

## The 2020 Jerusalem Biennale Goes Virtual

Artists and curators consider their work in light of COVID-19 and the future of the post-pandemic art world.

By Judy Bolton-Fasman for JewishBoston **TOP PICK** MAY 12, 2020



Yonatan Ullman, A Proposal For A Monument To Myself As I Wish To Be Remembered (part 04 of 04), 2015-19, plaster on formica, variable dimension (overall 300x300 cm, each 'unit' 60x100 cm), photo: Tal Nissim

**Yonatan Ullman** was born in Boston to Israeli parents. He has spent most of his life in Israel and is now based in Tel Aviv. He, too, works in various media, primarily sculpture and painting. Much of Ullman's art is an exploration of his identity. In his artist statement, he noted: "Like everyone else, I have my issues with my identity. As for self-reflection, well, having been raised by a psychologist mother and eventually marrying a psychologist—questions about self-reflection are obviously a charged issue for me. In a nutshell, I believe self-reflection is one of our fundamental innate human traits, and one of our greatest tools for continued growth."

Ullman frequently inserts photographs of himself in his art and works with them as self-portraits. He finds himself putting together "a proposal for a monument to myself as I wished to be remembered," which evokes Michelangelo's "David" and Rodin's "The Thinker." In his representation the sculpture eventually shatters, and the head is separated from the body.



Yonatan Ullman, Death, 2019, plaster on formica, overall: 240x120cm, each 'unit' 60x60cm

The image of decapitation returns in the depiction of a bull.

Ullman observed that there are many images of the ox depicted throughout history, from ancient cave paintings to Picasso's images.

The ox for him also calls to mind the story of the Golden Calf.

"When Moses encounters this image for the first time, it's the opposite of a monotheistic understanding of God," he said.



Yonatan Ullman, Aleph - Taph, 2019, plaster on formica, 24x24cm (each letter)

Ullman contemplates the breakdown of language with a series depicting the Hebrew alphabet. Originally, Ullman envisioned constructing numerous words from the bank of letters that he cast, but finally decided to display the entire Alphabet in order.

What remained throughout was his determination to separate the aleph, the first letter of the alphabet, from the rest of the letters. Ullman said that disconnect points to a time when Miri Regev, Israel's minister of culture, introduced the "[Loyalty in Culture Law](#)." The law would have allowed the government to take away funding from any project deemed not loyal to the state. Artists protested by burning their work. For Ullman, the missing Aleph of his installation was a political statement. "The diagonal lines of the aleph point upward and downward," Ullman said, "As above, so below - as in heaven and in hell."