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***Carte Blanche* Exhibitions and
Institutional Critique: Public
Movement's *National Collection* and
Debriefing II, Tel Aviv Museum 2015**

Reesa Greenberg

Reesa Greenberg was Associate Professor of Art History at Concordia University, Montreal from 1971-99. Subsequently, she has been Adjunct Professor at York University, Toronto (2000--), and Carleton University, Ottawa (2007--), Visiting Professor at the California College of the Arts (2011, 2012) and Moscow State University (2012). She curated the retrospective of Alfred Pellan drawings at the National Gallery of Canada (1980) and consulted on permanent collection displays or temporary exhibitions at The Edmonton Art Gallery (1989), the Jewish Historical Museum, Amsterdam (1998), the Art Gallery of Ontario (1999) and the Jewish Museum, New York (1999-2001). Greenberg served on the Carleton University Art Gallery Advisory Board (2005-2013), the Board of Directors of the National Gallery of Canada Foundation (2014--), and is an Advisor to the Acquisition Committee of the National Gallery of Canada (2009--). She is best known as one of the founders of the field of exhibition studies and co-editor of *Thinking About Exhibitions* (1996).

Carte blanche or invitational exhibitions took hold in the second half of the twentieth century as a vehicle for museums to engage non-resident curators in the presentation of temporary exhibitions. The premise is that an outsider is able to illuminate or revivify an institution, however temporarily, in ways that an insider cannot. Outsiders often accept, knowing they are given tacit permission to enact what the institution, for a variety of reasons, can or will not do.

Usually, artists are asked to “create” an exhibition using works from the museum’s collection. The out-sourcing model is particularly effective in drawing attention to latent or blatant ideological positions that determine(d) an institution’s acquisition and display practices. As Natalie Musteata demonstrates, the first *carte blanche* exhibition, Andy Warhol’s 1969 *Raid the Icebox 1* at the Rhode Island School of Design, is not merely a Warholian art project using items previously relegated to storage but an early example of institutional critique that challenges normative museal criteria determining which objects are valued sufficiently for public display while simultaneously interrogating a presentational aesthetic premised on displaying said art as valuable commodities.¹

Subsequent *carte blanche* exhibitions address other systemic lacunae. Early, iconic, North American examples include Joseph Kosuth’s 1990 *The Brooklyn Museum Collection: The Play of the Unmentionable* where the curatorial premise is the presentation of over 100 art works previously considered obscene for reasons of sex, religion or politics and Fred Wilson’s 1992 *Mining the Museum* which, for the first time, foregrounded the position of blacks as slaves or second-class citizens through artifacts and art found in the collection of the Baltimore Historical Society, an institution previously known for portraying history from a white-only perspective. With their focus on linking politics inside museums

to politics outside museums, both are more partisan examples of institutional critique than Warhol’s exhibition and lay the foundation for later polemical *carte blanche* exhibitions such as Hans Haacke’s 1999 *Viewing Matters* at the Boijmans van Beuningen Museum, Rotterdam, which examined the links between commerce and collecting, and Maria Eichorn’s 2003 *The Politics of Restitution* at the Lenbachhaus, Munich.

In the majority of *carte blanche* exhibitions, the curatorial methodology is demonstrative, proving the point in a restaging of the collection with variations on the selected theme. The tone ranges from clinical to expressive to ironic. There may or may not be extensive text. Viewers are asked to look (and read) and, as a result of encountering a markedly different perspective, to rethink their own.

National Collection, an exhibition in two parts, curated and presented by the art group Public Movement, at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, while belonging to the politicized *carte blanche* exhibition tradition, radically reformulates how works of art, artists, display spaces and, of primary importance, museum visitors are deployed. Rather than display works from the collection, the two performances comprising the exhibition, *National Collection* and *Debriefing Session II*, animate what is on the walls by staging connections between Israeli politics and the entangled national and cultural identities at the collection’s core.

Unlike previous forms of *carte blanche* institutional critique that work only with the collection’s contents in a designated exhibition space, using standard museum procedures and positioning viewers as passive, the moving or seated bodies of the visitor/viewer/audience/citizen are implicated in what unfolds. The result is a merging of their bodies, the bodies of art in play, and the body politic of the State in which all are located. Weaving together

1 MUSTEATA, Natalie. “Defrosting the Icebox: A Contextual Analysis of Andy Warhol’s *Raid the Icebox 1*.” *Journal of Curatorial Studies*, 5: 2, 2016, p. 214-237.

events in and outside the museum, Public Movement's site-specific, durational performance events incorporate narrative, dramatizations, re-enactments, and tableaux that take place throughout the museum. *National Collection* invites visitors and staff to experience what is or is not permissible in a museum and a country differently.

National Collection and Debriefing II: Process, Theoretical Affinities, and "Mapping the Politics"

National Collection began with an invitation from the museum followed by three years of research by the co-founder of Public Movement,² Dana Yahalomi, and co-conceptualizer Alhena Katsof, Public Movement's Director of Strategy and Protocol. According to its website, "Public Movement is a performative research body which investigates and stages political actions in public spaces. It studies and creates public choreographies, forms of social order, overt and covert rituals."³ At the Tel Aviv Museum, Public Movement's first museum event, the resulting action was a series of situations choreographed by Yahalomi and the troupe, to construct a history of the museum and its collection as inseparable from the State.

