



**URI KATZENSTEIN FAMILIES**

THE EVANS FAMILY CULTURAL RESIDENCY PROGRAM | DUKE UNIVERSITY | MARCH 2000

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Evans Family Cultural Residency at Duke University.  
March 19–April 2, 2000

**The Family of Brothers**

Freeman Center for Jewish Life

*Installation*

March 23–31

**Surnames**

Duke University Museum of Art

*Blood Drawings*

March 23–April 1

*Performance*

March 29

**Relatives**

Louise Jones Brown Gallery, Bryan Center

*Open Studio*

March 19–April 2

Center for Documentary Studies

*Lecture*

March 28

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**F***amilies*, a performance and series of exhibitions by Israeli artist Uri Katzenstein, is sponsored by the family of E. J. Evans, former long-time mayor of Durham, and Sara N. Evans, former prominent Hadassah leader. The E. J. Evans family has awarded Duke University a generous three-year grant for the purpose of bringing distinguished Israeli artists and intellectuals to campus. Uri Katzenstein inaugurates the Evans Family Cultural Residency. Katzenstein's work is clustered together under the rubric of *Families* in numerous exhibition venues on Duke's campus. They include *The Family of Brothers*, a sculpture, sound, and video-performance installation at the Freeman Center for Jewish Life; *Surnames*, a live performance accompanied by an exhibition of *Blood Drawings* at the Duke University Museum of Art; and *Relatives*, which the artist refers to as his "daily studio activities," at the Louise Jones Brown Gallery in the Bryan Center, where he will meet students, faculty, and the public, and where videos of his past performances will be screened on a continuous basis. Katzenstein will also give a public lecture on his work at the Center for Documentary Studies.

Katzenstein was selected from among a group of distinguished artists by the Duke University faculty committee of the Evans Family Cultural Residency Program. This committee is chaired by Eric Meyers (Bernice and Morton Lerner Distinguished Professor in the Department of Religion). Its members include Kalman Bland (Director, Center for Jewish Studies), Roger Jay Kaplan (Director, Freeman Center for Jewish Life), Joseph Shatzmiller (Smart Family Foundation Distinguished Professor of Jewish History), Alexander Silberger (Department of Music), Zannie Voss (Drama Program), Eric Zakim (Department of Asian and African Languages and Literature), and myself (Department of Art and Art History). The committee selected Katzenstein as an outstanding representative of contemporary Israeli art for the ways in which his work crosses media and contributes to an international, interdisciplinary aesthetic discourse.



This exhibition catalogue belongs to a distinguished series of undergraduate student-curated exhibitions at Duke University. These exhibitions have involved students in all aspects of mounting an exhibition, including authoring the catalogue. This year, Trinity seniors Sara Lynn Smith and Amy M. A. Vickers were selected as the curators. Normally, student-curators work closely with me over three semesters, but Sara and Amy's task has been unique and more demanding than any former student-curated exhibition. First, Katzenstein was selected by the Evans Family Cultural Residency Committee rather than by Amy and Sara. Since the artist lives and works in Israel, communication with him was complicated by distance and time zones. Second, the Evans Family Cultural Residency allows the artist to remain at Duke for a period of two weeks. In order to take full advantage of this extraordinary opportunity, rather than having one exhibition, we elected to find multiple venues for Katzenstein's work. This required that Sara and Amy work with numerous groups and departments across campus to secure these venues. Finally, I was teaching in Venice, Italy, for the fall semester of 1999, and Amy and Sara were able to communicate with me only by e-mail for that semester. In my absence, the Evans Family Cultural Residency Committee offered guidance where necessary, and Eric Zakim served as their important touchstone.

Sara and Amy have worked as a mutually supportive team, demonstrating remarkable self-direction and initiative, overcoming the aforementioned challenges by organizing a complex exhibition, as well as writing their catalogue essays. They negotiated their ideas about the various venues for Katzenstein's work and forged a unified vision of his residency at Duke. They conferred on the catalogue design, raised additional funds to support the project, and attended to such details as posters, announcements, receptions, and many other curatorial tasks. I have been honored to participate in their intellectual growth throughout this process and am proud of their many achievements, maturity, and self-determination. This exhibition process embodies the best of the reciprocal tasks of teaching and learning, and it has been a privilege to share their adventure.

*Kristine Stiles*

## Acknowledgments

**T**his exhibition was made possible by the generous contributions of several individuals and organizations. First, we would like to thank E. J. Evans and Sara N. Evans for establishing the Evans Family Cultural Residency Program at Duke University.

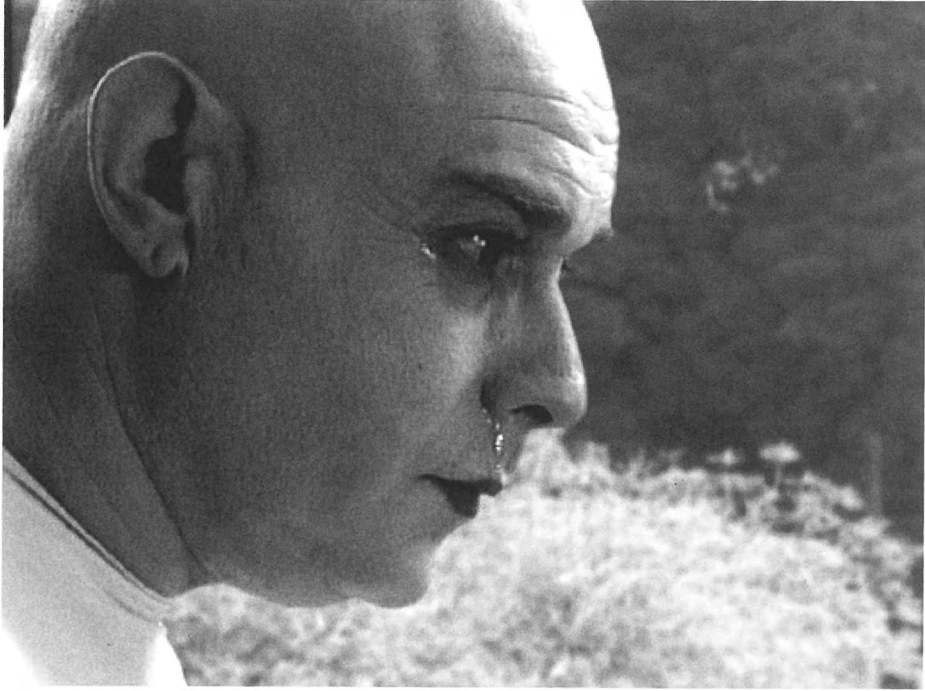
Next, we want to acknowledge Professor Kristine Stiles, who involved us in this series of exhibitions and catalogue. We cannot adequately express our gratitude for her generous gift of time, tireless devotion to our work, editorial patience (which appeared, at times, superhuman), friendship and personal warmth, and belief in us. The privilege of the opportunity to work with her is something that we shall appreciate for the rest of our lives.

It has been an honor to study the art of Uri Katzenstein and to work with him. His residency at Duke University in March 2000 will be an invaluable contribution to the entire Duke community. We greatly appreciate the support of Katzenstein and the Givon Gallery, Tel Aviv.

We also thank the Office of the President and President Nannerl O. Keohane's personal and continued dedication to the arts at Duke. Generous contributions of space and resources were given by the Duke University Museum of Art, the Freeman Center for Jewish Life, Duke University Union's Visual Arts Committee, the Center for Documentary Studies, the Department of Art and Art History, the Department of Religion, the Program in Judaic Studies, the Center for International Studies, Drama Program, and the Department of Asian and African Languages and Literature. Finally, we are most grateful to Professor Eric Zakim for his discussions with us regarding aspects of our essays; Molly Renda for her impeccable catalogue design, professionalism, and personal flexibility; Maura High for copyediting the catalogue; Tom Whiteside for working with Uri Katzenstein on his films and videos; Lillian Spiller for administrative assistance; and the Duke University faculty committee of the Evans Family Cultural Residency Program.

*Sara Lynn Smith and Amy M. A. Vickers*

**FAMILIES**



Still from video-performance *The Family of Brothers*, 1999

In *Families*, Uri Katzenstein considers the variant social hybrids that have emerged in contemporary global culture and the psychological effects of the massive political and technological changes that have uprooted and challenged all conventional terms of existence. He takes as his subject the broadest connotation of the family. Traditionally, the family has been defined as a group of persons united by ties of marriage and blood; it comprises individuals who interact with respect to social positions that might stretch to include familial relations with selective friends adopted as “family.” Larger collectives group around ethnicity, nationality, and other social and political markers such as sexuality and gender. But increasingly, numbers of mutually identified peoples form new kinds of families that compensate for the dissolution of conventional ties. These “voluntary associations” fill in the void created by the disruption and dissolution of traditional life and function as extended families, making hybrid groups that determine their own unique genealogies. In this regard, Katzenstein’s *Families* may refer to any number of hybrid units that form on the basis of interpersonal similarities and preferences from intellectual, psychological, and/or emotional to biological, cultural, and political structures and relations. In *Families*, Katzenstein addresses these heterogeneous cultural formations and social implications through a highly imaginary, metaphoric, and personal visual vocabulary.

Katzenstein’s journey in *The Family of Brothers*, for example, may be simultaneously an allusion to the Diaspora of the tribes (brothers) of Israel and to the Arab and Israeli family of Semitic brothers, who have shed each other’s blood for millennia over claims of sovereignty, territory, and faith. It is worth remembering, too, that its four sculptural “brothers” might also be a reference to Pesach (Passover), when four questions are traditionally asked regarding the story of Exodus from Egypt and where four sons metaphorically represent different human qualities of character and mind: one son is wise, one wicked, one simple, and one does not even know how to ask questions. Yet whereas Katzenstein may



have had explicit associations like these in mind, the hybrid conditions of knowing and being that he examines would make comparisons to esoteric traditions such as numerology and Kabbalah of equal merit. Both offer metaphysical stages of progression that include numinous realms, ranging from the physical to the divine. Such spiritual concepts are communicated through numerological symbols and metaphorical figures—male, female, and composite genders that represent aspects of reality communicated in actions, words, and patterns of behavior that enact aspects of creation, destruction, and transformation. If, for example, one considers the number four alone in *The Family of Brothers*, it would be useful to consult aspects of the four cardinal directions (north, south, east, and west), the four elements (air, fire, water, and earth), the four temperaments (melancholic, phlegmatic, sanguine, and choleric), the four biblical couples supposed buried in the cave of Hebron (Adam and Eve, Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, and Yisrael and Leah), the four evangelists (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John), and other similar symbolic numerological systems of knowledge that contribute to the hybrid epistemological sources the artist regularly consults. There are many other esoteric relations that might be pursued in Katzenstein's cosmology, but none of these ancient sciences, religions, or modern technologies alone can unlock absolute meaning in his work. For Katzenstein's art represents a hybrid and is about hybrids.

The overarching sensation in Katzenstein's body of works comprising *Families* is, however, haunting, sad, and foreboding. In one scene of his video-performance in *The Family of Brothers*, for example, tears run down the artist's face. When asked about his apparent sorrow, Katzenstein explained that he cried not out of anguish but in anger "for the things and experiences we can now see." Exactly what is to be seen, the artist leaves unidentified. Rather, he requires viewers to look closely at the conditions of social hybrids fraught with tense cross-breeding, technological augmentation and alteration, capital and information, all of which give birth to more notions of uncommon families. When he peers into a microscope in *The Family of Brothers*, he does not disclose the exact nature of what he inspects, even though he does reveal himself screaming under a stream of water. This representation summons the memory of deadly concentration camp showers, especially since Katzenstein sits on his swastika chair wearing a rubber apron to look through the microscope. But the artist may as well be looking at and screaming about the world of genetic engineering, a reference suggested by the strange hybrid animal he attempts to take by the hand in another section of his video-performance in *The Family of Brothers*. With its long ears and webbed feet, this strange creature recalls the genetically engineered hybrid "Geek," a combination of a goat and a sheep. Or perhaps Katzenstein, clad in a gold tunic and running shorts (right out of a science fiction spectacle), considers the terrain of cargo cults that fuse ancient native and tribal rituals of traditional cultures with the found debris of technological and urban global societies. His attention may be captured by consideration of the avatars that roam the Internet,

exchanging identities, genders, and sexuality with abandon. All these references are possible in the series of exhibitions and performances (live and on video) in *Families*. But Katzenstein's aesthetic refuses specificity, a refusal that is augmented by his use of multimedia, each medium commanding its own set of connotations and denotations.

The infinite range of hybrid combinations increasingly characterizes what may be called the hypertextual conditions of thought and experience in contemporary postcolonial, post-modern, and postbiological life. For this reason, *The Family of Brothers* belongs to no identifiable lineage or clan and bespeaks a relationship charged only with the signifier of the artist's own blood. Yet that blood, significantly, is displaced from the installation *The Family of Brothers*, where it makes no visual appearance. References to blood are, however, suggested through the object/image of a chair shaped like a swastika. It invokes memory of the racist vocabularies of National Socialism and blood brotherhood, blood vengeance, and blood baptism. Katzenstein uses his actual blood as an explicit medium in *Surnames*, a performance accompanied by *Blood Drawings*, a series of abstract and figurative images realized with the artist's own blood. The *Blood Drawings*, then, relate to the theme of family by remote association within the series of different exhibitions encompassed in *Families*. In this diverse, extended family of metaphors, the artist seems to suggest the blood-stained family of humanity thrust together as a so-called global social body, where interpersonal exchanges are marked by strange juxtapositions of values, contradictory self-annihilating and self-sustaining behaviors, and simultaneous acts of intense brutality and compassion. This dizzying multiplicity of contradictory possibilities throws the very question of family itself into endless mutations.

