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The museum in the palm of your hand: presenting the Israel Museum through ICT

Susan Hazan*

1. *Introducing the Israel Museum*

The Israel Museum is the largest cultural institution in the State of Israel and is ranked among the leading art and archaeology museums in the world. Founded in 1965, the Museum houses nearly 500,000 objects across its encyclopedic collections, ranging from prehistory through contemporary art and includes the most extensive holdings of Biblical and Holy Land archaeology in the world.

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This chapter will present the museum as viewed through its electronic footprint - its bi-lingual website. The electronic delivery of the museum not only reflects the sense of the scope and quality of its collections including: fine art, archaeology, and Jewish art and life; presenting the history of world culture from nearly one million years ago to the present day, but also the many events, and cultural and educational activities that go on in the museum campus throughout the year.



Fig. 1. Anish Kapoor's Turning The World Upside Down, Jerusalem (2010)

The concept of the museum's website is of a white cube – a neutral white space that relies on its basic geometrical proportions to set off the collections and frame the exhibitions. In order to present the richness of the Israel Museum dynamic, its online presence incorporates many different kinds of solutions; a collections-based online archive, a fully searchable exhibitions database; including 800 exhibitions, from 1992 to today; several virtual walk-throughs of the campus and exhibitions, and five, fully scrollable, online manuscripts. While delivering the museums' encyclopedic content online through traditional Web 1.0 solutions, the museum also maintains a robust Web 2.0 presence through its Hebrew and English Facebook pages, Twitter, and YouTube activities. This chapter describes how the institutional website plays a critical role in welcoming not only those who plan to visit in person and may come to the website for current information, but also for those who may not intend to visit the museum in person, and may wish to enjoy its holding from their home or office, or school computer or over their smartphone, when the museum is delivered straight into the palm of your hand.

All of the museums holdings showcased in its permanent exhibitions in the physical galleries are presented online. Visitors can explore the three curatorial

Wings; The Fine Arts Wing, The Archaeology Wing, and the Jewish Art and Life Wing in detail where each object and work of art is presented with rich descriptions for the pleasure and indulgence of the diligent visitor (http://www.english.imjnet.org.il/htmls/page_1937.aspx?c0=15404&bsp=12729). As an innovative feature we invite users to search the collections using Imaginative Access, an entirely different kind of search. Visitors can search on more than one term (idea) and these ideas are instantly combined in the search results to help think imaginatively. Ideas are simply typed in and works and objects semantically associated appear automatically highlighted in the description (http://w.mnemotrix.com/texis/isrmus/think_im). In this way visitors can browse the collections intuitively; make their own connections and forge their own associations.

2. *The Museum Campus*

In the summer of 2010, the Israel Museum completed the most comprehensive upgrade of its 20-acre campus in its history, featuring new galleries, entrance facilities, and public spaces. Most important were the consideration of the public's flow throughout the galleries and the cohesive narrative of the exhibits. The museum's collections of fine art, archaeology, and Jewish art and life now come together to present the history of world culture from nearly one million years ago to the present day.



Fig. 2. View of the Museum

Beyond the galleries lies the Billy Rose Art Garden. Designed by the Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi, the Garden is located on the western slope of the Museum's campus. It is divided into wide, crescent-shaped sections

arching upward and supported by high walls made of rough fieldstone. As in a Japanese Zen garden, the ground is covered in gravel, and paths lined with local plants and trees connect the different sections. A multitude of materials were incorporated into the garden's design: stones of different kinds and sizes, exposed concrete, and water. Walls enclose smaller spaces and rectilinear terraces of the garden, and echo the shapes of the Museum's buildings. Combined with an Oriental landscape and an ancient Jerusalem hillside, the garden serves as the backdrop for the Israel Museum's display of the evolution of the modern western sculptural tradition. On view are works by modern masters including Jacques Lipchitz, Henry Moore, Claes Oldenburg, Pablo Picasso, Auguste Rodin, and David Smith, together with more recent site-specific commissions by such artists as Magdalena Abakanowicz, Mark Dion, James Turrell, and Micha Ullman.