Katsof cites Tony Bennett's still influential 1988 essay, "The Exhibitionary Complex"⁴ linking the rise of the nation state in the nineteenth century to the establishment of museums as a key source to the thinking behind *National Collection*.⁵ Bennett posits that museums are important instruments for maintaining social order and existing power structures, placing "the people—conceived as a nationalized citizenry—on this side of power,

both its subject and its beneficiary."⁶ *National Collection* reconstructs Israel's early history, including the decision to declare the country's statehood in 1948 from inside the then Tel Aviv Museum, as an examination of the implications of the nation's Zionist ideology, especially, Katsof suggests, the connections Bennett outlines between the rise of the nation state, its use of museums and colonialism.

As in all of Public Movement's performances, the goal was "to map the politics"⁷ and, in so doing, create conditions that prompt viewers to become aware of, if not reconsider, their roles "on this side of power." As such, Public Movement offers an alternative to Bennett's portrayal of museum visitors as only enablers of State values. Even if no models of behaviour are proscribed, various forms of verbal and embodied knowledge that could serve as the basis of civic actions not based on hegemonic structures are provided. In a wall text at the end of the exhibition, Public Movement distances itself from institutional critique but "mapping the politics" functions in a similar manner: the difference is that here institutional critique goes well beyond the institution.

A key part of the preparation for the durational performative exhibition was the negotiation of permission for troupe activities such as marching, dancing, falling, skipping, jumping and shouting, all normally not permitted in the museum. The actors became agents, to use Public Movement's Bourdieu-derived term, who set up a counter-narrative to the museum's normative framing structures. Ruti Direktor, museum curator of the exhibition, described how difficult it was for both back and front of the house to adapt to the atypical behaviours and to adjust to repeated access for

² Omer Krieger and Yahalomi founded Public Movement in 2006. In 2011, Yalomi assumed sole leadership.

³ <<http://www.publicmovement.org/about/>> Accessed December 2016.

⁴ BENNETT, Tony. "The Exhibitionary Complex," *New Formations*, 4, Spring 1988, p. 73-102.

⁵ Interview Alhena Katsof and Reesa Greenberg, September 15, 2016. Unless otherwise stated, all subsequent quotes by and references to Katsof are taken from the same interview.

⁶ BENNETT, *ibid.*, p. 80

⁷ KATSOFF/GREENBERG. Interview, *ibid.*

both the troupe and audience to spaces usually off-limits to the public for the run of the exhibition.⁸ (fig.2) (fig.5) (fig.7)

During the research process, it became increasingly evident that not all the material could be accommodated in a single structure. As a result, a second performance event, *Debriefing II*, was scripted to accompany *National Collection*. The twinned performances, presented several times a day over a six-week period, differed in content and form: *National Collection* focused on official history using a troupe of performers and 30 registered viewers identified by coloured stickers, all moving throughout the public and backstage spaces of the museum, whereas *Debriefing II* was an intimate, one-on-one, seated encounter held in a windowless basement storage space where a version of the collection's formation, only hinted at in *National Collection*, was presented in depth. Visitors to the museum could participate in one or both performances. Regardless of which modality was chosen, for those who signed up and for those who witnessed some of the performative exhibition by chance, the museum and its history were given additional co-ordinates.

National Collection: Prelude, Processions, and Accidental Viewers

National Collection actually begins outside the museum with a one-off event. Eleven members of Public Movement, all dressed in white and moving with crisply choreographed movements, ceremoniously carry a reproduction of Lesser Ury's 1908 painting, Holstein Switzerland, through the streets of Tel Aviv. The procession, part of which can be seen at the beginning of *National Collection - the trai-*

ler: <https://vimeo.com/157543622>,⁹ starts from Independence Hall on Rothschild Boulevard, the original location of the Tel Aviv Museum, founded in 1932 by Meyer Dizengoff, then Tel Aviv's mayor. The museum was the site of the signing of Israel's Declaration of Independence in 1948. After the Tel Aviv Museum moved to its current location in 1972, the site was transformed into a national museum commemorating the founding of the State of Israel. Now known as Independence Hall, it includes a reconstruction of the gallery where the signing took place, complete with reproductions of the paintings, one of which was the Ury, chosen to hang on the walls of the central room in which the State was proclaimed.¹⁰

Independence Hall is also the site of Public Movement's "inaugural performative act,"¹¹ *The Israel Museum*, in which white flowers were placed on the outside steps to commemorate the founding of a nation state within an art museum.¹² In hindsight, the brief June 28, 2007, action can be seen as the group's foundational moment: a declaration of intent that all its subsequent events/actions would address art and politics. The procession ends with hanging the reproduction of the Ury painting inside the current location of the Museum, a distance of 2.5 kilometers or a thirty-minute walk. (fig.1)

Visually and conceptually, the procession links past and present, reviving historic and symbolic connections between what has become a national historical museum dedicated to the founding of the State and the city's art museum. As such, the procession introduces the premise of the intertwined national/cultural identity at the heart of the performative exhibition inside the museum.

8 Skype Interview, July 10, 2017. Direktor recounted how empty the museum felt when the exhibition ended. A 45-minute conversation in Hebrew between Direktor and Yahalomi can be accessed at: <<https://vimeo.com/147598602>>
9 (Accessed December 2016) I am grateful to Dana Yahalomi for providing me with a 44:23-minute video documenting *National Collection*. In the shorter, 5:52-minute, version, *National Collection - The Trailer*, the sequencing and sound have been altered for dramatic effect.