Moreover, although Katzenstein's work appears autobiographical, it does not necessarily picture only his own hermetic experiences. Rather, he uses himself as a transparent vehicle through which his viewers may come to see the complexity and contradiction of contemporary human experience. Characteristically, he accomplishes his goal by performing actions and constructing objects and installations that alternately play the hero and the clown, the sage and the fool, the mystic and the tyrant. No sculpture better embodies these qualities than his composite figure *Boudler* (1995), a title he invented from the compound hybrid names of Buddha and Hitler. *Boudler* embodies the poles between which moral and ethical judgments and acts are made. They are the good and evil ends of the metaphysical context within which Katzenstein's work must be considered. And they are the extremes of energy between which most human acts, the theme of Katzenstein's art, are to be found.

Katzenstein's deep commitment to the engagement of art in questions of life





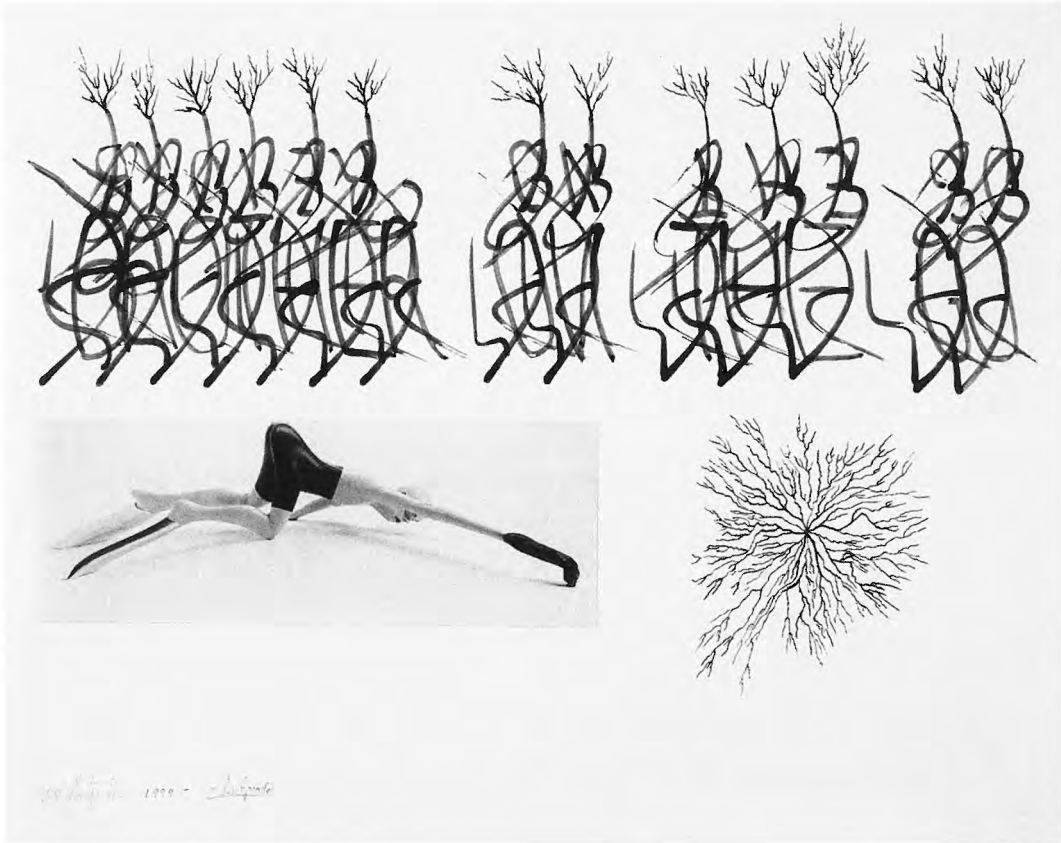
is important and literally drawn in blood and action. For Katzenstein works primarily with his body in the medium of performance, bringing the body to bear on the aesthetic and cultural issues of his time. His use of his own blood in actions, and as the material for *Blood Drawings*, belongs to a lineage of celebrated artists – a family of artists – who have worked with their blood. They range from Joseph Beuys and Carolee Schneemann to Zhang Huan and Yoko Ono. In 1961, for example, Ono wrote a score for a painting-event called *Blood Piece*. In it she instructed:

Use your blood to paint.  
Keep painting till you faint (A).  
Keep painting until you die (B).

While choice (A) of Ono's score conjures a frightful act of picture making sustained with the material support of life, choice (B) expresses the pledge of an artist to create a representation that signifies life, and to continue making such a sign until the end of life. In this sense, Katzenstein's use of his own blood becomes a ritual sign, a blood covenant with his viewers and the collectivity of signs that constitute the languages of the family of humans. For what could better exhibit the artist's commitment to art and to his viewers than the act of giving his blood as a drawing of life? And what could offer a more ironic commentary on the demands of contemporary life than to create an act (and an image of that action) that presents a metaphorical threat to life, for the very energy he exudes as art?

It is a testimony to the quality and character of Katzenstein's vision and art that some ten friends and associates in Israel volunteered to have a picture of a sculpture from his multimedia installation, *Love Dub*, tattooed on their bodies. The sculpture is a composite image of the artist, a kind of fantastic persona in skin-tight blue running shorts who appears to be perpetually climbing a wall. He is one of the prototypes for the figures in *The Family of Brothers*. The anonymous individuals who elected to have themselves tattooed with this image have chosen to join the family of Katzenstein's works by submitting their bodies to one of his images in an act that required them also to shed blood. This bodily manifestation might be considered a social hybrid of the ancient act of becoming "blood brothers," a pact that now entails the sharing of a cultural icon invented by an artist. It is also an act that challenges those, like artist and critic Moshe Ninio, who claim that there is no body art in Israel because Jewish culture represses the body in favor of the intellect. For to imprint the body with the sign of art is to commit the body to another, is to think the other through the body as a sign of extension with the other.

This covenant with Katzenstein's work also reflects the fact that experience with his art is immediate and sensate. For Katzenstein imbues materials with a vitality that is palpable. If energy were to materialize as a representation in the form of an object or action, it would assume the shape of Uri Katzenstein's art.

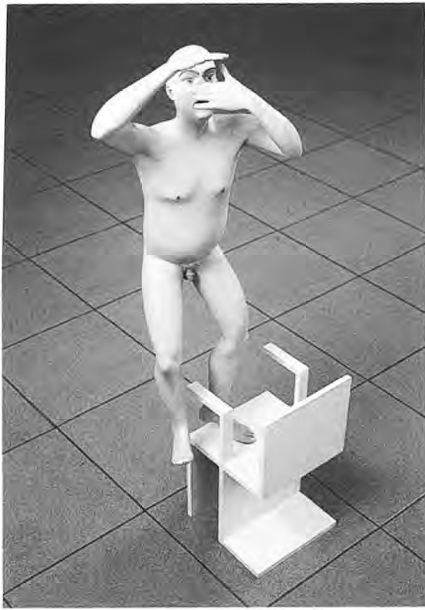


His work simultaneously captures his own vitality, encapsulates the dynamic tension of the Israeli nation, and depicts aspects of the ever more stunning alacrity and furious animation of the information age. Indeed, Katzenstein constructs and enacts corporeal situations in which his own stamina and power are so vivid that his actions threaten to overwhelm viewers by direct contact with the surging life force he presents. It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that Katzenstein's Bergsonian *élan vital* is anything but measured. For his work is tempered by an exacting control, a meditative discipline, and a calculating, critical, and deeply ironic and simultaneously empathic intelligence that only increases the sense that his art is an aesthetic implement. It is the combination of his cool remove and passionate emotional expression that makes his work so compelling. Duke University is fortunate through the generous grant from the E. J. and Sara N. Evans family to host Uri Katzenstein as the first recipient of the Evans Family Cultural Residency.

The Austrian physicist Erwin Schrödinger devised a thought experiment in which a cat is put into a box with ample food and water. There is also a radioactive isotope in the box, linked to a capsule of cyanide that will break as soon as a Geiger counter is triggered, an event that becomes increasingly probable as time elapses and the isotope decays. As long as the box remains sealed, we cannot say that the cat is alive or dead, only that it exists in an indeterminate state between the two. The box can be opened, and the cat's state can be determined, but at that point the situation, from the point of view of quantum physics, is irrelevant. The paradox of Schrödinger's cat is paralleled in Uri Katzenstein's installation *The Family of Brothers*. In the exhibit, as in the thought experiment, two opposite poles exist simultaneously.

*The Family of Brothers* represents no average family, but rather the children of the postmodern condition. The installation is complex and incongruous. It comprises four figurative sculptures, a video-performance, and sound—an entire environment that works as a self-portrait. Each of the sculptures represents a composite of the different brothers of Katzenstein's personality. In the video-performance the artist plays himself playing the composite characters figured in the surrounding sculptures. They include a nude hermaphroditic figure that stands on a chair shaped like a swastika; a male figure dressed in gold lamé, who lies on an inclined plane with a rock tied to his wrist; a figure looking searchingly at a baby dragon-like creature behind him; and an adult male with the expression of an inquisitive little boy, dangling his feet off a ledge. The sculptures silently witness the surreal video-performance by Katzenstein, who imitates the postures and attitudes of the four brothers, who are images and aspects of himself.

Together, these several parts of the installation represent a self-reflexive attempt to visualize the process of artistic creation. Katzenstein also pictures natural cycles of creation and destruction, of enthalpy and entropy, in this multimedia self-portrait, thereby linking his process as an artist, an aspect of his



self-depiction, to these cycles and paradoxes of nature. He draws connections between his own spirituality as represented in his artwork, as well as the subjects of sexuality and trauma. He blurs the boundaries between his identity as a person and as an artist and his self-portraits, including such elements as his Israeli nationality, his study and practice of art within the United States, his experiences in the Israeli military, and his role as both a son and a father.

The complex dynamics existing within Katzenstein's personality are multiplied in the self-portraiture of *The Family of Brothers*. Throughout the installation, the paradoxes of his life are echoed and amplified, as Katzenstein confronts questions of being through binary conflicts that evolve as he plays them out in person. He explores the concept of death by presenting figures that are afraid of their own mortality and, simultaneously, embrace their own demise. He questions the classification of art as either static or dynamic by creating sculptures that perform and performances that take their form from sculpture. He intermingles the natural and artificial, problematizing binary divisions. Creation and destruction become contingent upon each other

while remaining separate entities. His body is presented as loathsome and, at the same time, as a clearly positive and powerful force. Katzenstein breaks down the dichotomy of masculinity and femininity through his treatment of gender. He sets sex and creation up as opposing forces that also work as a united whole. He investigates the way in which the violence and peace in Israel are contingent upon one another. The subject of AIDS emerges in his work, but his work is not about AIDS. He uses culturally loaded symbols that allude to cultures ancient and contemporary, but does so self-referentially. In short, *The Family of Brothers* fits the model of postmodernism while it subverts that paradigm.

By positioning the content and meaning of *The Family of Brothers* as paradox, Katzenstein maintains the work's enigmatic and tension-filled character. As I will show, the multiplicity of interpretations in *The Family of Brothers* resides in the clash of unresolvable binaries, much in the way that Schrödinger's cat is neither dead or alive, but rather both at the same time, unless the box is opened.

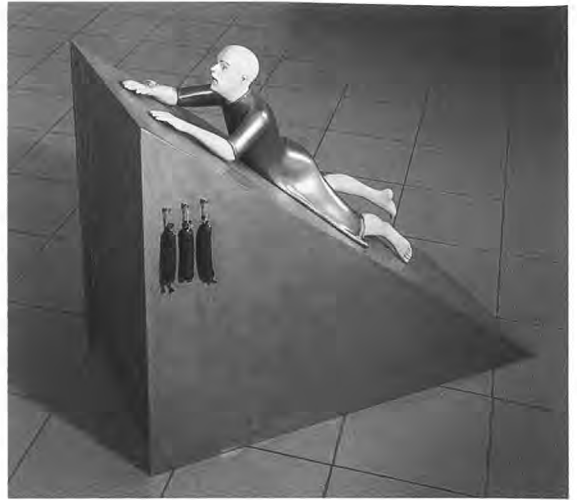
**T**he four figural sculptures of *The Family of Brothers* are all modeled after Katzenstein himself, but each is a miniature, standing about a meter high. The skin tones of each sculpture vary from one another, though they all appear slightly blotchy, having been built up in many layers much like traditional oil painting. The sculptures are dispersed around the gallery, three standing and one hanging from the wall. In this way, Katzenstein creates distance between each work. Separated in their display, the sculptures still convey the impression that they interact with one another, just as the different aspects of Katzenstein's

personality both cohere within the artist and seem simultaneously to have an independent existence.

