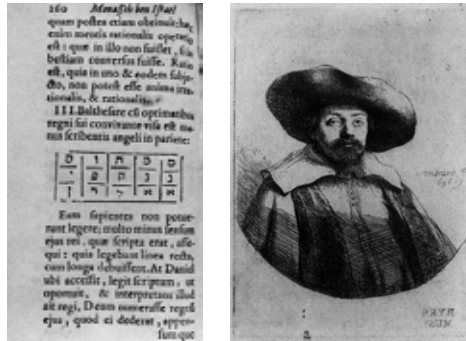


conceptualized through a personal prism. We are proud to present Nes's personal story, so genuinely and poetically imparted, to the Tel Aviv Museum public.

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Nes's Biblical Stories series was first shown at Jack Shainman Gallery, New York; for that first presentation, we thank the gallery director.



- 2 A page from Menashe Ben-Israel's *De terminis vitae libri tres*, Amsterdam, 1639
- 3 Rembrandt van Rijn, **Portrait of Menashe Ben-Israel**, 1636, etching, collection of Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam

with visual and textual materials gleaned from his immediate vicinity – his neighbor and friend Rabbi Menashe Ben-Israel (Ills. 2-3). The second example is William Holman Hunt's paintings of the Old and New Testament. Like other Pre-Raphaelite painters, Hunt strove for historical-scientific accuracy in his depictions of scripture, believing that the "realistic" touch would enrich and enhance the picture's spiritual message. Hunt made his first pilgrimage in 1854, wishing to paint the stories of the Holy Land in an exalted manner that would befit his Evangelist beliefs. The journey yielded pictures such as *Finding Jesus in the Temple* (1863, Ill. 4), documenting the habits, looks and attire of the Jewish community in mid-19th century Jerusalem. Aspiring to base his depictions of the past on direct eye evidence, Hunt made further trips to the Holy Land (1872-1869, 1892), where he painted the Biblical stories in a Pre-Raphaelite style, free of the fog of mystery and metaphysics.

We are grateful to Adi Nes for endeavoring to bridge spatial and temporal art, the most personally intimate and the collective memory encrypted in the old Biblical allegories. The return to the roots from a current point of view echoes quite a few contemporary Israeli prose works, whose stand on Israeli reality is



- 4 William Holman Hunt, **Finding Jesus in the Temple**, 1863, oil on canvas, collection of Sudley House, National Museums, Liverpool

Foreword

Mordechai Omer



1 Rembrandt van Rijn, **Belshazzar's Feast**, ca. 1635, oil on canvas, collection of the National Gallery, London

Any discussion of the relation between text and visual image brings to my mind, each time anew, Samuel Beckett's response to my question whether it is possible to illustrate his literary work: "Like fire and water, they [text and image] come together in the evaporation zone." The idea that Beckett wished to convey at that meeting in Paris, in 1975, was that acquaintance with a literary text – much like any phenomena that an artist encounters – may stimulate a creative response and engender a new utterance (visual, in this case) that has a life of its own.

Adi Nes's engagement with the Bible stories over the past four years has engendered a fascinating journey down the paths of his own private past, followed by travels in the zones of the here and now. The Bible stories that have captured his heart to become part of his life are the sites he moves in, out of which he constructs allegories of his own personal state as well as of the state of humanity. During his preparatory work for his Biblical Stories series, Nes explored the traces left by these narratives in the collective cultural memory, while also searching his vicinity for likenesses of biblical figures – finding them in the faceless figures of the homeless. By means of extremely loaded cultural expressions he brings these displaced figures back to life, charging them with tensions that take them beyond their biographical features to produce a "private appearance," an "essential identity," – such as Roland Barthes finds in a single, "just" photograph of his mother in *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*.

Nes's wandering through the tortuous paths of his childhood, guided by biblical stories, reminds us that masters of fine art have always tended to associate their own concrete world with layers of language and culture embedded in it, thus weaving it into magic. Let me point out two quintessential examples of such mysterious weaving practices. The first is Rembrandt's *Belshazzar's Feast* (ca. 1635, Ill. 1), immortalizing a mystifying moment described in Daniel 5