oil paint, ink, chocolate, felt,
photos

157.8 x 178 x 2 cm

Please note: The Fluxus demonstrations
which took place on 11.12.1964 in
Düsseldorf were performed by Joseph
Beuys, Bazon Brock, Wolf Vostell Fluxus-
Gruppe. Live broadcast from Nordrhein-
Westfalen by the ZDF: das Zweites
Deutsches Fernsehen (Germany's second
public broadcasting television channel).





Joseph Semah

Das Schweigen von Marcel Duchamp wird unterbewertet (The silence of Marcel Duchamp has been devaluated), – Comparative Performance – this took place at the opening of 'Measurement in Time' in Museum Jan Cunen at Oss, 23rd March 1999

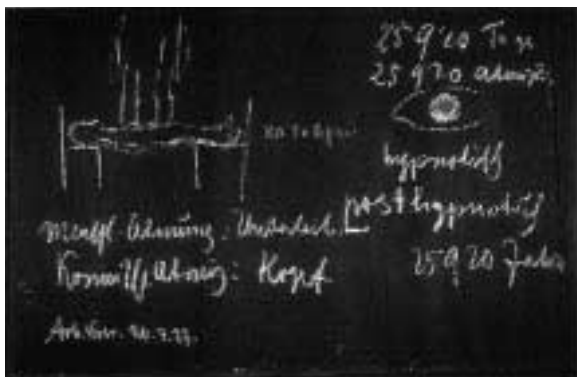
Please note: The project 'Measurement in Time' took place in the Museum Jan Cunen, Oss, situated in the 'Villa Constance', built (ca. 1888) by Arnold van den Bergh, the son of Simon van den Bergh. Later, in 1891, Anton Jurgens purchased the villa, changing its name to 'Villa Johanna'; later still the villa housed the French religious order of nuns called the 'Religieuses Filles de Notre Dame'. From 1929 to 1974 the villa functioned as the city hall of Oss.

Joseph Semah

The silence of Marcel Duchamp has been devaluated
Comparative Performance,
Measurement in Time, 1999
Ink on paper
21 x 30 cm

Rudolf Steiner

Der Bauch denkt schneller (The stomach thinks faster)
Blackboard drawing, 20 July 1923



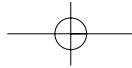
For a certain period of time the villa or city hall came under control of the Nazi's.

Excerpt from the invitation to 'Measurement in Time': "At the invitation of Museum Jan Cunen at Oss the artist Joseph Semah has put together the exhibition 'Measurement in Time', in which comment is made on the one-sided manner in which light is shed by the western art world on post-war art production. The exhibition project confronts us with the question whether the western museal culture has ever provided an effective response to the horrific acts by Nazi Germany. On the eve of the third millennium of Christianity, fifty years after 'Auschwitz', Semah calls on the western museal world to revise its dominant values, in which the voice of the 'Other' has been struck dumb...". 23.3.1999

Lying on the entrance floor of Villa Constance, surrounded by endless squares, the artist Joseph Semah watched the secrets of a female body through a monitor, while writing the 22 Hebrew letters on 5 sheets of copper with white ink.

Please note: Marcel Duchamp's *Etant Donnés* was unknown to the public until July 1969: The full title comes from one of Duchamp's notes for *The Large Glass*. *Etant Donnés*: 1. La chute d'eau 2. Le gaz d'éclairage. Given: 1. The Waterfall 2. The Illuminating Gas. The Philadelphia Museum of Art, since 1969.





Joseph Semah
Sefat Imi Sefat Ever
My mother's tongue is the Hebrew tongue, 1985
Iron, leather, wood, books
250 x 250 x 250 cm
Collection Israel museum, Jerusalem



Joseph Semah
Sham-Maiem
There is water, 1979
Metal, glass, sand from Jerusalem
10 x 40 x 44 cm

Joseph Semah
Temporal virgin site, 9 November 1995
 Page from the Talmud Bavely painted
 over with oil paint:
 Treatise of Ketuvot, Seder Nashim
 (treatise on women)
 33 x 24 cm
 Collection Roel Arkesteijn, Voorburg

Please note: The motif is based on an
 ornament from the 18th century painting
 of the wooden hideway-synagogue, made
 by the Polish frescoist Eliezer Sussmann.
 The synagogue is now part of the collec-
 tion of the Hällisch-Fränkisches Museum
 at Schwäbisch Hall, Germany.



Joseph Beuys
Three Hares, 1980
 Ink on paper

Drei Hasen und der Löffel drei und doch
 hat jeder Hase zwei
 Three Hares and three ears / yet each has
 two of them

Joseph Semah
Oznei Haman, 1985
 Watercolor washes and ink on paper
 29,6 x 21 cm





Window from the Cathedral of Paderborn,
Germany.
Drei Hasen und der Löffel drei und doch
hat jeder Hase zwei.
Three Hares and three ears / yet each has
two of them.



Oznei Haman, Ears of Haman

In 1614 a pogrom was carried out, led by the Frankfurter baker Vincenz Fettmilch. Two years later the expelled Jews returned to Frankfurt and celebrated the Purim festival there, at which occasion a special biscuit was baked, called after the form of the biscuit: Oznei Haman (Ears of Haman), which corresponds to the triangular emblem of the three hares.



Ceiling of a wooden synagogue from the
beginning of the 18th century, painted by
Eliezer Sussmann.
Collection Hällisch-Fränkisches Museum,
Schwäbisch Hall, Germany



Reproduction from: Basilius Valentinus,
*Macrocosmo, oder von der grossen Heimlichkeit der
Welt und ihrer Artney, dem Menschen zugehörig*
ca. 1600

The hunting of Venus has begun;
Truly, if the dog catches the hare, the
latter will not grow old.
This is realized by Mercurius, for when
Venus begins to rage
She produces a terrible number of hares.
Therefore guard Mars with your sword
That Venus does not turn into a whore.



Joseph Semah
YaKNeHaZ, 1983
Bronze, plumb-line, thread
30 x 300 x 300 cm



Hare hunt, Taymouth Hours ca. 1350

The hares / rabbits were hunted and bred by monks. In the Middle Ages hares / rabbits were not considered to be meat.

Stéphanie Benzaquen

An unfinished glossary for reading Joseph Semah

36

At the beginning, the task looks easy – contextualizing an artistic work, a creative process, providing explanations and definitions related to the themes, issues, objects the artist is dealing with. The idea of glossary looks relevant. Nevertheless, its limits quickly appear. Is it because such a technical format can not avoid a referential construction? Any definition requires a series of words and concepts that, in turn, necessitate further definitions. In some way, the encyclopedic gesture runs the risk of becoming endless – because of an ideal of total understanding –, or, on the contrary, turning to the advantage of readers who are already familiar with the treated terms¹. Moreover, resorting to the glossary form would make one think that the work of Joseph Semah is just a simple cultural comment on Jewish traditions, cult objects, and symbols, a comment on ordinary elements of Jewishness. It hardly handles the complex relationship that Joseph Semah has with modernity, Christianity, communication, and representation. In other words, it doesn't reflect the tensions present in his work, generated by his attempts to bring together – may it be through conciliation or opposition – the multiple facets of his identity: Jew, Easterner, Iraqi, Israeli, exiled, migrant, European, Westerner, Dutch.

The work of Joseph Semah, his building of artifacts, is based on displacements, shifts, and alterations in the appearance and meaning of the used objects. They are recuperated, recycled, transformed, and connected to different interpretations and contexts. It is obvious that any artistic representation functions according to similar principles, but this should not make one forget that most of the objects used by the artist don't have any fixed signification: this is, in fact, their common denominator. They are the result of a long process of reconstruction, re-composition, and re-articulation, adjusted to be preserved and diffused, in spite of, constraints, projections, impact of historical events, political and social changes, loss of national territory, Diaspora. Joseph Semah deals with mechanisms of memory, more specifically with the confrontation between personal reading and collective elaboration – as if some doubt remained – about the selection and canonization process, the way in which these objects inserted in a system of identification: a doubt that forms the core of an intimate questioning of 'identity'.

Usually the Talmud is described as the compilation of commentaries, discussions, and analysis of the Mishnah, in other words the laws and regulations related to every area of Jewish life. Those laws, considered as the oral Torah, have been gathered and finally redacted by Rabbi Judah Ha-Nasi, about 200 C.E. in the Galilee region of Palestine. There are six sections. Each part deals with a specific group of subjects². These in turn are divided into a total of 63 tractates of different sizes, each dealing with one central subject. Each tractate is further divided into a number of chapters and each chapter into individual sections, corresponding to a specific point of law or an instruction of how to behave under given circumstances. The Talmud combines two different works: the Jerusalem Talmud, primarily composed of the teachings of Palestinian sages and edited by scholars in

Tiberias and Caesarea around 400 C.E; the Babylonian Talmud, said to be compiled by Rav Ashi and his disciples in Sura, Babylonia (Mesopotamia) around 500 C.E. As mentioned before, such a simplified definition, though contributing to general comprehension, neglects its complex layering, its progressive emerging as a monumental corpus, in the most literal sense.

The scholar discussions about the compilation and the writing of the Babylonian Talmud (as, for instance, expressed by Heinrich Graetz, Zachariah Frankel, or Isaac Hirsch Weiss, during the 19th century), help us to better understand the fights related to the restructuring of Jewish religious authorities from the Exile era, and the way in which these authorities imposed their 'unquestionable references', how long-lasting and effective vehicles of identity and identification for the dispersed Jewish communities came into existence.

Though interpretations differ regarding the respective role of compilers and writers of the Talmud (Rav Ashi, Rabina bar R. Huna, Rav Jose, Academy of Sura, Academy of Pumbedita, Amoraim – sages called "Exposers" – and Saboraim – sages called "Reasoners"), they all emphasize the difficulty, faced at that time, to cope with an increasing written commentary, the fact that each community initiated its own reading of 'The Law', the resulting chaos, and the fear of destruction generated by the Roman and Zoroastrian persecution. The precariousness of the oral state, the necessity to settle educational principles, the plethora of viewpoints, often disconnected, if not conflicting, made it urgent to collect, clarify, systematize and standardize. Only a homogenous work could be then definitely closed. Only canonization would provide the religious authority with legitimacy and control.

When Joseph Semah transforms the Babylonian Talmud, through subverting, erasing, and covering, he addresses it neither in its liturgy nor study function. He calls into question the Talmud in its monumental role, both as signifier and instrument of the authority apparatus. Indeed, he questions the role of authority itself as constructors of 'identification tools'. He tests the limits of its power by looking at it through other cultural systems, developing dialectical relations with opposite references.

The treatment of the 'tallit' obeys identical principles. The tallit is a prayer shawl. Originally, the word meant 'gown', also 'oak'. It was made of wool or linen. At the four corners, tassels (twined cords) were attached in fulfillment of the biblical commandment of 'Tzitzit'³, the Tzitzit being a reminder in the form of a node, a knot, a memory device for the Jew concerning his religious duties. The tallit resembled the 'abbayah' (blanket) worn by the Bedouins for protection against the weather. The ones of finer quality, worn by wealthy and distinguished scholars and rabbis, were similar to the Roman 'pallium' white⁴. After the Exile, the tallit was discarded as a daily habit. It became a religious garment for prayers.

Following the destruction of the Temple, therefore of the centralized cultic system, the tallit had to be adjusted to the brutal uprooting and the transfer of the controlled religious

practice to individuals. The process operated according to substitutive principles. The tallit would, over time, become the Temple itself, the individual rebuilding of the religious structure. Nowadays, the priestly blessing, made at the synagogue by men of priesthood lineage, shows even more than such a symbolism. To pronounce the blessing, the men draw the tallit forward to cover their heads and hands, held to form a sort of fan. And amid the audience, each father draws his children to himself and covers them with his tallit.

The tallit plays the role of a construction, a home: a family gathering, the link between the father and the children. The Exile experience, in between the possible escape from the community life and the perception of threatening surroundings, has invested the texture. Folded, flattened, piled up, the tallit of Joseph Semah appears tense between certain nostalgia and the pure form which is used as an element of a tangible vocabulary, crossing limitations of cultural background. As if such confrontation would be the best way, for the artist, to open the door of the family house.

As said, the glossary temptation can not lead to completion. Looking back at my first writings, some supposedly taken-for-granted knowledge about the Temple, the Exile, the etrog suddenly strikes me.

Apprehending the Temple merely as a house of prayer, a symbolic tabernacle, a shelter for the ark which wandered from place to place until David brought it to Mount Zion, would hardly enlighten upon its reality. The Temple has reflected any political and military reverses of the nation. As depository of money and sanctuary of rich ornament, it has been exposed to periodic spoliations. More than this, through its destruction (by Nebuchadnezzar first, by Titus then) or the respect showed by the Persian power or Hellenistic kings, it is the symbol of national policy we can grasp. The outbreak of the Roman war, for instance, has been signalized by the cessation of the sacrifice offered for the well-being of the Roman emperor. In the same way, it mirrors the changes occurring within the community, the periods of transition: in the course of time, the Temple worship has been modified; sacrifices gave way to the study of Torah, while synagogues were slowly assuming a greater importance; the priestly class lost the leadership of the people and the judicial function. Paradoxically, alterations and transformations, though impacting on the nature and function of the Temple, could not have advent without it, remaining the main social channel among the people, the place for exchange and dispute.

There is a particular sequence that should be emphasized, destruction and reconstruction, as it has initiated essentials, tensions, and expectancies, between Israel and Diaspora; between staying, leaving, and coming back. The first Exile, after the Babylonian conquest and the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE, has generated patterns, and characteristics that are recognizable, in any exile, be it forced or accepted migration. There are those for whom exile is a temporary hardship, ending in deliverance and homecoming; those who stay or are left in the homeland; those who decide to identify with their hosting country and assimilate;

and, last, those who fail to keep any hope of return and commit themselves to (re)-produce 'their own universe' where they live now. Such a reproduction requests substitution, and may end in confrontational systems of life. Any object, practice, rite, habit will go through this process and will carry a twofold significance: on the one hand, a memorial of a vanished world; on the other hand, a sign of difference, resistance, rebellion. Maybe it is here that the uncertainty regarding definition of Jewish identity – caught in between religious and political concepts – emerges? No doubt the Exile has formatted polarities: territory versus moral value; egalitarianism versus elitism; zealotry versus tolerance; revolution versus tradition...

The etrog, the fruit of ambivalence: national icon represented on coins and mosaics, though it is not originally a fruit growing on the Israeli soil, maybe brought back from Babylon after the first Exile, maybe coming from a tree called 'Dar', a Sanskrit name that designates a tree found in the Himalayan mountains. The way the etrog accessed Sukkot (harvest feast) rituals conjoins a combination of political and religious reasons.

After the Maccabee victory⁵, the regained sovereignty and religious independence of Israel produced the removal of any foreign influence. This purification targeted anything suspected of assimilation. The new authorities felt especially concerned with resemblances between Jewish and Greek rituals, as it was the case for the feast of Dionysos and Sukkot. To mark a clear separation, the etrog replaced the fruit previously used in the rituals. Why such a choice? From a religious viewpoint, it was 'pure' since it never had been integrated into any pagan cult, contrarily to the grenade, for instance, related to Greek or Syrian gods. Politically, it became synonymous of military victories and beginning of a new era. It was cultivated in cities under Hellenistic control, which quickly joined the re-born State and had been cleansed from any Greek elements and influences. A fitting instrument for a reconstructed national identity, based on the denial of syncretism...

Nevertheless, this national symbol tells another story to be read through writings of Greek and Roman authors, Arabic agronomists, travelers, traders, and later on European botanists. Cross-cultural borrowings, approximations and shifts, fusions and confusions show how misunderstandings, limitations in knowledge, distance, and communication have shaped and changed traditions. Etrog, lemon, golden apple, coniferous fruit are mixed in some improbable taxonomy impacting on their usage – all lost in a strange linguistic and scientific game where two terms become interchangeable to designate the same fruit, or where two different fruits are designated by the same term.

This is the paradoxical nature of the etrog. It went through centuries, still carrying connotations of purity; its very nature became uncertain, subject to visual substitutions. On the middle-age religious paintings that represent Mary surrounded by symbols of purity, the 'cedrus excelsa', the allegorical Lebanon cedar-tree, had the form of an etrog-tree.

Exile memory... Memorbücher... In medieval times, each Jewish community kept and redacted its own Memorbuch – memory book. It was filled with names of rabbis and community leaders, dates of martyrs and persecutions – no historical intention here, but the production of paradigms that would dictate the reading of ulterior events, reframed within symbolic understanding. No treatment of the individual was worthy of memorialization. The mandate of what was recalled and how was collective.

Obsessively transforming these objects, giving them new visibility, Joseph Semah calls into question such a mandate that values group over individual memory. Through his intimate answer to such disintegration of personal remembrance, Joseph Semah builds, day by day, his own Memorbuch. Ready for public reading, in this case for the exhibition, this book – rather a space to display what has been collected, what testifies to changes, doubts, adaptation, quest, integration – focuses on representations. A cultural translation of his daily trajectory oscillating between desire to leave and desire to come back; willingness to include, to exclude; temptation to withdraw to community, to make a universal opening. This Memorbuch, everyone may peruse: behind the artistic codes, is the diary of a man who tries to understand who he is.

The term 'Yaknehaz' – a central matter in the work of Joseph Semah – accordingly to the encyclopedic definition, is a mnemotechnic aid, coming from an argument in the Babylonian Talmud. It gives the correct sequence of benediction on the eve of a festival which coincides with the conclusion of Shabbat. Indeed, this benediction offers a peculiar character, as two forms of Holiness follow each other. But the stringency of this festival is less than the one of Shabbat.



Haggadah, Augsburg, 1534



How to show then the difference between them?

The benediction has the following function. The acronym 'Yaknehaz' reflects the order which has to be followed: 'Ya' for Yayin (wine); 'K' for Kiddush (sanctification of the wine); 'Ne' for Ner (candle, light); 'Ha' for Havdalah (separation); 'Z' for Zman (benediction of time).

Such formal and technical information is insufficient to grasp the importance of 'Yaknehaz' for Joseph Semah. It is known that the abbreviation sounds similar to the German phrase "Jag den Has": "hunt the hare". This explains why the Hagaddah⁶ has been at certain periods decorated with hares⁷. The Augsburg Haggadah (1534), for example, includes two illustrations with hares. In the first scene, they are pursued by dogs and hunters, toward a net. In the second scene, the net lifts up, allowing the hares to go through and outrun the dogs. There is an utter symbolic mobilization in action here. The hare expresses speed, stratagems used by Jewish communities to survive all over the centuries as well as it is the allegory for the fate of Jews often persecuted at Passover. Thus, the hare becomes the reminder of the Exodus after the Red (Reed) Sea. At the crossroad of expression, denotation, and exemplification, the hare is a key visual element in a chain of references. This function, the abstract 'Yaknehaz' and its visual translation, forming an inseparable couple, appears also in the work of Joseph Semah. In a contradictory way: they are the symbol of exile and difference (threat, fear, escape, shelter, separation, protection) – and, in this sense perhaps a personal metaphor and allegory for a life partly spent in Diaspora. But they also have been the tool that enabled the artist to penetrate and ingest new environments that introduced him into systems he didn't know. They have been visual companions that brought him to cope with the unfamiliar. A way to integration.