Brother 1 is naked and hairless, except for some golden pubic hair around its small penis. This is the figure that balances on one foot on a chair that looks like a swastika. The soft curves of the figure's chest, belly, and buttocks, together with its small penis, suggest a hermaphrodite. The figure's hands form a box around its eyes, as a director or a painter might when framing a scene with his or her hands; Brother 1 frames and scrutinizes the viewer, metaphorically winking at the interaction among the other sculptures, the video-performance, and Katzenstein himself. It seems to mimic the process of artistic creation in its knowing stance.

While Brother 1 looks outward, interacting directly with the audience, Brother 2's attention is directed inward, as he engages in meditation. He lies on what appears to be an inclined plane, which Katzenstein has described as a descending stairway.<sup>1</sup> Lying on the ramp on his stomach, the figure remains in suspended motion, not sliding down the ramp but rather seeming to defy gravity. He wears a tight golden dress with cuffs and collar rolled like a condom. Brother 2 also has a rock tied to his wrist and an intense look of concentration and awareness on his face, hinting that he might be meditating. Three small decaying sausages hang from the ramp, "doing their own performance" the artist explains; they represent a "slow death in real time," adding a performative and temporal element to the static sculptures in the installation.

In the third self-portrait, Brother 3 is dressed in shorts and a T-shirt, which, like the clothes on Brother 2, are made of material rolled in the manner of a condom at the cuffs and neck. This brother twists around to look at what the artist has described as a baby dragon that is following him. The artist made the first version of the creature using Legos, children's interlocking plastic blocks. The creature is a composit: it has the head of an alligator, the ears of a seahorse, legs that look like a cross between a dinosaur's and a bird's, and the skinny tail of a rat. The brother invites the animal to walk with him, but this stroll, according to Katzenstein, is "as heartbreaking as touching a fish in deep water." He later explained that he meant "heartbreaking" in a joyful sense, implying that while the interaction is emotionally moving, it is not a negative experience. To interact



1. Uri Katzenstein, telephone interview with the author and Amy M. A. Vickers, September 1, 1999. All future quotations by the artist are from this interview, unless otherwise noted.





2. See *Penguin Encyclopaedia of Popular Music* (London: Viking, 1989), 427–429.

with a mythical creature is a supposedly impossible experience, so that for the person involved, emotions of awe and puzzlement mix. The expression on the face of Brother 3 indicates that he wonders why he has been chosen.

Brother 4 is childlike in a different way: dangling his feet, he holds his finger in the air in an enigmatic gesture that suggests he might be testing the wind, signaling, or waving. The blush on his cheeks and the slight tilt of his head give him a look of inquisitive innocence, an attitude ironically juxtaposed with his prophylactic clothing. To test the air is also a metaphor for figuring out a situation. The figure could be examining the realm beyond his innocence, the heated political situations in Israel, or any number of indefinite social and psychological possibilities. Brother 4's cryptic innocence is only one of the emotions that Katzenstein recreates in his installation.

The video-performance that accompanies the group of sculptures from *The Family of Brothers* consists of Katzenstein's physical re-creation and elaboration of the poses of the sculptures in the installation. Throughout the performance the artist wears a tight, skin-colored bodysuit that covers his entire body up to his neck. Over this suit he wears larger versions of the same clothing in which the sculptured figures are dressed, changing costumes to match the sculptural pose that he replicates. He begins the performance by sitting down in a larger-scale swastika chair in order to peer into a microscope, in which he sees something terrifying. He then walks away from the microscope, toward an open door filled with light. As he walks through the door he removes everything except the bodysuit, which has a sculpted penis attached to it. He then walks across a desert toward the stairwell of a silver dwelling. He picks up the sausages and hangs them on the stairwell. He proceeds to walk down a long dark corridor, trying to persuade the dragon to follow him. When he emerges from the corridor, he finds himself outside a tall building. In this last scene, he peers down into the room where he sees himself gazing into the microscope. This final image of self-reflection and self-observation completes the surreal and dream-like loop.

Throughout the video-performance there is an organic and ambient soundtrack, replete with noises that Katzenstein describes as those of forgotten animals and forgotten places. These sounds are the magnified noises of creatures too small to scream louder than the white noise to which many have become habituated, so that these sounds are no longer heard and thus have been forgotten.

Sound is a key element in *The Family of Brothers*. The environmental sounds in the video, the "primal sounds, genetic sounds," are linked to both Italian futurist Luigi Russolo and British musician Brian Eno.<sup>2</sup> Russolo's explorations into the art of noise and his idea that music can be made with things other than traditional instruments<sup>3</sup> have inspired Katzenstein in his musical performances



and sculptures, as has the pioneering pop and ambient music of Brian Eno. Katzenstein's use of environmental sounds, such as the magnified noises of small animals in *The Family of Brothers* or the monotonous drills of *Ritual Reality No. 5* (1993), is not, however, merely derivative of these and other earlier artists. By integrating them into a broader, multimedia work, he creates an entirely new thought for the music.<sup>4</sup> The sounds of the small animals' screams are altered in the video-performance, in the context of the self-portraying sculptures. The screams of the animals become the screams of the artist, creating a new context for them. The screams are also symbols for the chaos that Katzenstein has made sense of by magnifying complex, esoteric, inaccessible, and inaudible sounds.

Katzenstein contrasts the natural and the artificial by exaggerating natural sounds in a controlled setting: a paradoxical combination of nature and artifice, like the paradox of being both dead and alive. His explorations of sound and music in relation to naturalness and artificiality are also an interesting contrast to the *Jerusalem River Project* (1973), a work by another American-trained, contemporary Israeli artist, Joshua Neustein, made in collaboration with G. Marx and G. Battle. In his environmental sound installation, Neustein taped the sounds of all the rivers, springs, streams, and waterfalls in Israel, and played a composite of them on fifty loudspeakers in a dry wadi in Abu-Tor, Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup> Neustein's construction of natural-artificial sound in a natural environment serves as a foil for Katzenstein's artificial-natural sounds played in an artificial environment.

The tension between nature and artifice is at the core of Katzenstein's artistic

3. Michael Kirby, *Futurist Performance* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1986), 34-35.

4. Marcel Duchamp, "The Richard Mutt Case," *Blind Man* (New York) 2 (1917): 5. Reprinted in *Theories and Documents of Contemporary Art*, ed. Kristine Stiles and Peter Selz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 817.

5. Susan Lubowsky Talbott, ed., *Joshua Neustein: Light on the Ashes* (Winston-Salem, N.C.: Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art, 1996), 7-10.



project and is also of great personal significance. For *The Family of Brothers* is deeply personal, focusing on the artist's own corporeal sense of sex and gender, as well as his national and religious identity. It is a multimedia self-portrait that aims to capture Katzenstein's many personae. The sculptures are self-contained self-portraits, but Katzenstein's extensive past work in performance art from the late 1970s to the present also modulates each sculpture's identity. Performance and self-portraiture intermingle, so that *The Family of Brothers* becomes a dynamic and fluid explication of Katzenstein's own metacritical examination of himself as a person and a sexual being, an artist, an Israeli, and a veteran of one of Israel's most devastating wars.

It is the performative element in *The Family of Brothers* that makes the work so interesting in terms of the model of Schrödinger's cat. Through his career, Katzenstein has worked in many media: drawing, sculpture, installation, and performance. Performance, however, remains at the forefront of his aesthetic thinking, so that even static works such as the sculptures in *The Family of Brothers* have a strong performative element. Katzenstein brings these works alive in the video-installation by imitating and thus animating them. While the sculptures represent metaphors for Katzenstein's states of mind, they are also metonymic extensions of the video-performance. The point here is that Katzenstein's work is simultaneously static (the plastic, sculptural installation) and dynamic (the sound and video-performance). Such is the case in Schrödinger's paradox and the mechanics of quanta. Static and dynamic elements do not simply coexist in *The Family of Brothers* but imbue each element with the characteristics of all the other elements.

Just as the interaction among the media in *The Family of Brothers* presents a conundrum, so too does the content of the work. For example, Katzenstein's focus on the autobiographical representation of his own psyche and persona belongs to a dialogue the artist has established with other artists such as German artist Joseph Beuys and American artist Matthew Barney. Barney came to international attention in the late 1980s and his work is indebted to the artistic tradition to which Katzenstein himself contributed. His work, like Katzenstein's, combines sculpture and video-performance with installation, in surrealistic visual and autobiographical narratives. Barney especially emphasizes new bioengineering technologies and the transformation of human genetics into hybrid, sometimes half-human, half-animal forms. His mode of working is not entirely dissimilar to Katzenstein's, who in *The Family of Brothers* plays with gender and sexual distinctions. More important, both Katzenstein and Barney are indebted to Beuys, who, from the 1960s until his death in 1986, emphasized the organic condition of human life and its relation to both nature and animals. Beuys introduced such materials as felt, fat, dead animals, copper, sulfur, honey, blood, bones, and other uncommon objects and materials into his work, following the avant-garde call for the use of nonart materials as a means of drawing art closer to actual life.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the decay of food in *The Family of Brothers* is, according to

6. Alain Borer, *The Essential Joseph Beuys* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 15.

Katzenstein, a homage to Beuys. Most significant is the fact that Beuys belonged to the Hitler Youth movement and became a Stuka pilot in the Luftwaffe during World War II. Beuys himself used sausages in numerous installations. In this regard, the sausage in *The Family of Brothers* is not only a phallic symbol but also a sign of the death camps in which millions of Jews lost their lives. Beuys and Katzenstein both use evanescent, natural materials as memento mori, a reminder of human mortality, as well as a talisman representing hope for redemption through the artwork.<sup>7</sup> Katzenstein's interest in the German artist, then, suggests a conflict—perhaps even a paradox—in terms of the legacies of World War II and the Holocaust and the fate of Katzenstein's ancestors.

The use of food in the installations of both these artists addresses both personal and more universal topics. The sausage, for example, reminds Katzenstein of his childhood and memories of his father's delicatessen. "I can remember the smell of sausage coming from, really, it sounds pathetic, and it *is* pathetic, from my father's hands. It's something that penetrates the body, which really interests me the most." The sausage, thus, is an Oedipal symbol, one that Katzenstein hangs up outside his dwelling in the video sequence. The decaying meat hints at an eroding relationship, and knowledge of the artist's father's aging process, as well as his personal fear of his own inevitable death. The sausages are replete with conflicting meanings since they represent both an homage to his actual Jewish father and to his German artistic father, who fought on the side of National Socialism. This association throws light on the possible implications of the swastika chair in *The Family of Brothers*, as much as it does on the very title of this multimedia installation.

The slow degradation of the sausages also embodies the artist's fascination with American artist Robert Smithson, whose work of the 1960s and early 1970s has been identified with earthworks, minimal art, and conceptual art.<sup>8</sup> Katzenstein is most drawn to Smithson's research on entropy, the tendency of a system toward chaos and randomness. Just as a radioactive isotope decays, so (due to entropy) do all physical materials in the universe, until they only exist as heat. In fact, the pile of sand upon which one of the figures stands in Katzenstein's series of sculptures *Love Dub* (1996) is an allusion to Smithson's *Spiral Jetty* (1970), a large-scale sculptural form of salt, sand, and rocks that he constructed in Utah's Great Salt Lake.<sup>9</sup> *Spiral Jetty* was created so that it would improve through time due to entropy. It was covered for years by high water, and when it resurfaced in the early 1990s, it had assumed a new form. After nearly twenty years, the earthwork finally gained the appearance that Smithson had originally conceived.<sup>10</sup>

Yet while Smithson explored literal aspects of entropy, physical wastes, and their relationship to a decaying society—from bridges slowly falling apart to newly installed and polluting sewage pipes—Katzenstein's concern is with a figurative interpretation of entropy. He begins with Smithson's research on cultural decay but extends that exploration to a study of the personal ramifications

7. Heiner Stachelhaus, *Joseph Beuys*, trans. David Britt (New York: Abbeville Press, 1991), 68.

8. Lawrence Alloway, "Robert Smithson's Development," *Artforum* 11, no. 3 (November 1972): 52–61.

9. Robert Smithson, "The Spiral Jetty," in *Arts of the Environment*, ed. Gyorgy Kepes (New York: G. Braziller, 1972); Nancy Holt, ed., *The Writings of Robert Smithson* (New York: New York University Press, 1979), 109–116.

10. Jean-Pierre Criqui, "Rising Sign," *Artforum* 32, no. 10 (summer 1994): 80–81.





11. Robert Smithson, "A Tour of the Monuments of Passaic, New Jersey," *Artforum* 6, no. 4 (December 1967), reprinted in *The Writings of Robert Smithson*, 52–57.

of entropy on the body and the spirit.<sup>11</sup> Katzenstein's concentration on destruction and entropy suggests his fear of, and, ultimately, confrontation with mortality. Like the sausages, the figures of *The Family of Brothers* seem to be suffering from the ravages of time and decay, in Katzenstein's words, "being ageless till they go bad, something like this: they age until they spoil." Both artists explore concepts of randomness and chaos, although Katzenstein's work in *The Family of Brothers* focuses on the chaos of his own existence by portraying himself and his demise, even while he is alive and well. This paradoxical representation of himself cannot be logically resolved; Katzenstein's representations of his own mortality simultaneously resist death and speed toward it, much like Schrödinger's cat in the sealed box.

