

The Complete Jessy Cohen Museum

The Complete Jessy Cohen Museum is an ongoing project established by artists Effi & Amir together with Igal Ophir, Yaakov Erlich, Haviva Barkol, Pnina Barkol, Dvora Harel, Malka Cohen, Ruti Mizrahi, Tikva Sedes, Rachel Polet, Mimi Rosenberg, Ada Rahamim, and many more residents of the Jessy Cohen neighborhood. The Museum is curated by artists, residents and curators and offers a model of joint ownership by both artists and non-artists.

The project began with the residency of artists Effi & Amir who worked at the Center for a six-month period starting in April 2016. Their first endeavor was to put together the Museum team from among the local residents who wanted to take part in the project.

During their previous residency in the Jessy Cohen neighborhood in 2011, Effi & Amir initiated the *Jessy Cooks* project, in which thirty-three neighborhood residents were filmed preparing a dish of their choosing



Activity period: Since 2013

The Complete Jessy Cohen Museum Effi & Amir

The Complete Jessy Cohen Museum is by no means complete, nor is it exactly a museum.

The "museum" part of the *Complete Jessy Cohen Museum* is not an institution, but rather an artistic operation. In other words, it is a fictive museum. A kind of imposter. This act of impersonation is symbolic. It encapsulates the claim, the belief and even the demand for establishing a true neighborhood establishment. The title of "museum" itself confers authority and

power which, by means of its activity, are passed on to the local residents who are involved in its creation and content production.

But the concept of "museum" is not simply a symbolic costume worn by the *Complete Jessy Cohen Museum*. It is also a set of working practices: collection, research, archival work, selection, curation and presentation, as well as a course of action that invites analysis, criticism and implementing an approach. These practices are employed over time in an ongoing process of accumulation, buildup and deconstruction. It does not strive for one particular goal so much as weave and unravel, constantly taking shape and shapeshifting, enabling the kind of reexamination that can reveal new connections, possible narrative threads and alternative formats¹.

In the case of the *Complete Jessy Cohen Museum*, this process of ongoing formation is sustained not just by the richness of its findings, of items, memories and documents, but also through interactions, engagement and ongoing dialogue with the current neighborhood and its residents both past and present.

¹ This can be considered in light of how Georges Didi-Huberman understood Aby Warburg's Mnemosyne Atlas as an act of renewing the gaze and creating new meanings by re-editing, comparing various documents and texts, reorganizing elements in space (physical and imagined) and creating relationships between them.

מקור: כיתרת אום צילום: תום בוקשטיין
 From the exhibition *Homeroom Class*. Photo: Tome Bookshtain

The first exhibition at the museum went up following major ground work which included meetings with dozens of residents, past and present, local officials, professional and amateur archivists. We gathered material then documentation to be sorted and mapped. Most importantly, a core group of dedicated residents was formed. The exhibition was comprised of two parts: a timeline representing an eclectic neighborhood chronology as well as multi-layered mental mapping of the space of the neighborhood.

This exhibition served and continues to serve as a foundation from which the project's next stages are conceived and developed. Put together by the project's participants, it constitutes a common denominator and a jumping off point for future activity.

The Complete Jessy Cohen Museum's curatorial committee — whose members include neighborhood residents, project leaders and the CDA staff — meets annually to decide what the museum will engage with that year and which artist will head the project.

In 2017, Gal Leshem was chosen to lead a project focusing on the local school, Weizmann, which was established in the neighborhood's early days and which, in many ways, represents the Israeli melting pot approach of the state's early years. The school

itself closed in 2011, but the building which housed it is now home to the CDA and *The Complete Jessy Cohen Museum*.

In 2018, Tamir Erlich led a project regarding the archaeological site at the heart of the neighborhood which never received official recognition. In the first stage of setting up the museum, the existence of the site along with findings from its excavations, conducted in the early 1960s, were revealed and brought to the attention of local residents. Besides the presentation of the findings themselves, Erlich's project dealt with questions of nativity and authenticity, originality and imitation, place and ownership.

In 2019, in reaction to the municipally declared neighborhood renewal project — which brought up various concerns among the residents — the question of 'what might be lost' arose, and with it the need for creative memorializing. That year, Inbal Helzer took on the project, *Mini Jessy Cohen*, which centered around a utopian model of the contemporary neighborhood.

The Complete Jessy Cohen Museum is a museum of a place, as opposed to a particular discipline. It is a process as a tool for formulating an attitude to different aspects of the place. It aspires to create a new, multidimensional picture of the place, not by means of cosmetic changes, but through a longterm process of confronting the internal and external perspectives.

