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Foreword

For almost two millennia, the figure of Jesus has been such a fundamental part of Western culture – in the visual arts, in literature, and in music – that it is almost impossible to relate to cultural history without mentioning the story of his life and death. The progenitor of what became the world’s largest religion was a Jew who lived during the Second Temple period and was put to death by the Roman rulers of Judea. Jesus came to Jerusalem to preach the Kingdom of Heaven, and it was in Jerusalem that he was crucified, so that over the years the Via Dolorosa, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, and other sites in the holy city have become a world focus for Christian pilgrimage.

The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, engages importantly and in many ways with the material and cultural legacy of Christianity. Our collections and our collection gallery displays include significant archaeological finds from Christianity’s earliest days; the Shrine of the Book houses Dead Sea Scrolls that shed unique light on society and religion in the time of Jesus and on the theology that would evolve to become Christianity; and the unfolding narrative of our Archaeology Wing concludes with objects from the Byzantine and Crusader periods that are integral to our story of the “Chronicles of the Land.” Our curators study and interpret these texts and objects on an ongoing basis and present them to our diverse audiences, perhaps most notably in our *Cradle of Christianity* exhibition in the year 2000 (curated by Yael Israeli and David Mevorah), which focused on the archaeology of the early history of Christianity through the Byzantine period, and in our in-depth look at the Crusader period in *Knights of the Holy Land* (curated in 1999 by Na’ama Brosh, Silvia Rozenberg, and Hagit Allon). And in our Fine Arts Wing, we were proud to present in 2003 *Revelation: Representations of Christ in Photography* (curated by Nissan N. Perez), a pioneering exhibition devoted to depictions of Jesus throughout the history of the photographic medium, from the mid-nineteenth century and into the first years of the twenty-first century.

Behold the Man: Jesus in Israeli Art approaches the figure of Jesus and related Christian themes from a different perspective, entering the complex realm of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity to examine for the first time the ways in which Jesus has had a significant presence throughout the history of European Jewish and Israeli art. The work of some forty artists – spanning the late nineteenth

century through our own time – demonstrates the powerful symbolic role played by such subjects as crucifixion and resurrection, whether in the context of personal artistic expression or of collective national identity. The original research that led to both the exhibition and this publication draws on the doctoral dissertation of Amitai Mendelsohn, Senior Curator of the Museum’s David Orgler Department of Israeli Art. It joins the ranks of other Museum explorations of complex and wide-ranging subjects through which we attempt to extend and enrich our public’s understanding of the visual and cultural legacy of Israel. At the same time, even more broadly and deeply, this project touches on questions of rapprochement, on the ever closer ties that are being forged between the world’s first two monotheistic religions after centuries of divergence and **discord**. Dialogue and cooperative discourse with the various denominations of churches represented in Jerusalem have become a prominent element in the mandate of our Museum and of its Wings for Archaeology, Jewish Art and Life, and the Fine Arts. It is our hope that *Behold the Man* will be seen by all of Jerusalem’s diverse communities as a reflection of growing tolerance and awareness.

We are profoundly grateful to the private and institutional lenders who have shared their treasures with us, among them seminal works by European Jewish artists, and we extend special collegial recognition to Agnieszka Morawińska, Director of the National Museum in Warsaw, and Bernard Blistène, Director of the Musée national d’art moderne, Centre Pompidou, Paris. We are also deeply grateful to the donors to the Museum’s 2016 Exhibition Fund – Claudia Davidoff, Cambridge, Massachusetts, in memory of Ruth and Leon Davidoff; Hanno D. Mott, New York; and the Nash Family Foundation, New York – for enabling us to realize an exhibition of this scope, as well as an accompanying publication commensurate with the importance of its subject. **Our appreciation goes Jonathan Nadav, Director of Magnes Press, our partners in the catalogue’s production and distribution.** And we salute the many members of the Museum’s staff who played essential roles in ensuring that this project would come to fruition, notably Mira Lapidot, Yulla and Jacques Lipchitz Chief Curator of Fine Arts. Finally, we congratulate Amitai Mendelsohn, curator of the exhibition and author of this volume, who had the vision to engage with such a challenging subject and the talent, sensitivity, and dedication required to do so with such great and insightful success.

James S. Snyder

Anne and Jerome Fisher Director

Jerusalem, December 2016

Preface

My journey to the “Israeli Jesus” began more than a decade ago in the storerooms of the Israel Museum. I was looking at an early self-portrait by Reuven Rubin, in which the Romanian-born artist displayed his hands to the viewer like Jesus showing his stigmata. This painting led me to study Rubin’s interest in Jesus and in Christian iconography, and from there to ask if and how other Israeli artists had approached this subject. To my surprise, the more I examined this question, the more I discovered overt references and indirect allusions in the work of leading Jewish artists in nineteenth-century Europe through to the creative output of contemporary Israeli artists. This became the topic of my Ph.D. dissertation. As I examined works of art, I found that these artists, were drawn like moths to flame to the figure of Jesus, which was charged with threatening, alien associations, even as it signified the intimacy of human, personal pain and self-sacrifice. And I found that through this highly complex figure, subject to a vast array of ideological interpretations and stylistic treatments, it was possible to perceive the overall development of Israeli art. The changing winds of a century of local art were all there: the dialogue with European culture; evolving social and political issues; attitudes towards the body; and preoccupation with the artist’s own psyche.

