

The Larva Society for Psychical Research

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Jerusalem Artist's House
2019

On the occasion of the World Goth Day on May 22,¹ the Larva Society for Psychical Research will relocate temporarily to the Jerusalem Artists House. The Larva Society for Psychical Research was established in 2012 to explore Gothic imagery and language, their social and spiritualist aspects, and their Pop-like qualities. By means of pseudo-scientific research, it exposes romantic Gothic values concealed in works of art: emotion, kitsch, the grotesque body, lack of control, horror, love, torment, eternal life, spectres, popular science, science fiction, and alchemy. The Society is named after Larva, a young artist engaging in experimental cinema and installation.

The word *larva* has several denotations:

1. An immature phase in the life cycle of insects and amphibians, the phase between fetus and adult, before sexual maturity, which differs (in appearance) from the insect's full-blown form.
2. Latin: ghost, evil spirit, Satan, intimidating mask, skeleton.

Manifesto

Larva's research delves into local aspects of Gothicism vis-à-vis its global facets, juxtaposing images drawn directly from Gothic paraphernalia to Jewish and Israeli myths and culture. The interest in the Gothic is a fascination with the dark side of Western culture. Gothicism is the ghost of minorities, which comes back to haunt the establishment, serving as a black mirror which reflects innate evil and heartlessness. It introduces the gaze of the *other*, indicating the

disintegration of the absolute and constant into the breached and fluid, subverting everything perceived as secure or stable.

What is Gothic?

“Gothic’ is an epithet with a strange history, evoking images of death, destruction, and decay.”² Today, the term “gothic” is associated with adolescents dressed in black, with black make-up, who listen to dark music and worship demons, ghosts, vampires, and Satan. As a rich subculture which spans literature, theater, poetry, music, cinema, and fashion, however, Gothicism combines the rational and the emotional, the grotesque and the romantic sublime, touching upon the dark, mysterious, supernatural, and the future with all its technological advances.

Decadent, escapist subcultures have emerged throughout modern history, thriving against the backdrop of global socio-political crises and overwhelming scientific breakthroughs. When fear of the unknown and the inexplicable rises, the turn to spiritualism and the occult, through rituals which connect one to the unknown and the spirit world, summons the strange and foreign, even if these cannot be rationally contained.

Larva and the Undead

Larva's work mode relies on the literary and cinematic model of the undead—an intricate being that returns from the dead to haunt the living. It is a metamorphic entity that can emerge as either bodied or disembodied, corporeal—like zombies or vampires, or incorporeal—like poltergeists and phantoms. The undead's nature and appearance have been characterized in various, ancient as well as modern, manuscripts.

As opposed to the completed, clean, and rational modern human being, who sustains himself economically and socially, the undead emerges as a being emitted from the natural temporal cycle, indicating the presence of death in life. Modern man's body is bounded and isolated from other bodies; its curvatures and protrusions are smoothed, concealing physical changes, presenting a uniform, hermetic façade. The undead body, on the other hand, is the unfinished, grotesque body, constantly undergoing a process of decay and rebirth. Death

and life coexist in his figure, subject to perpetual change, accompanied by the prohibitions and torments associated with the 19th century idea of the modern man. Much like the undead, Larva refers directly to the human body. It empties in order to be able to contain additional corpora, thereby accentuating the difference between the private body and the universal body.³ The gaping mouth of the biting vampire, the creature's oozing organs, the blood dripping all around, the werewolf's shape-shifting body, the *dibbuk*, illness, loss of control, loss of ethics, and loss of sanity—all these are manifestations of the undead as a universal body, that embodies Western society's deepest fears: fear of aging, cloning, and technological advancements; fear of epidemics, terrorism, fascism, world war, destruction of the planet, apocalypse; fear of the dissolution of modern utopias; a lessening trust in religion and science alike; fear of uttering the voice of minorities, of constant erosion of the meaning of existence, and the devaluation in the status of man, family, and society.

History

The Larva Society for Psychical Research was established in 2012 by artists Maya Attoun and Meital Katz-Minervo. Their joint *modus operandi* gave rise to "Larva," a super-model of a young artist engaging in experimental cinema and installation through the prism of the Gothic subculture. Larva functioned as a third body, a receptacle through which the two artists fused to form a single idea that led to praxis. Definition of their work mode by means of a separate limbo-like entity furnished hierarchical freedom and validated the multiple identities, voices, definitions, and inclinations.