Fig. 3. Space that Sees, James Turrell

3. *The Museum Renewal and the Curatorial Wings*

In the summer of 2010, the Israel Museum completed the most comprehensive upgrade of its 20-acre campus in its history, featuring new galleries, entrance facilities, and public spaces. The three-year expansion and renewal project was designed to enhance visitor experience of the Museum's collections, architecture, and surrounding landscape, complementing its original design by Alfred Mansfeld and Dora Gad. Led by James Carpenter Design Associates of New York and Efrat-Kowalsky Architects of Tel Aviv, the project also included the complete renewal and reconfiguration of the Museum's Curatorial Wings.

An integral component of the Israel Museum's campus renewal project is

the complete reconstruction and reinstallation of its three collection wings for archaeology, the fine arts, and Jewish art and life, each now centrally accessible through the new gallery entrance pavilion. Merging the Museum's new curatorial vision together with innovative installation design, the renewed galleries enable visitors to navigate intuitively through the Museum's encyclopedic collections, following the timeline of material culture from prehistory in the ancient Near East to contemporary art worldwide.

4. *Samuel and Saidye Bronfman Archaeology Wing*

The Archaeology Wing tells the story of the ancient Land of Israel – home to peoples of different cultures and faiths – using unique examples from the Museum's collection of Holy Land archaeology, the foremost holding in the world. Organized chronologically, from prehistory through the Ottoman Empire, the transformed wing presents seven “chapters” of this archaeological narrative, weaving together momentous historical events, cultural achievements, and technological advances, while providing a glimpse into the everyday lives of the peoples of the region. This narrative is supplemented by thematic groupings highlighting aspects of ancient Israeli archaeology that are unique to the region's history, among them Hebrew writing, glass, and coins. Treasures from neighboring cultures that have had a decisive impact on the Land of Israel – such as Egypt, the Near East, Greece and Italy, and the Islamic world – are on view in adjacent and connecting galleries. A special gallery at the entrance to the wing showcases new findings and other temporary exhibition displays.

5. *Edmond and Lily Safra Fine Arts Wing*

The Fine Arts Wing reflects the wide-ranging, interdisciplinary nature of the Museum's collections, encompassing works of art from across the ages in Western and non-Western cultures. The wing has been reorganized to highlight connections among works from its diverse curatorial collections, which include: European Art; Modern Art; Contemporary Art; Israeli Art; the Arts of Africa, Oceania, and the Americas; Asian Art; Photography; Design and Architecture; and Prints and Drawings. Installations are organized to underscore visual affinities and shared themes and to inspire new insight into the arts of different times and places, as well as an appreciation of the common threads of human culture. The reconfigured wing includes the Museum's first permanent galleries for Israeli art; more than doubled gallery space for the Museum's extensive collections in modern art; providing meaningful connecting

points between Western and non-Western holdings; and a full 2,200-square-meter (7,200-square-foot) gallery floor devoted to changing displays from the Museum's collection of contemporary art.

6. Jack, Joseph, and Morton Mandel Wing for Jewish Art and Life

The Wing for Jewish Art and Life presents the material culture of Jewish communities worldwide, from the Middle Ages to the present day, and is conceived to provide a view of Jewish life that integrates both its sacred and its secular dimensions. Showcasing the aesthetic value of objects as well as their social and historical significance, the comparative display unfolds in five themes that highlight the individual and the communal, the sacred and the mundane, and the heritage of the past, and the creative innovations of the present. The reconfigured wing includes a new Synagogue Route, unique to the Israel Museum, containing four synagogue interiors from the continents of Europe, Asia, and the Americas; a dramatic introductory display focusing on the Jewish life cycle that features singular treasures from the collections relating to the ritual ceremonies of birth, marriage, and death; a new gallery space to showcase the Museum's holdings of rare illuminated manuscripts; and the integration of works of contemporary art and Judaica.