I was privileged to be accompanied on my journey by many people. First and foremost, I am grateful for the support and valuable insights of my father, Ezra Mendelsohn, an eminent scholar in the field of Contemporary Jewry. Throughout my doctoral research, his personality, his love of art, and the powerful intellectual curiosity that led him to investigate cultural history were an inspiration to me, just as his encouragement to pursue challenging subjects, no matter how controversial, strengthened me during this long endeavor. This book and the exhibition it accompanies are dedicated to his memory.

I am grateful to my Ph.D. supervisor, Prof. Haim Finkelstein of Ben-Gurion University, for his guidance; to Prof. Ziva Amishai-Maisels of the Hebrew University for reading and commenting on the dissertation; to Prof. Gannit Ankori, supervisor for my M.A. thesis on Rubin’s early work; to the Israel Museum’s former Senior Curator of Photography, Nissan N. Perez; and finally to Yigal Zalmona, who served

as the Israel Museum's Chief Curator at Large prior to his retirement, for sharing his knowledge and providing support and sage advice over many years. My love and thanks to my wife, Anat, who not only read and edited the dissertation, but also made it possible for me to devote so much time to this project; to my mother, Judith; and to my cherished children, Inbar and Orr.

Behold the Man would not have been possible without the creativity of the artists represented here, a number of them still active collaborators in this project; my warm appreciation to them, to family members who are entrusted with their legacy, and to the generous lenders of works. The Israel Museum's Director, James Snyder, provided essential support from the outset, and I am very grateful for the confidence he placed in me. Many colleagues at the Israel Museum assisted in the realization of the exhibition and publication. In particular, I wish to thank Chief Curator of Fine Arts Mira Lapidot for her encouragement and valuable counsel; Head of Curatorial Services Tania Coen-Uzzielli for orchestrating an intricate enterprise; Head of Publications Nirit Zur, for her keen eye; and Mor Kalev, General Manager of Israel Museum Products, for furthering our collaboration with Magnes Press.

My warm and heartfelt thanks to the members of the Publications Department who were so involved in this project: catalogue designer Yael Bamberger, whose dedication and sensitivity exemplified the process whereby she produced a book of great beauty; to Tami Michaeli, who edited the original Hebrew version with outstanding skill while contributing important insights; and to Anna Barber, who brought her talent, knowledge, and expertise to the complex task of editing the present volume, giving the text its final English form after it was ably translated by free-lancers Simon Montagu, Carol Sutherland, and Richard Flantz. I also wish to thank Shir Ventura, who created the index; Rachel Laufer of the Image Resources and Copyright Management Department, headed by Amalyah Keshet; head of photography Elie Posner; Yael Diner, who assisted the designer; and the Museum's librarians, headed by Vicky Leiderman, for their important contributions to the making of this book.

I am very grateful for the sensitive, meticulous work of the exhibition's designer, Shirly Yahalomi, and the valuable input of chief designer Oren Sagiv. Warm thanks to the teams of the Technical Services Department headed by Yaniv Cohen and the Audiovisual Services Department headed by Menachem Amin; to PMO Daniel Galperin; to Paul Zeharya Rowe; to conservators Ghiora Elon and Michael Maggen of the Restoration Laboratories headed by David Bigelajzen; to Henk van Doornik,

Tal Elispur, and Daniel Kobrinski in the Shipping Office; and to Liat Benzguida and Shira Cohen in the Curatorial Services Wing. Thanks to the staff of the Marketing Department headed by Ran Lior, including spokesperson Rachel Schechter and foreign press officer Natalie Chetboun.

To my colleagues in the Museum's Fine Arts Wing, my grateful appreciation: curator Aya Miron in the Israeli Art Department; Adina Kamien-Kazhdan, senior curator of Modern Art; Israeli Art volunteer Yael Misheiker; and Shua Ben-Ari, assistant to the chief curator. A special thank you to Netta Assaf, who gathered bibliographic information, checked details, and provided valued help as we installed the exhibition. Finally, my heartfelt gratitude goes to assistant curator Tamara Abramovitch, who was my right hand throughout this enterprise; it is owing to her careful, dedicated work that the exhibition and publication came to fruition. Thank you to all who joined me on this challenging journey.

Amitai Mendelsohn

Senior Curator, David Orgler Department of Israeli Art

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באמנות
הישראלית

BEHOLD
THE MAN
JESUS
IN ISRAELI
ART

ذلك هو
الرجل
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الإسرائيلي