In 2015, curators Tali Ben Nun and Sally Haftel Naveh joined the association, and its name was changed to the Larva Society for Psychical Research.

On the occasion of the World Goth Day on May 22, the Larva Society for Psychical Research will relocate temporarily to the Jerusalem Artists House—a historically significant building profoundly linked to the beginnings of Israeli art. located in a city which boasts numerous research centers. The Artists House will become a temporary, possessed body—a site still haunted by the ghosts of the past. Larva will operate on site for two and a half months, exploring the potential

of the work of art as a medium for spiritualist activity. It will bring works by artists both living and dead together, transforming them into transmitters—objects which enable communication between matter (the work of art) and anti-matter (the spiritual world).

Notes

1. This date was set in England in 2009. Accounting Day is also celebrated on May 22.
2. See Valerie Steele, *Gothic: Dark Glamour* (New York: Yale UP, 2008), p. 3.
3. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1984).

Larva, Undead, 2014, engraving on natural quartz surface

Planted amid the leaves of a lush, overgrown bush, a shiny marble slab shows the word “undead” etched into it. Designating mythical beings existing in-between, the worlds of the dead and the living, the expression “undead” was also at the basis of a whole class of characters in horror fiction from the 19th century on, among them Bram Stoker’s *Dracula*, which, described as “Undead,” feeds off of human blood. The undead can assume myriad forms: at times they are present through a physical embodiment, like with the zombie or the vampire; other times they are devoid of physicality and appear as a ghost, a phantom or a poltergeist. With the fine polish a fetishized object, the marble slab traverses realms of life and death, reality and fantasy, lending a parodic-theatrical tone to the inventory of objects related to the horror genre. At the same time, it stands as a monument to so many of these ghastly-looking liminal creatures, whose rotting, disintegrating bodies are the antithesis to the sound, normative and rational countenance expected in the capitalist society of our time.

Maya Attoun, G-host, 2015, fluorescent sign

The Hebrew word *ruach* (רוח) has two contradictory meanings: on the one hand, vanity, a mirage, and on the other—the essential life of the spirit. Ghosts are

reminders from the past, mediating between the world of the living and the world of the dead, between matter and spirit. They signify the penetration of the past into the present via a battle between external forces and imaginary forces, the human need to revive personal or collective memory. Uninvited guests, ghosts raise questions about the meaning of life and the essence of death, but the human instinct is to expel them. A pop-art neon sign fusing the Hebrew words *ruach* (ghost) and *i-ruach* (אִירוּחַ; g-host), summons ghosts to visit the here-and-now, thereby embodying the absent-present body and the gap between the corporeal and the spiritual.

Larva, The Good Son, 2017, single-channel video, 8:31 mins.

Set in a clinic, the video shows a therapist giving a therapy session to a child patient. The two are seen as they cut a wax doll to pieces and then recombine it, with the child following through the actions of the adult. Based on separate actions the patient is supposed to imitate, the type of therapy they are engaged in, known as Applied Behavior Analysis, was developed after the behaviorist theories of B.F. Skinner to achieve progress with patients on the autism spectrum. The set of actions they perform, however, tie together two fundamental myths related to father-son relationships: the Binding of Isaac in the Old Testament, which marks a trial of faith; and the modern myth of Frankenstein and the monster, where God the maker is challenged by a scientist who tries to take his place.

Gideon Gechtman, Beds, 1988, mixed media, 2 units, Cells, 1985, silver prints, wood and glass

Gideon Gechtman frequently delved into the gap between an object and its photographic representation, and the material and conceptual tension between the real and the counterfeit, imitation, distorted scale, and *trompe l'oeil*. Almost all of his objects were larger than the original, but in the case of this pair of hospital beds, he chose to shrink them to one quarter of their original size. It is easy to mistake them for a readymade, but in fact they were commissioned and custom

made. The beds, always presented as a pair (a father and son) were preceded by two photographs: the artist's child, Yotam (who passed away from a blood disease in 1998), lying in an adult sized hospital bed, and the hospital bed to which Gechtman the father was ridden during one of his hospitalizations. Years later, he reduced the photograph, copied it and placed it in a wooden box with partitions between the five beds. A "holy trinity" is created between the photographic object and the pair of deathbeds.