10 Direktor identifies the installation as the first exhibition of the State of Israel.

11 <<http://www.publicmovement.org/new/national-collection/>> Accessed December 2016.

12 Public Movement's initial title for the action is somewhat misleading because the Israel Museum is located in Jerusalem. The action is now known as *The Laying of the Wreath*. <<http://www.publicmovement.org/old/the-israel-museum/>> (Accessed July 2017).



Fig. 1

Screen shot of Performance Documentation video of Public Movement's Procession from Independence Hall to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art taken in the square in front of the museum, *National Collection*, 2015.

© Public Movement

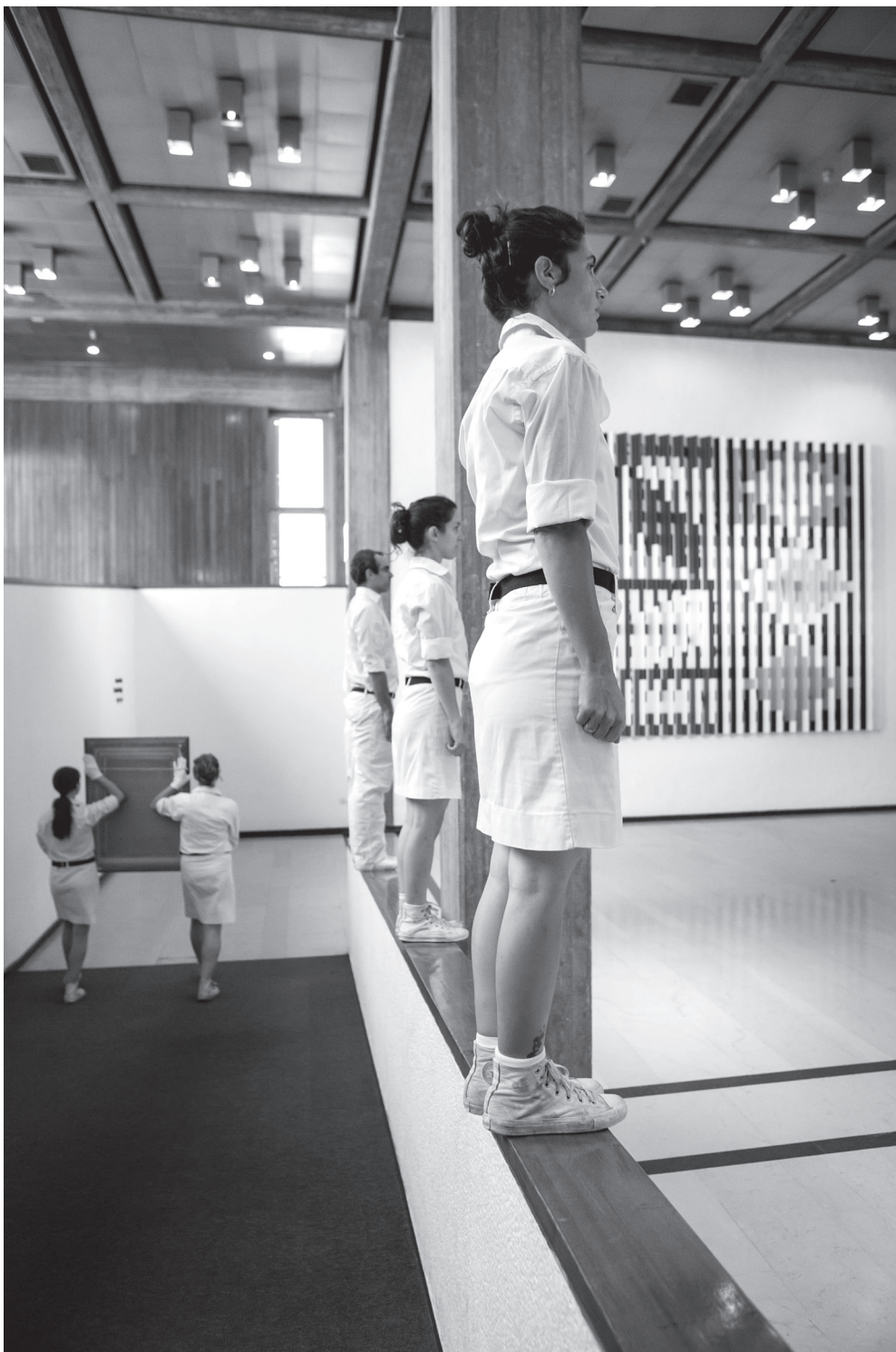


Fig.2
Performance documentation photograph of Public Movement, National Collection,
2015, Tel Aviv Museum of Art.
© Photographer: Kfir Bolotin.



Fig.3

Public Movement Rescue, National Collection, 2015, Tel Aviv Museum of Art.

© Photographer: Kfir Bolotin.

Yahalomi refers to such processions as civil pilgrimages, ritualized group visits and itineraries organized to consolidate identification with a nation state.¹³

Historically, publicly parading art through a city's streets is associated either with the display of war plunder or rituals where religious statues and paintings are the focus of ceremonies that take place outside of temples or churches.¹⁴ Public Movement's choreography may incorporate religious veneration and reverence—there are hints of Judaic liturgical practices in postures and movements that recall carrying the Torah aloft and around the synagogue during prayer services—but primarily it references parades associated with patriotism.

