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# No place like home

The exhibition incorporates a wide variety of visual works by artists who emigrated from the former USSR as children, and address migration from the perspective of a longing for childhood memories.

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Tajikistan-born Rima Arslanov references the ornamental iconography of her youth, and pays homage to her musician grandfather.  
(photo credit: RIMA ARSLANOV)



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It's never easy getting a new cultural venue off the ground, especially not in this country where state support for the arts tends towards the minuscule end of the national budget scale. Artistic directors of fledgling ventures talk about establishing "a new tradition." That is, of course, a chronological anomaly, but you get their hopeful drift.

So, kudos to Jerusalem Biennale founder Rami Ozeri as we approach the third edition of the event, which will take place October 1 to November 16. The third Jerusalem Biennale for Contemporary Jewish Art, to give it its full titular due, will showcase the work of close to 200 artists, Israeli and foreign alike, in dozens of exhibitions and installations at eight venues around the city. Biennale shows regularly feed off some central theme, which inform all the works on display. This time round the topical baseline is the concept of watershed.

The subject conjures up all sorts of ideas and avenues of inventive thought, and allows for abundant room for creative maneuver. The Biennale is said to be tailored to "explore the places where contemporary art intersects with the Jewish world of content," and having the notion of watershed at the core of the six-week program naturally leads one to consider life-changing decisions and moves, which, in turn, makes making aliya a logical reference point for the event. Ozeri certainly thinks so, inter alia. "The Biennale will throw the spotlight onto the concept of watershed, examining it from a literal, metaphorical and even historical perspective," he notes. "The theme finds its expression in issues as varied as Jewish identity, immigration and refugees, alongside watershed moments in history such as the Balfour Declaration and even the US presidential

election.”

The Biennale features a bunch of exhibitions and projects on the subject of “People on the Move,” which explore the life-changing experience of relocation, both for individuals and for communities, whether as the result of a proactive decision to emigrate from/immigrate to Israel, or following a decision made under duress, for example as a refugee.

Two of the more intriguing slots – the Biennale is shot through with thought-provoking stuff – will take place at the Museum of Underground Prisoners. *Homelands*, curated by Dr. Meirav Balas, conveys artists’ reflections on one of the defining watershed moments of the last century – the disbanding of Jewish communities throughout the Muslim world, presenting this issue from both a personal and communal perspective. In a similar vein, although from a very different historical, cultural and geographical context, 585,000 m2, curated by Andrea Ausztrics, features works by Hungarian artists who reference symbolic locations in Budapest’s Jewish Quarter, in the 7th district, through visual art statements from the pre-World War II period to the present day.

Meanwhile, *Dreamland Never Found*, which will run at the Bezeq building on Chopin Street across the road from the Jerusalem Theater, should resonate with over a million Israelis, at least, specifically those who moved here from the former Soviet Union. But its emotional purview extends to anyone who has made aliya, or whose antecedents moved here. That covers just about every Jewish Israeli. The exhibition, overseen by Maria Veits, who herself made aliya from the FSU around a year ago, incorporates a wide variety of visual works by

artists who emigrated from the former USSR as children, and which address migration from the perspective of a longing for childhood memories. Dreamland explores the artists' desire to uncover their individual and collective roots and search for a past that, ultimately, remains tantalizingly elusive.

"The exhibition relates to the aliyot of the 1990s and early 2000s, when the Soviet Union collapsed," Veitz explains. "The [Soviet] borders opened and people came here hoping for a better future for themselves, and for their children." Optimism, says Veits, soon dissipated as reality kicked in. "The first years in a completely different culture were very different from what they expected them to be." Hence the Shangri-la related disillusionment in the exhibition title.

Veits feels it is an ongoing odyssey, and not just for olim. "I think this is a global question that also relates to young Israelis, and especially those occupied in the creative fields, how they feel toward their future in Israel. Many of them prefer to go elsewhere, and to be more global and more international, and to be more present on the international art scene," she says by way of mitigating any criticism of this country that may be construed from the exhibition moniker. "It's a purely negative title, but I think it's very mixed," she continues. "There is a search for a better land, for a 'Dreamland,' which never finishes, especially now when society – the consumer society and the new liberal society – pushes you toward moving forward and being more successful or more active. This is also one of the themes [of the exhibition]."

So we're not just talking about people who undergo a physical and cultural scenery shift. Do young sabras also feel alienated and want to look for new professional horizons? "I would think so," says Veits. For instance, three of the artists in the show were brought here to Israel when they were quite young.

They didn't stay put. "One of them is in Canada, one is in New York and the third one is in Düsseldorf, in Germany." The first of the said triad refers to 30-year-old, St. Petersburg-born Felix Kalmenson, who now lives in Toronto. Kalmenson spreads his artistic net expansively, taking in installation work, video, photography, performance and sound art. His work looks at historical backdrops and the contemporary narratives of political, institutional and corporate bodies, and at how innovations in the field of communications serve to redefine publicness, sovereignty and power. "His work [in the exhibition] is about the St. Petersburg he left and the St. Petersburg he visited 20 years after he left Russia," says the curator.

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Ira Eduardovna hails from Uzbekistan, and she made aliya with her parents as a youngster. "She moved to the US because she was looking for more opportunities for herself," says Veits. "She was also looking to live in another society and there she very much developed as an artist. Most of her work is connected to her memory, and this nostalgia for her childhood. I think this *Dreamland Never Found* – for her – also has a spiritual reference to our childhood, which we lose." Veits believes this is universal hankering, and not just wistful pondering by people who leave their place of birth for a new life in a very different societal milieu. "We look for ways to go back there [to our childhood], but it's impossible because it doesn't exist anymore." That, says Veits, is doubly relevant for the likes of Kalmenson, Eduardovna and 32-year-old Ukrainian-born Vera Vladimirsky who is getting her MFA in photography at the Bezalel Academy

of Arts and Design. "It is the same with the Soviet Union. Even though you want to kind of get back to the country where you were born, all these attempts to go back don't lead anywhere because the country you left doesn't exist anymore. Everything has changed there."



Ukrainian-born Vera Vladimimirsky searches for cultural identity by combining the wallpaper of her childhood with Israeli flora.

It is a multistratified emotional and cerebral issue. "A lot of Eduardovna's works relate to different aspects of an immigrant," Veits notes. "How you feel in a different environment, or how people who stayed behind can sometimes see you as a traitor. And your memory can play tricks on you. You think you remember certain things when, actually, your brain is creating memories about things that never happened to you."



Biniashvili examines issues of belonging and identity.

The aforementioned works will sit alongside items by Nino Biniashvili, who will present her *An Archive of My Own*, the product of a research project on Georgian-Jewish history, which she completed on a fellowship program at the Prins Foundation for Artists and Writers in Residence, in New York. There will also be some installation- oriented creations by Rima Arslanov, while 31-year-old Moscow-born Tel Avivian photographer and video artist Sasha Tamarin takes a trip down memory lane.

*Each Biennale exhibition and project will hold its own opening event. For more information: [www.jerusalem.biennale.org/biennale2017-1](http://www.jerusalem.biennale.org/biennale2017-1)*

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