Meital Katz-Mlnerbo, The Sensitive Plant, 2016, lithographic limestones, ink
Propped up like two small gravestones, the two lithographic limestones laid on a vitrine carry the portrait of a handsome youth whose face is adorned with thorns. Etched into the stones, the face seen in the portrait is a hybrid being, part androgyny part spiky cactus plant. The two sources that inspired this work both date back to the 19th century: "The Cactus Man" (1882) by symbolist Odilon Redon, a charcoal drawing showing the head of an African native implanted in a pot and growing thorns; and the poem "The Sensitive Plant" (1820) by romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, which tells of the tragic amorous ties developing between a sensitive plant and the garden's mistress. The combination of the two breeds a representation that crosses genders, giving voice and validation to those whose otherness, tied to the pole of abjection and transgression, challenges societal norms.

Emanuele Napolitano & Zaelia Bishop, They Left Us, 2015, short film, 20:30 min
Emanuele Napolitano and Zaelia Bishop's short film, They Left Us, presents the tragic, prosaic daily routine of heroine dealers and prostitutes, exploring the religious theme of labour in a human reality surrounded by death and nature. The protagonist's dark journey appears like an illusion detached from time and place, which takes place in a universe where human beings and animals share the same destiny. Desertion and loss are at the core of a never-ending quest for personal nightmares and ghosts. The two artists address the link between image and vision, and the way in which images affect social conduct. They create

surrealism touched by horror, reveling in an aesthetic, cinematic experience that sweeps the viewer into a fragmentary stream of images, words, and sounds which simulates a dreamy, nightmarish, or illusive realm.

Lali Fruheling, Call Me Cherry, 2019, mirrors, wood, lighting, can, ashtray, cigarette butts, tarantula

A cross between fitness gym, Pilates studio and yoga center, the type of environment simulated in the installation connotes grooming and the cultivation of body and soul. An escapist refuge from the daily grind, it holds a promise for health, well-being, and balance, but begins to betray, at the same time, an obsession with the body and a relentless struggle against the ravages of time. A shelf at the far end of a mirror holds a selection of objects laid out in the style of a still life – an ashtray containing cigarette butts tainted with red lipstick, a can of Cherry Cola with the words “call me” in mirror writing, and the furry slough of a tarantula. Echoing the Vanitas genre, the arrangement points to the conceit inherent in self-grooming, while the mirrors, which cover the wall throughout, force the viewer to an encounter with their own reflection, making them an accomplice to this conceit whether they like it or not.

Uri Katzenstein, Value, 2012, writing by shooting 470 bullets, 0.40 caliber, from a Champion CZ 75 pistol

Uri Katzenstein frequently addressed the affinities between body and violence, and between image and sound. The Hebrew word "*erech*" (ערך; value) is punctured on the body of a military padded Doobon coat by means of pistol bullets, appearing and disappearing intermittently like a ghost; a single word with multiple meanings, which encapsulates the artist's private post-trauma: the value of life, a moral value, an ethical value, the value of goods, the value of the object. The tension between self-restraint and loss of control is embodied in a sterile, uncanny image. The coat becomes a shooting range target, allowing the penetration of its hypodermic space. The violent potential concealed in the act of shooting is present, yet muted. The shooting clicks cutting through the body and

piercing the word are only heard in the viewer's mind, while the artist's performative act is embodied in the envelope of the coat.

Avi Sabah, Stones, 2017–2019, pencil on paper, 20x30 cm

Three years ago, on his way to the studio, the artist picked up a stone from the ground and drew it in the studio, in graphite on a small sheet of white paper. What began as a warm-up exercise to start the day's work, became a daily ritual, which he still practices. The stone portraits have accumulated; over time, many of them acquired names, such as Perla, Eva, Evelyn, and Marcel—all of them women in the artist's extended family, whose names appeared in his early paintings, and still emerge in his works as a graffiti inscription, a tattoo or a scar, as a part of the painted scenery, or as a substitute for the artist's signature. The link between stone and name, deeply rooted in the religious and cultural spheres, echoes both the stone placed on a grave and the violent potential inherent in it, at the same time.

Uri Nir, Heat Archer, 2012, single-channel video, 3:51 mins.

