



Body, Image, and Fragmentation: On Art in Times of Collapse

A conversation with Roee Rosen about the body as a political space, art in the shadow of violence, and the possibility of bearing an image when reality is unbearable.

/ Roee Rosen February 12, 2026

روعي روزين، السنة مزدوجة، 2025.



[1]

Roee Rosen, *Crying Skulls I Forked Tongues*, 2025.

courtesy of the artist

Reem Ghanayem: In the Gaza War Tattoos, the body becomes a site of memory—not through actual action, but through the image of action. What led you to choose tattoos, particularly tattoos that were never actually inked?

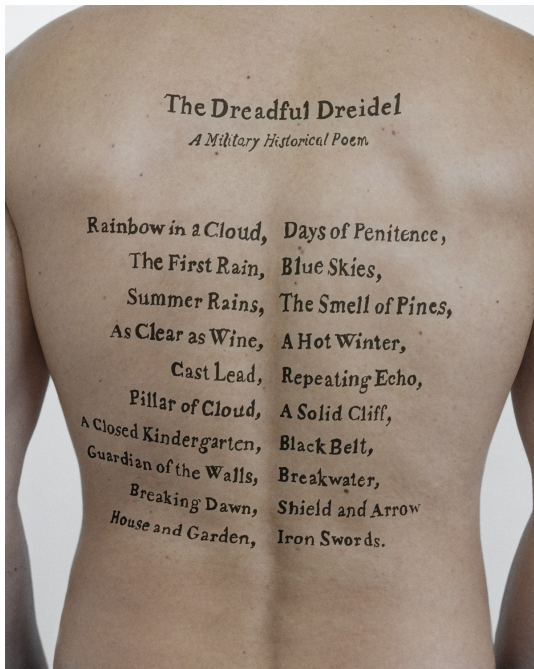
Roee Rosen: To start at the end of the question, I'll tell you that I'm currently working on the second chapter in the series, and this time it will consist of real tattoos. I thought only a handful of people would be interested in getting tattooed, but within an hour of publishing the call for submissions, more people responded than I had images, and the majority, by the way, were women. It's very exciting, both in the transition of art to the body (through the talented hand of tattoo artist Roy veksler) and in the desire to permanently bear images with a critical, disturbing, and rebellious dimension.

But yes, the images in the first part were simulated tattoos created using makeup and Photoshop.



While working on that section, it seemed unlikely to me that enough people would want to get real tattoos. However, there was the advantage of fathoming images that posed no practical obstacles to the models' ability to bear the image or inscription on their skin and in their souls.

[low 07 Military Historical Poem 2024 2.jpg](#) [2]



[3]

Roe Rosen, *The Dreadful Dreidel, A Military Historical Poem*, 2024.

courtesy of the artist

[low 12 Total Victory English 2024.jpg](#) [4]



[5]

Roe Rosen, *Total Victory*, 2024.

courtesy of the artist

The context in which the follow-up works are being created is a group exhibition at the House of World Cultures in Berlin that addresses global fascism. The exhibition will feature The Gaza War Tattoos as well as the film *Out* (2010) contains a sadomasochistic scene that becomes a political exorcism, as the woman who absorbs the pain responds by uttering quotes by Avigdor Lieberman, then a symbol of extreme right-wing ideology. as well as *Vladimir's Night* (2011-2014) in which animated objects torture and murder Vladimir Putin, thereby examining the fascistization of Russia (to describe with extreme brevity). Alongside the older works, there will be a selection that mixes real and imaginary tattoos, in a way I hope adds another dimension of instability and uncertainty.

Regarding the creation of the entire series and your question about tattoos as a means of mediation: Shortly before I started working on the tattoos, I thought it would be impossible for me to respond artistically to the horrific events that began with the massacre on October 7, and continued with war crimes, the systematic destruction of cities, mass starvation, and genocide. At the same time I felt that I couldn't ignore it – like a lump that can neither be swallowed nor spat out. I felt great discomfort with regard to Israeli artistic responses, especially in the first months after October 7.

