

# Aesthetica

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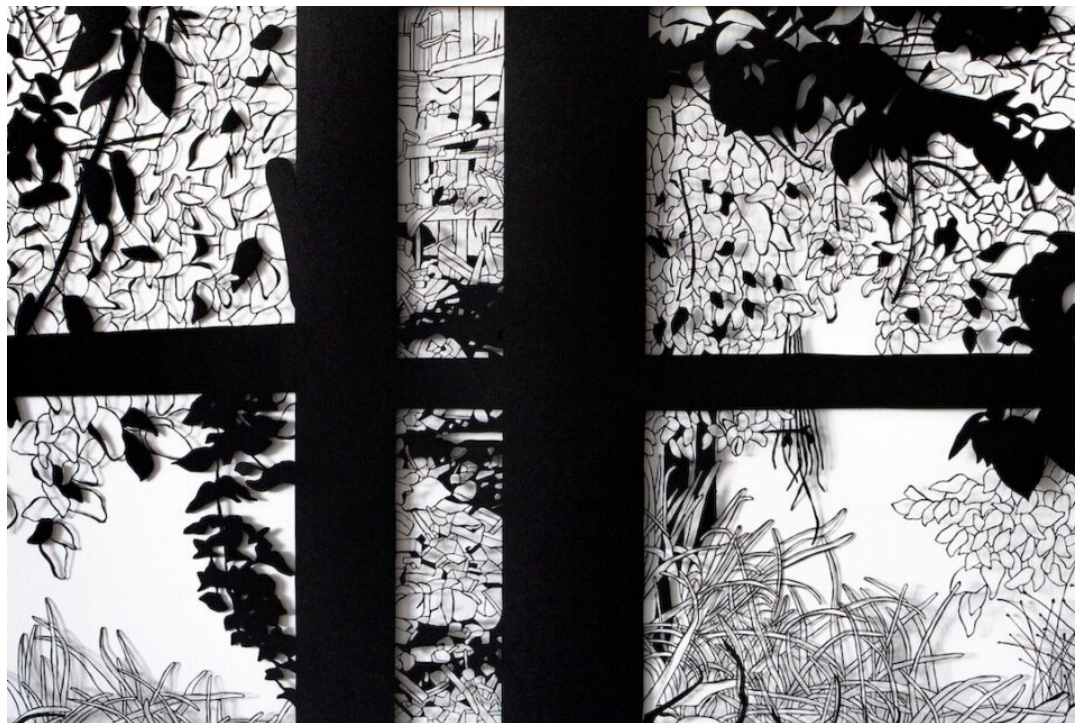
## Collective Consciousness



“They seem, upon first impression, to be more dissimilar than related.” Shai Baitel is a curator and the inaugural artistic director of the Modern Art Museum (MAM) Shanghai. Here, he’s talking about the creatives featured in *Conscious Collective*, a bold and thought-provoking new exhibition he has put together alongside the Director of the Maxxi museum, Bartolomeo Pietromarchi, at the museum in Rome. The show contains monumental works by Israeli and Palestinian artists Tsibi Geva, Maria Saleh Mahameed and Noa Yekutieli: three contemporaries who have very different backgrounds, influences and sensitivities, and who work using a diverse range of techniques and material. The goal: to reveal what binds them together, showing a “complex cultural reality, between identity and place, memory and ties.”

“Their narratives, mediums, and artistic intentions can even be seen as being at odds with one another,” Baitel adds. “But despite their differences and divisions, these three artists all share the miraculous bond of friendship. Their mutually supportive relationship buttresses each other’s work, providing a remarkable

framework for this exhibition.” The works on display in *Conscious Collective* are rooted in the artists’ differing individual biographies. Mahameed, for example, is showing the 2022 work *Ludmila (Wadi)*, a visual allegory for her own life and larger socio-political struggles within Israel and Palestine. Her story resonates with countless others whose lives have been both transformed and created out of the intimate yet universal, and often irrational, human experiences of love and romance.



Elsewhere, Yekutieli’s *Structure of Land* examines the personal trauma of being a “permanent outsider” – always looking through a metaphorical window. Born in Los Angeles, California, to a Japanese mother and an Israeli father, she relocated to Israel as a child and, today, divides her time between Tel Aviv and LA. Violent imagery, sourced from around the world, is framed by window-like paper cutouts. Finally, Geva seeks to explore his ambivalence towards his own identity and that of Israel itself. Of Ashkenazi Jewish heritage – and the son of one of the leading exponents of the Israeli Bauhaus – his work is layered, addressing at once the political situation in Israel; the psychological ramifications of conflict; and the aesthetics produced from turmoil. Geva presents modular paintings – self-contained canvases exhibited as a collective whole – that show life as complicated, defined both by kindness and friction.

*Conscious Collective* is the brainchild of MAXXI’s new president, Alessandro Giuli, who is keen for the museum to widen its focus to show art reflecting what is happening around the wider world. “There are so many parts of Israel’s society that are in conflict, but this exhibition shows both the similarity and dissimilarity of these artists, their art, their history and their experiences. Relationality, a world view that emphasises an innate sense of human connectedness, underlies their work.” Whilst created in the context of Israel and Palestine, Baitel is keen to stress that the works in *Conscious Collective* are not solely about geopolitical struggles. “They resonate with the state of conflict in the region or within the artists themselves,” he says. The title recalls the Jungian concept of the ‘collective unconscious’: an inheritance belonging to the distant past but common to all humanity. *Conscious Collective* investigates how it is possible to rediscover a sense of collectivity in a land where conflict seems to be a constant.

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*Conscious Collective*, curated by Bartolomeo Pietromarchi, Shai Baitel and associate curator Elena Motisi and realised in collaboration with the Israeli Embassy in Rome, is opening at MAXXI – National Museum of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Arts, Claudia Gian Ferrari Hall, from 17 March to 4 June 2023. [www.maxxi.art](http://www.maxxi.art)

Words: Sarah Bridge

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Shai Baitel is a creative and artistic director with extensive experience in the fields of arts and culture in the United States and abroad. He serves as the Artistic Director for the Modern Art Museum (MAM) Shanghai. Baitel also leads Creative Philosophy, an agency and advisory for concepts and projects in these fields.

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#### Images

1 & 2. Noa Yekutieli 3. Shai Baitel

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