Ambiguity would certainly be a relevant term to denote the work of Joseph Semah. An ambiguity that emerges from the continuous tension between closing, self, folding, withdrawing in symbols that provide a shelter, and the attempt to open these symbols and elements, to break them, in encounters with different cultural situations, different civilizations, from a desire to widen his belonging. It is both respect and reject of what establishes the continuity of memory and identity: authority, home, nostalgia, territory. In this sense, the ambiguity generates the universality of the work of Joseph Semah, since the questions that arise, in this specific context, send any human being back to her or his personal relations with origin, education, and culture.

Notes:

1. More even, shouldn't we investigate other cultures, try to decipher connections, similarities, and exchanges – to make our glossary an ideal tool for understanding?
2. Agriculture, Celebrations, Women, Damages, Cult, and Purity.
3. Num. 15:38-41
4. Woolen band worn around the shoulders.
5. The priest family that revolted against Antiochus IV, Hellenistic king who initiated religious persecutions. Shabbat and celebrations were prohibited. The Temple was desecrated and became the place for Zeus cult (with sacrifices of porkers). The father, Matthatias, started a guerrilla war. After his death, in 166 BCE, his son Judas led the rebels to victory. He re-consecrated the Temple in 165 BCE.
6. Ritual book used during the celebration night of Passover, with prayers, songs, recitals.
7. The presence of the hare should be reviewed in relation to the notion of 'unreliable witness'. According to the Targum Yerushalmi, The Targums of Onkelos and Jonathan Ben Uzziel on the Pentateuch: ...And it was when Izaac had finished blessing Jacob, and Jacob had only gone out about two handbreaths from Izaac his father, that Esau his brother came in from his hunting. And the word of the Lord had impeded him from taking clean vension; but he had found a certain dog (Calumny), and killed him, and made food of him, and brought to his father, and said to his father; Arise, my father, and eat of my vension, that thy soul may bless me....". Esau came back from hunting with a dog; that's why he lost his primogeniture status. According to Yehuda HaDassi, *Eshkol ha-kofer* (cluster of henna blossoms), written in 1148. "...they said that he (Esau) returned unsuccessful from his hunting; So, he took small impure animals, such as dogs and a hare and the like, then he cooked a delicious stew, and brought it to Izaac his father, and when he (Izaac) tested it the dog begun to cry out and to bark....". Esau came back with a hare. For further analysis, I refer to the text of A. Hartog.

A Journey into

PaRDeS

Joseph Semah



Shabbat's hymns and lyrics, Bohemen (Prague) 1514



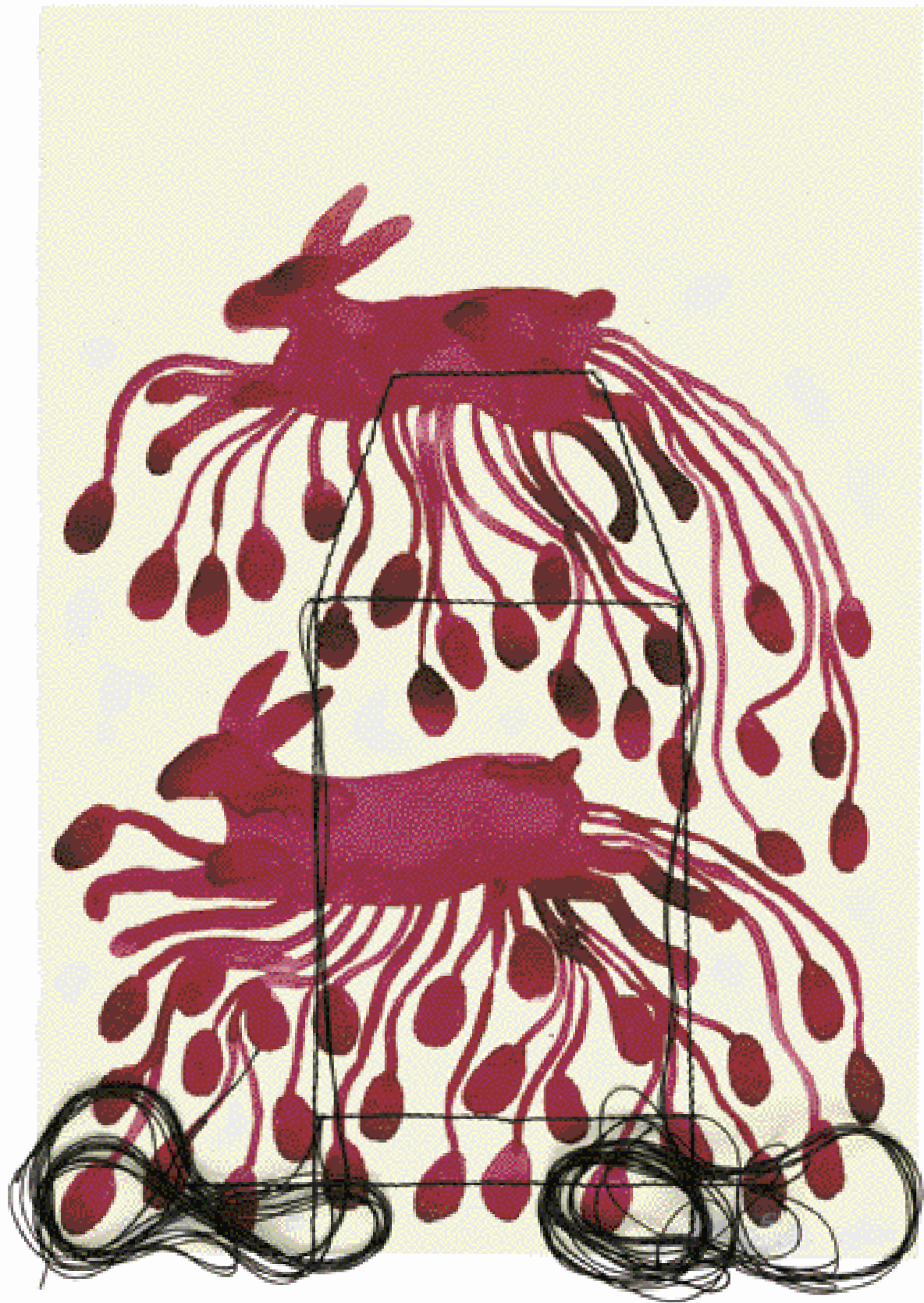
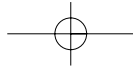
Darmstadt Haggadah, 15th century

YaKNeHaZ

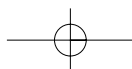
Please note: Usually the hunting scene in the Haggadot is represented by hare hunting; however, sometimes a stag as quarry may be depicted.



Joseph Semah, *YaKNeHaZ*, 1984
Bronze, electrical wires, 4 fluorescent tubes, 30 x 70 x 120 cm



Joseph Semah
From the diary of the architect, 1982
Watercolor washes, ink on paper, black thread
30 x 21 cm





Joseph Semah
YaKNeHaZ 1/3, 1983
Bronze, light bulbs, electrical wires
30 x 200 x 200 cm
Collection Centrum kunstlicht in de
kunst, Eindhoven

Hans Locher

What is signified here?

When I was invited to choose a work by Joseph Semah and put my thoughts to writing about it, the first thought was of the ensemble dating from 1987: the voluminous work that is part of the Roel Arkesteijn collection. It has not escaped attention and more than a few words have already been spoken about it, to which I am afraid not much more substance could be added by me. Still, it would be sensible perhaps to draw attention once again but in my own way to the hardly superficial balance it sustains between what it shows and what it signifies.

The tableau is formed by an ensemble of green oxidized bronze dogs, all lying on their sides with their paws stretched and headless, while brightly lit neon tubes interconnected by an eye catching electrical wiring circuit including starters and transformers are seen entering their bodies through the neck cavities. I can verify that all dogs and tubes are alike. In identical clusters yet in different positions they have been spread widely across the floor of the exhibition room where the work meets the eye. Initially its rather capricious pattern appears as an unspecified manifold. As I unwittingly perhaps begin to count I can make out a number of twenty-two units. On most of its pictures only part of it is visible. What is displayed can only be the result of deliberate decisions and actions, although it fails to become clear to me straight away where already available material is used and where it is designed.

Evidentially tubes, wiring, starters and transformers were applied 'as is'. The dogs, however, who appear to be life-sized and I would think recognizable to everyone as cast in bronze, are raising several questions. Was the prototype of the twenty-two casts clay-sculpted true to life or was an already available specimen used? Were they decapitated before or after their casting? The manner in which every single dog is positioned and fitted with a neon tube and attributes appears to respond to exact design requirements. Even so, the positioning of each cluster and the pattern as displayed in its entirety imply an inconstancy. Could this be meant to be some form of spatial handwriting, using the available space slightly differently with every arrangement?

Questions concerning its genesis belong to a more comprehensive, evocative, bemusement. If not done away with as nonsense it also provides food for thoughts, even if barely solid ones. It seems as if dogs, tubes, wiring, starters and transformers act as words in an enigmatic poem in which primarily analogies and connotations have been used. For as long as I just look their exact nature fails to materialize, although several possibilities present themselves. Dogs may stand for loyalty, but pose a latent threat as well; and connotations, as apparent in sayings like 'ungrateful dog', 'faithless dog' and 'fit for a dog'. The decapitations make aggression palpable, but whose? Are those stretched paws referring to stiff carcasses? Are the lit tubes penetrating them meant to be deadly rays of light, or a spiritual enlightenment, or else life-generating energy? Is the eye-catching wiring structure with starters and transformers a nervous system laid bare?

The exhibited work has immaterial dimensions and it reaches

According to this descriptive level the dog had been isolated by the iceberg – the Geopolitical concept (Germany), Caspar David Friedrich; the Hope, contributing as it were, a constant perspective (although restricted) by asserting the link between Christianity and Judaism. There is something bluntly deliberate in one's logical scheme, the distinct operation which administers the lingering conflict situated between the good and the bad, between the immaculate / the pure and the wicked, between the person's innocent love and the cynical attitude towards the whole human being. Between compassion (Christianity) and cruelty, blood etc., (Judaism). The dog is (the unabridged reality) a companion, a wreath, a friend, that is, in the comprehension of the Christian. The dog is the evil, the stranger, the constant fear for the Jew.

The human spirit, the pigeon, the bird,
the angel, the desires and the inclinations
(to eradicate the Self).

Restraining oneself by demanding nothing in return. Restraining oneself by demanding nothing in return. Restraining oneself by demanding nothing in return. Restraining oneself by demanding nothing in return. Restraining oneself by demanding nothing in return. Restraining oneself by... (Joseph Semah, Restraining oneself by demanding nothing in return, 1982)



Joseph Semah
*Restraining oneself by demanding
nothing in return*, 1982
Watercolor washes, ink, pencil on paper,
30 x 21 cm
Collection Hällisch-Fränkisches Museum,
Schwäbisch Hall, Germany



Joseph Semah
Temporary Virgin Site, 1984
 Black ink on paper
 29.6 x 21 cm

out through a poetical complex of concepts. This is underscored by the long title given to the ensemble:

But here we know how the name had been formed, for it is not an ordinary name and it is already included in the problem of translating self-criticism.

It is an obscure sentence which even deepens the mysterious character of the ensemble, but in any event draws attention to an extraordinary process of naming. Does naming refer to signifying or to providing meaning generally? Apparently it is part of translating self-criticism. What is the substance of this self-criticism and how can it be translated? In relation to the ensemble, translating is perhaps to be understood as converting; a conversion into the pictorial language of the displayed objects. Explanatory remarks made by Joseph Semah and a treatise by Felix Villanueva concerning an earlier version of this work, at that time still only consisting of five clusters, shed light on such pictorial language and what it purports to say.¹ First of all it appears that the dogs are not based on a clay-sculpted prototype. Semah discovered a stuffed specimen, sawed off its head and had it cast in bronze twenty-two times. He sought and found not just any dog, but a dingo. This was probably the first domesticated dog, having at one particular point in time returned back to

unspoiled nature. If by any chance a dingo puppy is tamed, he too as soon as he gets older will turn its back on humans and will attempt to withdraw within a territory of its own.

To Semah this rare animal is a significant example of the essentially different, the non-human. By displaying the dingo as a laid out carcass with stiff paws, he binds up the essentially different with death. To him as grandson of a chief rabbi this also reflects on the dog as an impure animal in the Jewish faith, and then also as bound up with Christian European culture and the persecutions of Jews culminating in the Holocaust.

Considered this way the sawn-off head becomes a negation of the dark threat that emanates from the essentially different, and the light of the neon tube by contrast will constitute a spiritual counterbalance.

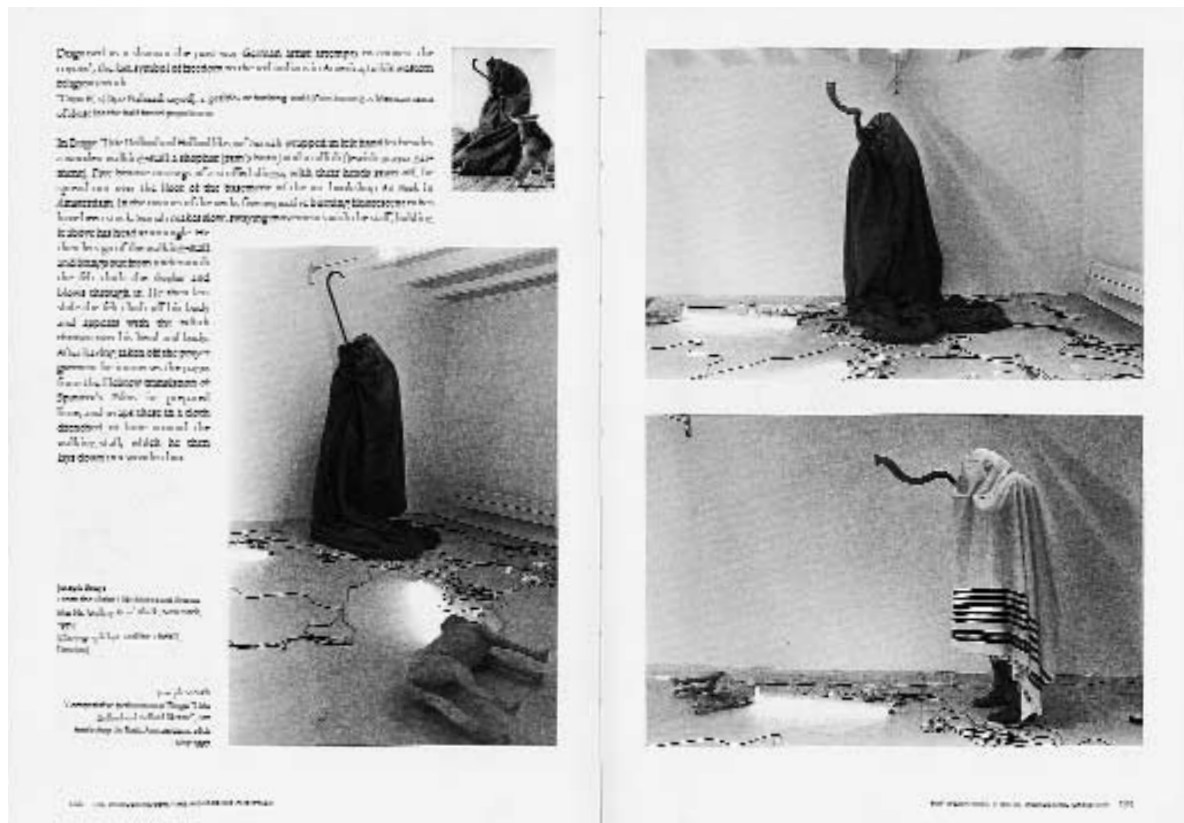
The polarity is ambivalent however. On the one hand even that which gives light harbors a dark connotation, because the lit neon as gaseous element also reminds Semah of the Holocaust. On the other even the carcass holds a reference to spiritual life because to him the green oxidization compares to a preparation for a text; this in view of a parallel between the oxidization of bronze and the dressing of skins into edible parchment. This draws back to old arts and crafts where preferably urine is used at both processes.

Joseph Beuys
From the Action *I like America and America
likes Me*, 1974
Gallery René Block, New York

Joseph Semah
– Comparative Performance – *Dingo*:
I like Holland and Holland likes me,
16th May 1997
Art bookshop Art Book, Amsterdam

Double page from : *The wandering Jew /
The wondering Christian*, University
Leiden, LAK Gallery, 1998

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Disguised as a shaman the post-war German artist (Joseph Beuys) attempts to convert the coyote*, the last symbol of freedom to the red indians in America, to his western religious truth.

*Coyoté (-s) [Sp.(Nahuatl)], 1. prairie- or barking-wolf (*Canis latrans*); 2. Mexican term of abuse for the half breed population.

In Dingo: 'I like Holland and Holland likes me' Semah wrapped in felt handles besides a wooden walking-staff a shophar (ram's horn) and a tallith (Jewish prayer garment). Five bronze castings of a stuffed dingo, with their heads sawn off, lie spread out over the floor of the basement of the art bookshop Art Book in Amsterdam. In the cavities of the necks five respective burning fluorescent tubes have been stuck. Semah makes slow,

swaying movements with the staff, holding it above his head at an angle. He then lets go of the walking-staff and brings out from underneath the felt cloth the *shophar* and blows through it. He then lets slide the felt cloth off his body and appears with the tallith thrown over his head and body. After having taken off the prayer garment he immerses the pages from the Hebrew translation of Spinoza's *Ethics* in prepared lime, and wraps these in a cloth drenched in lime around the walking-staff, which he then lays down in a wooden box.

(Double page from : *The Wandering Jew/The Wandering Christian*, University Leiden, LAK Gallery, 1998)

Joseph Semah

But here we know how the name had been formed, for it is not an ordinary name and it is already included in the problem of translating self-criticism, 1987
22 bronze dingo's, 22 fluorescent tubes, electricity wire, 22 starters and 22 transformers, plumb-line

Collection: Roel Arkesteijn, Voorburg

What the surface of the dressed dingo can receive, so to speak, must be the Torah in particular, the main text of the Jewish faith consisting of the first five books of the Old Testament including the commandments given to Moses by Yahweh.

A working drawing which is generously described by Felix Villanueva indicates that the presence of Torah and Judaism has also been secured in other parts and aspects of the ensemble. Below to the left the signature has been applied close to the plug, which suggests that the artist's inspiration provides the voltage required for the neon tube's light. Immediately above that are two indications of the Torah written on parchment: tucked away in its case and partially rolled out. Especially the protruding sticks suggest a form analogy with the plug; an analogy expressive of the word of Yahweh also feeding the light.

Over what has to be a transformer it says in technical notation that the voltage is brought down from two hundred to sixty volts. Aside from the neon tube the starter is visible and besides the dingo's front paws also two prayer boxes with their belts, which by their striking visual affinity with the transformer, starter and wiring emphasize that in this metaphor electricity is converted into spiritual enlightenment. Below the back of the carcass a schematic representation can be found of the temple of King Solomon holding a global ground plan, with a text suggesting that the outline must have been about one hundred and four meters. Felix Villanueva tells us that this gives meaning to the fact that one hundred and four meters of electrical wiring were used for the ensemble as a whole. There is one more numerical analogy put forward by him. The five clusters of the version of the ensemble he describes refer to the five books of the Torah. The twenty-two-fold character of the version attracting my attention appears not to be arbitrarily given either. According to Semah it is not unrelated to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet, to which he adds that he thinks it not unimportant that the human skull is built up from a similar number of parts.