This constant back-and-forth between the broader external and a more personal and experiential perspective makes it possible, on the one hand, to be deeply involved, included within the gaze and subject to the fragility and vulnerability inherent in that. On the other hand, it preserves a critical distance, making it possible to remain open to additional, even contradictory voices, and interpretations that are not necessarily consistent with that same personal experience.



Meir Tati in conversation
with the Complete Jessy
Cohen Museum team
July 2020

Tikva Sades: throughout the process we learned to better acquaint ourselves with the neighborhood, we were exposed to local sites we didn't know existed. And thanks to that exposure, people who used to live here came and told us more things we didn't know, and it was good to be reminded.

Meir: You could say that the project broadened the historical vision of the neighborhood and became a site of learning.

Tikva: It gave us tools for collaborative work. We couldn't wait for the next project — and that's not to be taken for granted for people our age. We come to hear, create, help... It gave us a lot. Each project took us one step further and expanded our knowledge.

Effi Weiss: One of the high points, at least in my opinion, was at our last meeting, when you brought up ideas, some of which you can carry out yourselves, independently, or with a little assistance. That was when I realized that this project had become yours. I saw the potential for advancement in how the project is conducted, and that's where I wanted to go.

Meir: If I looked at this project in terms of the hierarchy of entrepreneurs and partners, this was actually the moment

when everybody was on the same level, and what was important for them was the level of activity and the place of the participants within the project hierarchy.

Amir Borenstein: That was a condition for us. We didn't see this project happening without a group of people from the neighborhood. We wanted to first find the group and then begin the project. It's not a project with goals set out in advance — there's a starting point from which things begin to take shape.

Effi: It's a very complex process, not just for us but for the participants too. We didn't define a goal, but had to believe in something, together, without knowing exactly what it was.

Tikva: It was the collaboration itself that motivated us to carry on. We didn't feel alone, and the project's success was not just important to us, but to all of the other partners too.

Ada Rachamim: For me, the first project that we did with the museum, when we gathered photographs, brought us back to the years when I lived [here] in the neighborhood and was a part of its history.

Jessy Cohen has a bad reputation, and I always explained to people from outside that it wasn't the way they thought. The whole time I lived in the neighborhood I never heard anything about violence, because there were good social relations.

The commercial center had everything we needed. And I told people about the work that we did with the Jessy Cohen Museum, a deep dive into the neighborhood's history, finding out about the archaeological mound that was close to my house and all of that helped clarify, for anyone who saw or heard about the project, that the neighborhood wasn't just those negative things and that stigma.

Mimi Rosenberg: I have to be honest. I came to the neighborhood in 1972. I was here for the neighborhood revitalization but I wasn't familiar with its whole history. The first part [of the project] created an opening that I was not familiar with, and there were fascinating stories.

The different stages of the project made me go through a personal artistic process the whole way. Everything was done one step at a time — the initial research, Tamir Erlich's project and the rest. It's hard for me to say exactly what the process was, but it was meaningful for me and it is inseparable, in a way, from other neighborhood activities at the center, which are very significant for the youth and other groups. It was a kind of self-enrichment the whole way through. These are the things that, when I tell my friends, they say I had a great experience and then when they see the things that we created they are surprised.

Avigail Surovich:
You could say that
as a result of your

involvement in this project you developed a more meaningful connection to the center and its other activities as well.

Inbal Helzer: When I joined, it was clear that the project belonged to the group and was not mine [as an artist], and that I would have to help the group realize the idea that they had. There were two groups in this project – yours and the group of children from the school – and the project began from two completely different perspectives. You spoke about the neighborhood's history and how proud you are of it and wanted me to help you find the space to realize that feeling. The second group that I worked with was about thirty kids, from which only one girl was willing to say that she lived in Jessy Cohen. The project developed out of the image of Jessy Cohen – between what people think of Jessy Cohen, including the children who go to school in the neighborhood, to what you want people to think of the neighborhood. And I think that if earlier on there had been any attempt at some hierarchy – what is the role of the artist, of the group and of the participants – here a different group of participants was included.

If the project is yours, first and foremost, and after that mine, then the center's, then of all of the other residents of the neighborhood that we invite to participate, there are a lot of opinions. Which also makes me think about the future of the project, and the relationship and attitude of

those who have been here for a long time. I will never have to convince you to participate. Even when it was really cold on the second floor, all of you still showed up and cut straws because it was important, and from that came everything that had built up in all of the Jessy Museum's other projects. There are those who we invite into some fantasy that the museum knows how to present. In my case it was computer games and TikTok. It could be any other fantasy, but that's where you meet with the reality and much more complex opinions.