People on the street were accidental spectators. They probably had no idea of what was going on. If they were looking for an analogy, given the stylized marching movements, synchronized patterns, and troupe of similarly clad participants, it would be to military parades with the painting replacing the carrying of arms or flags. Most Israelis serve a minimum of two years in the army. Accidental spectators would recognize and identify with the military components of the marching troupe even if the meaning of valorizing a painting—this painting—remained obscure.

National Collection: A performative exhibition

National Collection tells the story of the museum chronologically. It divides the narrative temporally and spatially into two sections: earlier events in Israel's history occur before the troupe and audience group pass through the basement, whereas more recent history is presented afterward.

The first part elaborates themes in the prelude, beginning with the militaristic, processional marching by the white-clad troupe carrying the Ury painting from the Plaza outside the museum into the lobby and through the galleries. Parading outdoors approximates normal, if occasional, urban behavior, but in a museum, military marching is atypical. The troupe leader's repeated, abrupt commands (Next, Left, Right, in Hebrew) when changing direction or formation, and the sounds of their marching feet repeatedly hitting the floor and resonating percussively, magnify the sense of invasion of some foreign force moving phalanx-like through the museum. The commands and marching sounds rupture the decorum of silence endemic to museums. Sequences where the troupe forms protectively around the painting or audience or when individual members fall to the ground as if wounded add a dimension of danger that accompanies the triumphal marching. The danger is elucidated early on in a sequence that takes place in a gallery converted into a replica of Declaration Hall by a "guide" who explains that soon after the United Nations declared the partition of Palestine, war was declared by Israel's Arab neighbours. (fig.6)

Themes of danger, protection and rescue for both the State and the art in the museum recur. At various moments, the young, limp, supine, falling human forms, or bodies that are inert, are carried aloft horizontally conjure extreme sacrifice. References are made to the security features of Declaration Hall (dug deep into the ground with high windows) and the thick concrete walls of the current museum and its location in a military zone across from Israel's main Defense Forces base. (fig.3)

13 KATSOFF/GREENBERG, *ibid*.

14 In 2002, Francis Alÿs adapted the format in *The Modern Procession* as a comment on the substitution of art worship in secular societies for and as religion. Alÿs's Catholic-inspired, three-hour spectacle celebrated the move of some of New York's Museum of Modern Art activities from mid-town to Queens with palanquins transporting reproductions of MoMA masterpieces, accompanied by bands and police.

In the second part, Agents explain the classified, coloured-sticker, coding system, used during the 1991 Gulf War and again in 2012 during Operation Pillar of Defense in Gaza, to prioritize the order art is to be removed from the walls in the event of war.¹⁵ For reasons of security, individual artworks are not identified; instead, in a subsequent sequence, they are represented in wordless *tableaux*.¹⁶ A restaging of *Rescue*, based on Israeli emergency procedures where bodies are carefully and gently extracted from building ruins, comes next, set in a gallery with photos of urban destruction hung on the walls behind.¹⁷ (fig.3) (fig.4) (fig.5)

Rescue is followed by *National Collection's* final scene with the troupe viewed from inside the museum by the audience seated on a back stairwell. The troupe moves with coordinated gestures of firmly raised fists, arms throwing stones, and advancing in solidarity with linked arms, interspersed with passages of leaping, kissing, shimmying, in an amalgam of dance and defiance to the Talking Heads song *Burning Down the House*.¹⁸ The implication is that what has been kept outside the museum may well burn it down. With this scene, *National Collection's* finale, the layering of museums, collections, nationhood and what is valued thickens as does the reality of a country under regular threat of war. (See trailer)

References to the links between the founding of the nation state and the museum hinted at in the Prelude are expanded, especially in the first half-segment held in the purpose-built replica of Declaration Hall inside today's Tel Aviv museum. There, the audience is told the story

of *Operation Museum* where, in 1948, the main gallery of the original museum was converted into a political hall draped with blue fabric on the walls, a photograph of Theodore Herzl, the founder of modern Zionism at centre stage and Israeli flag banners to either side. A clip from Ben Gurion's Declaration speech is played, and troupe and audience toast the new State. (fig.6)

The guide states: "Think about it, the most political art event takes place inside a museum." He draws attention to the paintings lining the walls, including the Ury, ceremoniously placed to the left of the dais at the beginning of the sequence.¹⁹ The troupe masses together and sings Public Movement's triumphal, upbeat and inspirational anthem. By this point, viewers, who in all likelihood did not see the procession from Independence Hall to the museum or watch the video of it in the lobby, understand the main theme of the performance: Israel's history as a nation is inextricable from that of the museum and vice versa.

The price of nationhood is referred to in sequences such as the defiance/danger dance and the trajectory of the troupe and audience group moving through the basement storage and work areas of the museum. There, the contrapuntal interplays between verbal and visual modes of communication that underscore the performative exhibition work in conjunction with the symbolism of access to off-limits museum spaces to imply inclusion and exclusion well beyond the walls of the institution.

15 Other museums have used similar systems during wartime. For example, during World War II, the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam classified paintings with red, blue and white stickers—the colours of the Dutch national flag.

16 *Rescue's* silence contrasts with another recent re-enactment of artworks, *An Immaterial Retrospective of the Venice Biennale*, by Alexandra Pirici and Manuel Pelmus, the acclaimed 2011 performance in the Romanian Pavilion in which five performers stage works from past biennials introduced by an actor who announces the title and the artist of the work, as well as the year in which it was created and the year it was exhibited.

