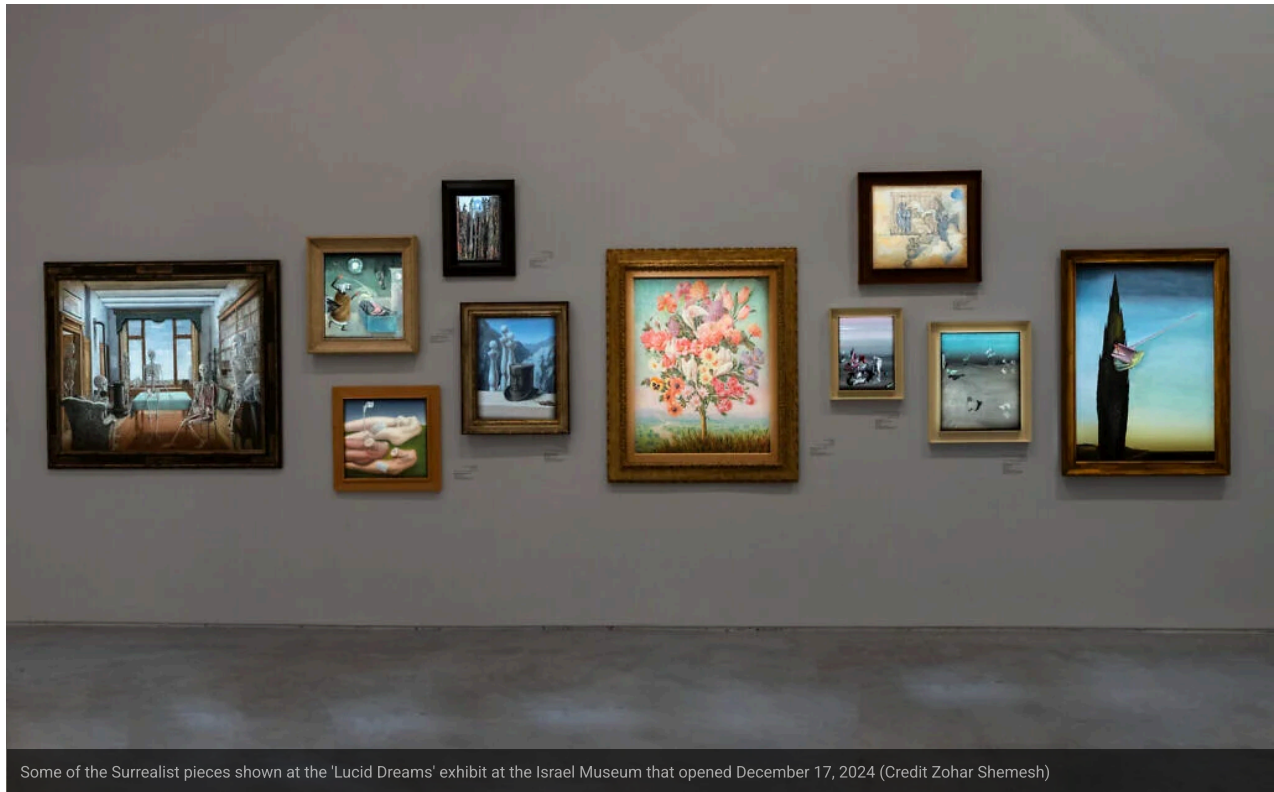


What dreams may come: Surrealistic exhibits mark start of Israel Museum's 60th year

After international institutions shunned them amid war, the curators of 'Lucid Dreams' and 'Alma Mater' turned inward, assembling over 180 local works

By JESSICA STEINBERG [FOLLOW](#)

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Some of the Surrealist pieces shown at the 'Lucid Dreams' exhibit at the Israel Museum that opened December 17, 2024 (Credit Zohar Shemesh)

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In times of distress and sorrow — such as the last 14 months of war following the October 7, 2023, Hamas atrocities — dreams can be a gateway to a place of healing or a nightmarish space.