Much of it requires further explanation, which prompts a feeling of inaccessibility, even when the ensemble provides a fascinating visual spectacle. Still, I believe that every visitor can observe and experience straight away without specific prior knowledge that what is involved here is an emotive interplay between threat and enlightenment. But then again it seems to be a confrontation of the immaterial reality of a religious text with the essentially different, which holds within it the impure, the inhospitable nature and death. Particularly the ground plan demonstrates unmistakably how much the Jewish faith is at stake here as well. The self-criticism as mentioned in the title perhaps means that Joseph Semah aims for an open confrontation of Jewishness with the essentially different. He does this metaphorically, which puts the polarity into perspective and holds universal connotations. Although almost every aspect of the tableau seems to take part in it, as a sign system it can hardly be called closed. What is signified here remains open in essence. Every visitor is free to some extent to add dimensions to it, convert it

somehow into a proper self-criticism. On the ground plan the dingo's carcass has been drawn partially, covering a Hebrew text, consisting of a repetition of three words translated by Semah as 'temporary virginal site'. Does this mean that the ensemble, in spite of its numerous meanings, is designated as a moment of purity which still perhaps could give rise to naming or designating? It is beyond discussion that what is displayed has a specific place in Joseph Semah's oeuvre and adheres to his way of reacting to works by other artists. The former will be left undiscussed by me but with respect to the latter I would like to draw attention to a performance by Joseph Semah organized in book shop 'Art Book' in Amsterdam on 6th May 1997. The name he had given it was *Comparative performance. Dingo: I like Holland and Holland likes me*. It was a comment on a well-known 'Aktion' by Joseph Beuys that took place from 23rd to 25th May 1979 in the gallery of René Block in New York under the title *I like America and America likes me*. Joseph Beuys had entered into a day-to-day confrontation with a wild coyote, to him closely related to the American Indians and a representation of unspoiled America faced with a threat of destruction. Semah saw this as an attempt to incorporate even the last symbol of freedom to the Indians into western Christian culture. His own performance mirrored a few important moments of Joseph Beuys' action, although the live coyote had been replaced by the stiff carcasses of the dingoes cast in bronze with the light beams of the neon tubes reaching inside them, the staff and the felt throw, and ultimately by the ram's horn and the Jewish prayer garment.

When observing the ensemble the twenty-two clusters appear to be spread out rather arbitrarily, adapting to the floor space available. This is due in part to the visual structure invoking a performance of sorts or a highly individual ritual incantation, slightly different again with each design. Inconstant, moreover, is that what is also designated by the objects does not appear to be a self-sealing whole.

Note:

1. See: Felix Villanueva, 'In de naam van het Brons – de driedimensionele typografie van Joseph Semah', in: Daan van Speybroeck [Ed.], *De Tranen van God – genese van het beeld in het werk van Gérard Garouste en Joseph Semah*. Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen/Studium Generale, 1997, pp. 73-81. See also: Joseph Semah, Felix Villanueva, *The Wandering Jew / The Wondering Christian*, University Leiden, LAK Gallery 1998, pp. 114-123.

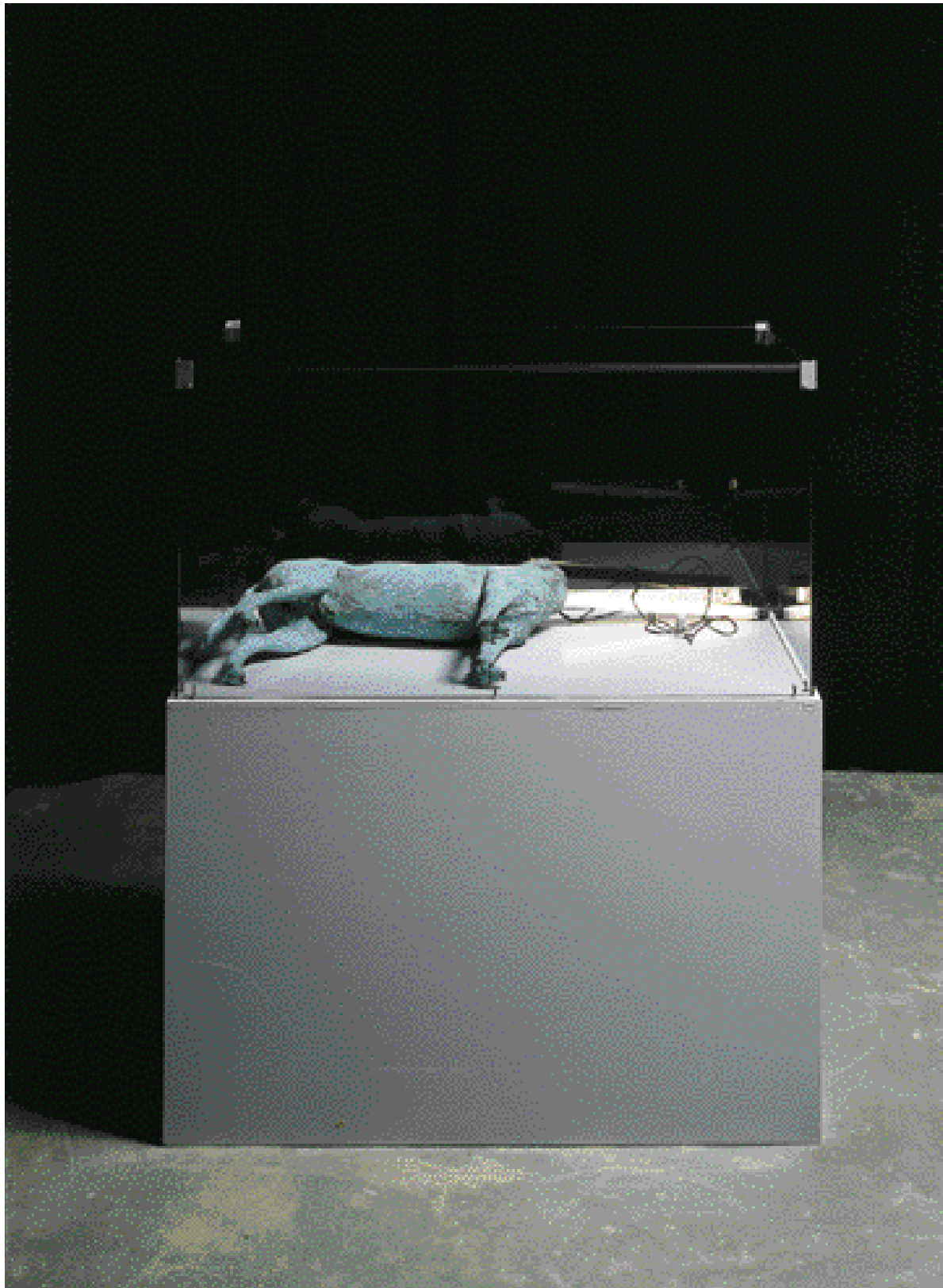
A Journey into

PaRDeS

Joseph Semah



Joseph Semah
*Restraining oneself by demanding nothing
in return, 1984*
Two cast bronze dogs painted in gold
color, five glass plates 150 x 150 cm each
Collection Hällisch-Fränkisches Museum,
Schwäbisch Hall, Germany



Joseph Semah, *A temporal virgin site*, 1984

Bronze, wooden ruler, electrical wires, fluorescent tube, vitrine, 150 x 60 x 60 cm



Joseph Semah

~~The Wandering Jew~~ / *The Wondering Christian*, 1990

Black piano, 4 bronze castings of a stuffed goat, 20 fluorescent tubes, 20 transformers, 20 starters, electricity wire
170 x 300 x 600 cm

Lucas Cranach the Elder

Woodcut on the title page of Martin Luther's *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*, (Concerning the Jews and their lies), Wittenberg 1543

"(...) I wish and I ask that our rulers who have Jewish subjects exercise a sharp mercy toward these wretched people, as suggested above, to see whether this might not help (though it is doubtful). They must act like a good physician who, when gangrene has set in, proceeds without mercy to cut, saw, and burn flesh, veins, bone, and marrow. Such a procedure must also be followed in this instance. Burn down their synagogues, forbid all that I enumerated earlier, force them to work, and deal harshly with them as Moses did in the wilderness, slaying thousand lest the whole people perish.



They surely do not know what they are doing; moreover, as people possessed, they do not wish to know it, hear it, or learn it. Therefore it would be wrong to be merciful and confirm them in their conduct. If this does not help we must drive them out like mad dogs, so that we do not become partakers of their abominable blasphemy and all their other vices and thus merit God's wrath and be damned with them. I have done my duty. Now let everyone see to his. I am exonerated. Finally I wish to say this for myself: If God were to give me no other Messiah than such as the Jews wish and hope for, I would much, much rather be a sow than a human being."

(Dr. Martin Luther, *Von den Juden und ihren Lügen*, Wittenberg 1543)

Gideon Ofrat

Blood Vanquished

On 24/2/1979, his 31st birthday, Joseph Semah erased dozens of pages of "Masechet Psahim" of the Babylonian Talmud. The Mishnah passage at the centre of the page, and most of the interpretative commentaries encompassing it, were blackened outright by systematic sweeps of oil pastels. It was a "rational" blackening, fully conscious of its rectangular borders.

Consequently, what had been originally a page constructed in a complex architecture of interpretative textual units, was now reduced to a neo-geometrical surface, black rectangle within black rectangle, with a residue of straight white channels framing the inner rectangle and flowing out from it to the margins, endowing it with a presence recalling the abstraction of Mondrian and the Dutch "The Style" artists (the homage of a Dutch Israeli to Dutch modernism) and the Neo-Geo(metric) paintings of Peter Hailey. Still, in the case of Semah, we are dealing, not with the communications networks of urbanism, but rather, with the communications networks of faith, lines of contact with the "heart", the source (the Mishnah, which itself is not source, being an interpretation of the Biblical Old Testament). At the hermeneutic level, Semah's lines of communication are the (empty) white space between the commentaries. Conversely, the equally hermeneutical element of concealment of the source of meaning, comes to expression in the act of blackening. In other words, if the expanse of interpretation is an ongoing process entailing the endless addition of black signs (in writing and print), Semah's act of total blackening proclaims that any additional commentary is an additional blackening, i.e. additional enciphering, an additional burial of meaning. Furthermore, in Semah's unending dialogue with the transcendental abstract painting of Barnett Newman, his flickering white stripes do not evidence "divine light"; rather, they denote a nothingness which traces the interval between one interpretative passage and the next.

Erasure is a familiar act of modern art, ever since Robert Rauschenberg's renowned erasure of Willem de Kooning's painting. Conceptual art has frequently resorted to subtraction (as in the removal of excess whitewash from a wall, in Lawrence Weiner's conceptual work of 1967) and Israeli art of the seventies also experienced several acts of elimination and erasure, including Menashe Kadishman's effort employing coloured lines to erase lines of information from a telephone directory. Much later, a decade subsequent to Semah's Talmud erasures, New York artist Helene Aylon displayed an installation and video work (in the "Too Jewish?" exhibition at the New York Jewish Museum) including erasure (whitening out) of lines and words from the Bible wherein the artist identified representations of anti-feminine aggression. It was the artist's way of declaring war upon the Almighty.

Indeed, in Jewish tradition, the very act of erasing a sacred text constitutes an act of defiance, or even provocation. Such an erasure is taboo, sacrilege, an outright offence. The blackening of books is attributed to benighted regimes, which sponsor pogroms wherein books, whether sacred or secular, are burned to ashes. Jewish tradition attributes sanctity to the



Talmud Bavely, tractate Pesachim

Talmud Bavely: writing from the tractate Pesachim in which prescriptions are given for the celebration of Pesach, when this coincides with the Sabbath יקנהז (YaKNeHaZ). The blessing distinguishes "between holy and holy" as opposed to "between holy and profane". The order of this Kiddush - Havdalah is indicated by the acrostic יקנהז (YaKNeHaZ) – י Yayin (wine), ק Kiddush (sanctification), נ Ner (candle), ה Havdalah (Blessing over fire), ז Zeman (season).

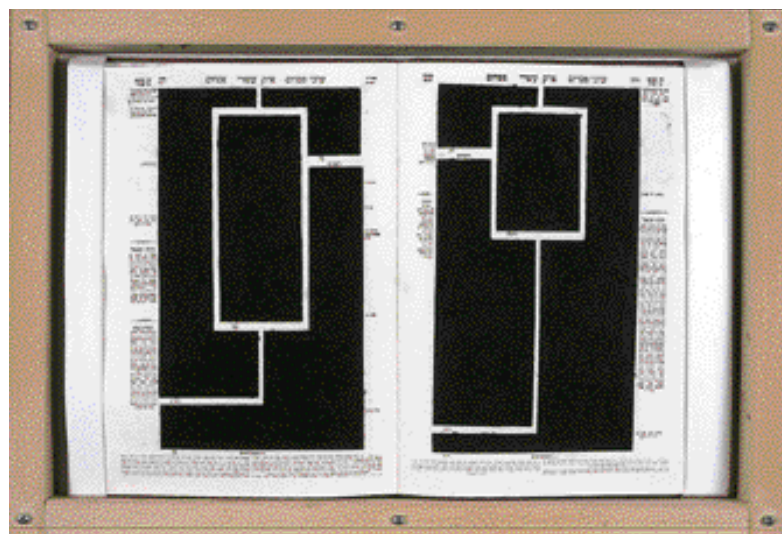
תלמוד בבלי *Talmud Bavely*

(an excerpt from tractate Pesachim) (YaKNeHaZ) ... He sent [back] to him: Thus R. Ishmael bar R. Jose say, speaking in the name of his father who said it on the authority of R. Joshua ben Hananiah: [The order is] NaHiK. This is an acronym for Ner (Light) Havdalah (the blessing noting the separation of Shabbat from the rest of the week), Kiddush (sanctification over Wine). Please note: Besamim (Spices) is not mentioned]. R. Hanina said: R. Joshua ben. Hananiah's [ruling] may be compared to a king who departs [from a place] and governor who enters: [first] you escort the king [out], and then you go forth to greet the governor. What is our decision about this? Abaye said: [The order is] YaKaZNaH; [In talking about the order for Havdalah on Passover when the first seder is Saturday night, Abaye says the order is: Wine, Kiddush, Zeman (the Shehechyanu, noting the holiness of the Festival), Light, and Havdallah]. While Raba maintained: יקנהז (YaKNeHaZ) Wine, Kiddush, Light, Havdalah, and Zeman. And the law is as Raba.

printed page of Holy Scripture (including a page of Talmud). It calls for no more than the slightest blemish in transcribing the letters, for an entire parchment to be declared fit for nothing but burial. The Jewish principle of "gnizah" (storage, deposit) comprises the interment of pages or books rendered unworthy for use because a single letter deviates from the accepted standard. In other words, holy writings are treated as a body imbued with sanctity. "Please preserve the sanctity of the page" proclaims the computer program of Jewish scriptures. Hence, Semah's act of blackening can be regarded as a challenge, an outright sin. His choice of "Masechet Psahim", in the section relating to the differentiation of the sacred from the mundane (when the feast of Passover falls on a Sabbath, and the ritual therefore requires that the Sabbath candle be snuffed out) comes across to us as an act of snuffing out the page and transmitting it from the sacred to the mundane, i.e. into a pure form, or better said, into art. Accordingly, the choice of oil pastels secures the treated Talmud page an "artistic" presence.

However, blackening a Talmud page entails greater complexity than implied hitherto. In Rabbi Avraham Abulafia's "Sefer Ha'Ot" ("Book of the Letter") we read: "And the Lord said unto me, thy soul is named blood, and the name of thy spirit is ink, and behold, thy father and mother are vessels for my name and my memory. (...) And I knew that my soul dwelled in its colour within the mirror that is red as blood, and my spirit dwelled in its colour in the mirror that is black as ink. And the conflict was very vigorous within the heart, between the ink and the blood, and the blood was of the spirit and the ink was of the dust, and the ink vanquished the blood, and the Sabbath overcame all the days of the week."

Joseph Semah
YaKNeHaZ, 24.02.1979
Black oil sticks on Talmud Bavely,
Tractate Pesachiem
40 x 54 x 4 cm

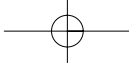


The victory of the black ink over the red blood is the triumph of spirit over soul, and simultaneously, the triumph of the Sabbath over the mundane days of the week. Semah's act of erasure, the triumph of the blackening over the physicality of the text, assures the transition from the sacred to the mundane. In the broader context of his work, and his convoluted dispute with the work of Josef Beuys (as representative of Christian culture) the triumph of the black signing over the blood-soul is also the victory of the spirit over the presence of blood in Beuys' work. Jewish tradition pits blood and ink into a mighty metaphysical conflict. In "Yalkut Shim'oni" we read: "The Lord said unto him [Satan, G.O.] Go inscribe upon the brows of the saintly a line of ink, so that they come not under the domination of fiends, and on the brows of the evil a line of blood, so that they come under the domination of fiends." Accordingly, Semah's act of blackening is not so much erasure, more the ultimate signing, a quasi-magical act of protection from evil and the triumph of the spirit. Black ink, it should be recalled, features in Jewish tradition as an essential means for writing the Torah ("Hazohar" vol. 2, Shemot, Parashat Truma, p. 159, p. 1). Likewise, "A man is obliged (...) to write him a fine Torah book, in fine ink." ("Masachtot Ktanot", Masechet Sofrim, chap. 3, halacha 17). With that, this specific precept possesses dialectical status, the preference for ink resting upon its potential for erasure: "One does not write in kumus [a gum used for writing in antiquity] or kankanthum [copper sulphide used for writing in antiquity] or any other thing that inscribes, rather in ink, for it is said And erase writing that can be deleted (...) the Almighty said A book written in sanctity shall be deleted on water." ("Bamidbar Raba" [Vilna] chapter 9, p. 5). The eternal status of sanctity is not predicated upon its physical presence. Thus, paradoxically, Semah's act of erasure, even if it does not entail the dilution of ink in water – rather, its blackening with oil paint – reaffirms the sanctity of the erased page. For as we have seen, the act of blackening signifies the triumph of the spirit over the red

human soul ("for the blood is the soul") and functions as the performed act of an "utterance" that is a deed (blackening as an act of differentiation) assuring the monotheistic "aversion of countenance" by the Source of Truth, the Creator, in the infinite and impenetrable darkness. Ultimately, does Semah's act of blackening affirm the mundane or the Sabbath? As we have shown: both. And this duality, howsoever paradoxical, appears most appropriate to Semah's secular religiosity: his progress along the border-line between modern art and the Jewish scriptures and holy vessels; and his reiterated attraction to the Havdala ritual, to pinpointing the moment of transition from the holy to the mundane, which is simultaneously the moment both of the holy and the mundane.