At the center of this metaphysical-surrealist vision is a skull suspended mid-air, possessed by a trance-like stream of elocution emitted from its mouth. Located at an inner courtyard at the Rockefeller Archaeological Museum in Jerusalem, the scene likewise includes a jet of water shot from the roof, and, inserted through the eye cavity of the skull, spilling into a decorative water basin. Intermittently, a second skull appears, emerging from the murky waters of the pond, only to disappear in them again. Shaken into speech by the intensity of the jet, the skull moves its jaws, spouting fragments of words that represent its situation. The video's unique aesthetic of black-and-white was achieved using a thermal camera (which translates the view in front of it according to the heat emitted from objects and surfaces), further exacerbating a sense of alienation immanent to the scene.

Lali Fruheling, Cheerleaders, 2018, pompom handles, Swarovski crystals, hair extensions, polystyrene foam, dimensions variable

Trash, Glam, and Pop culture, cinema and television, all cultivate the image of the all-American middle-class suburb that conceals dark secrets and dissected bodies behind decent façades and manicured lawns. Lali Fruheling places still life on a shelf—two decapitated heads of cheerleaders turn their backs on us, brushed blond hair flowing onto the shelf, a crown is skewered to its top, inlaid with Swarovski diamond-like crystals. It is a readymade whose sweet-violent beauty is blood-chilling, reeking of ill will, horror, and style alike. On the one hand, blond cheerleaders dance and cheer to the victory of male power; on the other hand, perverse grotesqueness simmers under suburbia's sleepy, pastoral façade. Fruheling objectifies everything—the stereotype, the object, the ironic distortion produced by culture, and our pining gaze vis-à-vis the shells of beauty, the hollow blond headpieces.

Jenifer Bar Lev, Sarah, 2016, textiles, canvas, fabric, sewing, acrylic paint

Jenifer Bar Lev creates her sewn paintings as a type of collagist séance which fuses painting, patterns, myths, superstitions, black magic, folklore, fashion, and mysticism. She connects old and new, biographical memories and cultural anecdotes, dresses and fabric leftovers, cultural heroes, movie stars, and literary protagonists, text and music. Dresses without bodies, hanging like ghosts or like a spiritualist voodoo object. Some of them she inherited, others were purchased in the market or found on the street. They appeared in her dreams and recounted their stories: Sarah, who hosted the most highly esteemed Jewish intellectuals of the Weimar period around her table; *Abigail*, the daughter of the Wright brothers' test pilot; and Jamila, who never stops seeking her children, everywhere.

Maya Shimony, Skull and Bones, Yale (Class of '48, 1868, 1887), 2012, oil on canvas, 3 paintings

Based on annual class photos of the "Skull and Bones Society", a secret student society active at Yale since 1832, the series of paintings repeats each time the

same composition with its rigid symmetry and over-the-top seriousness. In each painting, the 15 society members are deployed around a table clad with a cloth carrying the society's emblem, with, on top, the society's skull-shaped suggestion box an old grandfather clock from behind. As we learn the identity of these participants, who went on to become top officials in the USA's political and economic elites – among them presidents – the image shifts its meaning; what seemed as an innocent group photo comes to represent the power elites bred in elite universities. At the same time, the very symbols adopted by the society, whose esotericism served a fertile ground for the abundant conspiracy theories that surrounded it, seems to gloss over a hidden network of ties whose impact on reality is, in fact, very real.

Netally Schlosser, Blimp, 2012, oil on canvas, pendant

The portrait of a young woman is embalmed in a bubble pendant. Her decadent beauty is carried in the air, suspended on a gold chain. Her face is imbued with romantic delicacy suffused with Victorian melancholy. The grayish turbidity of her hair up and the rosy blush of the background suck the blood out of her translucent facial skin. She hovers between earth and heaven like a blimp, hanging between life and death. Her solitude is silent, her gaze is turned away, her brown eyes are possible glaring, possibly dead. A flat, blood-chilling beauty.

Meital Katz-Minerbo, Stories of Strange Women, 2016, embossing and graphite on paper, bronze pedestal and glass bell.

Emptied of its contents, a bare book cover is propped on a bronze pedestal, shielded under a glass bell that gives it the aura of a rarefied object in need of safekeeping; an object of veneration now intended only for the gaze, but at the same time the ghost or shell of a body that, now emptied, must be set aside and quarantined. The cover features an embossed ornament and the drawing of a woman with a snake entangled in her abundant hair, with the combination of the two forming a decorative pattern that, covering the woman's pubic area, spreads out to dominate the entire cover. The work drew its inspiration from "Stories of

Strange Women” and its art-nouveau style graphic. Published in London in 1906 under the pseudonym J.Y. Cooke, the book brings a collection of stories from diverse literary sources around women who challenge social conventions.