7. The Ruth Youth Wing

The Ruth Youth Wing coordinates all of the cultural education programs in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Here, the goal of attracting the public to the Museum and the cultural values, knowledge, and beauty it embodies, prompts the birth of ideas and development of programs. It is one of the largest and most prominent art education venues of its kind in the world. Many in the field of museum education travel here to draw on the Ruth Youth Wing's years of experience. They find a unique and magical place, which integrates professionalism with learning, play, and fun.



Fig. 4. The Youth Wing – in the exhibition

The Youth Wing's staff includes some 80 teachers, instructors, lecturers, and administrators, who share a common vision: to serve as a center for study and creation, which stimulates artistic and cultural dialogue and endeavor, inspired by the original works housed in the Israel Museum.

The Ruth Youth Wing for Art Education, unique in its size and scope of activities, presents a wide range of programming to more than 100,000 schoolchildren each year, and features exhibition galleries, art studios, classrooms, a library of illustrated children's books, and a recycling room. Special programs foster intercultural understanding between Arab and Jewish students and reach out to the wide spectrum of Israel's communities.



Fig. 5. Discovering art

In addition to the extensive programming offered on its main campus, the Israel Museum also operates two off-site locations: the Rockefeller Archaeological Museum, an architectural gem built in 1938 for the display of archaeology from ancient Israel; and Ticho House, which offers an ongoing program of exhibitions by younger Israeli artists in a historic house and garden setting.

8. *The Shrine of the Book and the Dead Sea Scrolls*

Among the architectural highlights of the Museum's original campus is the Shrine of the Book the galleries that house the Dead Sea Scrolls, as well as rare early medieval biblical manuscripts. These are perhaps the museum's most famous collections – the oldest Biblical manuscripts in the world. The ancient texts represent a journey through time, which, adopting a scholarly-historical approach, traces the evolution of the Book of Books. Dating from the third century BCE to the first century CE, the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered between 1947 and 1956 in eleven caves on the northwestern shores of the Dead Sea. The manuscripts are generally attributed to an isolated Jewish sect, referred to in the scrolls as “the Community,” who settled in Qumran in the Judean desert.



Fig. 6. The Shrine of the Book

The Shrine of the Book was built as a repository for the first seven scrolls discovered at Qumran in 1947. This symbolic building, a kind of sanctuary intended to express profound spiritual meaning, is considered an international landmark of modern architecture. Designed by American Jewish architects Armand P. Bartos and Frederic J. Kiesler, it was dedicated in an impressive

ceremony on April 20, 1965. Its location next to official institutions of the State of Israel – the Knesset (Israeli Parliament), key government offices, and the Jewish National and University Library – attests to the degree of national importance that has been accorded the ancient texts and the building that preserves them.

The building itself attests to the story of the Qumran community who once lived by the Dead Sea. The white dome that covers the underground galleries symbolizes the lids of the jars in which the first scrolls were found; the contrast between the white dome and the black wall alongside it alludes to the tension evident in the scrolls between the spiritual world of the “Sons of Light” (as the Judean Desert sectarians called themselves) and the “Sons of Darkness” (the sect’s enemies). The corridor leading into the Shrine resembles a cave, recalling the site where the ancient manuscripts were discovered.

In the Autumn of 2011 the museum launched its Digital Dead Sea project (<http://dss.collections/imj.org.il>), allowing users to examine and explore these most ancient manuscripts from Second Temple times at a level of detail never before possible. Developed in partnership with Google, the new website gives users access to searchable, fast-loading, high-resolution images of the scrolls, as well as short explanatory videos and background information on the texts and their history. The Dead Sea Scrolls, which include the oldest known biblical manuscripts in existence, offer critical insight into Jewish society in the Land of Israel during the Second Temple Period, the time of the birth of Christianity and Rabbinic Judaism. Five complete scrolls from the Israel Museum have been digitized for the project at this stage and are now accessible online.