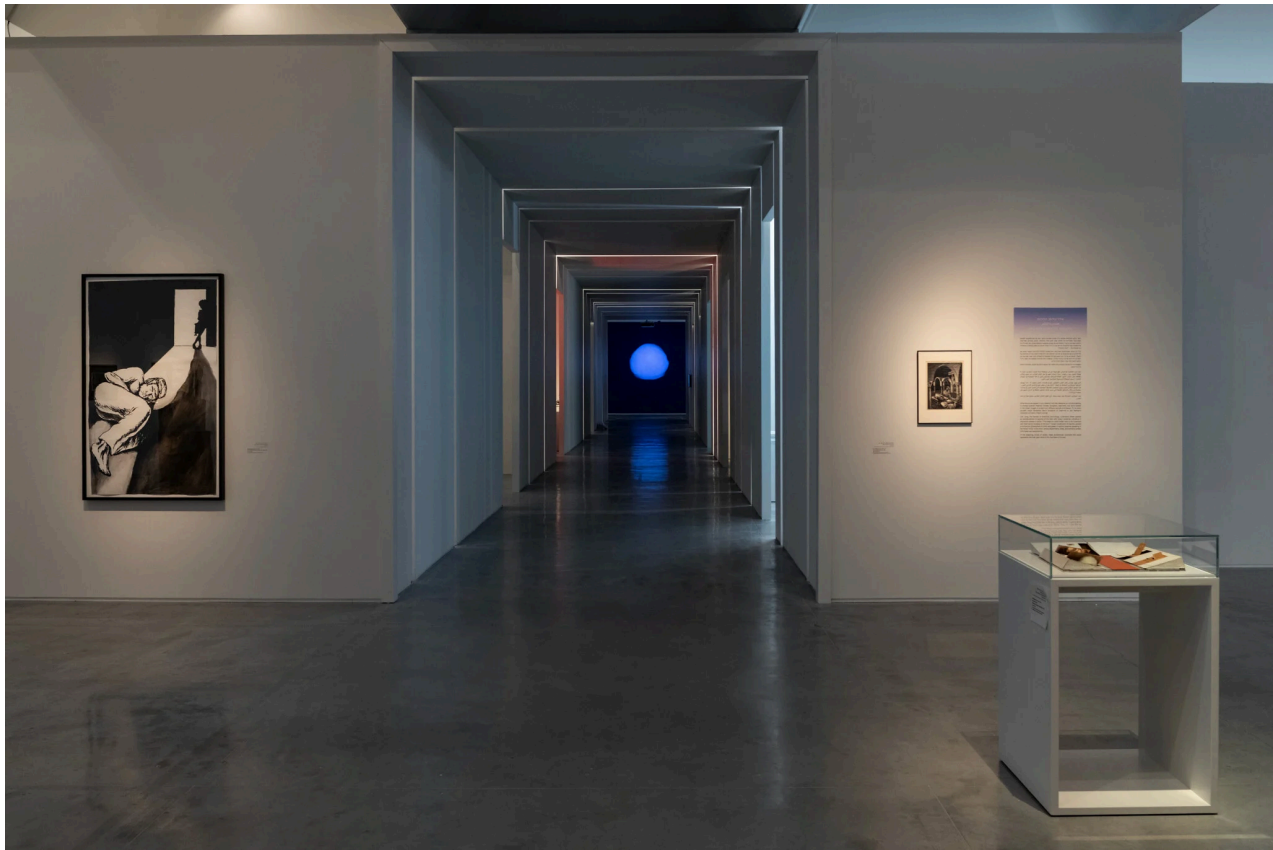
These concepts are explored in depth in “Lucid Dreams,” a new exhibit of 180 works curated by Adina Kamien, December 17 through June 7, 2025, at the Israel Museum alongside “Alma Mater,” a sound, video and light installation by Yuval Avital that envelops visitors in a womb of sound and experience.

Both exhibits offer an escape from the harsh reality in Israel right now with a “therapeutic touch,” said Israel Museum director Suzanne Landau.

The two exhibits mark the launch of celebrations commemorating the 60th anniversary of the museum’s founding, which begins with the new year of 2025.

In “Lucid Dreams,” Kamien examines the magical and fantastical imagery of dreams, with a hefty connection to surrealism — a natural inclination for Kamien, an expert on Dada and surrealism with a master’s degree in clinical psychology.