Assi Meshullam, Basin, 2012, mixed media, Candlestick, 2010, mixed media

Assi Meshullam's engagement with rituals, folklore, religious beliefs, and esotericism has given rise to a private lexicon of religious-secular iconography which fuses biblical and Christian symbolism with pagan symbolism, challenging religious and cultural boundaries and undermining the dichotomy between sanctified and profane. *Basin* and *Candlestick* are ritual appurtenances that embody the hybrid element found in many of Meshullam's works; semi-human, semi-bestial objects, seeking to regard the hybrid as a whole entity. The monster becomes the thing itself. Sculpture represents a form of ritual worship, therefore the presence of the body and hands in the raw material is meaningful. *Basin* was featured in the exhibition "Baal Ha'Loa"l (Ha'Hanut Gallery, Tel Aviv, 2012), which was met with rage and protest by passersby, and was closed following an arson attempt. *Candlestick* was featured in the synagogue/church of the "Order of the Unclean" in the exhibition "Lexicon of Principles" (Julie M. Gallery, Tel Aviv, 2010).

Masha Yozefpolsky, Aporia, 2017, oil on canvas

Aporia is an irresolvable internal contradiction (from Latin: *poros*=passage; *aporos*=impassable); a no-man's land whose impassability fixes the inability to mark boundaries or transitional apertures in it, hovering between reality and illusion, between dream and memory. Masha Yozefpolsky's painting/object is a detail from an installation that cannot be discussed. As a fractal of a confidential whole, it indicated its identity while concealing it; a dark, mysterious, private space which blocks the gaze at it. Are we observing an urban or other landscape from the edge of the roof, or a closed walled-in and delimited space? Will an image be imprinted on the retina—an image of engraving, scar, course, the cobwebs of an intoxicated spider, ripples of air, some topographic sign? Or, will

the signs prance like codes changing indecisively, to themselves, in themselves, in the absence of a spectator to notice them in the first place?

Ohad Fishof, The Body, 2010, mixed media, The Founder, 2010, video, 4:54 min

The connection between *The Founder* and *The Body* is reminiscent of the relationship between a person and his totem in primitive cultures; a reciprocal system of mundane rituals, intimate as well as public. The gender and periodic biography of the two characters remains vague. The Founder has accompanied Ohad Fishof since 1999: his figure is always present in the room; a prehistoric man of sorts, experimenting, getting lost. The shack and the phonograph stand for the manual and analogue, while extension of the act of lowering the needle onto the first record track is filled with pathos. The body, a literary device which sets the plot in motion, represents the enigma—a sculpture which magnetizes the gaze, becoming an image that haunts you in the dark. The vapor billowing from the dead body's naval indicates the present living-dead state, an impossible form in which life and death co-exist.

Avi Sabah, Sack, 2018, upholstery fabric

Upholstery fabric that looks like a cross between an army blanket and a domestic blanket drew the artist's attention. Upon impulsive intuition, he decided to sew it into a gigantic, purposeless pocket, a receptacle for nothing. Its function in the world amounts only to the movement of the textile and the way in which its pleats fall. The sack will never be filled, or sustain pressure. The current sack is adapted in volume to a family of four. The artist personifies an object whose functionality is far-fetched, rendering the inanimate intimidating and uncanny. The weight of the absent body, the weight of the souls, burdens the empty sack, which now carries only its own specific gravity.

Mia Gourvitch, Pythia, 2019, black-and-white photograph, plexiglass and wood

The work originated from an attempt to sculpt with smoke and light – an absurd undertaking given that these are near-impossible to manipulate, let alone shape into a predetermined form. Yet the temptation remains, compelled by the

amorphous formations we see when light hits billowing smoke, triggering the imagination to find meaning in them – a basic urge related to the human instinct of finding logic and meaning in mysterious visions, most notably in nature. In Greek mythology, undulating smoke is associated with the Pythia, the high priestess at the Oracle in Delphi who advised worshipers and gave predictions by divine inspiration. She is depicted in a trance, a subliminal state from which she answers the questions addressed to her with enigmatic riddles. The smoke formations, which hark to the binary nature of the sign, place the viewer in the position of an unwitting interpreter.