17 *Rescue* is based on the action *Emergency*, originally created by Omer Krieger and Dana Yaholomi in 2008 and performed outdoors. *Rescue* was performed again as a separate action on August 18, 2017, in conjunction with Part of Little Rebellions, Aarhus.

18 Full lyrics can be found at: <https://play.google.com/music/preview/Td2c2yd2hcb2vrn2vtgtntdyswm?lyrics=1&utm_source=google&utm_medium=search&utm_campaign=lyrics&pcampaignid=kp-lyrics> (Accessed December 2016).

19 In *The Viewer as Citizen*, Ruti Direktor provides a full list of the paintings and their significance for the occasion. Draft manuscript provided to Reesa Greenberg, July 2016.



Fig.4
Performance documentation photograph of Public Movement, *National Collection*, 2015, Tel Aviv Museum of Art
© Photographer: Dan Haimovich, Courtesy of Artis.



Fig.5
Performance documentation photograph of Public Movement, *National Collection*, 2015, Tel Aviv Museum of Art
© Photographer: Oz Moalem.



Fig. 6

Reconstruction of Declaration Hall in National Collection, 2015, Tel Aviv Museum of Art.

© Photographer: Kfir Bollitin



Fig. 7

Performance documentation photograph of Public Movement, National Collection, 2015, Tel Aviv Museum of Art.

© Photographer: Oz Moalem.

In the basement, troupe and group move in linear formations that, while referencing the procession in the prelude, function to underscore the negative aspects of a triumphal history. Crates lining the long corridor are pulled out, one at a time, and dragged along the floor, briefly separating and confining the audience into smaller units. Though no mention of visual overlap is made, for those familiar with them, these patterns momentarily conjure the treatment of groups of Palestinians attempting to enter Israel through its security checkpoints. The restrictions of movement and access echo separations of the accredited audience earlier in the performance from those merely attending the museum, as well as the subdivision of the accredited audience into smaller groups with coloured stickers.

The crates are then hoisted aloft, carried on shoulders and heads, used as pedestals for members of the troupe posing on top as semi-recumbent nymph-like classical sculptures, and a base to stand on, from which the troupe chants that the museum is “the final dwelling place of art.” One member of the troupe intones: “The belly of the museum pulls inward. There is a void between us—a non-national collection.” Together the group recites “Artworks that will never be carried through these halls. We are standing on paintings. Underneath us is a political mission.” These words are spoken from the rarely acknowledged, underbelly of the museum and the country—the unnamed, non-Western, non-Jewish Other that lived in Palestine prior to 1948. Like an umbilical cord, the underground passage links the past, present and projected futures of the museum and the nation, all products of complex instrumentalist premises.

(fig. 7) The scenes after emerging from the basement—*Rescue*, explanations of the museum's evacuation system, the *tableaux vivants* of prioritized works for removal, and the danger/defiance dance—allude to what has been excluded. With the exception of a coda, the mixed message of a possible future conveyed by the dance is the end of the performance, its finale. The audience descends, exits, then re-enters the museum and is directed to look at a reproduction of a 1796 Hubert Robert painting. If the implications of the dancing just witnessed did not register fully, Robert's *Imaginary View of the Gallery of the Louvre as a Ruin* offers a more explicit vision of the demise of a museum. Fittingly, the Robert ruin is the only painting in *National Collection* hung masterpiece-style on a dark green wall behind a stanchion rather than in the modernist white-cube spaces favoured by the museum and historically most appropriate for its collection. The performance ends further along the corridor with the audience passing before a line of photo captioned head-shots of each member of Public Movement and credits.

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National Collection: Paintings

The two paintings selected to bookend *National Collection* construct its narrative arc from the optimistic idealism of a new nation state to its (imagined) future unraveling.²⁰ Ury's 1908 canvas is instrumentalized as a synecdoche of both the museum's collection and Zionist Israel.²¹ Although *Holstein Switzerland* depicts an unpeopled Swiss landscape, its sandy earth and sparse, spindly trees are akin to geographic areas of Israel. Ury's landscape of possibility is easily co-opted to a European Zionist rhetoric

20 The trajectory of *National Collection* is the inverse of the narrative of progress inherent to the modernist museum discussed by Bennett and charted in detail by Carol Duncan and Alan Wallach in their influential articles, “The Universal Survey Museum.” *Art History*, December, 1980, vol. 3, p. 447-69 and “The Museum of Modern Art as Late Capitalist Ritual: An Iconographic Analysis.” *Marxist Perspectives*, 4, 1978, p. 29-51. See Liane McTavish, “The Decline of the Modernist Museum.” *Acadiensis*, XXXIII, N° 1, Autumn, 2003, p. 97-107, for a literature review and examples of counter-narratives.

21 Ury (1861-1931), a well-established, cosmopolitan, German Jewish Impressionist best known for his secular paintings, was championed by the Tel Aviv Museum's first director (1933-47), the German-born art historian Dr. Karl Schwarz, who orchestrated the purchase of the painting in 1944. Prior to moving to Israel, Schwarz (1885-1962) was director and curator at the Jewish Museum, Berlin (1928-33). *Holstein, Switzerland* was purchased thanks to funds contributed by Arieh Shenkar, a successful industrialist born in Russia who immigrated to Palestine in 1924. Schwarz collected other paintings by Ury before and after the acquisition of *Holstein*,

that paints a picture of Palestine as virgin territory, ready to be colonized and made fruitful. Variants of the slogan “A land without a people for a people without a land” were used when advocating for a Jewish state prior to 1948 and became part of the new nation’s founding mythology thereafter.