Joseph Semah
An introduction to the principle of relative expression, 1979
 Black oil sticks on pages from Talmud Bavely, Tractate Pesachim
 40 x 27 cm each





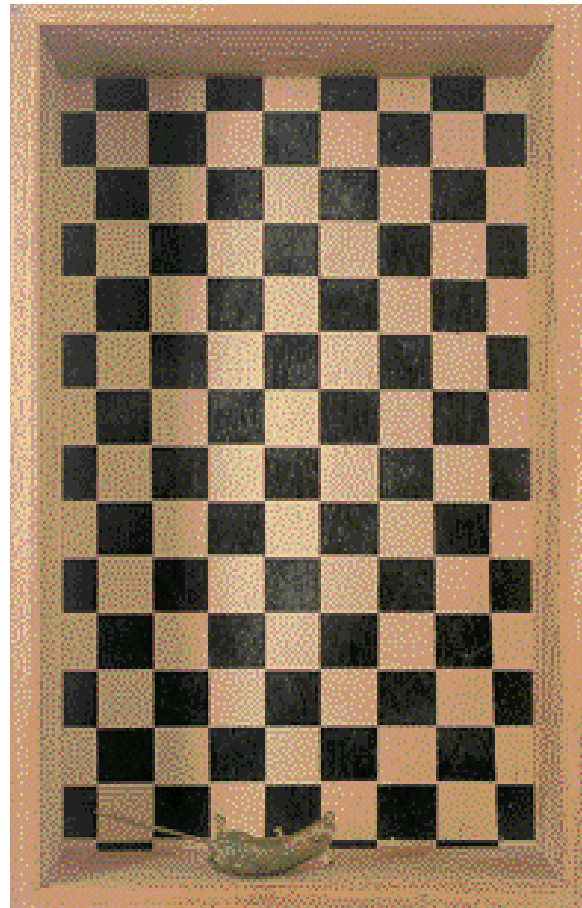
Watercolor washes and ink on paper, 30 x 21 cm

A Journey into

PaRDeS

Joseph Semah

Joseph Semah
The Locking of the Gate, 1984
Wood, bronze, oil paint, glass
54 x 34 x 10 cm
Collection: Becht, Naarden



Joseph Semah
קדיש
Kaddish
One man bowed out
Now the quorum of ten (Minian)
only has nine
One too few, 1982
Linen cloths on canvas stretchers,
10 ties, ink
136 x 30 x 5 cm





Joseph Semah

*Hermann Voigtländer Stühle Sessel
Tische Berlin S 036 Lausitzer Platz
1415, 1979*

Wooden chair, 22 mice cast in bronze
83 x 46 x 46 cm

Collection: Becht, Naarden

But the hand of the LORD was heavy upon them of Ashdod, and he destroyed them, and smote them with emerods, even Ashdod and the coasts thereof. (King James Bible, 1 Samuel 5: 6)

And these are the golden emerods which the Philistines returned for a trespass offering unto the LORD; for Ashdod one, for Gaza one, for Askelon one, for Gath one, for Ekron one; And the golden mice, according to the number of all the cities of the Philistines belonging to the five lords, both of fenced cities, and of country villages, even unto the great stone of

Abel, whereon they set down the ark of the LORD: which stone remaineth unto this day in the field of Joshua, the Bethshemite. (King James Bible, 1 Samuel 6: 17-18)

Emerods (emeroids)
Hemorrhoids; tumors; raised up; swellings, protuberances
The word Emerods means ophel or techor in Hebrew

Marcel Duchamp
Roue de bicyclette, (Bicycle Wheel), 1913
 (original lost)
 Replica (5), 1964
 Truing Stand, bicycle wheel, stool
 Edition of 8, 127 cm high
 Galerie Schwarz, Milan
 Supervised by Marcel Duchamp

Joseph Beuys: '... The fat on the Fat Chair is not geometric, as in the fat corners, but keeps something of its chaotic character. The ends of the wedges read like a cross-section cut through the nature of fat. I placed it on a chair to emphasize this, since here the chair represents a kind of human anatomy, the area of digestive and excretive warmth processes, sexual organs and interesting chemical change, relating psychologically to will power.

In German the joke is compounded as a pun since Stuhl (chair) is also the polite way of saying shit (stool), and that too is a used and mineralized material with a chaotic character, reflected in the texture of the cross-section of fat.

The presence of the chair has nothing to do with Duchamp's Readymades, or his combination of a stool with a bicycle wheel, although they share initial impact as humorous objects.'

(Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys*, Thames and Hudson, 1979, p. 72)

Joseph Beuys
Fettstuhl, fat chair, 1964
 Wooden chair, fat, metal



The earliest writing (in Mesopotamia and Egypt) was either through stylized pictures, "pictograms", or by combinations of wedge marks in clay, called "cuneiform" (meaning wedge shaped).



Please note: the original combination had a truing stand, not a front wheel fork. True – A situation in which a wheel or other rotating device such as a chain-wheel is in proper lateral alignment. Truing stand – A bench – mounted device to hold bicycle wheels while they are being aligned – trued –.

Marcel Duchamp: "The Bicycle Wheel is my first Readymade, so much so that at first it wasn't even called a Readymade. It still had little to do with the idea of the Readymade. Rather it had more to do with the idea of chance. In a way, it was simply letting things go by themselves and having a sort of created atmosphere in a studio, an apartment where you live. Probably, to help your ideas come out of your head. To set the wheel turning was very soothing, very comforting, a sort of opening of avenues on other things than material life of every day. I liked the idea of having a bicycle wheel in my studio. I enjoyed looking at it, just as I enjoyed looking at the flames dancing in a fireplace. It was like having a fireplace in my studio, the movement of the wheel reminded me of the movement of flames."

(Marcel Duchamp in an interview with Arturo Schwarz circa 1960)

Joseph Semah
From the diary of the architect, 1982
 Ink on paper
 30 x 21 cm

שמן FAT

An amount or quantity beyond what is needed, desired, or appropriate: excess, glut, overage, overflow, overmuch, over-run, overstock, oversupply, superfluity, surplus, surplusage.
 (Surplus = gold = fat = yellow)
 Yellow is a color that serves a dual purpose. As the color of light, yellow may be used to represent divinity. However, because yellow light is not pure white, it may also be used to symbolize corruption and degradation.

שמן SHAMAN

The word Shaman means in Hebrew: to become (grow, wax) fat, oil vender, toucher, one accustomed to touch everything.

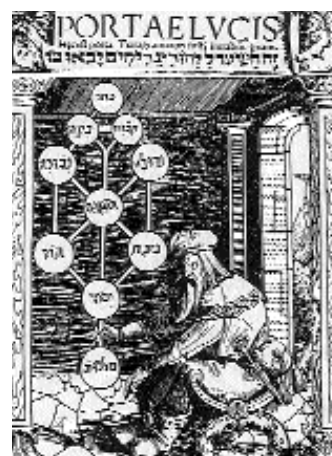
כפרת KAPORET

Exodus 25:22. And there I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the (Kaporet) mercy seat...
 The translation of Kaporet is a "lid" and can be interpreted as "mercy seat" but "mercy seat" is not the translation.

Moses's seat: Cathedra;
 ex cathedra; from the throne; taken to be indisputably true, and must be accepted by Catholics.



Joseph Semah
The birth of perspective, 1987
 Bronze, chess-boards, 22 bicycle wheels
 50 x 180 x 380 cm



Front page *Porta Lucis* (Gates of Light) by Paulus Ricius, Augsburg, 1516. This book is a partial translation of *Sla-Arei Orah*, Joseph Gikatila, 13th century.



Mutilated criminal elevated on a wheel, from the so-called *Book of Numquam*, 13th-14th centuries. Tempera on parchment Cathedral Library, Soest.



Joseph Semah

אופן (*Wheel, angel*)

NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM

(OFaN, GaLGaL, OFaNaYieM,

GoLGoLeT, GoLGaTA), 1983

Three bicycle wheels, galvanized metal
pipes, two wine glasses

180 x 180 x 60 cm

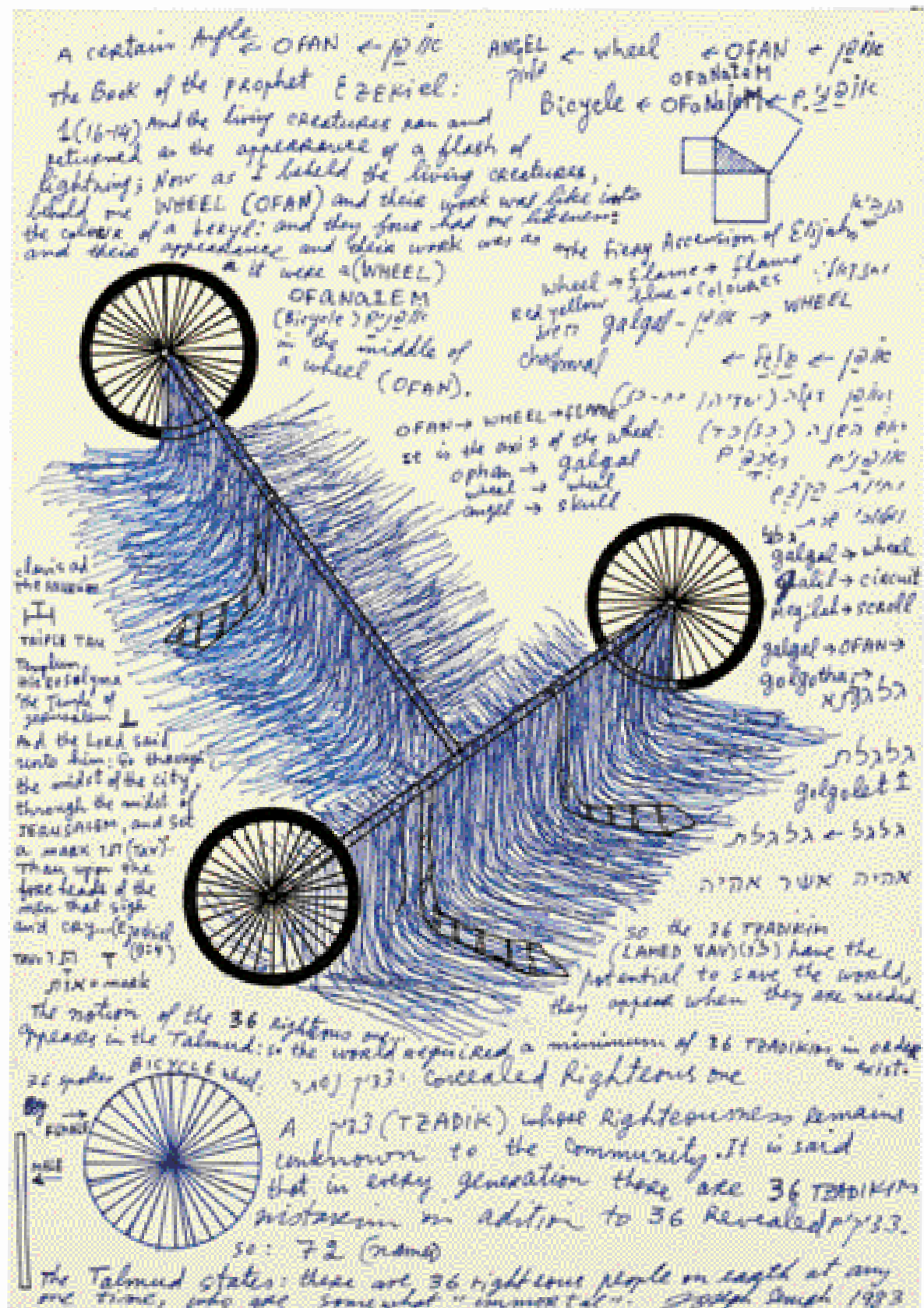
And the living creatures ran and returned as the appearance of a flash of lightning. Now as I beheld the living creatures, behold one **אופן** (OFaN) wheel upon the earth by the living creatures, with his four faces.

The appearance of the **אופנים** (OFaNiM) wheels and their work like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness: and their appearance and their work as it were a **אופן** (OFaN) wheel in the middle of a **אופן** (OFaN) wheel. (King James Bible, the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, 1: 14-16)

The word **אופן** OFaN means a wheel or an angel in Hebrew. In modern Hebrew **אופנים** (OFaNaYieM) means bicycle. Please note: the bicycle wheel has 36 spokes, hence the bicycle has 72 spokes. As the Talmud Yerushalmi points out, 36 is a number that alludes to the supernatural light of creation, the special light that Adam had use of for 36 hours in the Garden of Eden before God hid it for the 36 Tzadikim in every future generation. Remember, according to the oral tradition of Judaism the **ל"ו צדיקים** Lamed Vav (36) Tzadikim, namely the 36

righteous persons, cannot be recognized and yet they are here to hold our world, as a mother holds her child.

At all times there are 36 concealed Tzadikim and 36 revealed Tzadikim, together they correspond to the 72 Names of God, the force that links the concealed and the revealed worlds.



Joseph Semah, *From the diary of the architect*, 1983
 Blue and black ink on paper, 30 x 21 cm



A late-18th century's *Elijah's Chair* in the niche in the Carpentras synagogue "this is the chair for Elijah, blessed be his memory"

Please note: A chair is prepared and a cup of wine poured for Elijah at every Pesach (Passover) celebration. He is also believed to be present at every Brit Milah (circumcision) ceremony, and a special chair – Elijah's chair – for his invisible presence is placed next to that of the Sandak (godfather) holding the male baby.

This particular belief may be due to Elijah's angelic status (having ascended to heaven) and the prophet Malachi's reference to him as the "angel of the covenant".

Consequently one must not forget Elijah's eschatological role in Jewish tradition, namely, his role of precursor of the Messiah, for he is the messenger announcing his advent.



Joseph Beuys

Celtic + ~~~~

Footwashing during a public performance
Basel, 1971

And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then say the scribes that Elijah must first come? And Jesus answered and said unto them, Elijah truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, That Elijah is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them. Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

(King James Bible, The Gospel according to St. Matthew 17: 10-13)

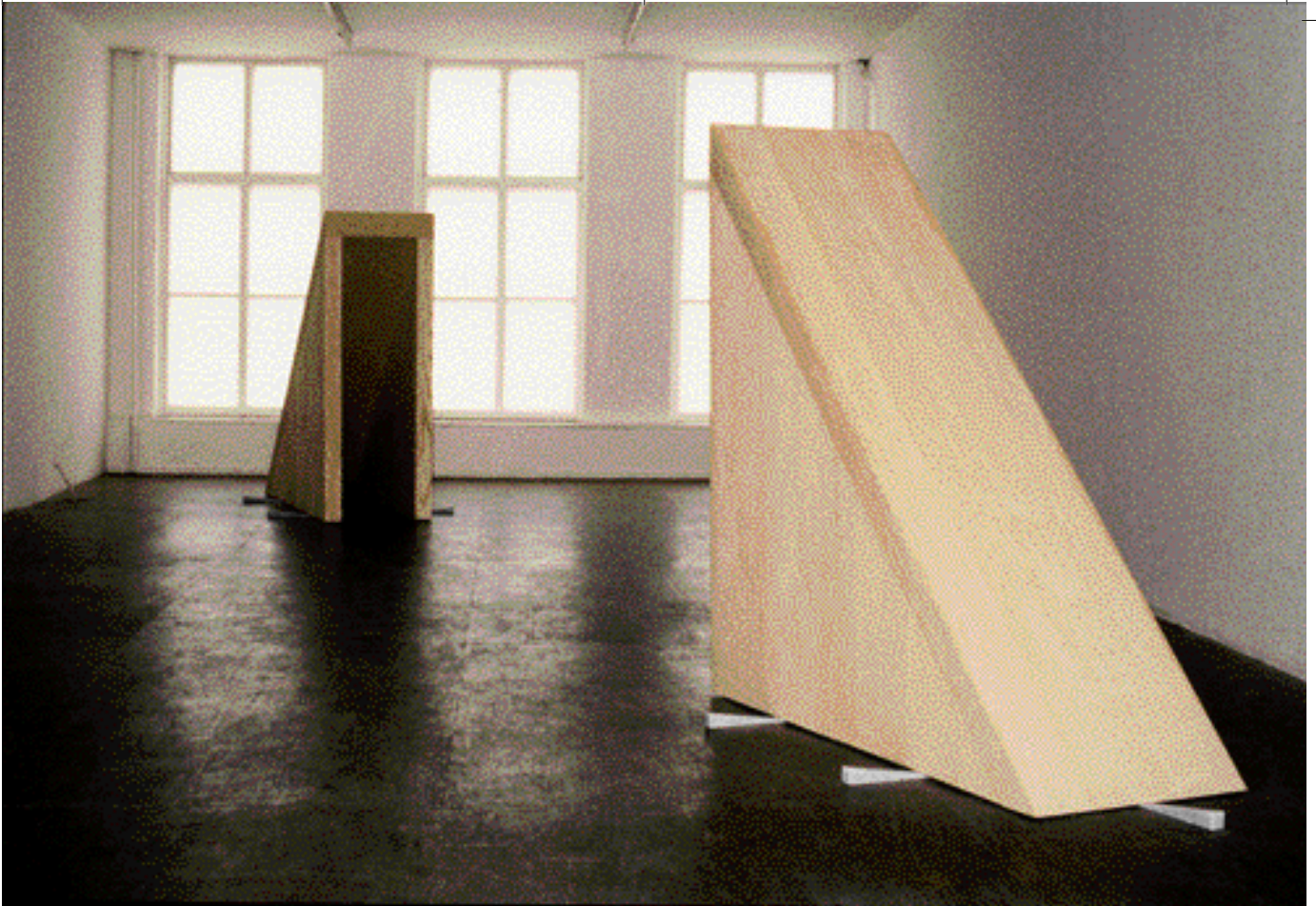
Joseph Semah

(The Gulf war) 1991 - (Purim) 2003

..... 12 years later, 1991-2003

Wooden chair, 5000 meter of white threads, glasses, plumb-line
80 x 400 x 700 cm





Joseph Semah
Voluntary self-restraint, 1986
 Wood, 10 blue marble wedges, books
 176 x 500 x 80 cm

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אופנים OFaNiM
 6th century representation from Didron,
Christian Iconography.
 Two burning wheels, wings, eyes, flames
 (Ezekiel 1)

Paul Groot

The two faces of an Antichrist

About God and Joseph Beuys, the youth catechism and a last confession

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I Joseph Beuys' last confession to father Mennekes

Think, talk, act! Joseph Beuys for children and youngsters is the title of the exhibition disclosing Joseph Beuys' oeuvre to the public in an ambiance of social and artistic quasi-familiarity. I have asked myself whether the old master would have felt flattered, now that for the smallest among us his pictures and symbols are reduced to their most basic meaning. Will he up there feel relieved that the weight of his artistic oeuvre is taken from his shoulders so easily? Come to think of it: Beuys as light as a feather, why not? But to anyone, like me, who was a contemporary of Beuys and actually met him, this would still be something of a shock. For even as the master eventually grew milder, he remained uncompromising until the end of his life. His always argumentative and hard to please attitude as a workaholic, forever building on issues and always trying to stay ahead of criticisms, leaves little room for children playing, at best perhaps for children being serious. But first, before we begin to market Beuys as 'Beuys Light' and we let loose his legacy on today's youth, we perhaps ought to bring to mind his Catholic upbringing. Then by taking a measure of his theological oeuvre we could speak about it in more certain terms. Anyone no longer – or still not – aware of the theological and ideological indoctrination of youngsters in his youth may miss a good understanding of Beuys' artistic views. Relevant interpretations of his work are impossible without a thorough knowledge of neo-Thomistic theology, as practiced in those days. For while innovators such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer were making preparations for a new religion, Beuys' intuitions are still entirely the product of an almost mediæval dogmatic strictness. For a fuller understanding of his metaphorical language this would be the direction to pursue. This therefore means an insight in different times, in different esthetics and artistic theory; beyond contemporary and somewhat trimmed down theology, back to the fascist compulsive neuroses of the era from 1933 to 1943, back to Beuys' boyhood. Back to that hysterical cultural indoctrination past all civilization, used to fool an entire people with and touching young Beuys equally in his true self. The scars of the wounds it had left he could never hide; he never managed to cut himself loose completely. These wounds he would still talk about two years before his death with Father Friedhelm Mennekes, the Jesuit. This could very well be called his last – public – confession, and he doesn't mince words.¹ Beuys is annoyed by a lack of appreciation for his artistic thinking by the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of his childhood in Kleef, his puberty and his – dreamed up, by the way – military service as a Stuka pilot. Mennekes' lack of understanding artistically takes Beuys back to those years of the Roman Catholic Church's almost completely servile obedience to Hitler. These horrific experiences prompt a metaphorical language use that perplexes the priest; he is rendered powerless by the suddenly exposed deeper emotions of the artist. When he moreover attempts to restore the tainted image of the Church in Beuys' head and attempts to interpret the work as coming from a contemporary figure of Christ in the world, Beuys' reaction speaks volumes:

- No, Beuys says, the Church no longer teaches us anything; nor does the figure of Christ.
- But, the priest asks, is there no trace left of the saving, redeeming and liberating principle of an 'Auferstehungstheologie'?
- No, Beuys replies, resurrection is only meant to sell an old structure that is dying or stagnating as a lively, vibrating, life giving and exciting form.
- But, the priest asks, is it not the portrait of Christ that we recover in your extended concept of art?
- No, Beuys replies, what matters is the negation of Christ and the principle of evolution, the only thing for an artist like me to do is reach back to the figure of the Antichrist!