Shosh Kormosh, Untitled (M23), 1991–1993, silver print

In two collage photographs from the series "Terms", the artist cut chairs out of an auction house catalogue, duplicated and reattached them to make a sculptural installation of six chairs hovering in a white space. Their perfect overlapping complements the limbs missing in some of the chairs. The collage technique enables Kormosh to toy with the tension between depth and flattening, embalming and death, animate and inanimate. The image produces a secret society of empty chairs that cannot carry the body's weight. Kormosh generates a supernatural event, a ritual of sorts which introduces an encounter between the living and the dead, between body and spirit. The homely and familiar (*heimlich*) becomes an intangible memory, a morbid image which freezes the beauty of the "anxiety embodied in the details that make up perfection" (Adam Baruch, *Maariv*, 2001 [Hebrew]).

Dror Daum, Paper Works, 2008, color print on Baryte paper

The photographs in the series show the front covers of popular thrillers, but seen from the backside. Purchased by the artist at a used books store in Allenby Street in Tel Aviv, the books feature a typical repertoire of trashy elements on their embossed covers: a haunted house, a predatory animal or a vampiric mouth dripping with blood. Seen from their backside, however, they look more like hollowed-out, ghostly images taken out of context; when looked at from behind,

they are exposed as a mere imprint into the monochromatic void of the paper, a marking of some sort or a scar tissue. Haunting us through their myriad representations in contemporary culture, these ghostly images channel their primeval dread all the better when shown from behind.

Maya Attoun, Near the Surface of the Earth, 2011, stained glass

In his experiments using a water clock and a ball, which he rolled down an inclined plane, Galileo reaffirmed the principle whereby the gravitational acceleration changes in accordance with the mass of the planet. The regularity theory of the falling object's gravitational acceleration is illustrated in different sources as a basketball. Stained glass is identified with medieval Gothicism as a dramatic means to inspire a mystical ambiance. The work is made primarily from black glass which prevents the penetration of light. Another, organic, human and emotional reality thus infiltrates the world's coordinates. The Cartesian coordinate system leaks, and the orange basketballs resemble skulls buried under ground.

Ran Slavin, Ursulimum, 2012, single-channel video, 16:48 min

A young astronaut wanders about, eyes covered, in vast fantastical subterranean cavities, views that bring to mind the innards of a particles accelerator or an intergalactic spaceship. As he examines this futuristic-kaleidoscopic maze, he happens upon an astonishing discovery of what could be the remains of the Third Temple. Taking its title from an ancient Egyptian name for the city of Jerusalem, the work merges fiction and reality, symbolism, mysticism and science fiction in its journey into the subterranean layers of Jerusalem's Temple Mount, among the holiest sites to Islam and Judaism – and one of the most volatile among them, too. Cutting across eras, the images immortalize Jerusalem, one of the most ancient cities in the world, as a near-universal site of worship, a yearned-for dominion but likewise a place of bewilderment and charged conflict.

Asaf Abutbul, Last Night I Dreamed Someone Loved Me, 2015, fan and sheet music

An open music notebook is hung on the wall, with one loose page. An industrial fan, scattering air and making the page tremble and the sounds vibrate, faces it. It is a closed electric circuit between two ready-mades, which spawns a simple, moving harmony of two. The notes stand for the musical potential of the work which is not played, whereas the industrial sound of the air emitted from the fan conceals the distance, both physical and metaphoric, between the two. When the fan's motion stops, a static notebook will remain. Using a simple gesture which does not conceal its mechanism, Abutbul generates a poetic dependence between two inanimate objects. It is a single ongoing chord which articulates the human need for love via lo-tech means.

Uri Radovan, Raised by Man, 2019, 15 pencil drawings on paper, crib "We're a generation of men raised by women," this is Tyler Durden's motto in the film *Fight Club*. Modern society has given rise to lost men who grew up without a role model. Uri Radovan's series of portraits erects a monument to a haunted, flawed, desperate manhood. In a quick, associative, dense drawing, the artist directs his gaze at a castrated male weakness, at men who were raised by the establishment or among wolves, but their madness, genius, creativity, and ambition have left an imprint on history. They are tragic heroes whose emotional incapacity has prevented them from becoming popular cultural icons, pushing them to the margins, to the shadows. These figures include: Ole Kirk Christiansen, a Danish carpenter who invented the wooden blocks that later became Lego; Fritz Haber, a German-Jewish chemist who developed Zyklon B gas; the scarecrow from *The Wizard of Oz*; Doug McClure, lead actor in the American TV Western series *The Virginian*; and so on.