Ury’s seeming subject matter and the Europe/Israel amalgam represented by his painting explains its prominent placement to Ben Gurion’s right during the Declaration of Independence ceremony. The still lifes and portraits on the adjacent walls of Declaration Hall, also painted by European artists,²² were smaller or darker, less easily incorporated into the visual tropes of the new nation and less photogenic. De facto, Ury’s painting became part of the photographic historical record of the inauguration of the State of Israel, helping to perpetuate, however subliminally, the fusion of art and the new nation, a nation premised on the symbolism of the land. Public Movement’s use of the painting as icon of the nation and representative of the collection mobilizes increasingly contested mythologies within the State and the museum and, in so doing, raises questions about fetishization and fantasy in both spheres.

The second painting featured by Public Movement is not obviously associated with Israel nor is it part of the collection of the Tel Aviv Museum. Nonetheless, Robert’s vision of a combined political/cultural revolution gone wrong serves as a cautionary tale for all museums and countries predicated on ideologies of the modernist, colonialist nation state. Robert painted *An Imaginary View of the Grand*

Galery of the Louvre in Ruins as a pendant to *Design for the Grand Gallery in the Louvre*. Exhibited together at the Salon of 1796, the paired paintings are interpreted as a before-and-after didactic, moralizing comment on the creation and fate of a new nation and its institutions—“the Louvre as a beacon of democratic education, with the Louvre as a charred, roofless wreck.”²³ In *National Collection*, the pairing shifts time and place but implies a similar progression.

For those who do not know the Robert painting, Public Movement has provided a five-paragraph label in Hebrew and English. When speaking about the reopening of the Louvre as a new public museum so soon after the French Revolution, Public Movement describes it as “a model for later public museums and world’s fairs... a training ground for civic behaviour in public space and a way to unite people within a national identity.”²⁴

National Collection: Bodies and Choreographies of Power

National Collection is as much about physical bodies as it is about bodies of art, the museum body and the body politic of the nation state. Bodies perform, follow, and watch. They are actors, accredited audience members and accidental viewers. Together they comprise a field or network of different power relations: leaders, followers, and bystander/onlookers. *Choreographies of Power*, the title of a 2016 Public Movement action²⁵ based on the premises of *National Collection*, is also a fitting description for the Tel Aviv Museum action.

Switzerland.

²² In the 1930s, the importation of Western art was encouraged by the absence of an import tax.

²³ STAMMERS, Tom. “Cavorting Among the Ruins with Hubert Robert.” *Apollo*, June 2, 2016, <<http://www.apollo-magazine.com/cavorting-amid-the-ruins-with-hubert-robert/>> (Accessed December 2016).

²⁴ Between Research and Action: A Conversation with Public Movement by Guggenheim staff: <https://www.guggenheim.org/blogs/map/between-research-and-action-a-conversation-with-public-movement> Accessed December 2016.

²⁵ *Choreographies of Power*, a site-specific performance event, September 24–25, 2016, was part of the group exhibition *But a Storm is Blowing from Paradise: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa*, curated by Sara Raza at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, April 29–October 5, 2016. Like *National Collection*, *Choreographies of Power* questioned who is included or excluded in museums with references to the Guggenheim’s collection history and the temporary exhibition of which it was part. Katsoff and Yaholomi discuss the work in the video, Public Movement on *Choreographies of Power*: <<https://www.guggenheim.org/video/public-movement-on-choreographies-of-power>> (Accessed August 2017).

As Yahalomi and Katsof state, “[...] there is a new performative format that is created in the meeting between the curatorial and the choreographic.”²⁶ As Katsof states with regard to Yahalomi’s contributions to the *National Collection* performative exhibition: “The curatorial meets the choreographic.”

The audience, in its various forms, is an essential component of that choreography, integral to the performance and its meanings. Other artists, notably Tino Sehgal, incorporate the audience members into their museum performances but are more interactive and improvisational in approach. Sehgal’s works, such as *This Progress* (2006) and *This Variation* (2012) as well as his version of the *carte blanche* exhibition,²⁷ depend on cast-initiated chit-chat, dancing and singing. Sehgal’s *oeuvre* is a generic, updated response to the art/life problematic first introduced by Marcel Duchamp’s use of the art gallery or museum as paradigmatic test site for the definition of what constitutes art. By contrast, Public Movement, in its first museum exhibition, brings the body politic into the museum, exploring the inside/outside art world divide as inextricable from the history and politics of a specific site in a given nation state.

In *National Collection*, the exhibition exists only when there are viewers and those viewers are positioned as citizens. Responses and roles are tightly scripted, designed to raise questions about what it means to follow. The structure of the performance is a group tour for the accredited audience. Instead of the usual

museum lecture explicating and admiring selected artworks (so brilliantly parodied in Andrea Fraser’s 1989 *Museum Highlights: A Gallery Talk*), however, *National Collection* presents a history of Israel and the museum in words and images to a thinking body, a citizen body, capable of connecting the dots.

