

Zohar Gotesman

Disrupted Layer

The Archaeology Wing, Israel Museum

2023 – 2024

In *Disrupted Layer*, Israeli artist Zohar Gotesman intervenes in the permanent exhibition of the Archaeology Wing, placing in its various galleries seven contemporary sculptures and proposing a new reading of the display. This reading disrupts the display's linear sequence, blurring the boundaries between periods, contents, and techniques and thereby expanding the scope of the discourse on archaeology, history, and art history. This is the first time that the Archaeology Wing hosts an exhibition of contemporary art in its permanent galleries. The exhibition's title refers to a situation that sometimes occurs in archaeological excavations, where remains from one historical layer are discovered in a different layer and may disrupt its decipherment.

Gotesman's great love of archaeology and his fascination with the Israel Museum's outstanding collection were the point of departure, some years ago, for a unique journey that reached its peak with this exhibition. The large, site-specific sculptures are the result of material and conceptual research on the collection's items, visits to the galleries, contemplation of the artifacts on permanent display, and a fruitful conversation with the curators of the Archaeology Wing. The nature of the permanent exhibition and the narratives it offers captured Gotesman's imagination and inspired him to create works that propose a fresh look at the familiar collection. Each sculpture in the exhibition is a response to one or several items that drew his attention; through his works, he conducts a dialogue with these artifacts' historical and cultural contexts and with their style, iconography, and different uses.

In his artistic work Gotesman focuses on sculpture and installation, dismantling and examining these media on the basis of a broad reservoir of knowledge. As part of his practice, he addresses issues of balance, dimensions, forms, and weight, deliberately mixing new and the ancient ideas and narratives, juxtaposing the historical with the contemporary and the mundane with the sublime. He employs techniques from ancient sculptural traditions, working in stone, marble, wood, and bone with reference to the archaeological finds, in order to amplify the similarity (and disparity) between different periods. At the same time, he incorporates state-of-the-art techniques and materials used in contemporary art. His sculptures abound in internal contradictions and even paradoxes that undermine the essence of the sculpture itself and subvert the conventions of the artistic canon.

In *Disrupted Layer*, Gotesman unravels the structured narrative of the Museum's permanent archaeology exhibition, creating timeless, hybrid sculptures that feature alchemic and anachronistic combinations. These sculptures are works of art in their own right, while also referencing the displays among which they are placed, as if simulating archaeological finds. In-depth contemplation reveals the deliberate discrepancies between the contemporary works and the ancient objects, the unexpected and sometimes ironic encounters between them, and the tension, dissonance, and incompatibility that inevitably arise from the act of intervening in the permanent exhibition.

Beyond their material and stylistic similarity to the archaeological finds in the collection, the sculptures also offer a personal statement – whether in the form of incisive criticism or sharp humor – regarding the period in which we live. In one way or another, they all address human nature, with its primeval needs and instincts and inherent weakness: the search for meaning and protection, the need to dominate nature, the pursuit of wealth, power, and authority, and the fear of the "other". They also concern issues related to archaeology and art history such as replication, restoration, forgery, mutual influence, and cultural appropriation.