Another way in which Katzenstein has demonstrated his own mortality and concomitant, yet paradoxical, desire to be able to control the decay of his own body has been through his extensive work with bodily fluids in performances, as well as in drawings and sculptures: Katzenstein uses his own blood and urine as materials in his art. Bodily fluids have long been considered sacred and used in shamanistic and religious rituals, as well as in visual art. By using his own blood and urine, Katzenstein reveals how he understands his body to be threatened and

how it threatens itself. Such an aesthetic investigation is a means by which to gain control over that threat through the use of representations of it. Katzenstein included both blood and urine in vials that serve as physical counterbalances to the metal silhouette sculptures he crafted in the early 1990s. He has also used blood as a medium for drawing and writing in performance works, notably *Ritual Reality No. 5*, and in his blood drawings. The use of such bodily fluids recalls Israeli artist Gideon Gechtman's 1974 installation, documenting aspects of his open-heart surgery to replace a heart valve in April 1973. In this exhibition, Gechtman

staged the shaving of his body in the gallery at the same time that he amplified the sound of his heart beating with the artificial valve. The exhibition included photographs of the artist before and after the shaving, a series of boxes each containing shaved hair from head, underarm, pubic hair, and so forth, jars with the medications he took for his illness and operation, containers of his urine under which he displayed charts showing the quantities and varieties of foods he ingested during the day, chest x-rays, photographs of his chest scar, photographs of the attending physicians, and other relics related to the operation.<sup>12</sup>

While Gechtman's use of fluids and hair served as a documentation of a specific event, Katzenstein's vials of blood and urine are not linked to a time, place, or event. But, even when not physically present in the video-performance of *The Family of Brothers*, they are implied by the corporeal nature of the installation.

Katzenstein's focus on the symbolic nature of the body extends also to skin and the presence or absence of hair in *The Family of Brothers*, where the layered construction of paint (to simulate skin tone) echoes the layering and construction of personality and identity. The subtle lack of hair on the bodies of the figurines—other than the golden pubic hair of Brother 2—is also symbolic. It suggests social values that alter the human body to conform to cultural fashions and gender stereotypes, where bodily hair is often removed for aesthetic purposes. The scarcity of bodily hair in Katzenstein's sculptures and video-performance is striking, especially since the artist states: "I'm a hairy guy, so I've made a skin for myself. It's not like real skin, it's like tight fabric, like fingers . . . everything. Up to my neck." Although he doesn't actually remove all of his hair, Katzenstein does deliberately create the illusion of having done so. Since bodily hair removal is typically associated with women, the sparse bodily hair of the hermaphroditic figure on the swastika chair reinforces the ambiguity of its gender. Just as Katzenstein resists (through such emblems as the sausage) the inevitability of his death, he also resists (through the emblem of hair) socially imposed gender roles.

Katzenstein's work portrays the threatened body. Just as the figure is precariously balanced on the swastika chair, so too is the body precariously balanced in a society full of hatred of the other, self-loathing, and the self-destruction of

12. Kristine Stiles, "Uncorrupted Joy: International Art Actions," in *Out of Actions: Between Performance and the Object, 1949-1979*, ed. Paul Schimmel (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art; London: Thames and Hudson, 1998), 322.

both individual bodies and the social body. The combination is as unnerving as the abnegation implied by a Jew embracing the image of the swastika. This assault on the body hints at the state of trauma and flux in modern bodies. Particularly in Israel, with its incessantly failing and renewing peace talks, the Intifada, and fear of new wars cohabiting with the memory of past wars, day-to-day existence is continually traumatic. Fears become fundamentally corporeal in such a volatile and violent environment, for it is mortality, the failing of the body, that weighs upon the mind.

The intersection of internal fears and external conflicts occurs at the most fundamental level in the body. Katzenstein's *The Family of Brothers* suggests not only the inevitability of human mortality but also a deep fear of the body due to its innate unpredictability and impending failure, as well as the inadequacies of the social body to protect it. Body-associated trauma in Katzenstein's art must also be considered in relation to the artist's experiences as a medic in the Israeli military in the Yom Kippur war of 1973. Indeed, Katzenstein admits, "the idea of using blood and using liquids is somehow linked to previous experiences and traumas [as a catharsis]." Katzenstein believes that such experiences provide him "some freedom, also, like acquired innocence." The intermingling of relieved pain and relived trauma is as incongruous to traditional ways of thinking as the simultaneity of death and life in a cat is to traditional physics. The notion of attaining release from self-created prisons and of reaching a return to a state of childlike innocence through the re-creation and elaboration of trauma has been widely practiced in psychotherapy. Numerous performance artists have also explored this territory, notably Raphael Montañez Ortiz, whose performance, *Self-Destruction* (1966) led to primal scream therapy.<sup>13</sup>

By using art as an expression of, and a release from, the trauma of the military, Katzenstein's performances recall other Israeli artists who have worked with the body in relation to their experiences of war. For example, in his *Transfer of the Studio to the Gallery* (1975), Pinchas Cohen Gan created an unstable replica of his home environment that "grew out of his feelings about the Yom Kippur War." This work relates to Cohen Gan's installation *Action in the Jericho Refugee Camp* (February 10, 1974), which took place at a refugee camp in the northeastern sector of the ancient city of Jericho. There the artist constructed a temporary shelter and gave a lecture on the subject of the conditions for peace in Israel "in the year 2000." His *Transfer of the Studio to the Gallery* was a meditation on what it meant to be "in a continual state of being a refugee" himself.<sup>14</sup> The inclusion of themes of a shared national trauma is part of the cultural memory and psyche of a generation. It is also key to Israeli art in general, and, as Kristine Stiles has pointed out, such works function as "national self-portrait[s]."<sup>15</sup> In this regard, *The Family of Brothers* may be understood not only as a sculptural and performative portrait of Katzenstein himself, but as a picture of him as a part of the nation of Israel. *The Family of Brothers* is a dual portrait,

13. Kristine Stiles, *Raphael Montañez Ortiz: Years of the Warrior, Years of the Psyche 1988* (New York: El Museo del Barrio, 1988).

14. See Kristine Stiles, "Rampman against a Portable Field," in *Figure, Form, Formula: The Art of Pinchas Cohen Gan*, Nancy H. Margolis, ed. (Greensboro, N.C.: Weatherspoon Art Gallery, 1996).

15. *Ibid.*, 29–33.



a statement of national and personal identity. The title of the installation alludes not only to the many dimensions of Katzenstein's personality, but also to his brotherhood with the family of Israelis, who share a common fate.

At the same time that Katzenstein presents negative body images and trauma, he also affirms the body. By reenacting the poses upon which he based the four sculptures in *The Family of Bothers*, Katzenstein recreates and comments on the artistic process itself and the complexity of representation in a fundamental way. This work seems simultaneously to question and reveal the ways in which life drives the act of making art. But Katzenstein inserts another inversion here. *The Family of Brothers* alters conceptions of the process of the production of art by modeling the artist's performance after the sculptures of the installation rather than his life. By reversing the normal order—requiring the plastic sculptural form to dictate the behavior of the organic body—Katzenstein declares that life is not always the origin of art. In fact, art comes from art and may become the model for life. The idea of reversing the genesis of art is reinforced in the autobiographical aspects of the work. Katzenstein represents elements of his emotional states—or at least the psychological image of himself that he wishes to convey—in objects and then imitates the objects.

The psychological complexity of *The Family of Brothers* is augmented by the ritualistic character of the artist's performance. In fact, ritual is one of the central themes in Katzenstein's work, systematically recreating the psychophysical event of artistic creation and then transferring that aura to the sculptural objects (particularly in the ritual with Brother 3). His physical movements in performance are slow and methodical, suggesting the enactment of a religious ritual and implying that some special ceremony and spiritual meaning underlie his work. His use of blood and evocation of trauma summons the sacred innate to the body and independent of organized faith. Yet Katzenstein rejects organized religion and questions its relevance in postmodern society. Living in a region of the world where conflicts between different religions interminably cause bloodshed, Katzenstein comments as much on religion as on its consequences. He implies that underneath the conflict of organized religion, corporeal spirituality is still essential and present in ritualized actions. His rituals point to religious conflict without condemning religion outright. In fact, he seems to acknowledge the positive power of ritual in art and in life. Once again, Schrödinger's cat provides the parallels: the cat is both dead and alive, while Katzenstein both rejects organized religion and embraces the power of ritual.

Katzenstein denies any influence from Buddhism, but the kind of meditative concentration associated with Buddhist ritual is clearly expressed not only in the work, but also in his explanation of it: "If you called me in the morning and said, 'I'm not concentrated, Uri, I can't talk today.' I would say: 'Well, take an apple and put it on your head and we can talk now.' Something like this. Everything you do and everything you think of has to go through the apple balanced on your



16. See also Katzenstein, interviewed in *Missive*, Uri Katzenstein, ed. Yigal Zalmona (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1993), 9.

head. So it's something like that. Like a rock." Katzenstein's kind of meditation is not transcendental, as in the Buddhist tradition, but it is meditation nonetheless. While Brother 2, with the rock tied to his wrist, is not calm — he seems anxious as he balances on the ramp that the artist has described as a stairwell — he is focused. We could see the scene as depicting the slippery slope of religion, down which the figure of Katzenstein and his family of humans (brothers) have found themselves sliding. At this point Katzenstein's relationship to Schrödinger's cat becomes personal. For he finds himself in as much danger as the cat, and just as the cat is trapped in the box, Katzenstein is caught in the vertiginous religion-centered turmoil around him.

Religion comes up again in the desert image in *The Family of Brothers*. Here Katzenstein seems to evoke not only the wandering of the Jews through the desert, but also the ascetic tradition that continues into Christianity, in which the desert is an important scene of meditation. In this regard, Katzenstein's exploration of the desert suggests spiritual rejuvenation and reflection. In some Native American traditions, the desert is the locus of hallucination, the experience of "the real," a reality more real than quotidian experience. Katzenstein seems to refer to psychoactive drugs in several works, notably in the text of his video-performance *Ritual Reality No. 5*, where he writes: "Yesterday I went to the man, he was not home so I stopped using it."<sup>16</sup> In this statement Katzenstein apparently presents himself as someone dependent on drugs in the past, who has



since abandoned them, along with the alteration of his reality by anything other than ritualized action, namely art.

Just as Katzenstein has explored alternatives to the socially accepted conception of reality, he also searches for alternatives to traditional categories of gender in *The Family of Brothers*. There are no sisters in this family. Nevertheless, through the androgynous, even hermaphroditic, dress of these figures, Katzenstein investigates the construction of masculinity. The distinctly feminine physique of the figure standing precariously on the swastika chair may represent, for example, the instability of socially imposed notions of masculinity. In this way, Katzenstein seems to pose a critique of masculinity as defined by social conventions and patriarchal religions and violence. He also calls into question the division of all humans into two distinct genders, at a time when genetics and endocrinology reveal that such a distinct division does not reflect the physiological reality of gender. Social forms and norms do not correspond to nature, nor to the way in which Katzenstein wishes to express himself.

Katzenstein's preoccupation with the phallus also has gender implications: Brother 2 on the swastika chair, with the small penis may be read as an emasculated self-portrait. Calling into question his own masculinity and the time-honored notion that the essence of artistic creativity resides in the phallus, Katzenstein nevertheless celebrates this penis by surrounding it with golden pubic hair. Both magical and unnatural, the hair glorifies the phallus, paradoxically renewing the possibility that it may be endowed with creative powers. Moreover, the false penis that he wears in the performance implies that gender is a masquerade, neither masculine nor feminine. In fact, his ambiguous representation of gender and sexuality, especially in the cross-dressing of Brother 2 may reflect his own ambivalence about gender and sexuality.

Katzenstein also juxtaposes solemn subject matter with humor and the ridiculous. The image of a bald middle-aged man in a tight golden dress is ludicrous. The signification of sausages as sexual meat, with inevitable Oedipal overtones, demonstrates a knowing, self-deprecatory sense of irony. Similarly, the diminutive, detachable penis mocks the artificiality of sexuality and gender. The reduction of a man's sexual performance to the size of his penis is laughably common, and thus Katzenstein's deliberate use of a small and false phallus clearly ridicules this folklore. In addition, scale is important: although the sculptures are self-portraits, Katzenstein has inverted the macho image of a male sculpture and presented viewers with prissy little androgynous figures. Because they are so small, they appear more intimate, more able to be possessed like a woman. Especially in the large space of the gallery, all sense of the grandeur of self-portraits is dwarfed and diminished. Finally, the overtly condom-like clothing hypersexualizes the figures, implying that the entire body is a giant phallus to be sheathed. In short (pun intended), Katzenstein presents himself as a ludicrous, lethal, golden, sexualized being, whose threatening sexuality is a tiny penis in a halo of fake golden hair.