The five Dead Sea Scrolls that have been digitized thus far include:

- The Great Isaiah Scroll, inscribed with the Book of Isaiah and dating from ca. 125 BCE, is the only complete ancient copy of any biblical book in existence;
- The War Scroll dates to the late first century BCE or early first century CE and describes a confrontation between the “Sons of Light” and the “Sons of Darkness”, which would last forty-nine years, ending with the victory of the “Sons of Light” and the restoration of Temple practice according to their beliefs;
- The Temple Scroll, from the early first century CE, claims to provide the details of God’s instructions for the construction and operation of the Temple in Jerusalem. Written on animal skin only one-tenth of a millimeter thick, the Temple Scroll is the thinnest parchment scroll ever found among the Dead Sea Scrolls;
- The Community Rule sheds light on the Community’s way of life, dealing with subjects such as the admission of new members, conduct at communal meals, prayer, cleansing rituals, and theological doctrines;
- The Commentary on Habakkuk interprets the first two chapters of the biblical book of the prophet Habakkuk in a unique style that makes it

a key source of knowledge of the spiritual life of the secluded Qumran community, shedding light on the community's perception of itself.

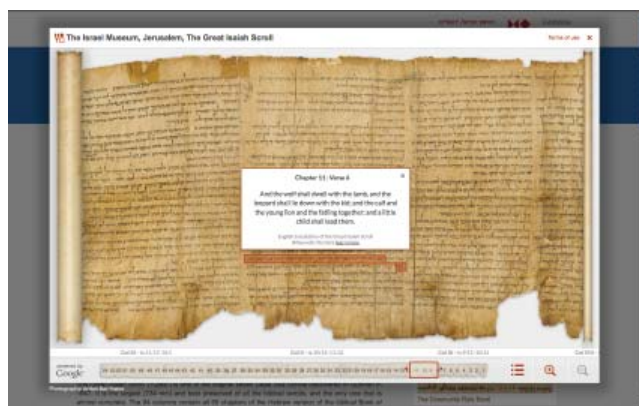


Fig. 7. Screenshot of the Isaiah Scroll and the English translation online

All five scrolls can be magnified so that users may examine texts in exacting detail. Details invisible to the naked eye have been made visible through ultra-high resolution digital photography by photographer Ardon Bar-Hama – at 1,200 mega pixels each, these images are almost two hundred times higher in resolution than those produced by a standard camera. Each picture utilized UV-protected flash tubes with an exposure of 1/4000th of a second to minimize damage to the fragile manuscripts. In addition, the Great Isaiah Scroll may be searched by column, chapter, and verse, and is accompanied by an English translation tool and by an option for users to submit translations of verses in their own languages. In just four days the project received more than one million unique visitors; the same number the museum receives through their doors in one year. This became an instant hit with visitors viewing the online scrolls from 213 countries and taking part in a dynamic conversation through comments left on the site. The museum was thrilled with the responses and the thousands of articles, radio and TV appearances that even now; one month later that are still causing endless waves of interest. See for example, the NDT TV interview on the scrolls project (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5zAm7fYU6pE>).

8. *The Model of Jerusalem from the Second Temple Period*

Adjacent to the Shrine is the Model of Jerusalem in the Second Temple Period, which reconstructs the topography and architectural character of the city as it was prior to its destruction by the Romans in 66 CE, and provides historical context to the Shrine's presentation of the Dead Sea Scrolls. This 50:1

scale model, covering nearly one acre, evokes ancient Jerusalem at its peak, meticulously recreating its topography and architectural character in 66 CE, the year in which the Great Revolt against the Romans broke out, leading to the destruction of the Temple and the city in the year 70 CE. Online visitors may take a virtual tour of the model and examine the details of the tiny buildings; King Herod's Temple, The Basilica, Antonia Fortress, Tomb of Alexander Jannaeus, Theater and the Palace of Caiaphas, the High Priest with the online zoom tool (http://www.imj.org.il/panavision/jerusalem_model_index.html).



Fig. 8. The Model of Jerusalem from the Second Temple Period

An additional and relatively new feature of the Israel Museum's online presence is its online exhibition database. Since 1997, the Israel Museum has been designing; presenting and maintaining more than 180 exhibitions online, representing a comprehensive archive of the museums' roster of exhibitions from all of the curatorial Wings. While each exhibition first came online in time for the opening of the physical exhibition, the exhibition online database is now valued as an excellent primary resource for scholarly research; now covering twenty years, of exhibition history, virtual tours and entire mini-sites from nearly 800 exhibitions (<http://www.imj.org.il/exhibitions/presentation/search.asp>).