These expressed genuine pain and shock in the face of a terrible, unprecedented massacre. But it seemed that the perspective of victimhood was absolute, with no expression or reflection on Israel's violence (not to mention its history in relation to current events). In other words, I do not question the feelings that were conveyed: melancholia, grief, anxiety, helplessness. But presenting the self (individual and collective) as an absolute victim involves not reporting on its role as a perpetrator, on its responsibility for the atrocities as part of a collective – and it was very clear the day after October 7 that the Israeli response would be brutal (although I, at least, did not imagine it would reach such proportions).

The sense of eternal victimhood also includes a utilitarian echo of the ever-present Holocaust connection that many (including myself) have pointed out over the years. Recently, in relation to Israel's self-representation after October 7, Naomi Klein pointed at this holocaust instrumentalization in an article in the *Guardian* (a text that, in a way resonating in the context of this conversation, was accompanied by a photograph of a mourning tattoo: an arm with the date 7.10.2023 inscribed on it, reminiscent of the prisoners' tattooed numbers in Auschwitz)¹.

The series was born in a moment of inspiration during a Zoom conversation with two curators and



friends: Ekaterina Diogot and David Riff, from the Steyrischer Herbst festival in Graz, Austria. We discussed the possibility of presenting older works in an exhibition entitled *Horror Patriae*, and one of the works suggested was a tattoo from the days of Operation Cast Lead, the IDF's attack on Gaza during Hanukkah in 2008, which had unprecedented death toll: approximately 1,300 Palestinians killed, under a title taken from a children's song for the holiday ("My uncle bought me a dreidel/ A dreidel made of cast lead"). That image combined a coffin and a Star of David, inside which was the skeletal figure that could be either human or Mickey Mouse, with the inscription "Beyond Guilt," taken from Jean Améry's book, and the years 1948-2008. (The 60th anniversary of the Nakba and the Israeli War of Independence was also the reason for commissioning the work at that time, for a "festive" issue of the culture section of the *Haaretz* newspaper).

The curators see difficulty in the fact that the inscription was in Hebrew, and that the year 2008 would be confusing, so the idea came up to produce a sort of update to the old work. This new version, soon lead to thinking about a collection of images and texts that would appear on the skin of different people, forming a fragmented and intimate body-scape that also serves as a disordered, disrupted chronicle of the sequence of horrors and the rhetoric accompanying them.

[low Help is Coming English 2025.jpg](#) [6]



[7]

Roe Rosen, *Help Is Coming*, 2025.

courtesy of the artist

R.G.: The transition from simulated to actual tattoos marks a shift in the intensity of commitment—not only on your part as the artist, but also the participants.

How do you see this willingness among women to bear images on their bodies that represent not only memory but also resistance, sometimes alien or threatening to the consensus?

Do you see this as an expression of a broader political change, or is it still an unusual act by individuals? I am also interested in the tension you highlight between representation and action—between an image of protest and a body that bears it. Do you think there is still space for aesthetic action as an image, when reality is so extreme, or must art today reach the limits of action,



perhaps even go beyond them?

R.R.: As much as I would like to, I find it difficult to see the willingness of individuals to get tattooed as an expression of change and widespread rebellion. It was moving and encouraging to be in the company of women who chose to get tattooed, and indeed, at least for a moment, there was a sense of marking solidarity with a community of resistance. But this is a minority group, and in a present where horrific war crimes continue to be committed daily, and barbaric positions that support them and explicitly call for extermination have become the norm. Hope is as necessary as it is difficult to hold on to.

Beyond that, you raise two fundamental questions about art at this moment (but in fact, at any moment that can be remembered in Israel-Palestine—we are always in a state of crisis). The questions are framed as a choice between two options: on the one hand, the question of the very necessity of engaging in politics, and on the other, the question of the transition from image to action (or, one might also say, from the imagined to the real). I experience these two problems as self-contradictory, multivalent, and fluid. I feel compelled to touch on the political, and at the same time, I do not want to imagine a situation in which art is required or compelled to do this or that art is denied the possibility of refusing to function properly, of slipping away, of insisting on beauty, and so on.

