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the israel museum, jerusalem
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meislin
P R O J E C T S

THE ISRAEL MUSEUM PRESENTS HADASSA GOLDVICHT'S *THE HOUSE OF LIFE*, A MULTI-CHANNEL VIDEO WORK THAT EXPLORES VENICE'S TRANSFORMATION AND DIMINISHED POPULATION THROUGH THE LENS OF THE KEEPER OF ITS ANCIENT JEWISH CEMETERIES

Exhibited in Conjunction with the 57th Venice Biennale, the Work Meditates on Themes of Historical Memory and the Threshold Between Life and Death

On View at the Palazzo Querini Stampalia Museum, the Exhibition is Presented in
Collaboration with Meislin Projects

New York, NY (March 28, 2017) – *The House of Life*, a poetic and expansive installation by Hadassa Goldvicht, explores themes of historical memory; the threshold between life, death, myth, and art; and the rapidly changing nature of Venice, via a multi-channel video work that will be installed at the Querini Stampalia in conjunction with the Venice Biennale. Presented by the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, in collaboration with Meislin Projects, the exhibition follows Aldo Izzo, the 86-year-old guardian and keeper of the Jewish cemeteries in Venice.

Curated by Amitai Mendelsohn, Senior Curator, Head of the David Orgler Department of Israeli Art at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, the exhibition will be on view May 9 – November 26, 2017. Installed throughout the entire third floor of the Palazzo Querini Stampalia Museum, the exhibition invites visitors to navigate fragments of conversations between Izzo and Goldvicht that took place over the course of four years.

Izzo was once the captain of a large merchant vessel, and for the past 35 years has been tending the cemetery with the same care he once dedicated to his ship. As visitors progress through the exhibition, they encounter different realms of Izzo's life—from his daily work at the cemetery, to his life at home, and the illustrated diaries he keeps. As the exhibition progresses, Izzo's home and the cemeteries merge, becoming interchangeable and mirroring the way he seamlessly inhabits two worlds: blurring the border between life, death, and myth, a thematic thread that runs throughout much of Goldvicht's practice.

Goldvicht's work often takes as its subject intimate conversations with members of a community or institution, unraveling language and gesture to reveal socially and politically charged content. *The House of Life* began as an exploration of Venice's Jewish community through personal conversations with its members, which evoked deep emotional responses that spoke to the city's struggle. Through Izzo, who introduced her to the city's Jewish cemeteries, Goldvicht began to see the plight of these specific sites as an allegory for the struggles of the city itself.

"Throughout my practice, I am interested in boundaries and thresholds—the place in which the line between personal and the public blurs," said Goldvicht. "The substance my works are made from is very real, mined both from my personal life and others. I am fascinated by the way each gesture or response to a personal question is a black box of social and political content, revealing layers of personal history. My work revolves around these deeply personal

rituals and intimate conversations, which are a way in for exploring much larger issues. In my years of following Mr. Izzo, I felt as if he was teaching me things that I was almost reluctant to learn about, the liminal space between life and death, a place that most people cannot inhabit.”

The exhibition’s central narrative follows Izzo, who hid in the cemetery as a young boy during World War II. Like the Greek mythological figure Charon, Izzo leads viewers on a voyage through the cemetery and its turbulent history, erasing the border between life and death; guiding visitors to a place where the dead protect the living and the living protect the dead. After retiring from his post as a captain, Izzo was appointed as caretaker of the cemeteries, which have been repeatedly demolished and rebuilt over the centuries, and which he now helms with the same care, charting and logging the daily activities. Approaching the cemetery as an art historian, Izzo has supervised the restoration of its grounds, preserving the ancient tombstones and rituals that revolve around the elevation of the soul after death.

“The work offers viewers a poetic statement on the universal emotional experience buried in individual and collective memory,” said curator Amitai Mendelsohn. “Hadassa’s many hours of interviews with Aldo and the Jewish community members became the backbone of the narrative, the subconscious grid against which the story is told, and which becomes a point of departure for an exploration of much bigger themes about the way we construct and preserve identity both as individuals and as a community.”

Through this work, the cemetery emerges as an analogy for Venice itself, a city that hides the true character of its struggle behind its beautiful façade. One of *The House of Life*’s central images is of the ancient cemetery where Izzo has carefully retrieved and restored the broken headstones that have been separated from gravesites they were intended to mark. Preserving the memories of those buried there, Izzo carefully hung the stones around the enclosed border of the cemetery, creating what appears to be an ancient installation, but which underscores the way in which the cemetery’s purpose has been undermined by the time and past destruction, and which mirrors the current state of Venice. Through his meticulous, daily caretaking, Izzo has preserved the cemetery and the memory of those buried there, a careful library of past memories.