But what about the bodies not represented in *National Collection*? The bodies alluded to but not identified? The bodies comprising the underbelly of the museum and the country? The bodies not accepted as part of the national body? The bodies that are not full citizens? These are portrayed in a second performance event accompanying *National Collection*, an account of an inquiry into art made by non-Jews in Palestine prior to 1948 and its place, or lack of it, in Israeli museums.

National Collection: Debriefing II

Debriefing II, as performed at the Tel Aviv Museum, is a parallel story line to the state/art/museum narrative of *National Collection*.²⁸

The action is an outgrowth of research conducted for the exhibition, “material that ends up on the ‘cutting-room floor.’”²⁹ According to Katsof: “the [...] methodology for the effective transmission of this material [is] through scripted meetings, henceforth referred to as ‘Debriefing Sessions.’”³⁰ Each session consists of an Agent who delivers a monologue to a Participant in a private one-to-one encounter in a secret place within the museum.³¹

26 Email Dana Yahalomi to Reesa Greenberg, January 14, 2017.

27 In *Carte blanche to Tino Sehgal*, 2016, at the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, Sehgal constructs a retrospective consisting of his own body of performance work, augmented by the art of four artists he admires (Daniel Buren, Felix González-Torres, James Coleman and Pierre Huyghe). Sehgal’s engagement with the labyrinthine spaces of the former museum effectively demonstrates the value of emptying a museum to allow different bodies of art to enter but stops short of engaging visibly with the body politic. Jessica van der Brand in *Tino Sehgal: Art as Immaterial Commodity*, LAP, Lambert Academic Publishing, 2014, argues convincingly that Sehgal’s version of institutional critique expands the definition, hence the body, of both conceptual art and institutional critique.

28 *Debriefing II* was first performed in 2015 at Artport, a residency space in Tel Aviv, and at the Spielart Festival, Villa Stuck Museum, Munich.

29 KATSOFF Alhena. “Component One: Scripts” in Alhena Katsof and Dana Yahalomi, *Solution 263, Double Agent: To Meet is to be a Stranger*, Sternberg Press, p. 20.

30 KATSOFF, *ibid*.

31 The methodology was first used in 2012 in *Debriefing Session I*, performed in conjunction with *SALONS: Birthright Palestine?*, New Museum, New York. Edited scripts for both Debriefing Sessions, along with Strategy Guides, and Procedures are published in Katsof and Yahalomi’s manual cited above.

At the Tel Aviv Museum, the *Debriefing Session* begins when the Participant who has signed up in advance is met by a museum guard in the lobby and instructed that no record of the encounter can be made, that all mobile phones are to be switched off and no photos or notes can be taken. The serious tone of what is to come is set by the instructions and the wordless journey through the museum's backstage to a small, almost empty, basement storage room where the Participant meets the Agent.³² The Agent, young, professional, dressed in neat, casual office-wear, stands and greets the Participant. With the guard positioned outside the closed door for the duration, Agent and Participant sit kitty-corner at a table for the twenty-five to thirty-minute scripted monologue.

As the Agent recounts the trajectory of Public Movement's research into the art found in pre-1948 Palestine and its current whereabouts, key dates, names and events in the intermingled histories of Israeli and Palestinian art history are identified. The Participant learns that Modernist art was indeed made by non-Jews prior to 1948, that some of this art was stolen or looted during the wars of 1948, that there are scholarly monographs by Israeli and Palestinian art historians on the subject, that there are rarely seen private collections of Palestinian Modernist art, that Israel's museums and archives do not include Palestinian art because its presence would rupture the founding narrative of the State and because Palestinians do not wish to participate in reformulating that narrative under current political conditions. The Agent notes fact upon fact in three vertical columns on a single sheet of paper, often crossing something out when the research trail leads to a dead end. Appropriately, the result is a dense, tangled

picture, difficult to decipher and almost impossible to follow, let alone remember.

Participants are not allowed to keep the paper as a record of this oral history. (fig.8)

The *Session* ends with the Agent stating: "This debriefing is about the roles we play. And how the limitations or possibilities of those roles might be imagined. To do this work, I am a Double Agent [. . .]. By being here today you become an emissary of this information."³³ Unlike *National Collection*, participants are directly implicated. Although "Debriefing Sessions exist in the transition between research and action,"³⁴ participants are left with the understood obligation to act on information received.

National Collection: Doubling

To date, Public Movement has employed its unique doubling strategy in three museum exhibitions. Like Robert's Louvre paintings, *National Collection* and *Debriefing II* work well individually but are more powerful experienced together. Paired performances facilitate seeing the collection and its history from multiple perspectives. The double portrait, physically separated and executed in markedly different styles, portrays and conveys co-existing, possibly irreconcilable, viewpoints with reference to its formation and its reception.

Nicola Trezzi, in her review of *National Collection*, refers to another form of doubling—the many ways *National Collection* "appropriates the language of political parties, propaganda, nationalism, dance and the army among others in order to investigate those gray areas of reality that exist within the power structures dominating the notion of democ-

32 When *Debriefing II* was performed at the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum in New York as part of a group exhibition, *But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa*, April 29–October 5, 2016, the meeting between Participant and Agent took place in a staff meeting room on an upper floor. Small changes were made to the script to include material about the Guggenheim and its collecting policy with regard to art of the Middle East.