But the humor stops suddenly when one realizes that the specter of HIV and AIDS is invoked by the condom-like dress of the *The Family of Brothers*. Especially in conjunction with his use of blood, it is impossible to divorce Katzenstein's art from questions of AIDS, even if he denies that this association is intentional in his work. Given the global AIDS epidemic, the association with AIDS is an involuntary cultural response to the use of blood. This is not the only instance where the artwork provokes the audience to respond. The swastika chair is another such provocation. Confronted with highly volatile material and symbols, viewers are actively engaged in the process of questioning their views, just as Katzenstein is engaged in questioning his own artistic creation. His art satisfies Kafka's criterion of artistic value: "If the book we are reading does not wake us up with a blow on the head, what are we reading it for?"<sup>17</sup> Katzenstein does not offer the public a pleasant visual experience but an installation that is full of disturbing meanings. He depicts the fate of the global community in a way that mirrors the plight of the cat; humanity exists in the box that is the earth, with lurking dangers such as AIDS and fascism, just as the capsule of cyanide threatens Schrödinger's cat.

It is Katzenstein's intention to constantly confront viewers with the paradox of their beliefs. For example, the swastika is an icon in early Indo-Aryan religious rituals as much as it is the sign for race from the late nineteenth century (when it was rediscovered as evidence of an Aryan race having diffused throughout the world during the Bronze Age).<sup>18</sup> Katzenstein's use of the swastika in the form of the chair is as much about people's reactions to it as it is about fascism, harmony, aesthetics, design, and the way that all of these elements simultaneously interact. The artist also uses the swastika to probe how people react to its symbolic content: "Once you sit on something, at least in a metaphorical way, it means that you come to terms with yourself to rest on something. . . . [The] basic invitation to sit is a chair. It's not like a hand that says hello. It's like a chair that says hello to our asses. It's kind of like 'Please, sit on me.' Sort of like an ass-hello." An "ass-hello" swastika clearly invites a confrontation with the audience, a provocation that demands a response. Katzenstein's interest in his use of the swastika is to reintegrate this ancient symbol into the lexicon of visual language and to reintroduce its aesthetic potential. It is also a shock for allusions to the Holocaust to be overtly and seemingly casually displayed in the work of a Jewish Israeli artist. It is interesting to note that although Holocaust references were largely rejected by Israeli artists in the 1950s, they returned in force in the 1980s and 1990s.<sup>19</sup>

All of the contradictions, conundrums, and paradoxes that I have explored in Katzenstein's *The Family of Brothers* suggests the location of this multimedia work in the center of the postmodernist aesthetic paradigm, especially if Fredric Jameson's classic criteria for postmodernism is the model: the representation of the simulacrum, the use of pastiche, the waning of artistic affect, a new depthlessness, and the death of history.<sup>20</sup> Katzenstein, however, also crafts his own

17. Franz Kafka, *Letters to Friends, Family, Editors*, trans. Richard Winston and Clara Winston (New York: Schocken Books, 1977), 16.

18. Malcolm Quinn, *The Swastika: Constructing the Symbol* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 2, 54-55.

19. Galia Bar Or, "Hebrew Work": *The Disregarded Gaze in the Canon of Israeli Art* (Ein Harod: Mishkan Le'Omanut Museum of Art, 1998), 160.

20. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), 1-54.



sculptures, and they exhibit an emotional and self-referential semiotics of engagement. At the same time that his ambiguous use of the swastika tends to confuse a smooth reading of that symbol in terms of recent history, his aim appears to be to engage viewers in a consideration of the historical process. In this way, Katzenstein hardly denies history, even as he confuses our reading of it. Katzenstein's self-portraits are serial, but they convey biographical concerns, unlike, for instance, Andy Warhol's *Disaster Series*, where the repetition of an image causes the waning of affect noticed by Jameson.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, in French theorist Jean Baudrillard's conception of postmodernism, the simulacrum functions as a void copy of the sign, a representation that no longer has a source.<sup>22</sup> In *The Family of Brothers*, the artist's experience of himself is directly represented as a fluctuating, fractured, and disembodied multiplicity that fails to achieve a cohesive gestalt. Thus the work is not a simulacrum but an infinite series of representations of one source, the artist himself. The division of Katzenstein's personality is multiplied precisely by the postmodern split as well as his own ambiguity and ambivalence toward the representation of his identity. In fact, this multiplicity makes it difficult if not impossible to apprehend the entirety of the installation at once, to engage simultaneously with all of the versions of himself that Katzenstein presents.

In quantum mechanics, a function collapses in on itself at the point of observation. So, in Katzenstein's work, does the specific image. It depends entirely upon the viewer and his or her momentary perspective of *The Family of Brothers*. Katzenstein's ambiguous position within postmodernism can easily be seen as a quantum phenomenon. The installation presents someone afraid of his own mortality who also embraces death. It links the static and the dynamic-performative. It intermingles the natural and the artificial. Katzenstein's body is under siege at the same time as it becomes a positive force. Creativity and destruction are contingent upon each other. The utopia of Israel is juxtaposed to the violence it perpetuates and in which it exists. Masculinity is imbued with powers of creation, but Katzenstein rejects the social constructs associated with patriarchal power. He is fixated upon sexuality, male and female. He uses the swastika referentially, but it also appears to be entirely self-referential. His art is not about AIDS, but AIDS is intrinsic to a discussion of it. The force of entropy, so fundamental to his work, is inextricably linked with its opposite, the energy of a system in nature. The paradoxes of culture in Katzenstein's multifaceted portrait of himself match the paradoxes of nature in quantum mechanics. For Katzenstein is like the cat in a sealed box, living in a country that remains in a constant threat of extinction. To reconcile the diametric oppositions of Katzenstein's work is to open the box and see if the cat is alive or dead.

21. Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real* (Cambridge, Mass.: October 1996), 131.

22. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulation, Semiotext(s)* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983).

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As I walked through the exhibit *Ketav: Flesh and Word In Israeli Art* at the Ackland Art Museum in late September 1996, I saw a curious sign hanging on a wall next to the entrance of a darkened room. It read: "This video records a performance involving the extensive use of human blood, which some viewers may find disturbing. Viewer discretion is advised." I wondered why the curators thought that this work of art merited a warning, particularly since no other piece in the exhibit displayed such a sign. I also wondered why the curators qualified the noun "blood" as "human blood." Did nonhuman, animal blood not constitute something disturbing to the curators? I entered the room. The video monitor stood on a podium in the middle of darkness. As warned, I did find Israeli artist Uri Katzenstein's video-performance *Ritual Reality No. 5* (1993) disturbing. It was compelling and repulsive, profound and horrific, and ultimately mesmerizing, almost meditative.

*Ritual Reality No. 5* is a continuous video loop in which Katzenstein performs the task of writing on a freestanding white wall with his own blood, blood that has been drawn from his body via an intravenous needle. Seven electric drills with bits facing outward are strapped onto the artist's muscular limbs, and he repeatedly writes in Hebrew: "Yesterday I went to the man, he was not home so I stopped using it." Another text appears, in English and in Hebrew, with the Hebrew above Katzenstein, and the English below. It reads: "In our culture language is secret, but we are sending frogmen to you." The audio track of the video, and hence the dominant sound in the museum space, is the monotonous din of rotating electric drills.

*Ritual Reality No. 5* is both literally and metaphorically a palimpsest. The word *palimpsest*, derived from the Greek term *palimpsestos* meaning "scraped again," has two definitions: (1) a writing material used one or more times after earlier writing has been erased, and (2) something having diverse layers or aspects apparent beneath the surface. *Ritual Reality No. 5* is both of these things,

and its palimpsestic nature constitutes what I will argue is the artist's visual theory of the nature of Being in the world and his interrogation of the construction of myriad identities. My analysis of the multiple signs and their concomitant relationships in Katzenstein's *Ritual Reality No. 5* aims to peel away the layers of the performance that create its overall meaning. These layers rub up against one another and shift within the overall form to reveal an erased, or past, text that the artist is still compelled to remember. With each peeling, it is possible to read deeper into the signifying content of the work, and Katzenstein's artifacts and actions (as well as their attendant implications for the artist and his viewers) may be engaged and decoded. The result is a new view of Katzenstein's commentary on relative palimpsests, realities of rituals, and the rituals of realities.

The drill has at least three primary meanings pertinent to Uri Katzenstein's work. First, as a tool it augments and remakes the body. As Elaine Scarry writes in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, a tool is a material artifact that is both an altered surrogate and an extension of the body.<sup>1</sup> In addition, a tool, by magnifying the powers of the body, creates the body itself as artifact. Katzenstein makes this process visually explicit by strapping the drills to his limbs, thereby showing the drill as both a substitute for, and extension of, aspects of his body, and, by association, all human bodies. Furthermore, the visual hybrid of drills and limbs explicitly brands the body as artifact. The locations and sounds of the drills attached to his body call acute attention to the social reality of his limbs and their movements. In this way, the artist seems to suggest a socialized body, precisely the body that Scarry theorizes as the body that must be recreated to experience itself in terms of its own objectification:

[H]uman beings project their bodily powers and frailties into external objects . . . and then those objects in turn become the object of perceptions that are taken back into the interior of human consciousness where they now reside as part of the mind or soul, and this revised conception of oneself . . . is now actually "felt" to be located inside the boundaries of one's own skin where one is in immediate contact with the elaborate constellation of interior cultural fragments that seem to have displaced the dense molecules of physical matter.<sup>2</sup>

In other words, after first projecting itself outward via the drills, the body then absorbs and interiorizes these externalized objectifications of itself.

This socialization, as Scarry so brilliantly describes it, is the process of becoming Being in the world. Katzenstein's performative body, adorned with drills, performs this process imagistically: the movement of an arm entails a complex system of blood, bone, nerves, and tissue. But it also conjures reminiscences of past movements or sensations and their concomitant context: the touch of a friend, the wisp of a cool breeze, the pain of an injury. It can represent the socialization of the body at the same time as its private physical sensations. It is

1. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 254.

2. *Ibid.*, 256.



likely that the artist senses both feelings during the movements of his arm in performance. Moreover, Katzenstein's exhibition of the socialization of the body in *Ritual Reality No. 5* comments directly on the human practice of tool making and consequently the often ritualized remaking of the body itself.

In its second meaning for this work, the drill is also a symbol for acts the body is compelled to perform. One thinks especially of educational and military drills performed through repetition. The firing of a military gun, for example, requires following a precise series of successive acts, each performed identically by all participants. An educational drill is rote learning, the memorization of terms, numbers, and facts. In this sense, drills serve to suppress individuality through repetition in order to discipline complex behavioral habits and knowledge systems for the purpose of reproducing social acts.

In a third meaning, drills also signify aspects of contemporary life. The monotonous sounds of the rotating electric drills parallel the monotonous movements of Katzenstein's body. They serve as reminders of industrial noise in urban centers, and the redundancy of rote activities and behaviors that systematize modern technological existence.

The drill as a sign, then, refers to general bodily states of being: the socialized body, the militarized body, and the modern, or urban, body. The drills also refer directly to Katzenstein's personal experiences, to his body as an artifact, a creator of artifacts, an Israeli soldier, and an urban dweller in Tel Aviv. The multiple meanings of the drill thus imply a narrative of the development of systems by which individual bodies are remade into social artifacts and social structures are imbued with bodily attributes—in other words, a process in which the socialized body engages in ritualized tool making, creating the body itself as artifact. The employment of repetitive behaviors and modes of thought further recreate the body as machine, as institutions mediate and organize individuals within society. Viewing the drill through the prism of a palimpsest, one can see how Katzenstein's work not only exemplifies such a process but also challenges it. The process I have outlined here is usually perceived as linear. The drill, however, denies linearity because it is an overdetermined symbol in which the past contains the now and the future, as the present and the future contain the past.

The multiple meanings of the drill are visually and metaphorically linked to other signs in the work via an actual tool, an intravenous (IV) needle that is inserted in the artist's arm. The needle visualizes a space on the body where pain and healing coexist. For the needle is both a correlative to pain (as a body-invasive tool) and to healing (as a medical tool). To be sure, these two meanings of the needle are highly problematic, for body-invasiveness does not necessarily connote pain, nor does medicine always engender healing. However, for *Ritual Reality No. 5*, even the problematic multiplicity of these meanings is useful: it reinforces the palimpsestic aspects of the artist's work and contributes its manifold of identity.

The visible space in which pain and healing coexist is the area of Katzenstein's

forearm, the space where body and text intersect. A literal lifeline of Katzenstein's blood extends from the needle to the syringe that is the writing instrument of his performance. The complex and often problematic relationship between body and text and their concomitant functions in the construction of individuals and society thus emerge along his bloodline. The artist's body – particularly given his muscular physique – appears physically stable, yet it is conceptually unstable, for he is linked to the heterogeneous meanings his actions have produced, by being bound to the drills. In this way, he embodies the problematic intersection of body and text by making them into a literal action-image.

Furthermore, by using his own blood as the material support of writing, Katzenstein visualizes and exposes aspects of his own corporeal interior. Through this exposition, the power of the materialized world is conferred upon the privatized body. In my interpretation of the artist's work, the drills evidence the multiple conditions forming identity in time, while the exposition of blood (via needle and syringe) marks identity negotiated in space.

Katzenstein writes on a freestanding white wall that is itself another sign with multiple significations. Writing about the function of walls in situations of terror and torture, Elaine Scarry notes: “[W]alls . . . mimic the body's attempt to secure for the individual a stable internal space – stabilizing the temperature so that the body spends less time in this act; stabilizing the nearness of others so that the body can suspend its rigid and watchful postures; acting in these and other ways like body so that body can act less like a wall.”<sup>3</sup> Drawing on her analysis of the phenomenological content of the wall in relation to the suffering body, it is possible to suggest that the wall secures a stable space for Katzenstein's body, situated within the intersection of time and space.

