

A temple of art, resilience, and renewal

Tanya Sirakovich, chief curator of Fine Arts at the Israel Museum, envisions the institution as a living space where past and present, people and artworks exist in constant dialogue

By NERIA BARRMAY 8, 2025 18:37



Tanya Sirakovich (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, 2025)
(photo credit: ELIE POSNER)

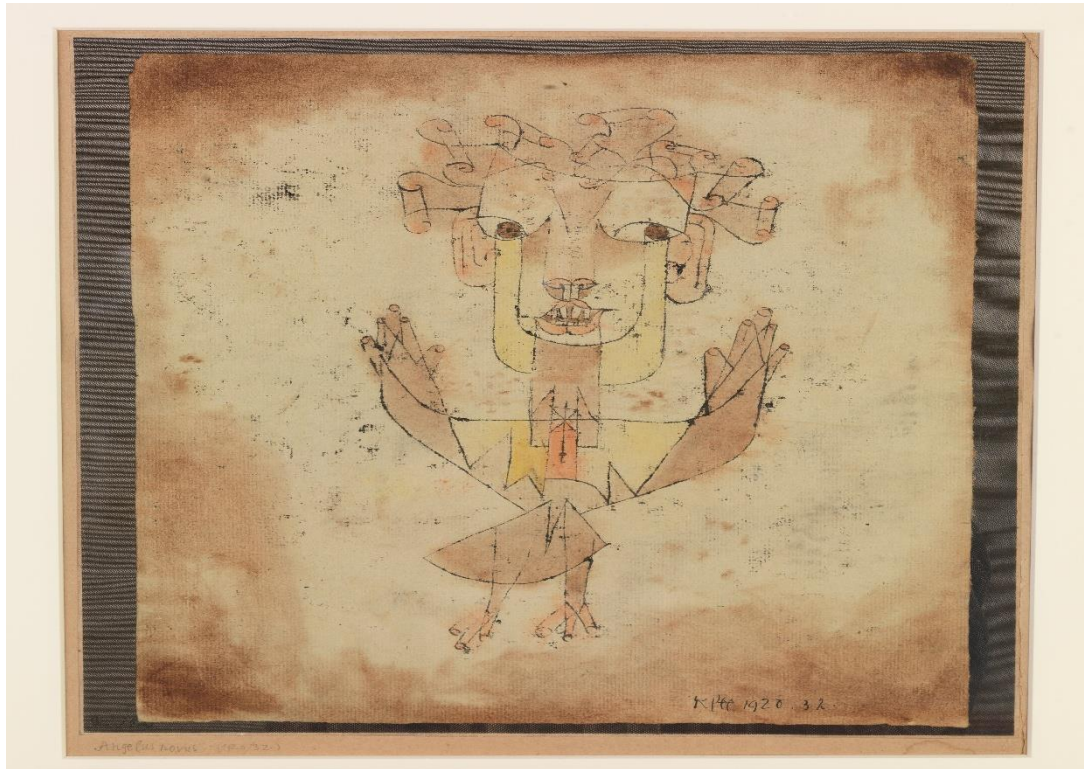
‘The museum is not just a building; it’s a temple, in both spirit and design,’ says Tanya Sirakovich, reflecting on her three decades at the [Israel Museum](#), where she now serves as chief curator of [Fine Arts](#). ‘Its architecture reinforces this vision. Its spatial language encourages contemplation,’ she notes, referencing Alfred Mansfeld’s architecture, the Shrine of the Book by Frederick Kiesler, and the sculpture garden designed by Isamu Noguchi. ‘You ascend to it as to a place set apart. It’s not elitist in the social sense, it’s a spiritual practice, a space for reflection and awareness.’

For Sirakovich, the 60th anniversary that the museum is marking this month is more than a milestone - it is a testament to the institution’s resilient dedication to art and culture. ‘I’ve worked alongside generations of curators, each bringing his or her own perspective, cumulatively shaping the vision I carry forward. It’s a journey I carry within me,’ she reflects, acknowledging the institution’s history while looking toward its future.

In parallel to the museum’s anniversary, Sirakovich is marking two personal milestones this year: 30 years at the museum and one year in her current role. Having started her career in the Youth Wing and progressed through various

curatorial roles, most recently as head of the Prints and Drawings Department, Sirakovich has witnessed the museum's evolution from within, acquiring a deep understanding of its institutional memory and spirit.

The museum has also maintained a standard of excellence that, according to Sirakovich, is practically imbued in its DNA.



Paul Klee, Swiss, 1879 -1940 *Angelus Novus*, 1920 Gift of Fania and Gershom Scholem, Jerusalem, John Herring, Marlene and Paul Herring, Jo-Carole and Ronald Lauder, New York, Collection The Israel Museum, Jerusalem. (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem) (credit: ELIE POSNER)

"Today, in our world, *Angelus Novus* speaks to our reality again," she says. "The German-Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin [1892–1940] purchased *Angelus Novus* in 1921, later developing his concept of the 'Angel of History.' He interpreted the work as an artistic allegory of history as catastrophe, humanity's inability to learn from its past, and its blind faith in progress. Over time, this work became one of Klee's best-known works. Due to the artistic significance of the work and its profound meaning in the history of Western philosophy and the intellectual heritage of the Jewish people, it is regarded as one of the rarest and most important objects in the Israel Museum's collection."