Now, that could be called fouling one's own nest!

Beuys, who always spoke in riddles in all those performances, conversations, lectures, papers and interviews, this time unconditionally, unashamedly, lays bare his soul. When the priest wants to give voice to today's world and its problems Beuys takes him back to his childhood; back to that state of confusion where all interests have become interlaced; to when the Eucharist from Sunday's Holy Mass smoothly blended with the packet of Blue Band from the regional butter and margarine culture of his birthplace Kleef; when Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and the Swastika seemed to incorporate the same strength as the Gospels and the Holy Cross of Christ; when the Holy Eucharist seemed a preparation for the experiments of the concentration camps, and the spiritual, extended church concept of the Roman Catholic Church, upheld as a very appealing example also used later by Hitler and Nazi-demagogue Goebbels, provided the foundation for Beuys' art concept. Does the priest have a response to that? And is he aware that subconsciously or not the rituals surrounding Jesus and Hitler had such a profound effect on his young mind that these would serve him for inspiration during his entire life as an artist? And that now, in the autumn of his life, he therefore stands before the priest as the Antichrist?

Don't you realize, father, that because you are talking to me you are also talking to the Antichrist?!, Beuys asks the priest.

But Mennekes remains imperturbable.

II Beuys' Extended Art Concept and the youth Catechism

In the Catholic 'little' youth Catechism we may find the most basic and also most adequate wordings for Beuys' art concept. If to the question 'Where is God?' the answer becomes: 'God is in heaven, on earth and in all places: He is everywhere', this is simply Beuys' response to the Jesuit's questioning him about his art concept. And when the priest even so wants to grasp the art concept in art objects, the Catechism again replies: 'We cannot see God, for he is without a body; He is the infinitely perfect Spirit.'² And when the priest persists Beuys will in fact tell him in veiled yet clear terms what the real issue is. And even today his reply is a startling one:

- Keine besseren Strategien als den Antichristen so auftreten zu lassen, is what we hear.

Are people aware of that when they try to explain Beuys to children?

The Antichrist was introduced by Jesus himself when he prophesied that 'false Christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders.' This is later specified further by John when he says that 'every spirit that dissolves Jesus, is not of God; and this is Antichrist, of whom you have heard that he comes, and he is now already in the world.' In the Middle Ages the coming of the Antichrist, who will falsely promise the second coming of the Messiah and wrongfully announce the Coming of the Celestial Court, gradually amalgamated into an expected arrival of Mongols and Tartars. This therefore puts Beuys' connecting his partly invented artistic identity with such Antichrist – when in the Second World War his plane had crashed Tartars would have rescued him by greasing him in and wrapping him up in felt – into better perspective. But since the Antichrist was considered in a combine with Jewish immigrants, the issue would be whether Beuys also personalized the Jewish Antichrist. If so, how are we to fathom Beuys' interest in Nazi persecutors? Or, what seems very plausible, does he change his perspective regularly? Succinctly: how Jewish is Beuys' Antichrist really?³

In the post-war years Beuys' feelings were of being chosen to bear not just his own guilt but that of Hitler and the Holy Mother Church as well. He seemed to want to show remorse for the misery the Nazi regime and the German people and in no lesser measure 'his' Roman Catholic Church had inflicted on mankind. On his shoulders came to rest the collective guilt of the German nation, the mourning after the lost war and all the misery originating in Hitler's years.

But that would have been too heavy a burden for just one person and Beuys becomes mentally unstable. He eventually finds a way out of this overburdening by a to some extent opportunistic choosing of sides by representing different parties alternately. This is how his periodic identification with the Jews can be understood and how he wants to play his role of Antichrist; an ambiguity also explaining his doubts about the position of the Antichrist. Beuys wants to provoke the priest by laying claim to the coming of the real Saviour aside from his role as the Antichrist. What would the father say if he himself, Joseph Beuys, also proved to be the real Saviour? What would he say if Beuys ultimately by, through and in His Work would be able to redeem the German Fall and its gruesome results? Even if Beuys himself would have doubts from time to time, to his followers he would still without question incorporate the presence of this Saviour who restored pure humanism and pure artistic Dasein in post-war Germany. They would agree to his playing the Antichrist, about whom St. Paul observes: 'even he, whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders (...), he that opposes and exalts himself against all that is called God or that is worshipped; so that he sits in the temple of God, setting himself forth as

God.' What would he say when Beuys subsequent to his role as the Antichrist would reveal himself to be the true Redeemer who, to paraphrase St. Paul: 'shall slay with the breath of his mouth the godless apparitions and brings to nought the shadows of the war by the manifestation of his coming.'

III Unilever's margarine plant and Beuys' honey pump

Beuys' thoughts, acts and words are shaped by an amalgam of Catholic theology and Nazi ideology. Hitler's madness and Goebbels' rhetoric became as thoroughly fixed in his mind as the ideas originating in the Catholic Church, and particularly in a theologian like Thomas Aquinas.

For evidence of this it would suffice to remind ourselves how the fat material functions in his work. Fat became his most intimate material, symbol of his in his own words: social sculpture, which becomes fluid in a heated and rock hard in a cooled state. Fat which in his youth in the words of a critic was 'alltäglich, zwangsläufig und lebensnotwendig'. This could arguably be a decisive image from his early years.



Joseph Beuys
"Churn Man"

Photographs show that Beuys' working method is the artistic variation on the function of 'churn operator', so vital to the process of making margarine. Beuys' almost priestlike demeanor in his performances, so often remindful of the liturgical services and the Eucharist, remains hidden as it were behind the actions of the man who at margarine making 'uses a shovel to throw five kilos of margarine alternatively to the left and to the right of him.' The historian writes this about him: "The margarine was taken up from the churn by a wooden shovel with sharpened edge. The churn measured one meter square and was about a meter and a half high. The front side could be let down. Dependent on its size in the churn the churning had to lift up quite some margarine mass. A churning moved from 9 to 14 tons of margarine a day, it was extremely heavy work."⁴ That is precisely what Beuys is seen doing regularly: churning, mixing, rolling. Beuys prepares his social sculpture in a way similar to how fat becomes margarine. Here the function of churning is provided with a touch of liturgy. Again and again Beuys comes back to it, a method of working developed perhaps into its finest result in

his *Documenta* contribution from 1977. This is Beuys at his peak artistically: the honey pump as the ideal mixture of the duties of a churning and a Catholic priest. But with no regard to the splendor of that work, in 1977, a period of high modernism, in an almost post-modern era, the use of fats falls completely outside the artistic code of the day. It is not his current material but an echo from his early years, material as a metaphor given only one reference, that is: the typical Nazi preoccupation with surrogates. As obsessed as they were about an economically fully autarkical, militaristic Germany with no need for anything coming from the enemy, the Nazis greatly emphasized the fabrication of substitutes for all kinds of products that had to be imported. One of the spearheads here was the production of synthetic fats. The health of the *Volk* was at stake and it was therefore of national priority that butter and margarine continued to be available in sufficient quantities. Beuys' tactile world, his affinity for materials, might very well have been co-formed by this compulsive thinking. This is not surprising, for Kleef, his childhood town, housed the margarine plants of Van den Bergh & Jurgens – later the Unie, later still Unilever – that featured prominently in his research.

He could never stop thinking about fat production. The madness of the regime at the time, calling on everyone to produce substitutes and making it out to be of a national duty to find a possible alternative fat production, did not leave Beuys undisturbed. In his fat production he finds himself in some curious company. His name is as prominent as



Trucks laden with processed margarine, ca. 1918

that of 'SS Gruppenführer' Wilhelm Keppler, whose plan was to obtain fat from coal and proudly advised Himmler how to realize his 'Utopia' of no more 'Fettlücke'. Thanks to tests carried out 'in dem Konzentrationslager in Sachsenhausen' he believed to be able to solve the problem of fat deficiency in the war years. Or the villain Alfred E. Frauenfeld, living on the Crimean, who played with the thought of robbing the occupied territories of their fats after allowing for the German occupying forces to take their share. And if perchance the right packaging would be missing they could still always confiscate the bath tubs in these territories and send them filled with 'Butterschmalz' to Germany.⁵ I am not the first to

suspect that Beuys, whose father preferred to see him as an apprentice in the local margarine factory, may also have been inspired by these idiots for his later corners of fat, his legendary *Badewanne* and his 'erweiterte' art concept. Beuys' *Badewanne* at Hamburg, made exactly twenty years after Frauenfeld provided his suggestions, is not just called *Jason II* for any reason. It is a reminder of the Greek hero Jason who brought back the Golden Fleece from the Black Sea, and also of the contrived crashing of Beuys' own Stuka on the Crimean, but perhaps especially for warding off that gruesome plan from Frauenfeld. Jason, Beuys and Frauenfeld, the Black Sea and the Crimean, fat and felt, all that can easily combine with Blue Band and Rama, Kleef and fats in one reading session.⁶

In Beuys' public confession his work becomes a reflection of fascist ideology; as a reaction to the Nazi passion for surrogates but equally to Goering's maxim 'Kanonen statt Butter'. 'Butter statt Kanonen' Beuys seems to emphasize, although his work apart from when in the 1960s the butter mountain was on the European political agenda, will be completely disregarded by the spirit of the time. After all, who still wants to hear about that after the war? But this did not stand in the way of Beuys' great successes in the 1970s and 1980s. How is that to be explained?

IV Beuys and the Hare, an anti-Semitic exorcism and the parody

Wrapped up in predatory Nazi and oppressive Catholic ideologies, in the parallels between rowdy Nazi slogans and more sophisticated Catholic patronization, it is not surprising that young Beuys was moved by the anti-Semitic aspect of this combine. After all, the Catholics also knew exactly what to do with the keepers of the divine promise. Even if the Jews had been passing down that promise from generation to generation – when the Redeemer had finally arrived they still had rejected Him. If the Saviour not for no reason pronounces a seven-fold woe over the Pharisees we find ourselves inside the heart of the matter. As a conjuration, a memory, as an inevitable reflex from the Nazi era Beuys explains his 'Braunkreuz' drawings to a dead hare.

- I decide who is a Jew, Goering says.
- I am the hare, Beuys says.

Could this have been the subject of the conversation between Beuys and the hare? It is said that Beuys addressed the hare in an 'indefinable language'. But this would not have to satisfy anyone. Joseph Semah, himself an artist, of the Jewish persuasion, a real stalker of Beuys' work – or rather, in his own opinion 'it is Beuys who is stalking me' – knows better. Didn't he hear Hebrew? Is he not familiar with that tone of Beuys' 'symbols and cymbals'? The success of this performance reminds him of something else. So much humbug, so much surface symbolism, so much meaningless metaphors, these were used before to touch a chord in the German soul. What public is it that surrenders to this accidental pictures' shaman? In his own oeuvre Semah recovers and examines the Jewish tradition of Torah, Talmud and Kabala and its dis-



Poster of Simon van den Bergh's Margarine Factory in Rotterdam and Kleef in Germany, 1894, Municipal Archive Rotterdam

proportionately hefty symbolism, but here he sees how a moderated superficial approach enables Beuys to dominate the art world's attention. He objects to that.

Semah therefore teaches Beuys what Beuys may not have known himself: that the hare can combine with anti-Semitic thoughts. Already from the thirteenth century in Europe the hare has been symbolizing Jewry and their responsibility for the suffering of Jesus and the Christian peoples. What Beuys may or may not have said, Semah has the advantage over Beuys with respect to what took place here and he raises his work's temperature to the critical one of anti-Semitism. To the tension this would cause Semah has just one response. Semah applies a grip on Beuys in a way that the master himself barely appreciated: by irony and, better still: parody.

At issue is whether Semah's parody obliterates the original image, as much as Charlie Chaplin's Hitler from *The Great Dictator* always continues to sparkle through the original figure. The spectator should make up his own mind about this. But what to say of the hare spoken to by Beuys and hearing from him about the meaning of the 'Braunkreuz' drawings? In these days it is due to Semah's intervention mainly a shocking image, as if after the Holocaust the sacrificial Jew would still be in need of an explanation for his grievances. Is it Beuys telling the hare of the fate of the Jews who repudiated Christianity and that this would serve them right, or is it Beuys speaking about Hitler's Swastika as the natural descendant of the Holy Cross? And, Semah wonders, if Beuys is not the hunter, on whose conscience lies the hare's death? And the hare, could he be the Image of the Jew whose life was obliterated in such a gruesome manner? Who could still look at the same performance after Semah's interpretation? In *Wie man einem toten deutschen Künstler das Hasen Jagen erklärt* from 1986 Semah had riveted a bronze hare to a burning neon tube as if it were electrocuted by the shock. In another parody – he prefers 'comparative performance' – Semah sitting in a chair addresses a stuffed hare, quoting Beuys' classic performances line for line. The text in Hebrew here does right to threaten the assertions Beuys made. Semah has told us



68

Blue Band poster - designed by Alan Harker, 1937, Archive Head Office Unilever, Rotterdam

through other interventions as well how hares and other animals sometimes pop up somewhere in large numbers and are always touched by the neon tube. Hares and dogs; the same dogs that in the Middle Ages suffered the fate of the Jews who repudiated Christianity by being hung from their feet on the gallows over a brightly lit fire.⁷

As furious as this is Semah's revenge on Beuys' performance *I like America, and America likes me*, where Beuys spent three days and nights caged in with a coyote inside a New York gallery. This highlight of Beuys' work from 1974 Semah has good use for. What had always been considered a statement about the destruction of Indian cultures at the hands of European immigrants is made into an embarrassing, ridiculous depiction. Semah minimizes the suggestive aggressiveness of the dog and ridicules Beuys personally. Where Beuys shrouded in felt fends off the dog in rage Semah converts this into a ram's horn's defense against a bronze dingo. And, telling enough, Beuys' felt cloth has transformed into a tallith, the Jewish prayer garment, draped around the head. As ghastly as a parody can be, for who appreciates it.

V

In *Ik lees al* (I know how to read), a publication by the R.K. Jongensweeshuis (Roman Catholic boys orphanage) from

1933, we find a short story as told to Catholic children in those years. It is about little Frits, and 'Frits is called to the priesthood, but he has to grow up a little first.' Frits in his preparation for priesthood is provided by Santa Claus with 'a sou-ta-ne and a small bi-ret-ta'. Although he is only a little father, still high up on the chair he preaches to brother and sister: 'You may not com-mit sin lest you go to Pur-ga-to-ry. When the lit-tle fa-ther has no more words, he says: A-men. Fi-nal-ly he jumps down from the pul-pit and the ser-mon is over.'

Beuys' conversation with Father Mennekes bears some resemblance to this childhood tableau. The old master is led back by his conversation partner to the images from his childhood. He was never capable of ridding himself for good of the 'high ideals' from those years. Beuys goes into confession with the priest. By the confession 'I am the Antichrist' he reports to the church representative for duty as Satan in person. After having overcome all shame and fear he after all knows that, in the words of the youth Catechism: 'It is better to confess our sins now in secret than face eternal shame about it.' And because 'the father confessor holds the place of Christ, full of love for the sinners (...) and the father confessor is bound by absolute secrecy', he may count on discretion.

Beuys' last confession is a beautiful artistic testament which sheds a bright and shining light on much of his work and should perhaps no longer be handed to our children so quickly. For Beuys is by no means as light as a feather, right?



Nazi subversive propaganda; Unterstützt die deutsche Industrie! Kauft und verkauft deutsche Margarine! (Protect the German industry! Buy and sell German Margarine!)



Execution of a Jew after a trial by ordeal at Bergen, Henegouwen, 14th century



Joseph Semah
I Like Holland and Holland likes me, 1985
Black and blue ink on paper
30 x 21 cm

Notes:

1. Friedhelm Mennekes, *Beuys zu Christ: eine Position im Gespräch*, Stuttgart 1990. The conversation took place on 30th March 1984.
2. *Katechismus, ten gebruike van de Nederlandse bisdommen*, Haarlem 1950.
3. For the Antichrist, in a catholic perspective, see: Prof. D. Bont en anderen, *De Katholieke Kerk*, Kortrijk & Utrecht, Imprimator 1943.
4. Maria Louise Josephina Carolina Schrover, *The Fat, the Sweet and the Common Good, labour relations in the margarine industry and in the cacao and chocolate industry in the Netherlands, 1870-1960*, dissertation Rijksuniversiteit Utrecht, 1991, pp. 101-102.
5. Frank Gieseke & Albert Markert, 'Kleine Fettgeschichte', from *Flieger Fliz und Waterland, Eine erweiterte Beuys Biografie*, 1996, ElefantPress, pp. 143-150.
6. That margarine, rough and elementary and a paper wrapped packet of margarine can have an essential impact on art is remarkable. Still, this also means that the inventor of the Oleo-Margarin, the Frenchman Hippolyte Mège-Mourièr, actually deserves a place in art history. And

perhaps also those two Dutchmen: Simon van den Bergh and Anton Jurgens from Oss in the Netherlands, who followed their business instinct and laid the foundation for a popular consumption article eventually leading to Unilever. And it also means that both their brands: Blue Band and Rama, are claiming their artistic rights in art history. As much as artists become recognizable today through Levi and Prada, Adidas and Nike, the products Rama and Blue Band were recognizable entities.

7. What more does this hare represent than just what people in the post-war years see in it? What more than just a symbol of lust and fertility, the connection with the female cycle and the lunar cycle? Old tradition gives the hare as an unclean animal, unclean because the poor animal has no hoofs. The hare is also a symbol of pernicious homosexuality. It corrupts boys, so, as it warns us: 'never eat hare for he gets a new "anus" every year'.

A Journey into

PaRDeS

Joseph Semah

Adso of Montier - En - Der (915-992)

Please note: The letter to Queen Gerberga concerning *The Origin and Life of the Antichrist* was completed by Adso of Montier-en-Der, ca 950 C.E. This letter became an important text in European eschatological literature. In this treaty the Antichrist will be born a Jew.