Scarry continues: “[T]he walls, are also, throughout all this, independent objects, objects which stand apart from the body, objects which realize the human being's impulse to project himself out into a space beyond the boundaries of the body in acts of making, either physical or verbal, that once multiplied, collected, and shared are called civilization.”<sup>4</sup> For Katzenstein, who challenges the historical dichotomy between text and body, that which is written on the wall might also be said to be written on and by the body. The text on the wall is both a projection of the body and an instance of culture, written in blood, the exposed interior body made public. Katzenstein seems to suggest that text and body are mutually constituting constructions.

In *Ritual Reality No. 5*, Katzenstein actually writes two texts. The first, referred to above, is written in Hebrew script in blood on the wall: “I went to the man, he was not home so I stopped using it.” The second, in English and Hebrew, is printed: “In our culture language is secret, but we are sending frogmen to you.” Interpreting the Hebrew script written in blood, it seems clear that the artist writes about someone, perhaps himself, who goes to the house of a drug dealer and, upon not finding him home, decides to stop using the drug. But whereas the “I” might stand for Katzenstein, it could also, by extension, refer to

3. *Ibid.*, 39.

4. *Ibid.*



modern Jewish Israelis. The “man” might signify God, a conglomerate assemblage of multiple fathers—father of humanity, father of the Jews, Katzenstein’s own father, or the religious, political, and cultural patriarchal history of the Jews and the land of Israel. In *Ritual Reality No. 5*, the “man” is, in fact, an absent presence. “He” exists, for “he” has a home. But “he” is not present at “his” home. Katzenstein (and all those entities embodied in “I”) stop using “it” because the “man” is absent. The “it,” therefore, may refer obliquely to the institutions that define normative identity and experience. The “it” also stands for those ideological paradigms that separate private and public, body and text, and other binary functions and aspects of being into divided states. In the absence of the “man,” or perhaps because of the absent presence of the “man,” Katzenstein stops using that which is given, identifies that which is, and begins to invent that which will be.

In the English text, Katzenstein writes about language in his culture. Indeed, language as the history of the Jews, the sacred Torah and Kabbalah, is very much considered hidden or secret. However, the text speaks of “frogmen” being sent to us. Frogmen are highly respected, specialist soldiers in an elite command unit. They are often sent out as scouts before a beach landing and are responsible for storming and then clearing the site. In *Ritual Reality No. 5* Katzenstein is the avant-garde frogman, enigmatically clearing the beaches by relaying through language secrets of his culture. He storms the border of collective mind.

The blood script is separated both in terms of form and content from, and yet linked to, the other text that appears on the video screen. The blood script may symbolize what is expected to be interior, private, and secret, and sacred. It is written in the private space of the original performance, in Hebrew, the ancient language of the Israelites. Hebrew is also Katzenstein’s language of origin, and a language certainly less well known than English. The English text may symbolize that which is exterior, public, and known, outside of the actual performance space, a common language. In short, the texts in *Ritual Reality No. 5* directly comment on the meanings and relationships of signs in the performance. They write Katzenstein’s ritual realities. After he resolves to stop using “it” because the “man” is not home—after he resolves to interrogate the symbolic meanings of artifacts and actions—he challenges their attendant implications. The frogman offers his knowledge and understanding of self, history, and culture to his relatives as a palimpsest of humanity.

The conceptual terrain and formal elements in *Ritual Reality No. 5* are similar to those in numerous other works by Katzenstein. A brief explication of one work in particular, *Love Song*, will contribute to an understanding of the development of a significant trope in his work, namely, the exploration of mutually constitutive individual and cultural habits, their relationship to the concept of ritual, and the implications of such.

In the video-performance *Love Song*, Katzenstein, robed in white, languidly rotates in a circle with arms outstretched in the attitude of a Sufi dervish in his

whirling meditation toward union with the Beloved. The outstretched arms can also be seen as crucifixion, Christ's passionate progress toward godhood and salvation. Intravenous needles are inserted in the artist's forearms enabling his blood to flow into tubes connected to syringes that dangle just above the ground, a pure white field, other than the emerging tracings of blood. The audio track of the video is an eponymously titled song, composed and performed by the artist. A hauntingly beautiful melange of synthesized tones and vocalizations continually repeated with slight variations, now and again a dramatic shift in sonic quality and tempo. Katzenstein chants the chorus: "This is a love song / This is a love song / This is a message of love / There ain't no love." Throughout the performance the artist visibly becomes physically stressed—his eyes shift between closed and open and perspiration emerges from his brow. As witness to this meditative action, one wonders if he experiences ecstatic vision or nauseating exhaustion, or perhaps both.

5. *Ibid.*, 34.

6. Kristine Stiles, "Shaved Heads and Marked Bodies: Representations from Cultures of Trauma," *Strategie 2: Peuples Méditerranéens* [Paris] 64–65 (July–December 1993): 95–117, reprinted in *Talking Gender: Public Images, Personal Journeys, and Political Inquiries*, ed. Nancy Hewitt, Jean O'Barr, and Nancy Rosebaugh (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 45.

As with *Ritual Reality No. 5*, a semiotic method of interpretation focusing on the concept of the palimpsest is useful for discerning some possible meanings of *Love Song*. With his outstretched arms, Katzenstein—a modern Israeli Jew—asserts his body as the site of ecstatic and traumatic religious rituals and conflicts. He ultimately calls for the remembrance and honoring of an original principle: love. The allusion suggests a process by which the body becomes overdetermined for the purpose of transcending materiality.

Commenting on the crucifixion of Christ as the center of Christianity, Elaine Scarry writes that "the self-flagellation of the religious ascetic . . . is not (as is often asserted) an act of denying the body, eliminating its claims from attention, but a way of so emphasizing the body that the contents of the world is canceled and the path is clear for the entry of an unworldly, contentless force."<sup>5</sup> This logic, in part, accounts for the acknowledgement of pain that is ever present in religious rituals and their myriad extensions throughout culture. One such extension is depicted in *Love Song*: the shaved head. As Kristine Stiles has written:

Shaved heads inhabit the visual memory of culture, a memory of the history of war, domination, and colonization across whose pages bodies reach back to the Old and New Testaments and forward to the white power of skinheads, the youth paramilitary arm of ultraconservative groups whose theology is based on Scripture and who act out of a belief in their divine right to be on top, where power and sexual abuse fire the cultures of trauma.<sup>6</sup>

The visual link between the artist's shaved head and performance of ecstasy and trauma suggests an astounding and insightful interrogation of the institutionalization of trauma. Similarly, the repetition of movements and vocalizations in the performance connote a primary feature of trauma—the inexpressibility of pain. Repetition-compulsion in such an attempted narrative construction points to the ways in which pain resists language, a fact that is perhaps not incidental,

but essential to its constitution. For as Scarry notes, physical pain has no referential content and as such is why “more than any other phenomenon [it] resists objectification in language.”<sup>7</sup> In this way, *Love Song* can be interpreted as a visual representation of religious and cultural traumas and an attempt to express the pain caused by such traumas. Furthermore, by repeatedly stating that “there ain’t no love,” but that his work is a “message of love,” Katzenstein transforms the difficulty of the narration of pain into a mantra of hope. The artist metaphorically sacrifices himself to express pain, which is foundational to the collective task of diminishing it.

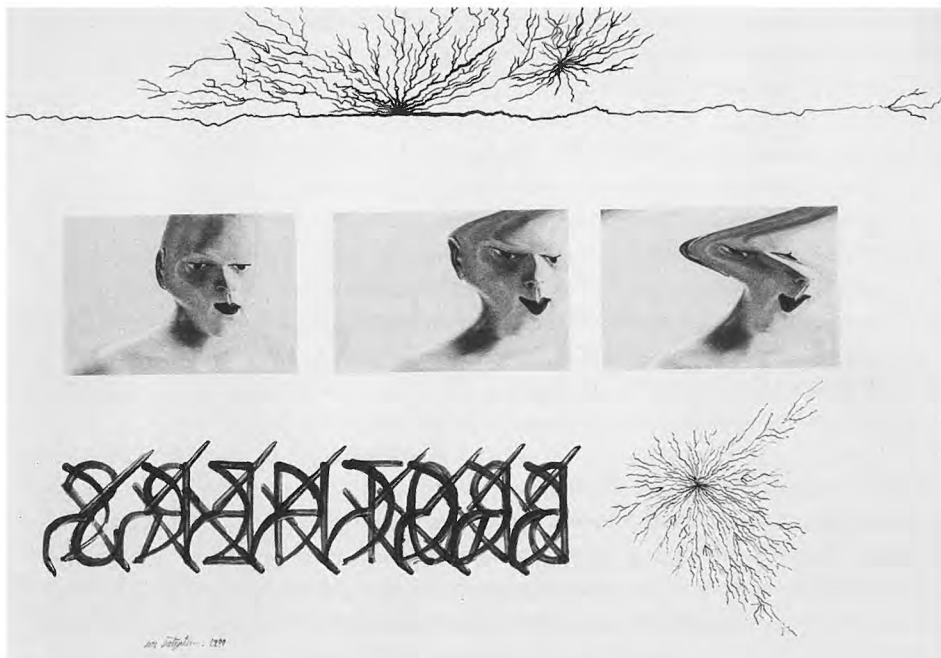
The visualization of pain, and the artist’s fury about the conditions of suffering, may also be seen in Katzenstein’s diverse oeuvre. It ranges from drawings, multimedia installations, and sculptures, to musical compositions. Most significantly, *Blood Drawings* draws viewers into the very spectral materiality of the artist’s life, rendered into pictures. While Katzenstein’s performances can be interpreted through the medium of a palimpsest, his blood drawings can be likened to cartographies of consciousness. In other words, Katzenstein’s *Blood Drawings* can be seen as maps of myriad configurations of personal experiences and aesthetic ruminations. Three of the drawings when decoded read “BROTHERS,” “MEANINGFOOLSISSISTERS,” and “ONEBROTHERDOWN.” They suggest an exploration of a diverse, yet interconnected, terrain — that of relatives, gender, and sexuality.

While the images and configurations of the drawings vary, each contains similar formal elements. In each drawing, an English word is written backward in blood. But this word is obscured by more blood writing that extends from and overlaps the design of the characters in a way that compels the viewer to decode the word. Each drawing also contains an image resembling a network of branching lines that emerge from one central point, also drawn in blood. Each drawing also contains an element drawn in black ink — usually a thick horizontal or semi-circular stroke, running across the picture field. The fourth common element is a single photograph, or a series of photographs, usually representing one of Katzenstein’s sculptures. Each element is set in an expanse of white background. The drawings, therefore, may be understood as singular locations on a map of consciousness. The dense layering of meanings found at each location and the conceptual connections between locations form the particular array.

In the blood drawing where the word “BROTHERS” appears as an overwritten palimpsest, the upper third of the visual plane contains a branching circuitry of lines drawn in black ink and is divided from the lower part of the drawing by a line that extends the entire horizontal distance of the plane. Three photographs



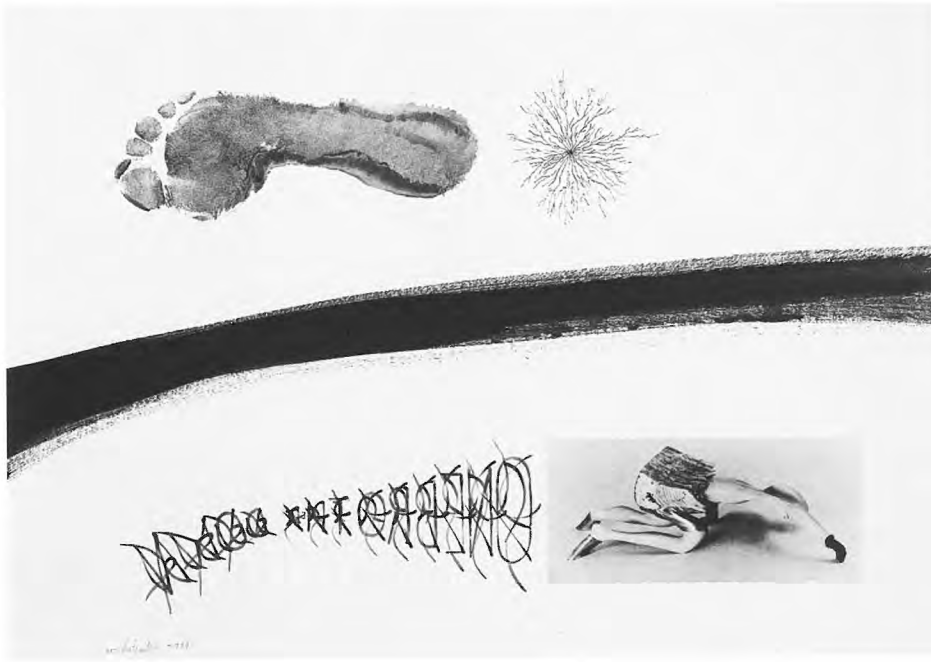
7. Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 5.



form the middle section. The photographs, depictions of a sculptural representation of the artist from his installation *Love Dub* (1996), differ only in that each has been morphed to contort the face of Katzenstein's portraiture. The word "BROTHERS," written in blood, is obscured (as described above), and a network of veins drawn in blood is located below the photographs. "MEANINGFOOLSISTERS" contains three photographs similar to those in "BROTHERS" except that they are morphed differently and the networks of blood lines are separated by a spreading blob of black ink. The visual plane of "ONEBROTHERDOWN" is split in the middle by a large black gestural stroke of ink. The lower third of the plane contains a photograph of a sculpture from *Love Dub*. The upper third of "ONEBROTHERDOWN" contains a network of blood lines and a footprint, presumably of Katzenstein, also drawn in blood. Together, these three blood drawings seem to chart actual bloodlines of relatives, over which are drawn the problems of sexual and gender identity.