Larva, The LARVA Society of Psychical Research, 2012, single-channel video, painted wood, 5:45 min

The female character of an artist-medium is accompanied by Dr. Harry Price (1881–1948), a researcher of paranormal phenomena and amateur conjurer, as they join the members of the Society of Psychical Research at a séance in what

looks like a studio or library. Price, who was known for his exposure of fraudulent psychics, is tasked with measuring the artist's supernatural powers. Soon an "ectoplasmic" tissue – the material manifestation of a medium's putative powers, often in the form of a gauze-like fabric excreted from a body orifice – begins to emanate from her mouth, growing in size to cover both her and Price – an image that echoes Magritte's *Lovers* (1928). The video is set in a decorative wooden frame fashioned after the great library at Strawberry Hill, a Middlesex mansion considered among the first examples of Gothic Revival style.

Anat Betzer, Untitled, 2017, oil on canvas

With a visual language of graphic arts and a decorative flair, the painting brings to mind the stationary paper of bygone times, yet here the naïve-saccharine motifs were blown out of size. A closer look reveals a tragic-romantic dimension, with symbolic references planted throughout. The center of the composition is dominated by a rectangular plate carrying the words "I'm in my bed. I'm dying" – a quote from Hole, the American grunge band; carnations entwined around the rectangle, as well as a song bird looming above it, complete the composition. Despite the sentimentality of its presentation, the painting doesn't shy away from private emotions, doing so with an intimacy while showing pathos. By telling of growing pains, of loneliness and of heart ache, it turns itself into a kind of monument, an empty grave or a letter of farewell.

Avigail Talmor, Slice of Life, 2019, leather and sewing

In the past five years Avigail Talmor has operated under the brand For Those who Pray, referring to the class distinction prevalent in the Middle Ages: those who pray and those who work and fight. Alluding to those who pray, Talmor appropriates multi-cultural, ritualistic, and fetishistic qualities for the wearable objects she creates, qualities which are reinforced by the use of leftover black leather. Talmor has gathered these leftovers—items sewn and unstitched, parts of used leather coats and bags—over the years. Now she stitches them together to make a single body—a grotesque, dystopian hybrid, patched and scarred, a-la

Frankenstein. The work's title was borrowed from a song by the British Bauhaus group (the first Gothic rock band), which, in itself, is a combination of sentences extracted from works by American artist Barbara Kruger.

Gilad Ratman, Multipillory, 2010, single-channel video, video projection on wooden structure

The dark landscape of a wood at dusk, strewn with what looks like the severed heads of humans, turns out to be more disturbing still as the camera moves sideways and back, revealing by its movement the backside of this landscape – a vertical wooden structure locking in the half-naked bodies belonging to the heads seen from the front. 12 in all, they are trapped and unable to move, locked in place in an awkward position that challenges the limits of human endurance. No less cruel than the pillory that served it as reference, the video offers a grotesque group interpretation to the medieval penal device, where the victim's head and hands were fastened to the frame as a form of public humiliation. The ongoing video loop traps the victims in an infinite limbo of eternal suffering, while the wooden structure that serves it as a projection screen manifests the horror even more vividly.

Assi Meshullam, Serpentine, 2019, glass paints on transparency

The art of stained glass culminated with the birth of Gothic architecture, which used it to emphasize the mystical quality of light. Assi Meshullam intervenes in the façade of a historical building, inserting a stained glass painting which intertwines with the top windows' grid—two snakes coiled around each other to become a single, two-headed serpent. The image of the serpent, with its primordial cultural baggage, manifests itself in Meshullam's oeuvre in various ways: from the biblical serpent (signifying rejection of the divine command, and conveying knowledge to mankind), through chaos, Satan, death and life, sexuality, etc. The self-cuddling embracing serpent alludes to paintings of

creatures copulating, wrestling, or devouring themselves, used by alchemists to describe a diffuse relationship between two substances. In 2012 Meshullam presented a monumental stained-glass painting on the windows of the Genia Schreiber University Art Gallery at Tel Aviv University. Its protagonist was also a serpent.