The dream-like exhibit is designed as a corridor with multiple spaces, inspired by the 1937 surrealist “Dream Object” work by poet André Breton, which has cardboard doors set along a red hallway.



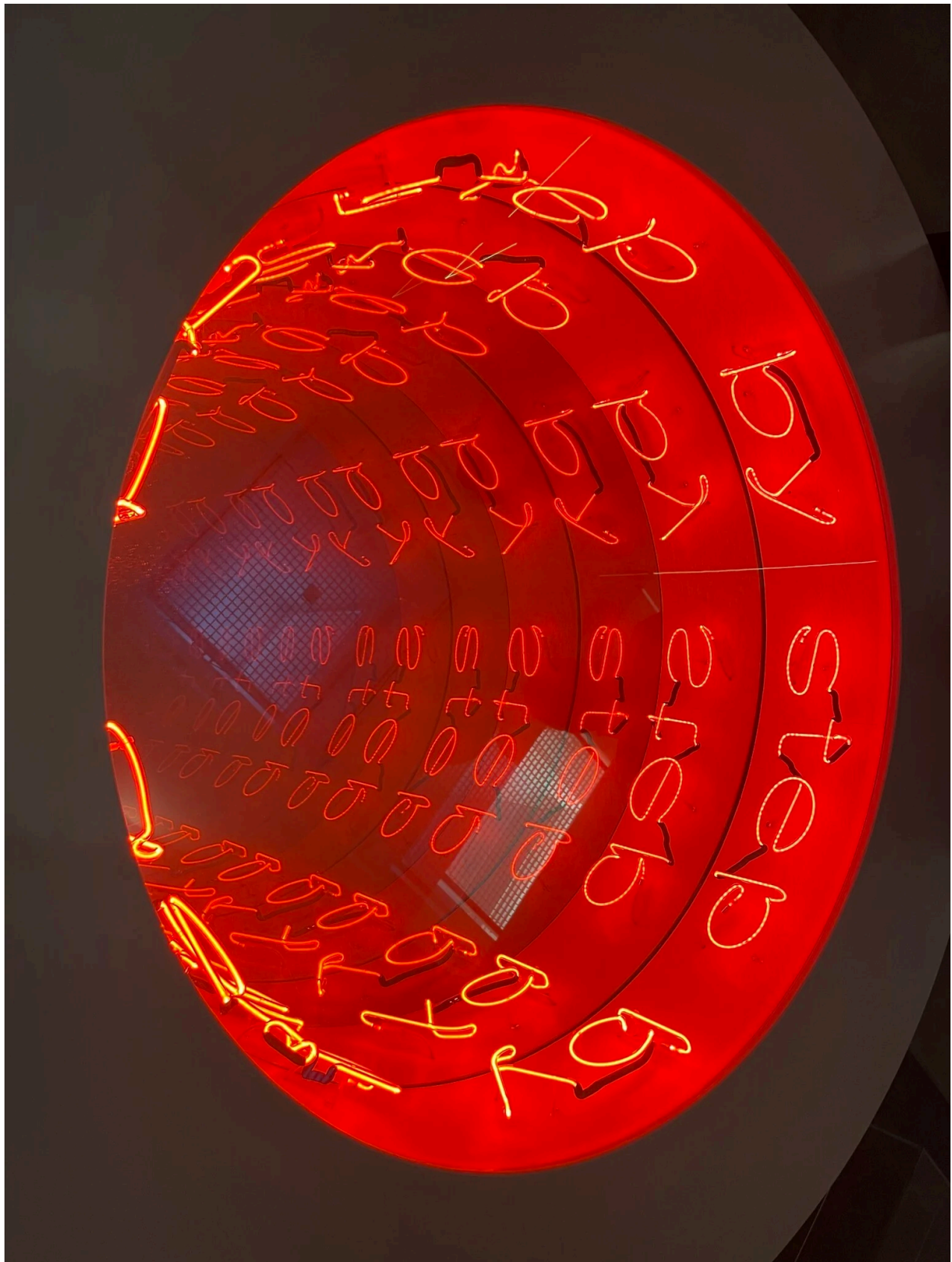
The corridor exhibition designed for 'Lucid Dreams' at the Israel Museum, December 17, 2024 – June 7, 2025, curated by Adina Kamien (Courtesy Israel Museum)

Visitors can stroll through the exhibit and wander into the smaller galleries and spaces that branch off the hallways, somewhat akin to the meanderings of one's mind.