Within each blood drawing, black ink appears to be the sign of normativity, or prescribed cultural identity. For example, the branching configuration in "BROTHERS" suggests a network of men or the Family of Man. The blot on "MEANINGFOOLSISTERS" implies the feminine because it is more rounded than linear. The horizontal stroke in "ONEBROTHERDOWN" seems to connote death, a flatline, the end of meaningful extension throughout space. The various blood-drawn networks are representative of the artist himself, for they make his



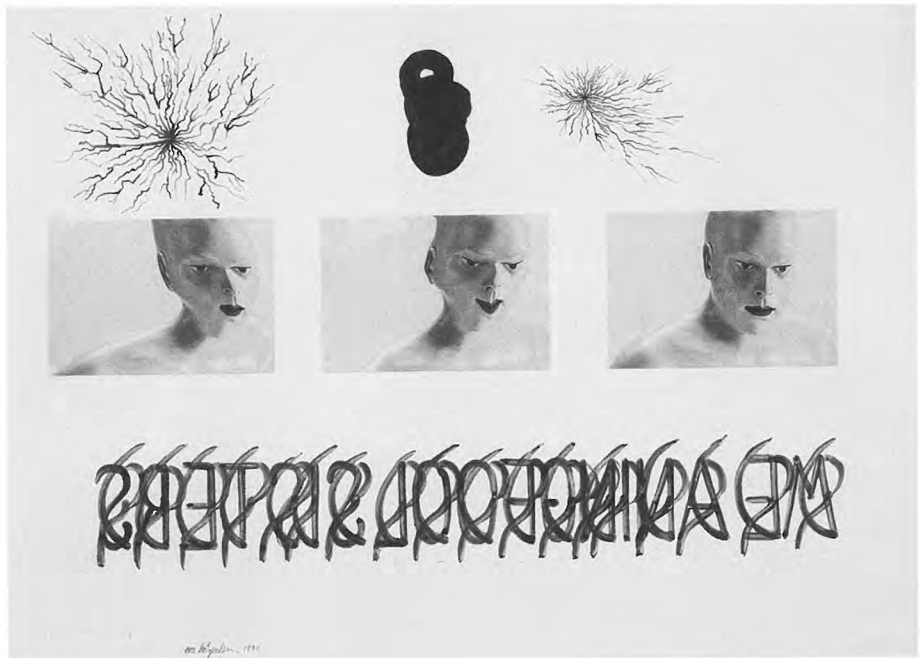


connection to these myriad constructions of identity literal, through the presence of his blood. The photographic images suggest a contested cultural space between the artist as a private individual, embodying various states of existential experience, and a public artist with his concomitant modes of socialized behavior. In this way, the formal use of the photograph refers to the simulacrum of his public life. In other words, Katzenstein exists as himself, connoted by the networks of blood, and as an artist, a creator of artifacts, a nominally defined “man” in society. The photographic representations of the artist are, moreover, four times removed from his life and art-making practice: they are morphed photographs of photographs, photographs of sculptures, sculptures made by Katzenstein.

As Fredric Jameson has written in *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, much contemporary art is dominated by categories of space rather than time. Hence aesthetic forms seem only to demonstrate “through inner contradictions, the enormity of a situation in which we seem increasingly incapable of fashioning representations of our own current experience.”<sup>8</sup> Jameson refers to heterogeneous fragments of representations that lack the capacity to organize past and present temporal manifolds into coherent experience. He then calls for an aesthetic of cognitive mapping, one that actualizes a new mode of representation so that “we may again begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle.”<sup>9</sup> For two

8. Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991), 21.

9. *Ibid.*, 54.



10. Kristine Stiles, "Survival Ethos and Destruction Art," *Discourse: Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture* 14, no. 2 (spring 1992): 74-102.

decades Katzenstein has realized, even anticipated, this vision. By representing personal, religious, and national struggles in aesthetic actions written with his own blood, he has initiated viewers into one man's "capacity to act and struggle." Indeed, the *Blood Drawings* demonstrate what Stiles has called an "aesthetic coefficient for survival,"<sup>10</sup> augmenting understanding of just how deeply Katzenstein participates in his own exploration of the rituals in realities and the realities of rituals.

In his work, Katzenstein interrogates the relationship between private and public lived experiences, and their attendant implications, not only in terms of the formation of identity but how an individual might live and negotiate that identity through meaningful action. He attempts the construction of such meaningful narratives, written in blood, in order to represent, but not reproduce, the transformations of a suffering consciousness. The palimpsestic metaphor that I have used to describe the artist's aesthetic practice may assist in decoding what I believe amounts to Uri Katzenstein's visual theory of existence, one that undermines silences and endows individuals with a sense of agency and transformative power.

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# **SURNAMES**



From the live performance, *Encounter with an Artist*. Uri Katzenstein, 1986



It would be a mistake to claim that Uri Katzenstein's art performances could only be understood in the context of national identity and state culture—of what it might mean to be Israeli. In all of Katzenstein's works, his commentary about what was once known as the human condition has relevance far beyond Israeli shores. Katzenstein's own peregrinations from Tel Aviv to New York and back again—a cultural journey not uncommon for Israeli artists since the early 1970s—imply the desire to step out onto a wide global stage, unbound by a narrow and parochial understanding of ethnic or national definition of art and unencumbered by the political conflicts of the Middle East. But these extensions of individual expression beyond the confines of the nation might also betray a national anxiety over the confrontation of artistic discourse within the public sphere. For in Katzenstein's art—which resonates with fears and emotions that speak to myriad audiences—we can also hear the echoes and ghosts of an intertextual Israeli and Hebrew legacy of artistic confrontation and contestation, of expressive expansiveness and limitation, of the individual coming up against the pressures of a national aesthetic that would encompass and envelope artistic language.

Katzenstein never lets up on the idea that performance—of his body, of himself—is ubiquitous: there are no boundaries between art as separate object and the artist as intact subject. In his work, Katzenstein denies the notion of art as static object and commodity; instead, he makes performance invade every instance and act of the artist's life. For instance, in a videotaped interview with Israel's Open University, Katzenstein makes a characteristic entrance, slowly and carefully negotiating the studio space with whirling electric drills strapped to his legs and arms.<sup>1</sup> This is a modernist, anti-intuitive performance of the dangers lurking in the very banality of the spaces we freely and unconsciously circulate through; what should be unencumbered movement through space is shown to conceal a treacherous landscape that confines and threatens our bodies at every moment, even—or especially—those that seem particularly benign. Katzenstein,

1. *Mifgash 'im oman: uri katzenstein* [Encounter with an Artist: Uri Katzenstein], part of a videotape series, *Omanut 'akhshav* [Art Now] (Tel Aviv: Open University, 1986).

wearing his orange coveralls, plays out Eugene O'Neill's "Hairy Ape": he's a working man whose tools, the very means by which he might participate in an economy of expression and production, create the dangers and alienation that legislate and delimit the body's movement through the social sphere.

Katzenstein explains that it is the self-fright of the performance that interests him.<sup>2</sup> Fear moves him closer to his audience and, more important, makes the performance a very personal demonstration of himself: the fears of injury are *his* fears, and it is this emotion specifically that takes him to the edge—of danger, of art, and, by implication, of expression. But if it is the audience that he wishes to draw closer to his fright, allowing the viewer some understanding of and sympathy with the pain (and "pressure," as he would have it) of negotiating this technologically treacherous space we call the social environment, then his audience here, his interviewer Dalia Manor, certainly betrays what must be a normal reaction for Katzenstein: complete confusion and utter disbelief. Throughout the interview—in her questions and in her face—Manor maintains an expression of incomprehensibility and, perhaps, more than a hint of disgust.

2. *Mifgash 'im oman.*

But Manor's reaction is itself excessive, not exactly staged, but showing too much incomprehensibility, too much disdain for the self-inflicted fear Katzenstein performs. If Manor is some sort of audience surrogate—the opposite of the canned television laugh track, a disgust track—then her complete inability to assimilate the performance begins to implicate her own role in the political aesthetics of the art. For Katzenstein's entrance works less because it turns attention toward him and his performance—Katzenstein is no narcissist—than because it disrupts the poetics of the interview, with its generically static camera and its carefully framed format. Instead, Katzenstein-in-motion quite literally skews the camera angle and moves perspective away from the artifice of the stage, thereby allowing us to see things we were not necessarily supposed to see. This is the subversive act, which pulls control away from the institutional frame of the interview space. Manor's incomprehension and discomfort are institutional incomprehension and discomfort at the way Katzenstein refuses to be easily digested and interpreted according to established frames of reference. The specific institutional frame here is significant: the Open University is Israel's noumenal campus, a popular educational institution that broadcasts itself through the media to the entire population. Manor, as representative of the institution, stands in as representative of the nation at this national television studio: the disgust track becomes the staging of national disgust, the abreaction of state-sponsored learning which tames, indeed "disciplines," knowledge for the sake of a wider, organized community of like-thinking members. And Katzenstein will have none of it.

Katzenstein performs this kind of disruptive deviance all the time, and it might be the decisive clue to a poetics of individualized reaction against institutional meaning and manners. In this context, his dramatic entrance to the television studio—his body in action, negotiating the whirling drills, while Manor

remains static, unmoving, not knowing how to handle the disturbed frame of discourse — parallels other performances in public space, such as his *Meitzag be-muze'on yisra'el* [Performance at the Israel Museum].<sup>3</sup> There he walks through gallery spaces, outrageously attired, with tape recorders hanging from his neck, pounding out a raw rhythmic beat. The crowd, a chance conglomeration of everyday museumgoers, does not know what to make of him, and that's where the performance lies: in the disruption of the institutional scene, a disruption of the surety of the signs of the museum — of the interview as well — to maintain their meaning and force behavior to conform to expected norms. Katzenstein is the discursive excess, the Lacanian leftover that falls outside the tidy limits of what a language — here, that of the museum institution — can handle, and by drawing attention to himself as leftover, he disrupts a sense of unity for this space.<sup>4</sup>

There is something markedly overdetermined in Katzenstein's physical appearance in this performance through Israel's national gallery: the radios, the blond wig, the shorts and dark socks, the army boots. But it is not at all clear whether physicality here figures as ethnic, national, or class critique. The confusion in how to read the performer (what *is* this person?) stresses the difficulty of understanding meaning in the sign, which here, as in most of Katzenstein's performances, is the body. This difficulty and the disruption of a public space work to make this performance modernist too. Katzenstein might break down generic barriers and play in the interstices of art, music, text, and stage, but still, he traverses a public sphere of interaction and encounter. He's Baudelaire's *flâneur*, now perhaps in the postmodern garb of videos and technology, but nevertheless a provocateur of the streets, venting his spleen at social convention and constraint. In *Meitzag*, he's a 1990s grunge amalgam acting out the dare of publicly legislated manners: the “no-spitting-no-radio-playing-no-eating-or-drinking” censures of the New York City subway, which tell us how to behave, or the motivational encouragement on Israeli buses — “Be Polite: Use ‘Thank You,’ ‘Excuse Me,’ and ‘Please’” — that tell us how to speak.

While admitting the blurring of signs and the transgression of boundaries in Katzenstein's art, I still object to Yigal Zalmona's interpretation of these elements in Katzenstein's 1993 exhibition at the Israel Museum, *Patshegen*, which was translated for the show as *Missive*. Zalmona's interpretive essay — he was the show's curator — in the catalogue, “*Shirei 'eres ve'egrofanim*” (Lullabies and Knuckle-dusters),<sup>5</sup> emphasizes the interaction of the three levels of objects presented: neat aluminum casts of the real (mostly bodily representations), objects taken from reality itself (shoes, hair, other clothing, etc.), and, “the living presence” (*hanokhehuyot hehayot*: a decaying sausage, a living aloe plant). Zalmona's title nicely represents the juxtaposition of odd combinations that break down a sense of generic intactness; but his emphasis on the object status of the show misses the role of the artist in the presentation of these objects. The collection of objects themselves might transgress certain institutional boundaries and

3. Videotaped segments of this performance are included in *Mifgash 'im oman*.

4. Slavoj Žižek performs a brilliant reading of symbolic excess in his Lacanian analysis of Charlie Chaplin's *City Lights* in *Enjoy Your Symptom!* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 4ff.

5. *Missive – patshegen* (Jerusalem: Israel Museum, 1993), pp. 5–6.