The circumcision of the Antichrist, 1482

"Even though he is a man, he will still be the source of all sins and the Son of Perdition, that is, the son of the devil, not through nature but through imitation (non per naturam, sed per imitationem) because he will fulfill the devil's will in everything."

Adso, *The origin and life of the Antichrist*."



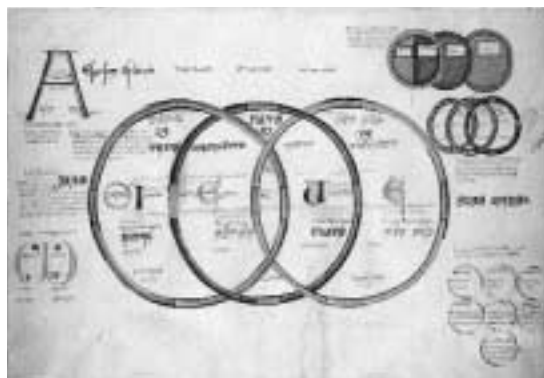
Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179)

The birth of Antichrist out of the church and his death

Hildegard von Bingen *Scivias* (know the ways) 3.2 from: *Eibington Abby codex 1*, a modern copy of the lost Rupertsberg manuscript, that was completed ca. 1151.

It reads a.o. "The Antichrist, the son of injustice, the cursed one of the cursed ones."

Please note: There are two main traditions concerning the Antichrist.
The first one is that Antichrist will be born a Jew. The second one is that Antichrist will be born from the Church.



Joachim of Fiore (1135-1202)
Liber figuratum, Book of figures, early 13th century.

In this chart one can read Joachim's theory of the three periods of history:

1. The era of the Father (Old Testament)
2. The era of Christ (The time of Joachim)
3. The age of the spirit (As a result of the reign of the Antichrist)



Antichrist astride Leviathan, *Liber Floridus* (Flowery Book of Lambert of Ghent), 12th century University Library, Ghent.



The false prophet, Shabbetai Tzevi (1626-1676) in Smyrna, 1666
Engraving from: *Two journeys to Jerusalem*, London 1685

Antichrist's false ascension.
Strassburg Antichrist Book, circa 1480

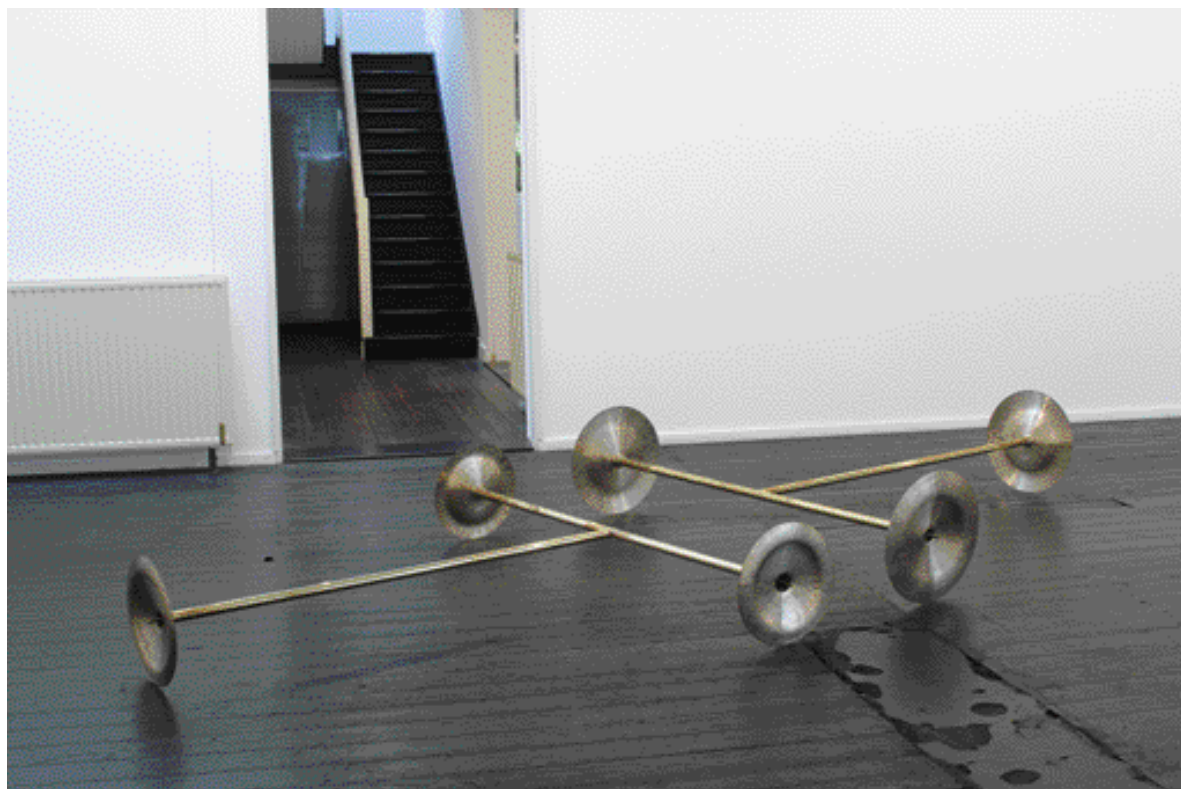


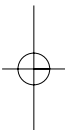


Joseph Semah
Techelet
Blue Band, 25 september 2004
 Tallit, linen cloths on canvas stretchers,
 two Blue-Band boxes
 90 x 30 x 40 cm
 Packing paper of Blue-Band margarine
 (Israel)
 21 x 15,5 cm



Joseph Semah
תו (TaV), 1983
 Iron pipes, 6 cymbals
 50 x 180 x 180 cm each





And the Lord said unto him, therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark (אֹת – OT) upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him. (King James Bible, Genesis 4:15)

And the Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark (תָּו – Tav) (T – Thau) upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof. (King James Bible, Ezekiel 9:4)

Triple Tau = Jerusalem 

Templum Hierosolyma (T above H)
'The Temple of Jerusalem'.
'Holiness supporting Trinty', according to Christianity.

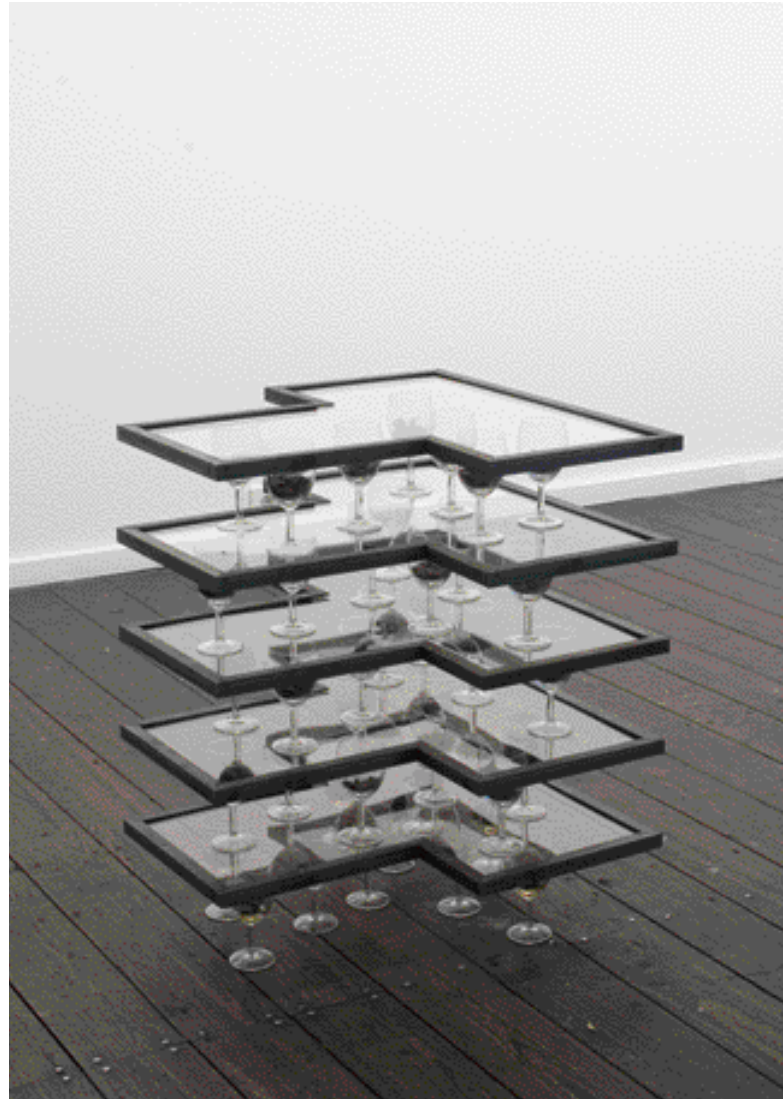
Clavis ad Thesaurum – 'A key to a treasure' Theca ubi res pretiosa deponitur – 'A place where a precious thing is concealed', according to speculative freemasonry.

Polonisierung Westpreussens (cartoon)
Simplicissimus (newspaper)
26.07.1903
Österreichische Nationalbibliothek



Joseph Semah
Black Fire / White Fire, 2005
Steel, glass, wine glasses, burned poetry
by Paul Celan
70 x 50 x 50 cm

According to a Jewish tradition, the Torah consists of all the names of God. When Torah was revealed to Moses, he saw its letters engraved with black fire upon white fire.



Joseph Beuys
Kukei, akopee - Nein!..., 1964



Paul Celan

Todesfuge

76

Todesfuge

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken sie abends
 wir trinken sie mittags und morgens wir trinken sie nachts
 wir trinken und trinken
 wir schaufeln ein Grab in den Lüften da liegt man nicht eng
 Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen der
 schreibt
 der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland dein goldenes
 Haar Margarete
 er schreibt es und tritt vor das Haus und es blitzen die Sterne
 er pfeift seine Rüden herbei
 er pfeift seine Juden hervor läßt schaufeln ein Grab in der Erde
 er befiehlt uns spielt auf nun zum Tanz

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
 wir trinken dich morgens und mittags wir trinken dich abends
 wir trinken und trinken
 Ein Mann wohnt im Haus der spielt mit den Schlangen der
 schreibt
 der schreibt wenn es dunkelt nach Deutschland dein goldenes
 Haar Margarete
 Dein aschenes Haar Sulamith wir schaufeln ein Grab in den
 Lüften da liegt man nicht eng

Er ruft stecht tiefer ins Erdreich ihr einen ihr andern singet
 und spielt
 er greift nach dem Eisen im Gurt er schwingts seine Augen
 sind blau
 stecht tiefer die Spaten ihr einen ihr andern spielt weiter zum
 Tanz auf

Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
 wir trinken dich mittags und morgens wir trinken dich abends
 wir trinken und trinken
 ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete
 dein aschenes Haar Sulamith er spielt mit den Schlangen

Er ruft spielt süßer den Tod der Tod ist ein Meister aus
 Deutschland
 er ruft streicht dunkler die Geigen dann steigt ihr als Rauch
 in die Luft
 dann habt ihr ein Grab in den Wolken da liegt man nicht eng
 Schwarze Milch der Frühe wir trinken dich nachts
 wir trinken dich mittags der Tod ist ein Meister aus
 Deutschland
 wir trinken dich abends und morgens wir trinken und trinken
 der Tod ist ein Meister aus Deutschland sein Auge ist blau
 er trifft dich mit bleierner Kugel er trifft dich genau
 ein Mann wohnt im Haus dein goldenes Haar Margarete
 er hetzt seine Rüden auf uns er schenkt uns ein Grab in der Luft
 er spielt mit den Schlangen und träumet der Tod ist ein
 Meister aus Deutschland

dein goldenes Haar Margarete
 dein aschenes Haar Sulamith

Paul Celan, Paul Pessach Antschel, may 1945

A Journey into



a

R

D

e

S

Joseph Semah

Joseph Semah
Spinoza Ethica, 1979-81
Wood, nails, branch, plaster and a book
19 x 200 x 19 cm
Collection: Hugues Boekraad

Joseph Semah
*... And they shall beat their swords
into plowshares, and their spears into
pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up
sword against nation, neither shall
they learn war any more*
(Isaiah 2:4), 1979
Two cartridge cases and hammers
60 x 60 x 60 cm





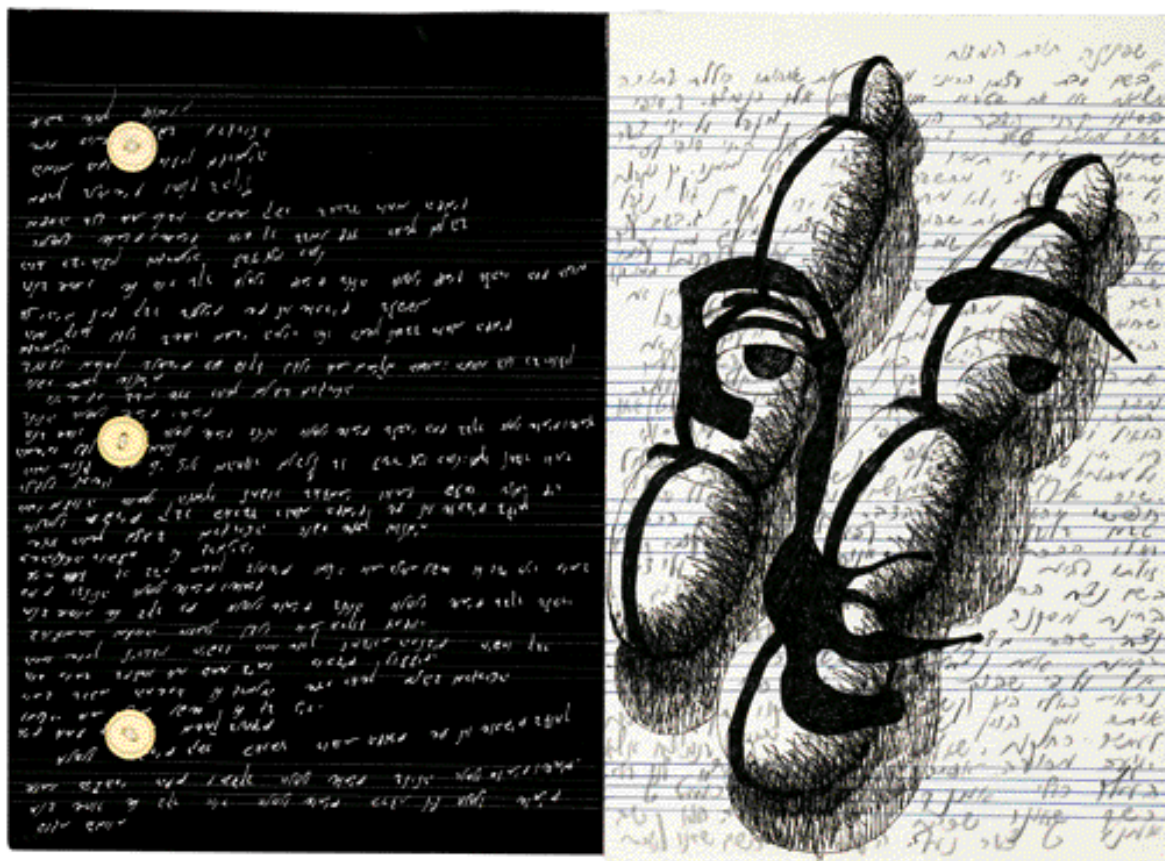
Joseph Semah
black milk, 1979
Two cartridge cases, milk jug
30 x 50 x 80 cm



Joseph Semah
... a black heart from Jerusalem, 1979
Violin, spade and white threads
21 x 40 x 90 cm



Joseph Semah
As one dies, so dies the other, 1985
Bronze, (walking stick, Matzah), spade
70 x 30 x 70 cm



Joseph Semah

Between Paul Celan and Spinoza, 1979

Pencil, ink, buttons and thread

40 x 30 cm

Collection: Museum van Bommel van Dam Venlo

79

As for myself, I was asked in 1950 at the time of my first one-man show, What is my own aesthetic? What can I offer as guidelines to my work? I said then that my entire aesthetic can be found in the Passover service. At the Passover seder, which was also Jesus's last meal, the blessing is always made to distinguish between the profane and the sacred: "Blessed be thou, O Lord, who distinguishes between what is holy and what is not holy." And when the Passover falls on the Sabbath [YaKNeHaZ], the Jew is caught in a dilemma between the holiness of the festival and the holiness of the Sabbath, which is holier than any other festival except the day of Atonement [Yom Kippurim]; and his blessing then becomes, "Blessed be thou, O Lord, who distinguishes between what is holy and what is holy." That's the problem, the artistic problem, and, I think, the true spiritual dimension. (Barnett Newman: *Revolution, Place and Symbol*, 1969)

Tallit

(originating from Bagdad), circa 1800

Wool

150 x 220 cm



A Journey into

P a R D e S

Joseph Semah

80

For as long as Western projects continue to display Art Works as objects (of desire), the public must remain aware of and acquainted with the nature of גללית (Gallut)¹. Gallut should then be considered in an allegiance with us and the strategy of modernism. This is what makes Gallut so unusual. Gallut is not merely a condition of exile but means also accepting that each move toward some understanding and solution of modernism near a post-war museum must begin by contemplating the distance between Gallut and the city of Jerusalem, between the guest and the art works on display, and therefore between the host (the public) and the gaze of Gallut. To begin with, Gallut is the status of the guest, i.e. the birth place of modernism. Likewise modernism in the vicinity of the museum is our concrete dispute with the translation of the guest's original text into an object (of desire). As yet, modernism means the negation, the denial of the guest's inquiry into how the conflicts between ideals and institutions proceed. What is then the meaning and the form of such a negation? Against the background of the museum the negation itself is the definition of design, that is to say, the skill to conceal, to mask, to veil and to obscure information from the public at large. In our context design is our skill at masking the city of Jerusalem's real significance.

Then as now one finds that the city of Jerusalem is simultaneously a criticism and a non-sight.

The result is worth describing, for to be modern is not only to become acquainted with an idea or with a theory – but rather, an act of joining, of linking oneself to the forces of denial. This denial is the denial of the guest's initial reading, the guest's original criticism in close proximity to the host (public). Likewise, the burden of the guest, the role of the guest's critical awareness near the museum should be seen as mastery, as the ability to distinguish endlessly between measurements.

At this point it is necessary to clarify the following: that the criticisms coming from the guest and deployed in the museum are still being ignored and obscured by the host (public).

So, one must confess that the implicit assumption of modern representation in and outside Gallut, made obvious especially by the practice of טלית (Tallit)² in Gallut, is becoming more and more a mirror image, a reflective surface, a skin upon which the Western dominated political cultures of cleaning reside. Just as the actual reading in Gallut is a concrete link with the realm of design, the representation of modern thought outside Gallut has become a system of perpetual withdrawal from one skin into another. In truth, this is no mere expression of an opinion - on the contrary, it is a concrete criticism of a policy that radically controls and contains the course of Gallut by emphasizing a status for the guest primarily in terms of restriction and rejection. Therefore, the more we deny this the more we confirm it, unless we all cease to be modern and start to exercise a free and open debate with the guest.