Dvora Harel: I came to the neighborhood in 1988. Together with Effi, in the first phase of the project, I began to understand all kinds of things about my own personal contributions in the community. To make it greener. We went through a journey with them to introduce them to the place I live and the way I see it. That expanded the connection between the people in the neighborhood. Yesterday I went to work in the special education preschool beside the sports hall and there I met other women who live in the neighborhood.



Just the fact that I knew they were also from the neighborhood gave me a sense of special connection with them, and that's something that this project gave me. I would like the museum to continue working and maybe even be a tourist center. I've even started learning to draw, which is something that would never have happened if I hadn't been a part of this project.

Amir: I hear all these ideas that come up and I think that there is something deep here that brings everyone together. The way we thought

about the project at the beginning does not need to define the final outcome — when a process has a goal it becomes a project, and when there's no goal it becomes a way, a search. And what the museum chooses to present are the results of that way. A kind of process that's much healthier, more organic, especially when there is a connection with a place. People change, demographics change, reality changes and the place responds to reality, and that's something that has been preserved over the years.

Effi: I think that what I'm hearing from all of you is the feeling of belonging, and I understand that something has been built. We have built a narrative and the ability to relate to a place in a different way, not just in the daily, emotional dimension, but a broader perspective. The ability to place myself in this space within this history.

Tikva: Thanks to the process I went through, I took part in the establishment of a club for young retirees. There's a need to contribute to the neighborhood, to recruit people to set this thing up. Things stopped because of Corona and I saw that people really need it, so we started holding meetings outside.

Meir: I want to say something related to what Inbal said, related to the failure between the historical reminiscence of the neighborhood residents and their desire to change the way this place is perceived, and the TikTok generation

that is settling in the neighborhood. I'm putting it as a question because what interests me is the future of the project — where can and should the museum go? The young generation is the Achilles' heel.

Effi: At the last meeting, when they began bringing up specific ideas, Dvora mentioned a kind of database or archive of skills among people from the neighborhood. Maybe within that database there would be ideas for continued activities. One of the things is to think up strategies relating to the question of how the museum can expand to include other groups of people. When we established the museum, we thought that it would be a tool through which we could approach all kinds of topics that are problematic or come to the surface. There is a situation and when we want to address it we say, "okay, let's bring this issue into the museum, we'll process it and work on it."

Meir: You mean that we have to engage with the here-and-now, to solve current things that are happening now through art, and deal less with the neighborhood's past.

Effi: The way I see it, that's the next stage for the museum. I feel that engaging with the past was essential — we have to understand where we are and where it all comes from, and so that's important. That is a chapter of the museum that will always remain. But it must become a platform.



Amir: A neighborhood tool of thought.

Meir: It's a little like the process of the CDA. In its first decade it put on exhibitions and in its second decade it began to address the community. So with the museum too — the first stage was community, and now it wants to work with the community in some conceptual way.

Effi: Right. But also we will always do exhibitions.

Amir: That's its method of communication, it's a place that communicates in that way, through shows. I also wanted to discuss the target populations. The big challenge is to reach the residents between the ages of 25 to 50. That population is least accessible to us, because they usually work and have kids. But they are very important to the museum. Youth have other activities bringing them in and out of the center. If the museum could draw those people in and give them something which would be worth leaving the house after a day of work, that would be something important.

Ada: I would like there to be more connection with the Ethiopian community. They are relatively new in the neighborhood and their culture isn't represented in the project.

Inbal: As Effi and Amir said, the projects together bring about new possibilities for neighborhood narratives. In previous projects there was a

move in terms of focus, from the past forward, integrating imagination. I think that the next step should emerge from the present. I think that the documentation-preservation pursuit, as much as it's meaningful, no longer needs to be our jumping off point. I loved the idea of a museum of the everyday, even though I don't have any idea for how we would realize that. Exciting ideas came up like the neighborhood skills pool for the museum, which would deal with real issues.

I think that would bring added value to the museum. For example, if we produced a list of everyday problems in the neighborhood — like one of the girls had said, the younger generation is focused on what there isn't, what they don't have, and it's hard to break out of that mindset — so we challenge the assumptions that classify them as problems. After all, what artists do is to take time, expanding the issue as a process not a solution. So what would happen if the neighborhood's real problems were discussed with artistic tools, which don't come from seeking a solution but from expanding the present reality?

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