This tension is not a sophistry, but an essential and troubling issue, I also experience this problematic as a consumer: I am grateful for the moments of pleasure and enchantment, laughter and liberation that art can provide, and at the same time, I sometimes feel repulsed by the absence of the political (or its transformation into something subterranean, inane, ambiguous, or flat). This dichotomy is even more conflicted, more active internally than externally.

Personally, the model I present (if there is one) is the presence of the political when it emerges from within what supposedly does not belong to it and continues to exist: the aesthetic, the humorous, the phantasmagorical, the somatic. But this is not a comfortable position; it has plenty of flaws, and in general, I do not feel that I can be or am entitled to formulate a path for other artists.

Even the transition from “image” to “action” is not something I experience as a stable answer but as an unsettling, confusing act: the product of a processes and circumstances. Let me clarify again: the actual tattooing had a power that was absent from the imaginary tattoos, mainly because the work became a group commitment, and because of the knowledge that this commitment was real and irreversible – but this does not undermine the belief in the power of the imaginary and the fantastical — the unreal — to offer dimensions of radicalism and resistance. I recently watched comedian Nathan Fielder's series “The Rehearsal,” and there is a moment when he blurts out during a conversation “I think honesty is overrated.” This is a wonderful quip, precisely because we all know how important honesty is, but for the trickster, who deliberately undermines direct notions of honesty, there are essential and unique paths to truth (and it also dialectically and critically exposes what is called “honesty” as a concealment that hides layers of truth. In other words, Fielder, like other disturbing artists, also employs active tension and self-contradiction).

R.G.: Your works feature images laden with symbolic meaning, such as the image of a row of corpses under a beach chair that you gave up on realizing because it was impossible to carry on anyone's body. From a Deleuzian artistic and philosophical perspective, do you believe there is a limit to the representation of violence, not as an external moral restriction, but as an internal tension between the aesthetic and the threshold of physical endurance? Do you think that, following Deleuze, the body is an active “drawing surface” for the image, not just its carrier? And do you think that the representation of violence on the body can become not only an act of identity but a creation of reality in itself?

R.R.: The image you describe refers to Donald Trump's delusion about a Riviera in Gaza, apropos war economies. This image continued a series of images of a landscape that extends underground, except that in the previous ones, a single corpse was exposed underground, or something that cannot be seen, whereas here, the equation was mass murder for a resort, and the ground (which is also sea waves) reveals a grid of graves. The image is indeed both too horrific and too large to be implemented as a tattoo.

In the first chapter, there were several works I felt were to crucial for me, which were also impossible



as actual tattoos. I am thinking, for example, of “The Dreadful Dreidel, A Military Historical Poem” a poem whose words are all the names of IDF assaults in Gaza during current century, listed chronologically. This work brings out the perversity of the military's particular linguistic vulgarity, which, to me, seems essential. The first chapter also included two images of burning that became a sleeve tattoo of fire and smoke embracing the arm, which is difficult to imagine anyone having inscribed on their skin: a burning IV and a burning book.

Other images that have proved impractical are two variations on the Golani Brigade's shoulder insignia: in one, the iconic tree becomes a skull that is also a mushroom cloud, and in the other, it is buried with its roots pointing upward. Both images respond to the killing and burial of fifteen paramedics in a close-range shooting on March 23, 2025, executed by soldiers of the Golani brigade. In this case, the military symbol was too disagreeable for the potential tattoo recipients to bear on their bodies.

In other words, the dominant tension is not exactly the product of a general philosophical question, or the relation between the threshold of endurance and an aesthetic position, but rather a dialogical one, which stems from the fact that if the image is likened to a voice that expresses identity and intention. That voice belongs to at least two people: the artist and the person on whose skin the image is etched. This is also a major difference between the first chapter, on imaginary tattoos, and the second. In the first, there were tattooed women, one of them Palestinian (who wished to remain anonymous), that is, to maintain a distance between their position and that of the artist. This is obviously not possible when the skin bears a permanent image.

I find beautiful the idea you proposed, following Deleuze, of a continuous, active, and dynamic presence of the body, beyond the skin's owner being a carrier, is a beautiful thought in my opinion. It illuminates an essential aspect of the tattoo as something that is at once a decisive expression of a particular moment in private and historical time, and destined to change as the body, identity, and the surrounding world evolve. But this is an idea that I gladly adopt from you, not something that motivated me in the work process.