Joseph Semah, *TERRitORY*, 2005
Two world maps, four wooden sticks, neon light, metal,
glass, electrical wires.
65 x 400 x 400 cm, Collection: Becht, Naarden

Indeed, some may suggest that there is not much use today for pitying the guest his status, or maybe it is a legitimate thought; either way, one must add that the question of criticism and in particular criticism moulded by the guest is still being disregarded by art criticism of the post-war period. It is equally worth recalling that the guest's political stance cannot be measured by territorial controversy alone – because, as a rule, the presence of the guest in the vicinity of the museum is always a certain dearth. After all, this is how one ignores the guest's critical view. The critical view that assists the museum in how it contains, controls and employs the narrative of Gallut. So, even when a clear choice has been made, one can still see that the meaning of art works on display is not an open invitation to a free debate – on the contrary, it is a certain denial of the very presence of the guest. No-one personally can claim a clear conscience and it has probably always been a fact of life. This is what makes us consider our differences with the guest mainly as a question of how to mask and obscure the proper interpretation. We cannot therefore forget that there is an almost desperate irony to the contrast between the making of an art work and how we trust our own criticism in the realm or sphere of the museum. This is the subject matter for our argument here, for it connects us directly to the need for the host (public) to visualise the problem of tolerance by establishing the vicinity of the museum as an accessible locality, whereas teaching itself makes progress as strategic moves in order to delay a debate with the guest.

It is not surprising that the most incredible failure on the part of art history, and in particular its post-war art criticism, is the refusal to recognize Gallut as the birth place of Modernism.

Even if we had not known this, we would at least have been aware of how the guest's contribution to the production of art works is essentially limited and controlled by the conditions of Western political freedom. However, the function of political freedom is another way of imposing fear – and has always been – and provides fear with its distinctive cutting edge. It remains important therefore to further our inquiry into what it means to be a guest. But only when the guest is someone ready to assume this identity and isolates some forces of the past. It is by no means an exaggeration to say that these forces are still active and formidable and still control and put limits on the guest's need and passion for debating freely with the host (public).

A combined view would make it evident that teaching in the vicinity of the museum would become a method, a system with a purpose of obliterating the arguments coming from the guest, and dating back from modern times to the earliest phases of evolution.

Not that there was evidence missing of what really happened in the post-war museum era, but on reflecting on the past it becomes clear that even today around the museum the critics of the guest are becoming more and more improvisational and casual, more and more connected to the foundation of modernism. Here it is by no means suggested that post-war art criticism is otherwise powerless – on the contrary, Western style artistic and political projects retain their functionality fashioned after the times. This means as much as saying that these projects if required will hide the critical propositions of the guest behind a mask. This is the place for emphasis. Gallut is a non-place, and the guest is the result of the extended association between post-war art consciousness and a habit of political generalisation.

Remember, by now we all know that TERRitORY meant something else in the realm of Gallut: TERR it or why?

But the paradoxes and ironies that surround the guest are no less severe; after all, the danger lies in how we handle power, which cannot integrate by itself into the world of Gallut. Of course there are varying degrees of intensity in this attachment to Gallut, just as there are varying degrees and types of healing in the vicinity of the museum. Even so, here we leave the realm of Gallut and enter the facts of history. Since 1945 the guest has been acquiring a certain authority and precisely because of this we should be wondering whether the act of covering up a lack of territory is nothing but a constant discharge of mourning. In all these discussions it should not be ignored that alongside the (newly) acquired native territory on which the guest began to operate, the tragic imperfection of the guest's form of appearance has continued embodying the extension not only for the non-sight of Architecture in and out-side the city of Jerusalem,

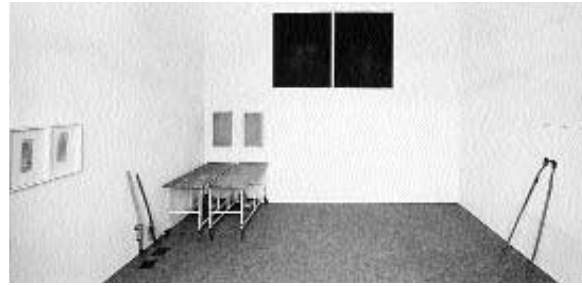
i.e., חורבן בית המקדש (Churban Bet Ha-Mikdash)³, but above all for the explicit misunderstanding regarding the significance of healing. So, extended logically, an equally intense realisation is appropriate for us because after all the question of the guest's self-determination concerning Gallut's wound includes not only the guests but also all the host(s).

Moreover, in the day to day surroundings of Gallut one can still identify a paradoxical attitude towards the guest. On the one hand there is a necessity, a real need for the production of art works by the guest, and yet, on the other, there is also an unambiguous demand to reject, to eliminate as it were the same critical propositions that gave reason to its production.

One can learn much from this, for this is not a contradiction; on the contrary, the guest is the source, the designed image of כפרות (Kaporet)⁴; At-One-Ment, At-Onement, Atonement.

In other words and unfortunately for the guest it is evident that the image of healing which is adopted by the host (public) has become an extended mourning for the guest. What I want to stress now is that in this body and being, just as no host has been unmarked by the condition of our art works, so too the guest has always been injured by them. Even so, one needs irony in Gallut; indeed the irony is crucial faced with one's own wound. Wherever there is a guest, one should properly appreciate the gaze of Gallut, and this is particularly striking in the case of Tallit. By making the Tallit inviting, by positioning Tallit in Gallut to create a certain desire, Gallut herself not only has begun to replace the wound of Tallit – but Tallit has lent herself to become understood and controlled only by means of denial. And yet, the question remains the same, what does it mean to look at Tallit accurately? More than anything else it is an ascending stride, flying without wings into the centre of Secularization. In fact, it is a process of redefining the meaning of Gallut, not in terms of restoring a certain past, or how the guest is reconstructing the narrative of Architecture, i.e., Churban Bet Ha-Mikdash – but in terms of looking at actuality and a possible future. So, if we really want to understand the guest's politics and their dynamics, we must come closer, much closer to the functional absence of the city of Jerusalem – because the image behind the reading on Churban Bet Ha-Mikdash means at the same time a wound for the guest.

Finally, the problem of redefining artistic exploitation on the outside of the city of Jerusalem and in the vicinity of the museum is a major misunderstanding, for it defines not only the distance between the guest and the host (public), but also the way in which the museum continues to recreate itself for itself. Within this context reference should be made to the guest's criticism in terms of being at perfect liberty to do so. After all it remains up to us in the future to review religion's past messages in the proximity of our wound. This is manifestly true, for the wound in question applies to the status of the guest, the passion of the visitor, the condition of the other to become the source of healing in the vicinity of the museum.



Joseph Beuys
Zeig deine Wunde (Show Your Wound), 1974-75
Iron tools mounted on stamped wooden sticks, wooden planks, chalk on blackboards, dissection tables, lamps, galvanized iron boxes covered with glass and containing fat, test tubes, bird skulls, clinical thermometers, preserving jars with gauze filters, pitchforks with cotton scarves atop two blackboards, issues of the Italian LOTTA CONTINUA mounted in white wooden boxes.
501 x 510 x 725 cm
Städtische Galerie im Lenbachhaus, München



Synagogue in Kleve, destroyed in the Kristallnacht, 9 November 1938



A Jewish prayer



After the shooting on this scene hundreds of thousands of personal effects left behind by their murdered owners were found: clothes, clothing, articles of worship, etc., unclaimed. Also found were several tons of money, half ready to be sent off to the banks for use to the manufacturer of each thing, as handbills.



Auschwitz

Please note: when looking more closely one can see that the so-called mountain of cloths is in fact a mountain of Tallitot (praying shawls).



Ukrainian soldiers photographed together with their Jewish victims wrapped in Tallitot (praying shawls) after a pogrom, 1918-1920.

But this is not all. The extended mourning which takes place in Western projects as a whole is furthermore also a potential for alternation, an elusive border line which defines not only the text of Tallit but each and every art work on display.

There is no doubt in my mind that the condition of Tallit is our controversy, for she represents the essence of modernism in the way that we have seen the innovation, the alteration of the law of *צִיצִית* (Tzitzit)⁵ taking place right here, from within the Western project. After all, it is here that Gallut released Tzitzit from an attachment to the faithful garment into a major design, and therefore also into a concealment of the faithful skin, which is to say also that Gallut began to prescribe Tallit as a concrete masking of the idea behind the idea of *לשנה הבאה בירושלים* (Le-Shanah Ha-Baah Biyerushaliem)⁶. So, lastly and most recently, we are, one thinks, beginning to get hold of the display of modernism, to feel the gaze of Gallut, to hear the breathing of the guest, in and out, although not sufficiently, yet with enough effective and recovering power. Ultimately we shall all benefit from the criticism expressed by the guest. Undoubtedly the guest is the dawn, the eyes that see what the art works on display mean. We understand that research by the guest is our way to cope with possibly the only way of remedying our future secularized images.

Chanukah 2004

Please note: Hebrew *בקר* B.K.R. root/word literally means: to visit, to examine and to criticise. Furthermore *בקר* B.K.R. means among other things: dawn, morning, cattle. So in our situation today we should accept that without the guest the group as a whole cannot exist. Conversely, without connecting oneself to the territory of *בקר* neither our bodies and souls nor our communities could in effect be sustained.

1. גלות (Gallut): exile, captivity, the dispersion, the Diaspora, banishment, captives, Roman dominion.
2. טלית (Tallit): Tallith, praying shawl.
3. "חורבן בית המקדש" (Churban Bet Ha-Mikdash): The destruction of the Temple in the city of Jerusalem.
4. כפרת (Kaporet), Seat of Mercy, covering (lid) of the Holy Ark, curtain. In the following examples we show the use of the verb K.P.R. *כפר* in Torah, the Old Testament. KoFeR: A protective coating – Genesis, Breshit 6:14. AChaPeRaH: A protection gift – Genesis, Breshit 32:21. KeFoR: A covering of the ground – Exodus, Shemot 16:14. KoFeR: Protection money, the word used to describe a payment which can be made in lieu of punishment, protection from punishment – Numeri, Bamidbar 35:31. KaPoReT: A golden lid with two Kruvim, Cherubs upon it, served as the cover for the Holy Ark – Exodus, Shemot 25:17-22. The Hebrew word Kippur is a derivative of the biblical word KaPoReT. The term Yom Kippur is commonly known as the day of Atonement. Please Note: The word Atonement appears only once in the King James Bible, the New Testament, Romans 5:11, and more than 80 times in KJB, the Old Testament.
5. צִיצִית (Tzitzit): fringe, tassel, frill, forelock: fringed garment (Num. 15:38)
6. לשנה הבאה בירושלים (Le-Shanah ha-baah biyerushaliem): Next year in Jerusalem.



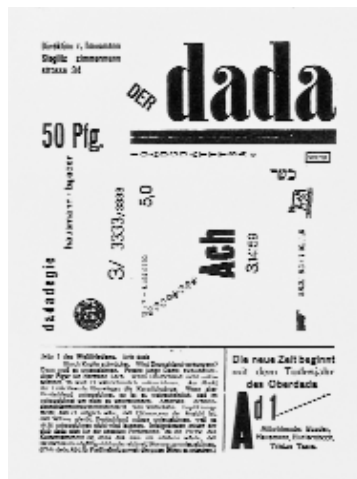
CABARET VOLTAIRE

Announcement *Cabaret Voltaire*

'...You do not know what is real and unreal. You think you see a bandit and you fire and they tell you afterwards that it was a soldier. That's how it was with me.'

Tristan Tzara, (an excerpt from the poem 'Doubts')

Please note: Tristan Tzara is the pen name of Samuel Rosenstock. The word Tzara means sadness, grief, trouble, sorrow, in Hebrew; therefore, combined with the word Tristan one can feel, as it were, the doubling of Samuel's grief. Consequently, the term DADA can be read as the doubling of Knowledge, after all, the word (Da) means Know in Hebrew.

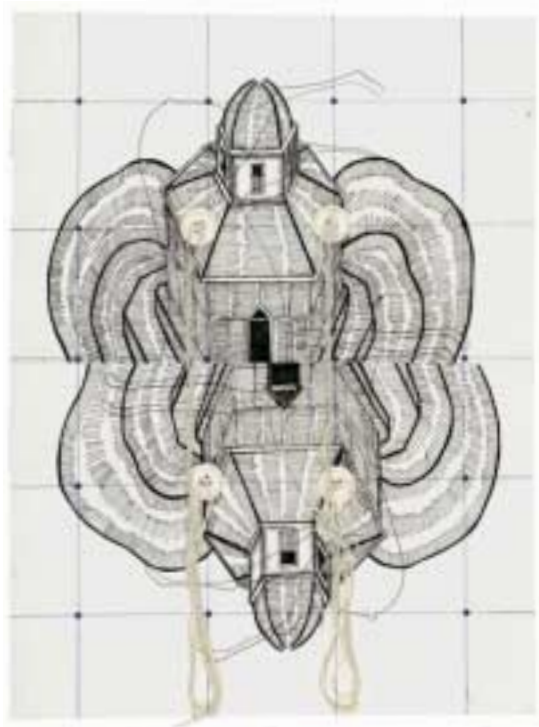


Cover for *Der Dada*, (No. 1), Berlin
כשר Kasher: fit, proper, right, valid, fair, pleasing, worthy, clean, good, satisfactory.

"The artist is the antenna of the race."
Ezra Pound

Ezra Pound, aged eighty-seven, died in the night of 1 November 1972, released at last from a long, agitated silence ("but the mind as Ixion, unstill, ever turning"). For ten years, haunted by despair, contrition, or some other nameless and more complicated sentiment, he had spoken very little. "I ruin everything I touch", he told an Italian journalist in 1963. "I have been mistaken, always... I have arrived at doubt too late (in a conversation reported by Michael Reck in *Evergreen Review*) that his worst mistake had been "that stupid, suburban prejudice of anti-Semitism". (*The New York Times Review of Books*, Volume 20, Number 1 - 8 February 1973. Ezra Pound By Michael Wood).

כשר



Joseph Semah

From the diary of the architect.

Yerushalaim Shel Maelah Yerushalaim Shel Mata.

(Jerusalem of above, Jerusalem of below), 1982

Black ink on paper, four buttons, thread

40 x 30 cm



Joseph Semah

An introduction to the principle of relative expression,
1980-82

10 Tallitot (praying shawls), 22 linen cloths on canvas
stretcher, wood, 2 saw-horses

100 x 80 x 140 cm

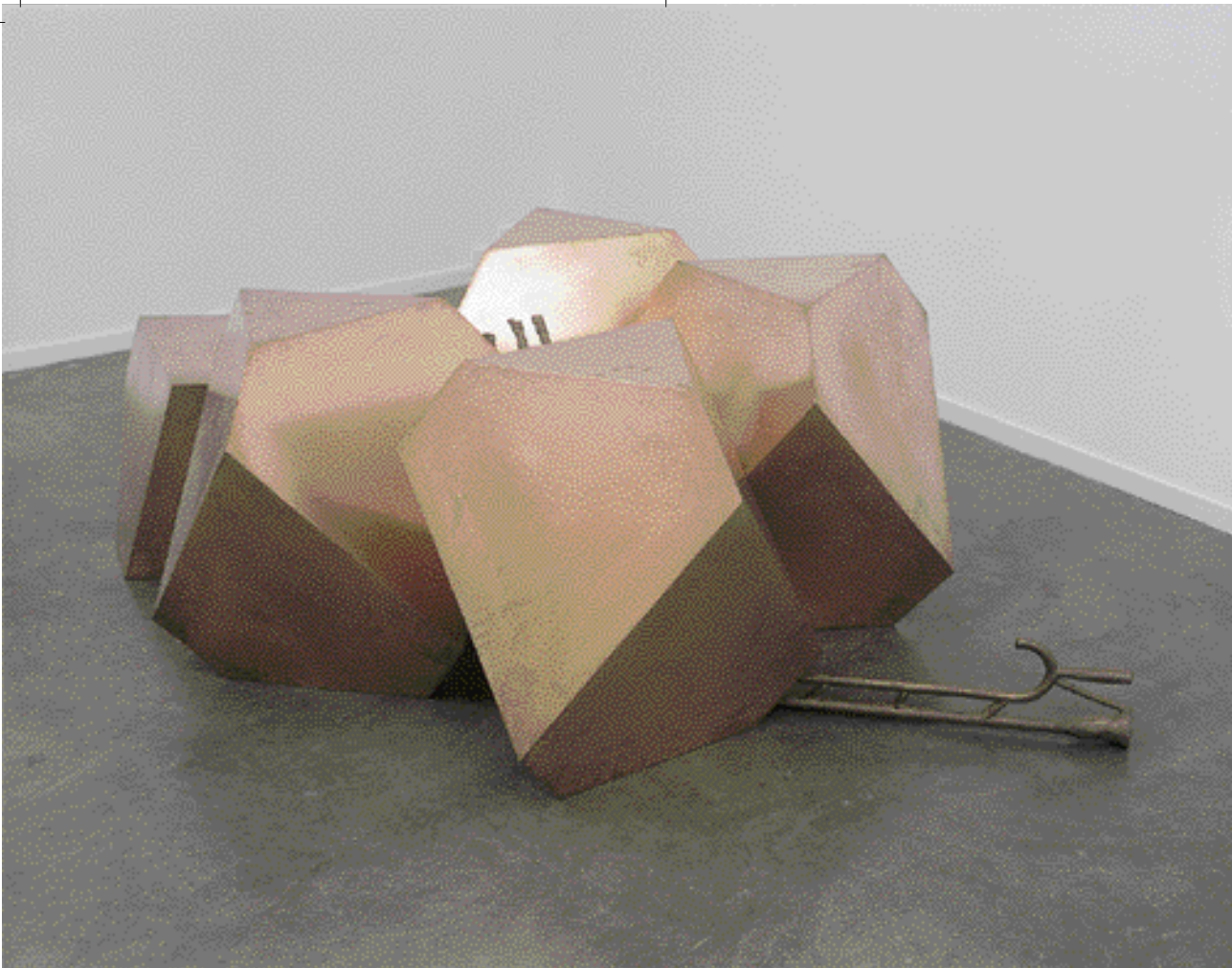


Joseph Semah
 לשנה הבאה בירושלים
Le-Shanah Ha-ba-ah Be-Yerushalaim
Next year in Jerusalem, 2005
 Wood, neon light, electrical wire, 2 saw-
 horses
 97 x 55 x 180 cm

Joseph Semah
 ירושלים הרים סביב לה
Yerushalaim Harim Saviv lah
Jerusalem surrounded by mountains, 1987
 Ten cast bronze dogs painted in a gold
 color, ten glass plates
 40 x 450 x 700 cm

Please note: This work is based on the
 ground plan of a synagogue, namely the
 one that was destroyed in Germany in
 the Kristallnacht, 9 November 1938.