Several thematic collections have their own mini-sites; and the museum is committed to opening up these collections to international visitors through dedicated sections of the institutional website.

From the time it came to power in 1933 through the end of World War II in 1945, the Nazi regime systematically looted works of art and other cultural property in Europe on a massive and unprecedented scale. Hundreds of thousands of such objects were unlawfully and often forcibly taken from their rightful owners, including Holocaust victims, public and private museums and galleries, and religious, educational, and other institutions. After the war,

the Jewish Restitution Successor Organization (JRSO) and the Jewish Cultural Reconstruction (JCR) were created to represent Jewish constituencies from Europe, the USA, and the Jewish community in the land of Israel and to distribute heirless and unclaimed property. Prior to the Israel Museum's incorporation, its predecessor institution – the Bezalel National Museum – received from these organizations the works of art listed below, which are now under the Museum's custodianship. Much of this material, especially objects of Jewish ceremonial use, came from institutions and synagogues that did not survive the War. The information included in the online inventory is complete to the extent that is currently possible and continues to be updated on an ongoing basis. We hope that this site will assist in the Museum's continuing efforts to restore objects from these holdings to their legal owners (<http://www.imj.org.il/Imagine/irso/index.asp>).

Dada and Surrealism rank among the most significant movements of our time. They challenged tradition, introducing materials, and visual strategies that would change the vocabulary of art and creating an enduring legacy that has transformed art history.

The connection between Surrealism and the Israel Museum began as a “chance encounter” more than fifty years ago, and it has since evolved into a deep and lasting relationship. Thanks in great part to generous gifts from donors and artists alike, the Museum has been able to form a spectacular holding of Dada and Surrealist material, comprising everything from paintings, ready-mades, and photographs to works in the wide variety of new and innovative mediums employed by these groundbreaking movements. A comprehensive mini-site (http://www.imj.org.il/Imagine/dada_surrealism/index.asp) now introduces our international visitors to this spectacular collection including the repository of the extensive library and documentary materials that make the collection an important international research resource, video documentation of the international symposium that took place in May 2007 as well as a virtual tour of the exhibition, *Surrealism and Beyond in the Israel Museum* (<http://www.imj.org.il/VirtualTours/dada/english/default.html>).

9. Search the museum collections via the interactive map

Now for those of you who may have got lost by now traveling the museums long corridors and galleries online there is always the map! Each and every of the museum objects and works online is represented on the interactive maps that define each Wing and each Gallery within the curatorial Wings. In order to provide insights into the museum collections in a quiet moment of relaxation and contemplation the New Media Unit has developed a series of Information for the visitors coming into the museum. These include The Information Center for

Jewish Art and Life (http://www.imj.org.il/Judaica_visitor_center/ScreenSaver.html), The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Center (http://www.imj.org.il/shrine_center/merkz_meida/index.html), The Conversations with Jacques Lipchitz (<http://www.imj.org.il/lipchitz>), and finally the Youth Wing Education Wing, which at the moment is only in Hebrew.

10. *Life on the campus*

With so much going on in the galleries; curator's talks, guided tours and school tours, and so much taking place in the Education Wing; art classes, lectures and year-long courses there is never a dull moment. In addition there is always plenty going on in and around the campus, especially during the summer; open air concerts in the Art Garden, family art happenings, and our annual Kite festival. All this has to be entered into the museum online calendar and all events and activities re posted online and sent out to thousands of friends and visitors over monthly electronic updates. The Israel Museum is an exciting place, and whether you have come to glimpse the once in a lifetime, 2,000 year of Dead Sea Scrolls, are wandering around the galleries with a friend from out of town or simply hanging out in the Art Garden with the family, one thing is for sure – you will never be bored!



Fig. 9. Kite Festival in the Art Garden

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