R.G.: Throughout your work, there is a clear focus not only on the boundaries of aesthetics but also on those of representation and the associations between control, body, and subjectivity. If we broaden our perspective a little, not only to tattooing as a practice, but to the body as a site of struggle, consciousness, and memory, do you see artistic creation today as a kind of cultural survival battle? In other words, is the artistic act, especially when it touches on the horror and language of fascism, capable of preserving a crack, not only in political observation, but in the possibility of being human? Or, as the world appears today, is art also doomed to be pushed into places of helplessness and image alone?

[low 05 SafeZone English 2024.jpg](#) [8]



[9]

Roe Rosen, *SafeZone*, 2024.
courtesy of the artist

[Roe Rosen, *Field of Yemen*, 2024.](#) [10]



[11]

Roe Rosen, *Field of Yemen*, 2024.
courtesy of the artist

R.R.: It is true that in my works over the years, the body and bodily events and affects (desire,



torture, stress, excretions) are articulated, just as you said, as a battlefield. This is, for example, the suggestion underlying a work such as *Live and Die as Eva Braun* (which asks the viewer to inhabit the body that will experience intimacy with Hitler) or at the level of the title of Justine Frank's pornographic novel, *Sweet Sweat* (a lust for excretion and smell – but one that engages with arenas such as Jewish mysticism, libertarian ideology, Zionism, surrealism etc).

I hesitate to answer this question, partly because I don't see art as one thing, but rather as a diverse and incoherent range of potentials and positions, and mainly because I don't feel I have any answers. If I remove the definite article from the word “art” and think on a personal level, it seems to me that always, and even more so today, our very survival in the face of horror requires fragmentation (here the shadow of Deleuze and Guattari appears again). It is clear that when the morning coffee comes along with news of the systematic killing of starving Palestinians waiting in lines for food, and in the face of unimaginable dimensions of destruction, evil, denial of the other, historical and physical erasure, in the face of all this, an aesthetic act feels insignificant, irrelevant, and often impossible. Perhaps we must emigrate from here in order to return to producing, for example, romantic comedies or simply landscape paintings. Regulating one's breathing, the belief that there is room for small pleasures, if available, human contact, all of these become survival skills, as does clinging to the absurd and infantile, but also so real that it recognizes a precious horizon of liberation and humanity in the aesthetic act.

But I want, at least at this late stage of the conversation, to return the question to you: how do you see the act of art, as well as poetry, conversation, editing: your creative practices in the face of the horrors of war and mass murder?

[Roe Rosen, *Listening*, 2024.](#) [12]



[13]

Roe Rosen, *Listening*, 2024.
courtesy of the artist



[Roe Rosen, Landscape with a bed, 2024.](#) [14]



[15]

Roe Rosen, *Landscape with a bed*, 2024.

R.G: Thank you for the question, Roe, and for your answer. It seems to me that these days, when words feel too small in the face of the horror, and every gesture seems anachronistic or submissive, it is precisely artistic action that survives as one of the last ways to hold on to the possibility of humanity. I write even when I have nothing to say. Not as a response, but as a physical necessity. Pain that sinks into words, just so it doesn't fall apart. In this space, poetry, too, is not "content" but a form of existence. So, in the hours when reality seems like a gaping crack with no echo, I write:

Here I die the death of a Palestinian poetess.
Then I live anew as a Palestinian poetess,
Becoming, with agonizing leisure,
A mystical ode that has traversed nothingness twice over²

This poem, in my view, does not attempt to represent. It is neither a symbol nor a record. It is a physical, political, almost mystical act of survival amid collapse. And as you wrote, there is no necessary distinction between image and action. Sometimes the very act of being in tension is the action. The fact that you gave up on a particular tattoo does not seem to me like hesitation, but rather an acknowledgement of the body as a witness—not as a surface, but as a bearer of pain, of memory, of a language that cannot be translated. And perhaps this is where our paths converge: in the idea that the artistic moment is not an interpretation of the world, but a place where it is being breathed into new life.