Joseph Semah
Notes from the diary of the architect, 1987
Copper, bronze
80 x 180 x 340 cm



Joseph Semah
From the diary of the architect, 1982
Watercolor washes, black ink, paper
30 x 21 cm

Joseph Semah
Orlah, 1980
Watercolor, white oil paint, paper
30 x 21 cm



Joseph Semah
Orlah, 1982
Copper, 10 marble eggs
30 x 80 x 80 cm

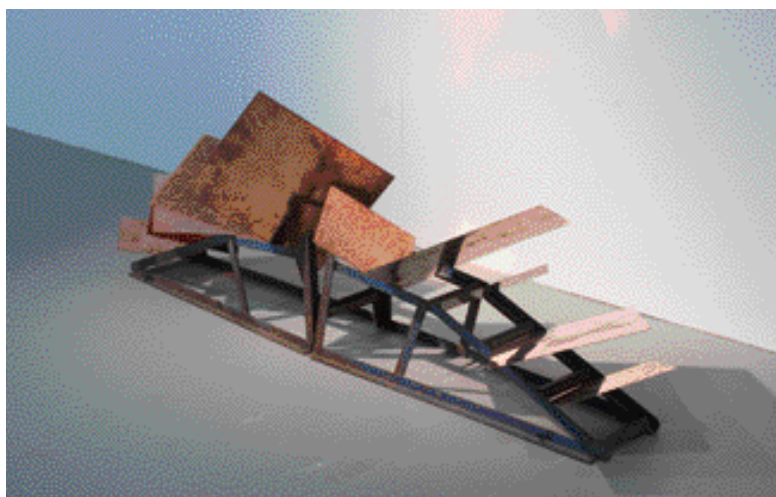




Joseph Semah
YaKNeHaZ, 1987
10 bronze castings of a matzah,
3 wooden glueing clamps, vitrine
80 x 70 x 180 cm
Collection: Jeanne and Arnaud Braat,
Kortenhoeve

Joseph Semah
An open book (From right to left),
1979-1980
Copper, leather, white ribbon
25 x 60 x 180 cm





Joseph Semah
KaPoReT, 1979
Iron, copper
50 x 130 x 40 cm



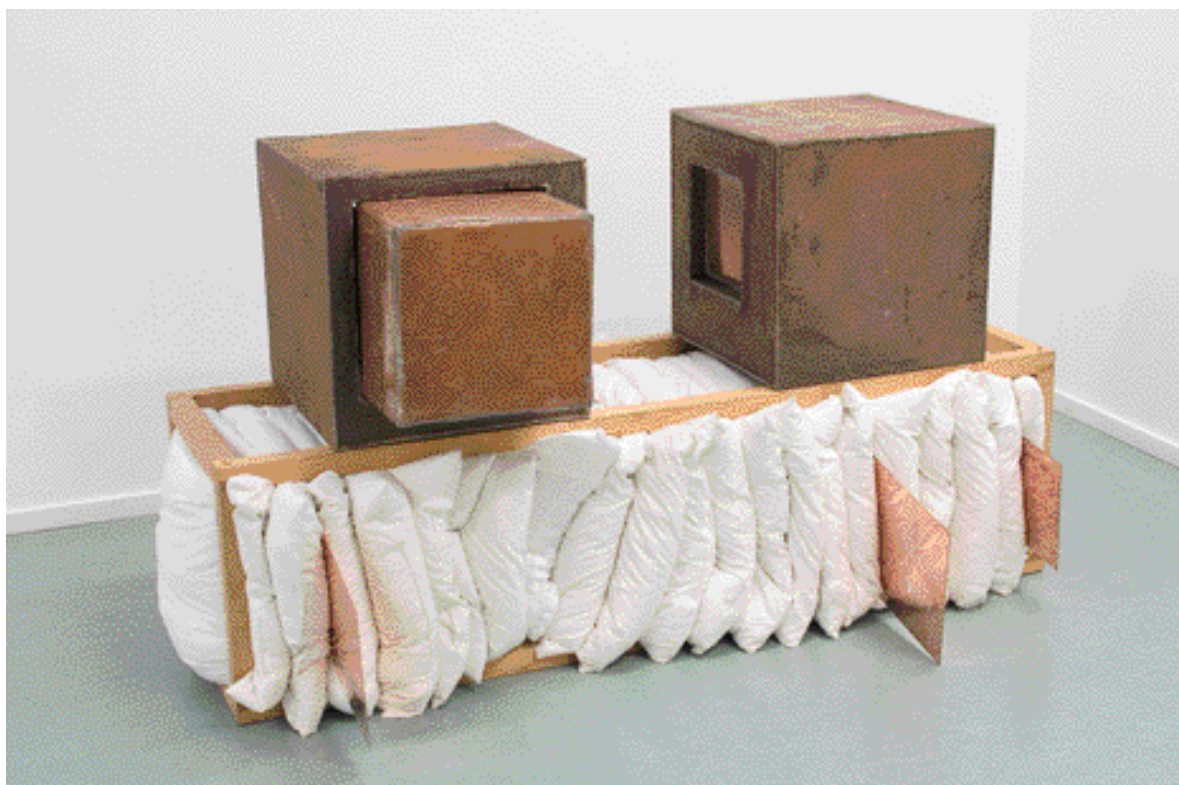
Joseph Semah
ShaMaleM ChaDaShIM (New Sky),
1979
Cow hide, black thread
84 x 51 cm
Collection: Linda Bouws, Amsterdam



Joseph Semah
Amidah, 1983
Wood, white ribbon, metal
150 x 60 x 150 cm



Joseph Semah
Past, present and future
Deep in Europe, 1979-1980
3 ostrich eggs, 22 shepherd sticks
22 x 30 x 180 cm
Collection: Roel Arkesteijn, Voorburg



Joseph Semah
Existence therefore emergence at birth, 1979-1982
Wood, metal, copper, 22 cushions, feathers, silk, white oil paint
100 x 180 x 80 cm



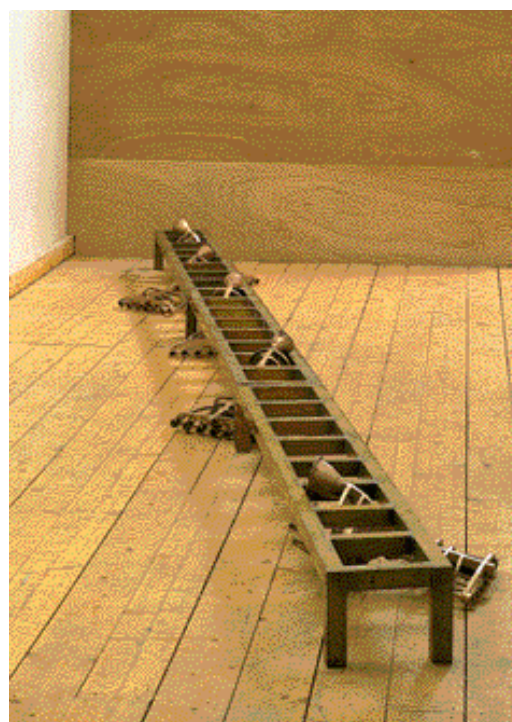
Joseph Semah
Sham-Maiem
There is water, 1979
Metal, glass, sand from Jerusalem
10 x 40 x 44 cm

Joseph Semah
Sham-Maiem
There is water, 1984
Copper, bronze
90 x 180 x 300 cm

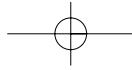
91



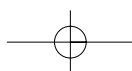
Joseph Semah
Amsterdam
(When a name becomes a place), 1985
Bronze, brass, walking stick, oil paint
20 x 70 x 105 cm



Joseph Semah
Makkom
(When a name becomes a place), 1987
Brass, bronze
30 x 40 x 540 cm



Joseph Semah, ~~The Wandering Jew~~ / *The Wandering Christian*, 20.08.1997
 36 used cast-iron shoe lasts, wine glass, silver-plated candle snuffer, two bronze
 castings of the valves of a Venus's-shell, wooden alpenstock, 170 x 80 x 160 cm
 Collection: Becht, Naarden



Joseph Semah
ShaMaleM ChaDaShl (New Sky)
or a natural history of Zero, 1979
 Blackboard, a horse tail
 138 x 55 x 30 cm

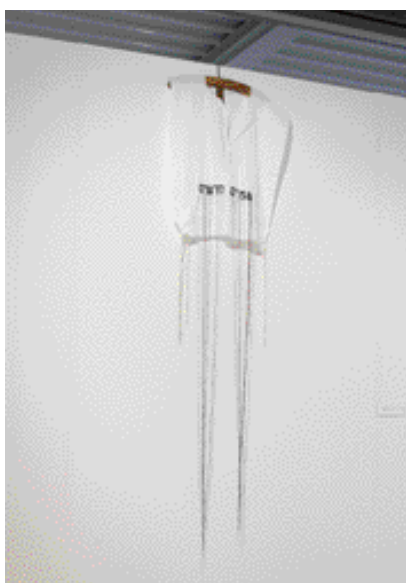
Joseph Semah
Touching untouching 2/4, 1983
 Crystal, wood, black oil paint
 12 x 41 x 13 cm
 Private collection, Amsterdam

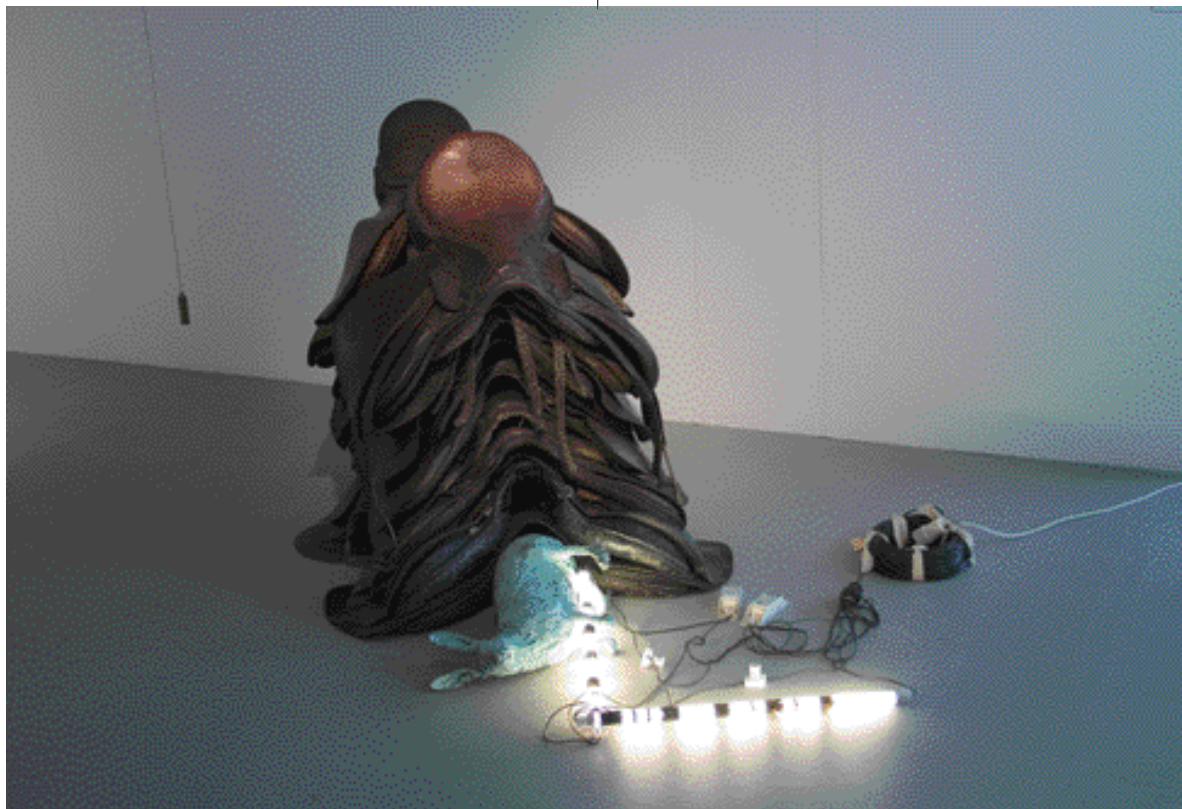
Joseph Semah
ShaMalm ChaDaShIM (New Sky), 1979
 Two Shofarot (ram's horns), camera tripod
 138 x 40 x 40 cm



Joseph Semah
Box in a box, 1979
 Maria box, wood, metal, black oil paint
 35 x 30 x 13 cm

Joseph Semah
ShaMaleM ChaDaShIM (New Sky)
Details, repetition and faith, 1979
 Tallit-Katan, black thread, hanger
 170 x 44 x 5 cm





Joseph Semah

Wie man einem toten deutschen Künstler das Hasen jagen erklärt
(How to explain hare hunting to a dead German artist), 24.02.1986

22 leather saddles, 4 stirrups, a bronze casting of a stuffed hare,
2 fluorescent tubes, black oil paint, electricity wire, plumb-line
120 x 230 x 140 cm

Joseph Semah

From the diary of the architect, 1983

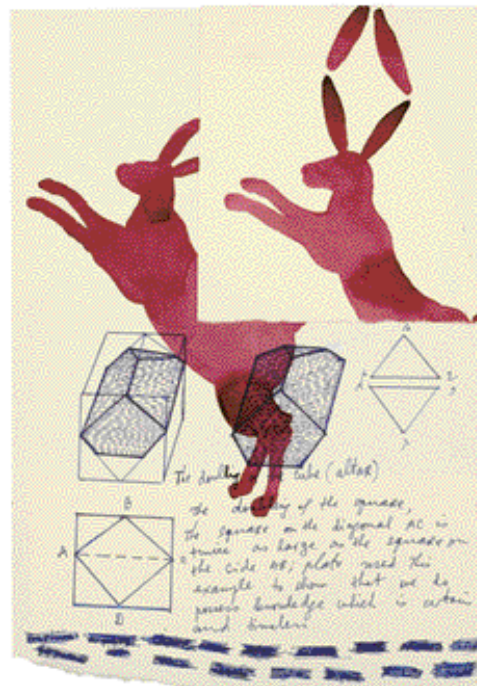
Watercolor washes, black ink, paper
30 x 21 cm

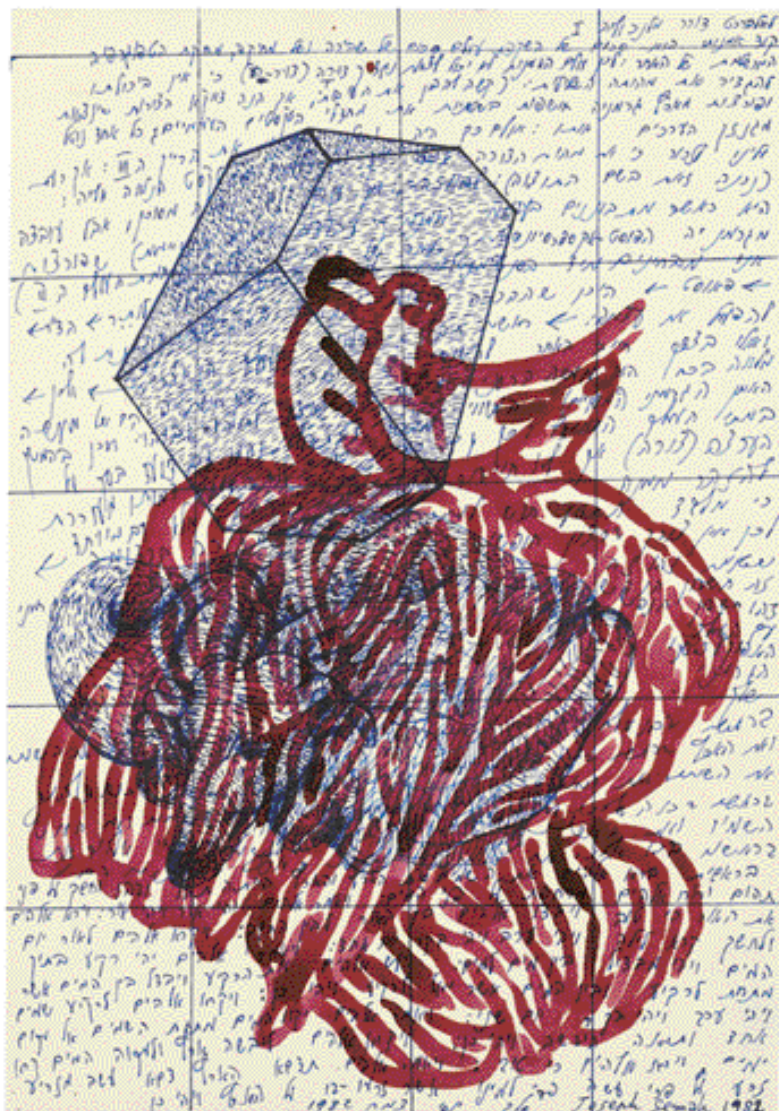


Joseph Semah

From the diary of the architect, 1982

Watercolor washes, blue ink, paper
30 x 21 cm





Joseph Semah
Letter to Albrecht Dürer, 1982
 Watercolor washes, blue ink, paper
 30 x 21 cm

Joseph Beuys
Diagnoseextm, 1959-60
 Assemblage
 57 x 80 cm
 Collection: Becht, Naarden



Joseph Beuys
Positive-Negative, 1962
 Hare skin, card board, iron
 48 x 64 x 12 cm
 Collection: Becht, Naarden



Joseph Semah, *Letter to Albrecht Dürer, 1982*

Dear Albrecht Dürer

Melencolia I

An artistic code is nothing but a certain outlook, that is to say: a summing up of disjoining and omission, or the erasure of the perfect Typography of the Other. For that reason the museum's sphere cannot cope with tangible formation (articulation in which evil vegetates): it lacks the lucidity to decipher the destructive – negative. Which is an enigma, but the forms, bursting out from Germany, systematically lay bare the popular texts. Each of us may hark back to the treasures and values of his culture, but it is sufficiently well-known that we have had to experience the legacy of the Third Reich. Not that this was the first split in our unity; on the contrary, it is by its moment of origin that we have come to understand that the essence of the articulated can only be found exclusively in a reading of the accompanying text (not the aftermath, but the foundation), again rising up from a certain leading German post-expressionist art. Therefore, we cannot but point towards a sentimental link with the feverish brain of Luther > Dr > Faust > ergo, where human consciousness deviates from the natural forces because of its limited capacity to activate itself – ergo, the beginning of the secularization of Christianity – hence it is accurate to remark that the Other should be on guard: for when the principles behind the creative act are connected to a contemporary might, it may eventually revert humanity again to a state of upheaval / chaos. Certain German (contemporary) artists are continuing their chants. Is something similar happening with Luther? Can it be that the image of Luther commands admiration (a tangible form therefore)? We should be aware of the danger of his convictions, for aside from the fact that he introduces the devil, he re-introduces the concept of predestination, eradicating free will in the process, as it were.

However – it is and remains our seeking soul versus the apocalypse.

Yours,
 Joseph Semah, 1982

Colophon

This book is published following the exhibition
A Journey into פּרדס (PaRDeS)
organised by Museum van Bommel van Dam Venlo (NL)
from September 3rd until November 26th 2004

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side, top left-hand side)

Olaf Bergmann, Witten/Germany: pp. 27 (bottom), 31 (top), 46,
49, 50, 57, 88 (top) 91 (bottom left-hand side)

Eitan Hillel, Israel: pp. 20 (bottom), 32, 54

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Hedie Meyling: pp. 6 (top), 19 (bottom left-hand side), 63

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Illustrations front cover

Joseph Semah

An introduction to the principle of relative expression, 1980-82
10 Tallitot (praying shawls), 22 linen cloths on canvas stretcher,
wood, 2 saw-horses
140 x 80 x 100 cm

Joseph Semah

An introduction to the principle of relative expression, 1979
Black oil sticks on pages from Talmud Bavely, Tractate
Pesachim
40 x 27 cm each

Illustration back cover

Joseph Semah

... after Etrog

And you shall take of yourselves on the first day the fruit of a
goodly tree ..., 1982
Ten nails, ten lemons