

# ARTPREMIUM

WINTER 2018

ARTPREMIUM.COM



**CONTEMPORARY ART  
IN ISRAEL**







## RITE OF PASSAGE

From a modest “hole in the wall” in 2005 to now a spacious three-storey building in Tel Aviv, **ALFRED - A COOPERATIVE INSTITUTE FOR ART AND CULTURE** strives to carve out, with their own bare hands, a yellow brick road for emerging Israeli artists in this concrete wall of a commercial market. Their decade-long establishment and success is a most encouraging indication of a healthy and balanced artistic scene in the country.

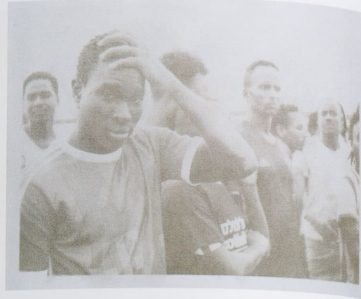
**T**he commercial circuit for contemporary art is like a torrent, ferocious and erratic. Dvir Cohen-Kedar, one of the founding members of Alfred - A Cooperative Institute for Art and Culture, remembers a younger self as a fresh graduate disillusioned and suffocated by the immutable mainstream art scene in Israel. To counter this moment of crisis upon graduation and alongside a dozen of his peers, they opened Alfred Gallery on Florentine Street in South Tel Aviv in 2005. The gallery's namesake, Alfred Hecht was an Israeli art dealer, collector and self-proclaimed picture frame-maker. Hecht moved to post-war Britain and led a life as the host of his salon for the intelligentsia of the 50s'. Similarly, as Alfred Gallery transitioned into its more substantial and permanent iteration in Simtat Shlush, the Institute becomes the home to

the artistic abundance in the community and an alternative safe haven for independent emerging artists from all walks of life.

The group of artists, who call themselves “gallery members”, took a leap of faith and gambled in the unknown over ten years ago. Without comprehending the true depths of its benefits, the gallery members spent their first year as an artistic cooperative hosting solo exhibitions of each other's works. Media coverage and ardent public interest flooded in almost immediately - a possible Newtonian counter-reaction to the otherwise stagnant and formulaic scene in the industry. Yielding from their triumphant experience, 'Alfred' has since registered as a non-profit organisation and became synonymous to the bridge that makes art and artists accessible to the mass.

Entirely independent from the industry colossals' aid, the Institute stresses on open





and transparent communication to establish their own, unique network. An extremely special relationship was kindled between the Israeli cooperative and their counterpart in Germany back in 2015 through a group exhibition. **BETONBOX** Art Space is a similar artistic initiative running in Dusseldorf. Both organisations hosted members from each group in their home countries to carry out research and develop new projects together. This year, as the fourth rendition of the Alfred-BETONBOX collaboration and on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Israel and Germany, the Alfred Institute sets up a cluster of exhibitions collectively named *KONTINUUM*, with the support from the Embassy of Israel and the Cultural Office of Dusseldorf, showcasing the many fruitful results reaped from the interactions among the members of the two groups.

The joint effort that is *KONTINUUM* is not so much a demonstration of the two nations' contemporary artistic prowess, but rather, like chapters in a book, sprinkles of points of view telling a universal kind of story of humanity. Dafna Gazit and Alfred and Nathalie Bertram from **BETONBOX** collaborated on

*Outcast*, a portrait series intended to humanise the African migrants that are trying to survive in the forgotten and desolate Holot Detention Centre. Captured through a large-format camera and framed by both photographers, their subjects' gaze penetrates through the two-dimensional surface of the print and evokes a song of poignant poetry reflecting on the unjust treatment by the government to whomever is seeking asylum in the world, especially in Europe and in the Middle East. With hindsight, *Outcast* earns greater pathos in accounting the previous exhibition, *Photolytic City*, by Gazit. The Israeli photographer, with her own hands following a 19th century traditional method, printed the photographs of the panoramic skyline of Tel Aviv onto the walls of the Institute. The prints were then assimilated completely back into blankness by a fresh coat of paint upon the conclusion of the exhibition. Coming back to *Outcast*, which is now superposed on the erased landscape of modernised Tel Aviv, the exhibition essentially questions the real importance of ownership of territories with respect to the necessity of human survival.

The Alfred Institute is able to feed the organisation incredible exhibition

programmes as *KONTINUUM* and other activities like lectures, workshops, and providing spaces for artist studios because it is an artist-run initiative and more importantly, its gallery members put in genuine dedication and passion into supporting emerging talents like themselves. One of the very original points of what they do is a guide to writing exhibition proposals and artist portfolios. Speaking from experience, the Institute exudes authority in the advice they give. The gallery members noticed a gap in the art scene in Israel and pioneered in what is now known as the cooperative trend implicated as one of the aftermath of the 2011 Israeli social justice protests. Currently, there are eight artistic cooperatives in Israel. Their existence transmuted the nation's art scene into a robust current, creating dynamic platforms for exchanges and encouraging greater development within the arts.

PL

Zvi Tolkovsky, *How to Make a Bomba*, 2016, mixed media on hand-made paper, 45 x 45 cm.

Nathalie Bertrams & Dafna Gazit, *Untitled* (from the series *Outcast*) 2017, Handmade Gum Print on paper, 30 x 40 cm.

Dafna Gazit, *Photolytic city* (detail), 2017



Dvir Cohen-Kedar, *Untitled*, 2017, oil on canvas, 20 x 20 cm.  
Photo credit: Dafna Gazit