R.R.: There is a kind of breathing motion in this moving poem, a contraction and expansion of death returning to life, and at the same time there is also tension between here and there: death "here," that is, in Israel, of the Palestinian poet with Israeli citizenship, and the death of a Palestinian poet 'there' (and all this passes through the "twice nothingness"). I spoke a little at the beginning of the conversation about different artistic and human responses among the Israeli-Jewish community, and I am curious to hear from you, if I may, about the problematic nature and character and experience of the relationship between a Palestinian who is a citizen of the State of Israel and the Palestinians in Gaza and the Territories in this ongoing present, about this relationship between belonging and



separateness.

R.G.: Thank you for your very accurate reading of the poem and for inviting me to continue a little further into the truly sensitive place that may always be hidden between the lines: the relationship between *here* and *there*, between a Palestinian woman living in Israel and a Palestinian woman who is being erased in the Gaza Strip, or the West Bank, or in exile. It is a relationship to which I have no stable answer. I cannot speak of “dual identity” because the duality itself is not symmetrical. Nor can I speak of a rupture, because sometimes it seems to me that there was never any wholeness.

What there *is* is constant *friction* between what I can see and what I am prevented from experiencing, and am also *responsible* for, and at the same time. I am not there, but I am also not *not* there.

And perhaps most of all: I am too close to remain silent, and too distant to speak on behalf of others. In this sense, my writing, whether poetry, conversation, or editing, does not function as a bridge. Nor is it an attempt to unite or bridge the gap. Instead, it is being *within the gap itself*.

I sense the Palestinian experience not as a single identity but as a layered sequence of pain that overwhelms me in different ways: through language, the body, glances, silences. Sometimes, it is precisely my inherent proximity to an Israeli identity that intensifies my perception and suffering—because I am skilled at reading the denial. And so, I often feel detached: from both the howl and the silence. And yet, it is precisely this detached, unresolved place that has become the terrain from which I write.

Perhaps this is what gives art its power in moments like these: not the assertion of a stable position, but the ability to *remain present* in the cracked, trembling, uncertain space. And to breathe there. In light of this moment, do you see art as a space where it is possible to bear division, contradiction, and non-belonging, without seeking to heal them, or is it, like the body, merely a witness to the fracture, unable to transcend it?

R.R.: I feel that indeed, throughout our conversation, we have both been groping around situations of fragmentation and contradiction, and even if not “disconnection,” then certainly criticism and skepticism regarding positivist forms of belonging.

The term “testimony to the rupture” that you used resonates with me; the rupture and crisis, the genocide and famine in Gaza, and the moral disintegration in Israel continue and worsen as we conduct this dialogue, and therefore art that addresses this amid the turbulent events willingly relinquishes the claim to stability, accuracy, and “historical perspective;” it is a kind of convulsive testimony, whose meanings change as it is created. There are images whose survival is also a record of change (the only image that recurs in

both chapters of the series is an abstract image of a tunnel in the heart, but the underground existence in Gaza, both of Hamas and of the hostages, is not the same existence. Sometimes, the power lies precisely in the fact that the image's meaning changes completely. In this context, I would like to mention a series of paintings by another artist who responds to the ongoing events: the young artist, who used to be my student, Tal Hagi.

[Tal Hagi, Market in Rafah, 2024, oil on canvas, 120X80 cm \[16\]](#)



[17]

Tal Hagi, *Market in Rafah*, 2024, oil on canvas, 120X80 cm

courtesy of the artist

Her gaze has been directed at the war in Gaza since October 7, and she does so through pictorial adaptations of photographs from social media and news sites: from IDF soldiers wearing Palestinian women's clothing, through newsworthy moments such as the return of hostages, to images of Palestinian suffering. It is a deceptive painting because it is deeply rooted in the tradition of painting, the creation of beauty, and classical genres: landscape painting, still life, portraiture, historical painting, all of which echo the experiential duality between the tendency to view painting as an aesthetic, reflective, stable act, and the fact that changing reality also changes them.