33 KATSOF and YAHALOMI, *ibid.*, pp. 69–70. Karen Archey and Janto Schwitters provide histories of WW II double agents in *Case Study: A TL;DR History that contextualize Public Movement's adoption of the tactic*. *Op. cit.*, 81–96. In the Guggenheim version of *Debriefing II*, the emissary was changed to carrier. Email Yahalomi/Greenberg, *ibid.*

34 KATSOF and YAHALOMI, *ibid.*, 20.



Fig. 8

Debriefing Session II premiered in 2015 at the Tel Aviv Museum as part of *National Collection*. The performance *Debriefing Session II* premiered in the United States as part of *But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise: Contemporary Art of the Middle East and North Africa*, June 18-October 10, 2016, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York.

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racy at its ultimate state.”³⁵ Trezzi also alludes to another, less desirable, form of appropriation or doubling when she mentions that no Palestinians are part of Public Movement. She does not say whether any applied for membership or were approached and, if so, declined the invitation. Refusal to join the colonizer is a form of *survivance*, here, a rejection of the role of double agent or collaborator in the enemy’s camp as a viable political position.

In many countries grappling with decolonization, including Israel, what is seen as the appropriation of indigenous histories is controversial. Ideally, the colonizer cedes telling stories from the perspective of the Other, or colonizer and colonized can work together to construct new, mutually acceptable narratives. When, for a variety of understandable reasons, such strategies cannot be put into effect, other tactics are used. Public Movement’s probing and alternative histories in what is now Israel present contextual histories from the perspective it knows, situating the collection in the Jewish Israeli body politic, even if doing so means becoming a double agent.

Fully aware of the difficulties of effecting systemic change in and outside the museum, Public Movement offers the new role of double agent to museum visitors, the majority of whom are citizens of Israel. In this paradigm, viewers, equipped with information and instruments of inquiry, can interrogate the dominant narrative of State and museum further, and join those who work to change it, doubling the numbers who do so.

35 TREZZI Nicola, Public Movement’s Bold Breakdown of National Identity at Tel Aviv Museum, Israel, Artnet news, November 18, 2015. <<https://news.artnet.com/exhibitions/nicola-trezzi-public-movements-bold-breakdown-national-identity-tel-aviv-museum-israel-359903t>> (Accessed September, 2017).

**Expositions carte blanche et critique institutionnelle :
National Collection et *Debriefing II* de Public Movement, Musée
 d'art de Tel Aviv, 2015**

National Collection, une exposition en deux parties commissariée et présentée par le groupe de recherche performatif Public Movement au Musée d'art de Tel-Aviv en 2015, fait la démonstration que la carte blanche reste une tactique viable : lorsqu'elle n'a pas déjà été utilisée dans un lieu donné, que l'idéologie examinée est inédite et que la collection est présentée de manière novatrice. La plupart des *cartes blanches* passées ont porté sur le contenu de la collection et sa réexposition. *National Collection*, en revanche, reformule radicalement la manière dont l'art, les artistes, les espaces d'exposition et, surtout, les visiteurs du musée sont déployés dans le contexte d'un événement performatif global, inscrit dans la durée et conçu pour mettre en relief les identités nationales et culturelles enchevêtrées au sein même de la collection. Plutôt que de considérer le musée comme un refuge, un espace d'évasion ou un lieu où règne une réalité différente de celle du dehors, *National Collection* intègre l'intérieur et l'extérieur au moyen de reconstitutions illustrant les interrelations entre les politiques nationales et culturelles d'Israël. En outre, contrairement à la plupart des formes antérieures de critique institutionnelle recourant à la carte blanche et qui portent sur la seule collection, ici, ce sont les corps en mouvement ou assis des visiteurs/observateurs/membres du public/citoyens qui sont impliqués. Il en résulte une fusion de leurs corps avec les corps de l'art en jeu et le corps politique du pays dans lequel tous se trouvent.

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Pour préparer *National Collection*, Public Movement s'est inspiré de l'analyse faite par Tony Bennett de ce qu'il appelle « The Exhibitionary Complex » (*New Formations*, 4, printemps 1988, p. 73–102) et de sa description des liens entre différents corps au sein de l'État-nation moderne. L'un des arguments avancés ici est que *National Collection*, comme la performance *Debriefing II* qui lui fait contrepoint, par son regard sur le corps muséal, le corps national et le corps politique, pose la question de ce que signifie être membre d'un corps citoyen. Cet article avance par ailleurs que la technique du doublement utilisée par Public Movement constitue une approche singulière à la critique institutionnelle. À cela s'ajoute une analyse de la paire de tableaux servant d'ouverture et de clôture à *National Collection*.

La place accordée dans ce texte aux descriptions s'explique par le fait que la vidéo complète de *National Collection* n'a pas, à ce jour, été rendue publique. *National Collection: The Trailer*, une vidéo plus courte, est disponible en ligne, mais elle condense les scénarios et ne respecte pas la séquence des événements, ajoutant, superposant ou altérant certains segments sonores à des fins expressives. Qui plus est, contrairement à *Debriefing Session II*, la performance qui accompagne *National Collection*, aucun scénario n'a été publié. En l'absence de scénario et d'une vidéo montrant l'intégralité de la performance, l'ajout d'une brève description de son déroulement aidera au moins à en reconstruire les séquences. Cependant, l'article ne permet pas de rendre adéquatement la nature des mouvements ou des sons. Pour cette raison, les photographies accompagnant l'article sont peu nombreuses, les lecteurs étant plutôt invités à visionner la courte vidéo.