However, collections and architecture alone don't sustain a museum. "The second component is the staff," Sirakovich says. "Very accomplished, very experienced people. And even in such exigent times, when you have these two components -- collections and people -- you can do a lot."

These are indeed challenging times. Since the October 7 Hamas attack and the subsequent war, international collaborations have grown more complicated, with cancellations and hesitations multiplying. "Artists don't want to be identified.

Colleagues and institutions have demurred. But I still believe in the professional network and the museum's image. The exhibitions we've mounted, and those we are preparing for the 60th anniversary, speak for themselves."

As head of the Prints and Drawings Department, Sirakovich has spearheaded meaningful anniversary projects, such as a commemorative portfolio featuring works on paper donated by artists connected with the museum. "We approached artists – Israeli and international – and asked them to give us a gift: a work on paper. We didn't dictate themes or subjects. Just dimensions. The results are impressive," she says.

Another highlight will be a major exhibition titled *The Medium and the Message: Six Centuries of Printmaking*. Over the centuries, the introduction of printmaking techniques transformed artistic methods, had a revolutionary impact on distribution and accessibility, and as a result played a crucial role in shaping the art world. Featuring approximately 300 masterpieces from the museum's holdings, this exhibition underscores the expressive and creative power of prints while revealing their pivotal role in communicating social, political, and artistic ideas. Spanning the 15th century to the present day – from Dürer, Rembrandt, and Goya to Picasso and Warhol – the comprehensive exploration of printmaking includes a special focus on female artists such as Käthe Kollwitz, Louise Bourgeois, Kiki Smith, and Orit Hofshi. This exhibition is prepared under Sirakovich's leadership in her additional role as head of the Department of Prints and Drawings. Outstanding works from the museum's collection will be shown – many of them donated through the generosity of the Friends of the Israel Museum, some donated in honor of the 60th anniversary and exhibited for the first time. This exhibition will stand as a natural continuation of the major exhibitions curated by Sirakovich over the years, featuring highlights such as *Out of Body: Fragmentation in Art*, *Pablo Picasso: Drawing Inspiration*, and *Victory over the Sun: Russian Avant-Garde and Beyond*.



Orit Hofshi, Israeli, *Rumor* 2017, Woodcut, rubbing, ink, oil sticks, colored pencils on handmade Kozo & Abaca paper, 65 x 122.5, in Collection of The Israel Museum, Jerusalem (credit: Yigal Pardo)

Past meets present

Following the upheavals of October 2023, many of the museum's plans had to be recast. "We suddenly had an entire exhibition floor available, no budget, and only three months to plan. We gathered and looked inward," she explains. The result was *Common Ground* (curated by Amitai Mendelsohn and Tanya Sirakovich from the art wing, and Ahiad Ovadia and Pirchia Eyall from the archeological wing). A thoughtful, locally oriented exhibition juxtaposing new acquisitions by Israeli artists with archaeological artifacts from the museum's permanent collection. "It created incredible dialogues between content, between materials, between generations."

This ability to pivot, rethink, and adapt is a hallmark of the Israel Museum's spirit. "We are always reinvigorating the collection through acquisitions, gifts, and ongoing research. Our warehouses are at full capacity. We'll have to find a solution. But this is a living institution – it's vibrant. And there aren't many like it in the country," she asserts.



Common Ground Installation View (The Israel Museum, Jerusalem) (credit: ELIE POSNER)

The Israel Museum comprises four wings: Art, Archaeology, Jewish Art and Life, and the Youth Wing for Art Education. The Art Wing alone includes 10 curatorial departments that encompass art from Europe, Asia, Africa and Oceania, the Americas, as well as Israeli, modern, and contemporary art, photography, design, and prints and drawings. Sirakovich sees the Israel Museum as the Israeli parallel of the Louvre or the Metropolitan Museum of Art. "It is a universal museum."

And yet, it is deeply interwoven with Israel's national story. "We operate on two axes," she says. "We are a national museum, but we also have an international impact. We are in constant contact with colleagues around the world. That's the duality we carry."

Sirakovich is committed to enriching and expanding the museum's art collections, strengthening collaborations with Israeli and international artists, fostering relationships with colleagues at museums worldwide, and deepening connections with the Friends of the Israel Museum.

At sixty, the Israel Museum continues to evolve, steadfastly embodying the enduring conviction that while art may not rescue the world, it has the power to illuminate it.

"The Israel Museum is a continuous narrative, from one and a half million years ago to today. One that renews itself through excellence and innovation. Its strength lies in its encyclopedic scope and unique ability to connect the local with the global. We position the museum as both a national treasure and a global cultural beacon. In difficult times, it is art that provides perspective and solace, and our task is to keep that light alive."

In collaboration with the Israel Museum