Thus, the paintings that Tal Hagi created during the first months of the bombing of Palestinian cities, depicting food trade, refugee convoys, or ruined buildings, now seem almost nostalgic, because the city, Rafah, for example, is still there. This archaism adds another dimension of tragedy to the painting: it arouses an almost physical desire to stop reality at that moment, which was undoubtedly frightening, but still less frightening than what came immediately after, still allowing for reconstruction. In this sense, there is an almost performative dimension to the creation of these silent images, and gradually I feel more and more that what is generally understood as a weakness ("not enough distance") can be an essential quality. As the genocide, destruction, famine, and transformation of Israel-Palestine continue, I may seek the opportunity to produce the third chapter of the Gaza War tattoos.

[Roe Rosen, *Burning IV*, 2024](#) [18]



[19]

Roe Rosen, *Burning IV*, 2024

courtesy of the artist

[Roe Rosen, *Burning Book*, 2024](#) **[20]**



[21]

Roe Rosen, *Burning Book*, 2024

courtesy of the artist

- [1.](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2024/oct/05/israel-gaza-october-7-memorials) Naomi Klein, "How Israel Made Trauma a Weapon of War," [The Guardian](https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2024/oct/05/israel-gaza-october-7-memorials), October 5, 2024, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2024/oct/05/israel-gaza-october-7-memorials> [22]
- [2.](#) Poem translated into English by Nancy Roberts.

Source URL: <http://tohumagazine.com/article/body-image-and-fragmentation-art-times-collapse>

Links

- [1] <https://tohumagazine.com/sites/default/files/low%20Crying%20Skulls%20I%20Forked%20Tongues%202025.jpg>
- [2] <http://tohumagazine.com/file/low-07-military-historical-poem-2024-2.jpg>
- [3] <https://tohumagazine.com/sites/default/files/low%2007%20Military%20Historical%20Poem%202024%202.jpg>
- [4] <http://tohumagazine.com/file/low-12-total-victory-english-2024.jpg>
- [5] <https://tohumagazine.com/sites/default/files/low%2012%20Total%20Victory%20English%202024.jpg>
- [6] <http://tohumagazine.com/file/low-help-coming-english-2025.jpg>
- [7] <https://tohumagazine.com/sites/default/files/low%20Help%20is%20Coming%20English%202025.jpg>
- [8] <http://tohumagazine.com/file/low-05-safezone-english-2024.jpg>
- [9] <https://tohumagazine.com/sites/default/files/low%2005%20SafeZone%20English%202024.jpg>
- [10] <http://tohumagazine.com/file/roee-rosen-field-yemen-2024>
- [11] <https://tohumagazine.com/sites/default/files/low%2001%20Field%20of%20Yemen%202024.jpg>



- [12] <http://tohumagazine.com/file/roee-rosen-listening-2024>
- [13] <https://tohumagazine.com/sites/default/files/low%2015%20Listening%202024.jpg>
- [14] <http://tohumagazine.com/file/roee-rosen-landscape-bed-2024>
- [15] <https://tohumagazine.com/sites/default/files/low%2016%20Landscape%20with%20a%20bed%202024.jpg>
- [16] <http://tohumagazine.com/file/tal-hagi-market-rafah-2024-oil-canvas-120x80-cm-0>
- [17] https://tohumagazine.com/sites/default/files/Tal%20Hagi%2C%20Market%20in%20Rafah%2C%202024%2C%20oil%20on%20canvas%2C%20120X80%20cm_2.jpg
- [18] <http://tohumagazine.com/file/roee-rosen-burning-iv-2024>
- [19] <https://tohumagazine.com/sites/default/files/low%2009%20Burning%20IV%202024.jpg>
- [20] <http://tohumagazine.com/file/roee-rosen-burning-book-2024>
- [21] <https://tohumagazine.com/sites/default/files/low%2010%20Burning%20Book%202024.jpg>
- [22] Naomi%20Klein,%20“How%20Israel%20Made%20Trauma%20a%20Weapon%20of%20War,”%20The%20Guardian,%20October%205,%202024,%20<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2024/oct/05/israel-gaza-october-7-memorials>