According to Kamien, the exhibition is 15 exhibits in one and explores every aspect of dreams with imagery, installations and works from an array of ages and places.

There are ancient stone headrests, Chinese dream stones and works by surrealist masters whose unexpected imagery, sometimes presented in painted doors, hallways and apertures, hint at the mind's wanderings.

Viewers can stand and ponder Yael Bartana's "If You Will It Is Not a Dream" neon light; be mesmerized by Sharon Balaban's video installation "Mascara" featuring thick mascaraed eyelashes; and peer deep down into Guy Zagursky's "Step By Step," a round installation made from mirrors and neon letters.



From the 'Lucid Dreams' exhibit at the Israel Museum that opened December 17, 2024 (Jessica Steinberg/Times of Israel)

Stepping into multidisciplinary artist Nelly Agassi's gallery feels like entering a Hans Christian Anderson story. Agassi's animated collages create dark shadows on the dim walls as she borrows images familiar from fairy tales and creates fantastical worlds of magic and secrecy.

In Shai Azoulay's "Jacob's Ladder," visitors can also consider other, familiar stories of dreams, referenced in works by Marc Chagall, Rembrandt, Salvador Dali, Goya and more.

“Dreams are similar to art in that they’re visual, they help us work through thoughts, they let us work out issues,” said Kamien. “We see things that aren’t realistic in our dreams, we experience extreme emotions and then we forget what we dreamed when we get up. It’s a kind of amnesia.”

Much of the exhibit is taken from the museum’s collection, with some pieces borrowed from the museum’s neighbor, the National Library of Israel.



The fantastical works of Nelly Agassi shown in the 'Lucid Dreams' exhibit at the Israel Museum that opened December 17, 2024 (Credit Zohar Shemesh)

Kamien said there were many cancellations of artworks that she had planned to include from other collections in France, Spain, England, and China, due to the ongoing bias against Israel in the international art world since the war against Hamas in Gaza began.

“It didn’t help to explain that we had materials side-by-side from Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Palestinian-Israelis, Druze,” said Kamien.

Instead, she pivoted, and given the museum’s wealth of surrealist works, Kamien created a meeting between historical surrealism and Israeli artists.

“You can see that surrealism isn’t something from a certain time but a kind of spirit,” said Kamien.

Several Israeli video installations include “The Moon Film” by Yehudit Sasportas and Rut Patir’s 2017 “The Dreamers.”



From Sharon Balaban's video work 'Mascara,' part of the 'Lucid Dreams' exhibit at the Israel Museum that opened December 17, 2024 (Courtesy Israel Museum)

There's also an astounding video created by Alma Mia Hadas about Avera Mengistu, an Ethiopian-Israeli with mental health issues who walked into the Gaza Strip on September 7, 2014, from the dunes of Zikim Beach.

As of now, Mengistu is considered one of the 100 Israeli hostages held by Hamas in Gaza. The display is a vivid reminder that some dreams are all too real.

The exhibit "Lucid Dreams" jives well with Yuval Avital's "Alma Mater," a gallery of sounds created by the Milan-based Israeli artist as he hearkens back to the sounds of his mother and grandmother, as well as to the calls, whispers, stories and songs of women in the Mediterranean and Europe.



From Yuval Avital's 'Alma Mater' installation at the Israel Museum, December 17, 2024, Fabbrica del Vapore 2015 photo by Enzo Mologni (Credit Yuval Avital)

Avital gathered sounds from archives and his own recordings, and the spacious gallery fills and dims with light, with low chairs for sitting and contemplating the sounds that emerge from speakers set in the ceiling and ground.

“It’s a closing of a circle,” said Avital, who grew up in Jerusalem and has lived in Milan for the last 20 years. “It’s like returning to the womb.”