

# Moshe Ninio / *Rainbow: Rug*

January 16 – April 18, 2015

Santa Monica Museum of Art

## Levitation

1

*Untitled* · 1989–1992 · cibachrome prints, pinewood, MDF · 122×180×40 cm each unit

Museum moderner Kunst, Stiftung Ludwig, Vienna / Arturo Schwarz Collection, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem

[photo: Meidad Suchowolski]

2

*Hole [R]/ Patch [L]* · 1989 / 1994 · inkjet prints (2009) · 85×70 cm each

Courtesy Dvir Gallery, Tel Aviv [photo: Meidad Suchowolski]

3

*Rainbow: Rug* · 1996–2000 · rainbow type floor Hologram · 5×59.5×179.6 cm (4: front; 5: back)

Courtesy Chantal Crousel Gallery, Paris [photo: Shaxaf Haber]

## Foreword

When I first saw Moshe Ninio's *Rainbow: Rug* in 1996, it was installed in a dark, rough space on the lower level of Teddy Football Stadium, which was under construction in Jerusalem. *Rainbow: Rug* (an earlier version and not its title then) was part of an exhibition of International and Israeli artists called Art Focus, organized by Ami Barak. I was there with six other art professionals from Europe and the United States, at the invitation of the Israeli Consulate, to visit this illuminating exhibition. Being in Israel for the first time was a poignant revelation; getting to know Moshe Ninio has been similarly poignant. The Santa Monica Museum of Art takes great pleasure in presenting this bold example of his eloquent work for the first time on the West Coast.

*Rainbow: Rug* is not easy to explain and no less easy to write about. I am grateful, therefore, to curator and art critic Ory Dessau for his incisive text. I extend my thanks as well to Michael Gordon for his handsome design of the online catalogue, to Monica Rumsey for her expert editing, and to John Perry of Holographics North for his technical assistance. At SMMoA, Registrar Rose Simmons and Communication and Engagement Manager Adrienne White have deftly administered the exhibition details and public outreach.

Our deepest thanks to Shulamit Nazarian and the Y&S Nazarian Family Foundation, The Philip and Muriel Berman Foundation, and Adam Gunther for their generous support of this exhibition. Additional funding has been provided by the City of Santa Monica and the Santa Monica Arts Commission, the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors through the Los Angeles County Arts Commission, and SMMoA's Ambassadors Circle.

*Rainbow: Rug* is on loan here courtesy of Galerie Chantal Crousel, Paris. Chantal Crousel and Gallery Registrar Marie Laure Gilles have been adroit and thoughtful partners in this premiere presentation.

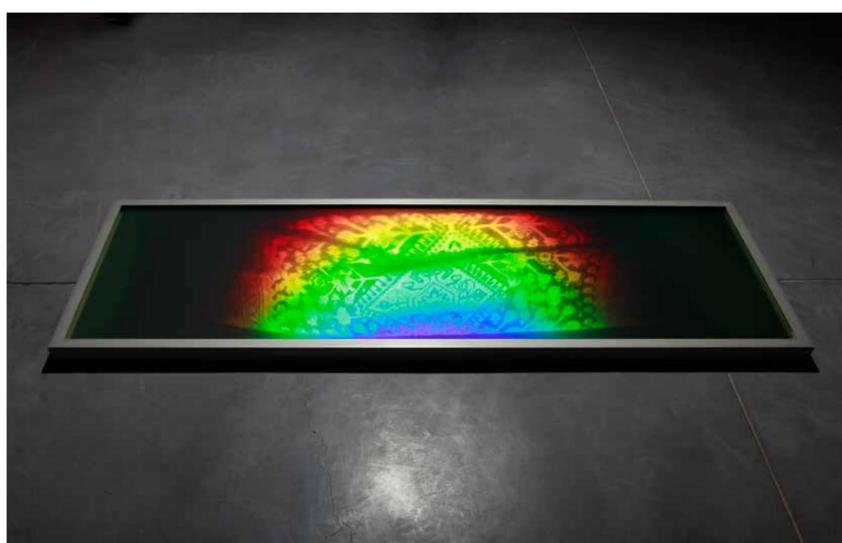
Elsa Longhauser  
Executive Director  
Santa Monica Museum of Art



1



2



3a



3b

## Rainbow: Rug

Moshe Ninio's *Rainbow: Rug* is a human-size floor hologram of a partly folded Middle-Eastern carpet. Perceivable in full only from a restricted viewing angle, the holographic carpet seems to hover over its frame; outside this privileged vantage point, it starts to disappear, gradually sinking into the latent background from which it will re-emerge each time anew, like a magic trick, an apparition. The more the viewer advances toward the hologram after hitting its spectral peak, the more it evades him or her. From the back of the piece, the carpet reappears as a shadowy afterimage, and when the viewer approaches the hologram it disappears completely, leaving nothing but one's own reflection on the mirror that lies beneath, within the frame.

In the case of *Rainbow: Rug*, reality and illusion, appearance and disappearance, presence and absence, are more than general dichotomous categories of sensual/optical experience; they manifest existential instability, or even more so, a flickering threshold. The carpet's position ostensibly changes in accordance with viewing angles. The term "parallax" — an object's appearance from different positions — could be used here to describe the dynamics if only the word also implied complete vanishing. Though situational, *Rainbow: Rug* is not purely integrative. While reaching climactic visibility and optimally actualized when seen as a whole, this work immobilizes the viewer's body by which it is activated, rendering it passive, motionless, freezing it together with the image.

Contrary to conventional photographic output and to digitally modified images, *Rainbow: Rug* is neither a representation of an object nor its virtual reconfiguration. Instead, it exemplifies the holographic process, whereby still objects placed in highly controlled darkness are scanned by direct laser radiation, as an in-depth intervention, fundamentally altering the object and transforming it into a code — an empty, abstract pattern from which it is reconstructed by light, with a new, rather disturbing tonality, pushed here to a kind of optical thrill by a fake rainbow spectrum. *Rainbow: Rug* is not an image of a thing, it is the ghostly substitute of the thing itself, its intensified replica (its Antichrist, one might say), and the fading out of both.

*Rainbow: Rug* superimposes two systems of signification: carpet weaving and holography. One involves an interlaced network of threads, the other a light-loom network of interlaced laser rays. One is a traditional craft, antique and tribal; the other is ultimately modern (though in the obsolete sense of the word). One is both utilitarian and decorative, while the other is both scientific and deceptive (yet used in technologies of covert information storage). After being converted into a hologram, the carpet image manifests a cultural-historical intersection, merging the map-like Garden of Eden patterns of Oriental carpets with the original meaning of the word holography ("writing the whole" in ancient Greek). It also joins recurring depictions in the history of European painting from the High Renaissance onward, in which Oriental carpets had a purposeful, iconographic role (of designating "the East").

Oscillating between epic resonance and nothingness, Ninio's hologram is a paradigmatic meta-image. It deals with the implications of turning an object into an image as an act of mummification and embalming (the holographic recording process). Then, the holographic image, as a mummy, is resuscitated into a living zombie by the inexhaustible holographic reconstruction (or deconstruction) obtained (or dropped) by the moving (or halted) viewer in real time and space. Immersed in nomadism, it resists fixed meaning.

Ory Dessau

Santa Monica Museum of Art  
2525 Michigan Avenue, G1  
Santa Monica, CA 90404  
www.smmoa.org

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Editing: Monica Rumsey

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