6. Esther 3:14, 4:8, and 8:13.

7. In "Hevlei lashon" [Language Pangs], in Ch. N. Bialik, *Divrei sifrut* [Literary Criticism] (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1965), pp. 7–18. See also Chana Kronfeld's essay "Beyond Language Pangs: The Possibility of Modernist Hebrew Poetry," in *On the Margins of Modernism: Decentering Literary Dynamics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), pp. 81ff.

8. "Uri Katzenstein," in *Missive-patshegen*, p. 10. The English version of the essay in the catalogue translates "*alimut hasrat tohelet*" as "abysmal violence"; "gratuitous violence" not only truer to the Hebrew but gives a better sense of the post-modern meaninglessness that Fischhoff reads in Katzenstein's work.

9. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1987), p. 180.

10. "Uri Katzenstein," p. 10.

accepted limits of public taste, but admitting the artistic consciousness that performs these objects and places knuckle-dusters next to lullabies becomes a much more subversive act. Performance is everywhere here because of the way the artifacts deny their own power to signify. In themselves, they have no meaning; meaning exists only in the artistic consciousness that leaves a trace on these objects.

The show's title, *Patshegen*, does not simply translate to *missive* in English, but instead points to the interpretive difficulties and problems of the show's object interactions. Katzenstein uses *patshegen* on one level to refer to the meanings in the objects he presents: these are "notes," as he would have us understand the show's title. But *Patshegen* is one of those words that appear only a handful of times in the Hebrew Bible (three, actually).<sup>6</sup> Its full meaning is unclear, and contextual clues are not enough to fill in the definition. The stakes are high since the word refers to the publication and dissemination of the genocidal proclamation in the Book of Esther. Ironically, in the narrative the word implies the reproduction of the sign, even as meaning evaporates in the sign's unique—and obscure—appearance in the text. If this then points to the impossibility of meaning outside of social exchange, of the circulation of linguistic signs within the national arena—a position touted in the 1920s by the national poet, Chaim Nachman Bialik<sup>7</sup>—then we need to read into the word a second, contrasting understanding. If we tweak Hebrew morphology just a bit, we can hear *patshegen* as *fetishgan*, the garden of fetish, which then turns everything back toward the controlling consciousness of Katzenstein himself: the transgressions of discursive boundaries enacted by the juxtaposition of semantically distant objects help define a space in which the artist might be able to control meaning. Now, meaning is performative of the individual, the sign losing any intrinsic value and only signifying through the psychosis that would bring together disparate signs and objects, in clear violation of normative principles.

The disgust provoked by Katzenstein's "gratuitous violence" (*alimut hasrat tohelet*)—Ohad Fischhof's approbatory description of Katzenstein's technique, which he applies particularly to an artwork where Katzenstein nails eels to a wooden floor<sup>8</sup>—is Katzenstein's escape toward expression unfettered by collective boundaries. Disgust closes off aesthetic judgment, as Kant teaches us, and places the art object outside of a representational system where the beauty of form imbues an infinite array of content values: "[I]n that strange sensation [of disgust], which rests on nothing but the imagination, the object is presented as if it insisted, as it were, on our enjoying it even though that is just what we are forcefully resisting; and hence the artistic presentation of the object is no longer distinguished in our sensation from the nature of this object itself."<sup>9</sup> Fischhof would agree, albeit, in a postmodern fashion, valorizing the way Katzenstein's violence demonstrates "waste" (*bizbuz*) and "leads to nowhere" (*lo movilim leshum makom*).<sup>10</sup> But Katzenstein is not a nihilist; he retains and inverts the Kantian valuation of the aesthetic object to invoke moral judgement, as he uses



disgust to break down the representational layers of the sign. The performance of disgust here strives for “nothing but the imagination,” as Kant describes it, allowing for a personal articulation in a language free of social restriction and imposition, free of the signified content-meaning that representation gives to an object. As Katzenstein says to Manor: “[The unpleasant element in my art] is not the goal of the artwork but it is one of the [expressive] means.”<sup>11</sup> The Kantian result of disgust—the encounter with the object *qua* object, unable to signify content—comes close to how the Israeli artist Pinchas Cohen Gan described the goals of his *Normal Art*, art that is “just what it is.”<sup>12</sup> The difference is that while Cohen Gan’s mantra of figure, form, formula responds to and heightens the object status of the artwork, Katzenstein remains focused on the subjective role of the artist. Again, we return to performance as inclusive of art, a stress on the “nothing but the imagination” of Kant’s quotation and not on the object status of art.

In fact, for Katzenstein, the object is never unmediated; it is never “just what it is.” Instead, Katzenstein never denies the multiplicity of valences that provide meaning. His goal becomes, then, to undermine representation, to stage an uncanny reflection on the value of unconsciously accepted intuition, and thus to disrupt any sense of accepted meaning for the sign. This idea is the strength of his recent tattoo project: the tattooed reproduction of a sculpted human figure, an image of a person striving ever higher, reaching beyond itself—a self-portrait from the installation *Love Dub*—onto ten anonymous bodies. The sign doubles on itself, not just as flesh into sculpture into flesh: it is then transformed once again in blood drawings, drawings representing the tattoo using blood extracted from Katzenstein’s own body. The drawing on the body of the body using the body creates quite an uncanny effect: our understanding of the banal—of bodies and figures and the relations between them—is disrupted and disturbed. Not only is the body haunted by the blood of the other, but the body as artistic stage and canvas—as hermetic expressive identity—is undermined and subverted. This is political subversion, where the individual—the figure—of the representation gets life and movement from the body of another. The fragmentary, unframed photos we see of this performance—and it is performance because the figure is always in motion, both up the surface of the body and as it circulates through the public sphere—make the tattoo invasive and uncontrollable, an anarchist hiding in the shadows always already about to throw a bomb at the central powers-that-be. Imagine our fear, our utter shock at the uncanny encounter with the tattoo on the street. The fear of that fear already makes the streets themselves haunted; danger lurks in the possibility that this encounter waits for us on the next body



11. *Mifgash 'im oman.*

12. Quoted in Kristine Stiles, “Rampman against a Portable Field,” in *Figure, Form, Formula: The Art of Pinchas Cohen Gan*, Nancy Margolis, ed. (Greensboro, N.C.: Weatherspoon Art Gallery, 1996), p. 19.

we see. The museum and gallery disintegrate and fail to contain the expressive artwork. And yet, this tattoo is not body art; it is not part of a popular genre of counter-culture types standing outside the museum or gallery. It explodes from within because we cannot place the sign within the comfortable institutions of the social and political sphere. Instead, and this is Katzenstein's triumph, the tattoo becomes *him*: ever struggling but uncannily disrupting the meanings of the spaces we inhabit and through which we move. Katzenstein literally gets under our skin with the tattoo, and through art upsets and distorts the intactness of the social body.

It is this challenge to the controls of the nation, the striving for individual expression through performance, that brings Katzenstein within the intertexts of Zionist debate and Hebrew literature. The refusal to participate in a representational system that transcends the intimate relations between artist and his objects resonates with old debates in the Hebrew public sphere: we can hear Ahad Ha'am and Micha Berdichevsky through the palimpsests of Katzenstein's performances. These two proponents of cultural Zionism—the proposition that a modern Jewish sense of nationhood must first be cultivated before political solutions in Palestine can be sought—focused on the role of individual expression within the nascent national movement: how the articulation of subjectivity must always serve national needs. Their debate, which raged through all the coteries of Zionists in Eastern Europe a hundred years ago, has infected Israeli creativity ever since, even as it became *passé* to invoke the historical arguments of Zionism as having relevance in the contemporaneity of the Israeli present. In fact, the success of Zionism might be measured precisely in the way Israeli society focuses so myopically on the present and away from past legacies: the aversion to history has been dominant in the invention of Jewish modernity. Even post-Zionism, with its intense re-engagement of history, bifurcates a sense of Israeli achievement in the present from the revision of the state's past. But Katzenstein's art, for all of *its* focus on the performative instance, resonates with this conflict over individualism.

Ahad Ha'am, a formidable figure in this history, argued for the subjugation of individualism in favor of national needs. The debate was about literature, but its target was the rejuvenation and reinvention of the Jewish soul: "Good stories from the life of the people, from the past and the present, . . . will bring a great awakening of thought and an expansion of national consciousness in us, and will fit our purposes therefore no less than [abstract theory]. However, the beautiful creation that has nothing but its own beauty, that stimulates the emotions . . . in our situation right now, we argue, our poor literature should not waste its limited power on such things while more pressing issues require attention."<sup>13</sup> By beauty, Ahad Ha'am meant "poesy alone, the out-pouring of the soul";<sup>14</sup> in other words: the expression of individual fear and emotion. Berdichevsky, a representative of a younger generation, countered that the modern Jewish soul

13. "Te'udat hashiloah"  
[Hashiloah Manifesto],  
in *Kol kitvei ahad ha'am*  
[The Collected Writings  
of Ahad Ha'am] (Tel  
Aviv: Dvir, 1947),  
pp. 127–28.

14. "Te'udat hashiloah,"  
p. 128.

needs a complete reintegration of all elements of life, arguing for the full flowering of individual expression as the underpinning of national completeness, including the representation of emotion through “poesy”: “My sorrow is not mine . . . but the sorrow of our entire people, the sorrow of the many people, that became my own sorrow.”<sup>15</sup> Emotion works on a national plane, reflecting the community as much as a poetics dictated to suppress the personal for the sake of the nation.

What is important, as the literary critic Michael Gluzman points out,<sup>16</sup> is the way the two sides of the debate collapse on themselves. The effect of both amounts to something very similar: the imposition of the nation onto Hebrew creativity on every level. The archaism of the debate—these were, after all, little-read intellectuals writing for obscure journals in places like Odessa and Vilna—should not mask the fact that allegory has always been the dominant mode of Hebrew discourse. Meaning is always deferred and detached from the denotative controls of the sign, and displaced to the communitarian needs of first the nation and later the state. Certainly, the origins of contemporary Israeli art performance in the 1970s sought to challenge control of borders, both political and discursive, and the restrictions they imposed. In 1974, when Pinchas Cohen-Gan undertook his *Touching the Border*,<sup>17</sup> attempting, with four others, to transgress Israeli political borders, the action could not end without a textual element. After being stopped by the army in their march across the border, the group buried thirty-nine-inch lead bars engraved with demographic information about the Israeli people. The need for contact, for communication, is articulated clearly within the desire to transgress the limits of what is policed. In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, a war that most Israelis consider as one that ended a step shy of defeat, the discursive gap between individual perception and national rhetoric in Israel began to widen. But if action then demonstrates an expressive response to the impositions of the state on expression, then perhaps Cohen Gan’s stance of objectifying the discursive utterance in the lead bar does not quite succeed in challenging state control enough. As he articulated within a graphic work from that year, “*ani raḥok midai me’omanut*” [I am too distant/far from art].<sup>18</sup> It is unfortunate that the English in the same work is misleading; it reads “I am too upset for art,” which may have been true, but the Hebrew inscribes the failure of the performative act, the inability to put oneself within the action.

Katzenstein closes that distance, and in its collapse we can finally understand and react to the fear and the bodily danger in his work. His entrance into the Open University studio does not mark only the mechanized environment of modernity, full of dangers at every turn. Beyond the universal lesson on the human condition, Katzenstein’s turn to his body—the blood drawings, the tattoo, the whirling drills, the disruption in the museum—challenges the allegorical status of the individual within the Israeli cultural system. The disgust of

15. Quoted in Y. Ch. Brenner, “Micha yosef berdichevsky: dvarim aḥadim ‘al ishiyuto hasifrutit” [Micha Yosef Berdichevsky: A Few Words on His Literary Personality], in *The Collected Works of Y. Ch. Brenner*, vol. 3 (Tel Aviv: Sifriyat poalim and Hakibbutz hameuchad, 1985), p. 831.

16. Michael Gluzman, *Lines of Resistance in Modernist Hebrew Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, forthcoming)

17. See *Figure, Form, Formula*, pp. 4–5.

18. See *Figure, Form, Formula*, p. 5.



Manor, the institutional and national representative, is precisely Katzenstein's weapon, because there are no illusions here of free expressive control. Instead, disgust stymies aesthetic judgment and refuses to allow the sign to represent anything beyond the body. By making his body the object of the art performance, Katzenstein enacts performance on the very site of political contestation.

The strength of Katzenstein's work is its constant doubling and redoubling on the controls and expectations that are built for art. It is for this reason that his sculpture is never truly mimetic or realist. Instead, the form enacts a doubling: the gaze that watches the gazer gazing. Isn't that what *The Family of Brothers* is all about? Representation in the gallery space is never unmediated by the eye of the other, and Katzenstein always repeats the sculptural figure in order for us to understand how art is always already beyond the object. Instead, the sculpture prefigures its own making and is carefully watched and gazed upon by the video camera that reveals the artifice and thus breaks down the transcendent mythological status of the pose.

In the end, the art performance indeed creates a treacherous space — treacherous not for the physical dangers it presents to Katzenstein's body but because of the overlapping and contesting perspectives and discursive expectations it challenges and works to subvert. Out of all this, Katzenstein's body might emerge bruised (or at least bereft of some blood, a token of its own damaged intactness), but what emerges too is a subjectivity struggling to articulate a sense of freedom from institutional — and national — restraint.