With the influx of tourism and the replacement of craftsmanship with cheap, readymade imported goods, the city no longer provides a livelihood to its citizens and, as a result, its permanent population has been diminished by half in the past three decades. Today Venice is the only major city in the world that had a larger permanent population during the Middle Ages than it has today. Like the city, the ancient cemetery remains a beautiful and fascinating place, but even the cemetery is hollow, as many of the headstones no longer serve their intended purpose. Throughout the work, Izzo speaks of death—of the cemetery grounds he oversees, of his pet tortoises that he embalms, of the burial plots left for the remaining Jewish population in Venice—effortlessly transporting himself without fear between the worlds of the living and the dead.

Through the narrative of one small corner of Venice and one man’s life’s work, the exhibition becomes an abstract allegory through which viewers examine the fading historical memory of the city itself. Like Izzo’s work with the cemetery, *The House of Life*—through its very nature as a work of art that will live on beyond the lives of its character—fights

against death, creating a quiet space outside of time to meditate on the life of the individual and his lasting personal effect on place.

The work will include an original score by Alicia Jo Rabins and will be accompanied by a full color catalogue with essays by Shaul Bassi, Associate Professor of English Literature at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, and Amitai Mendelsohn, Senior Curator, Head of the David Orgler Department of Israeli Art.

About Hadassa Goldvicht

Goldvicht received her BFA from the Rhode Island School of Design (2004) and her MFA from the School of Visual Arts in New York and currently lives and works in Jerusalem, Israel. Goldvicht's work has been exhibited widely including at major venues such as The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; The Jewish Museum, New York; The Zachęta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw; the Tate Modern, London; and The Ackland Art Museum, Chapel Hill. Past artist residencies include The Lower Manhattan Cultural Council Workspace Residency; New York University; The Center for Book Arts; and Urban Glass in New York, as well as Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Maine.

About the Israel Museum, Jerusalem

The Israel Museum is the largest cultural institution in the State of Israel and is ranked among the leading art and archaeology museums in the world. Founded in 1965, the Museum houses encyclopedic collections ranging from prehistory through contemporary art and includes the most extensive holdings of Biblical and Holy Land archaeology in the world, among them the Dead Sea Scrolls. Over its first 50 years, the Museum has built a far-ranging collection of more than 500,000 objects through an unparalleled legacy of gifts and support from its circle of patrons worldwide.

The Museum's 20-acre campus, which underwent a comprehensive renewal in 2010 designed by James Carpenter Design Associates and Efrat-Kowalsky Architects, features the Billy Rose Art Garden, the Shrine of the Book, and more than 225,000 square feet of collection, gallery, and temporary exhibition space. The Museum also organizes programming at its off-site locations in Jerusalem at the Rockefeller Archaeological Museum, where it presents archaeological artifacts from the ancient Land of Israel, and at its historic Ticho House, a venue for exhibitions of contemporary Israeli art.

About Meislin Projects

Founded in 2016, Meislin Projects presents exhibitions and installations by internationally recognized artists and artists' estates, whose works are in the collections of museums around the world. In addition to presenting three-to-four exhibitions a year of art in a variety of media, including painting, photography, video, and installation in its space on Madison Avenue, Meislin Projects works closely with artists to produce and realize public and private commissions, often in conjunction with major institutions in the United States and abroad.

Founder Andrea Popowich Meislin is an art historian, writer, independent curator, and gallerist. From 2004 to 2016, she owned Andrea Meislin Gallery, located in New York's

Chelsea neighborhood. The Gallery presented work by significant emerging Israeli artists, as well as internationally established artists who had not shown in New York, interspersed with history-based photographs about or from Israel. Prior to that, she served as an independent research associate at the Phoenix Art Museum, and Associate Curator of Photography at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Ms. Meislin received a B.A. from Skidmore College, New York, and an M.A. in art history from the University of Arizona.

About the Palazzo Querini Stampalia

The Palazzo Querini Stampalia has been home to major exhibitions presented in coordination with the Biennale in past years, including by Mona Hartoum in 2009 and Kiki Smith in 2005. The Palazzo is a short walk from the Giardini, as well as other major historical sites, including St. Mark's Basilica, the Rialto Bridge, and the Church of Santa Maria Formosa.

The Fondazione Querini Stampalia was established in 1869 to support the arts in Venice. It was given to the city by Count Giovanni Querini, a scientist and man of letters, along with his art collection. The complex includes a library; a museum, which presents its permanent collection of 16th–18th-century painting; a concert hall; and a prominent space for temporary exhibitions. The ground floor and gardens of the Palazzo were redesigned in the 1960s by the noted Venetian architect Carlo Scarpa, and is now a mecca for students of art and design. On the second floor, the gallery presents major examples of Venetian painting, including works by Palma Vecchio, Giovanni Bellini, and Pietro Longhi. The third-floor gallery, designed by Swiss architect Mario Botta, is dedicated to contemporary art exhibitions.

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Press Contacts:

Arden Shwayder / Abby Margulies
212-671-5172 / 614-827-5810

AShwayder@resnicow.com / AMargulies@resnicow.com