

NOAH BECKER'S  
**WHITEHOT  
MAGAZINE**  
OF CONTEMPORARY ART

(<https://whitehotmagazine.com/>)

**APRIL 2022**

"THE BEST ART IN THE WORLD"

**Cultural Rebels: Ghiora Aharoni transcends cultures and creates new myths at Sundaram Tagore Gallery**



*Ghiora Aharoni, "The Genesis Series", Day I, 2021, image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery.*

Ghiora Aharoni (<https://www.ghiora-aharoni.com/>): *Inception*

Sundaram Tagore Gallery (<https://www.sundaramtagore.com/>)

Through April 30, 2022

By **COCO DOLLE**, April 2022

“Inception” is the first major gallery exhibition of artist Ghiora Aharoni. It is the centerpiece exhibit at the Sundaram Tagore Gallery in Chelsea. The exhibition focuses on the artist’s assemblage sculptures from “The Genesis Series”, along with a presentation of some of his other works “The Immanent Transcendental”, “Crossroads” and “Make me a Temple Within”.

The feeling of awe created by Ghiora’s mesmerizing assemblage sculptures dominates the inside of the gallery space. It is a world both familiar and unknown to us, with flourishes from ancient, bygone eras and a futuristic world. Stemming from Ghiora's fascination with religious creation myths and the early history of humanity, “The Genesis Series” is a large-scale installation of sculptures displaying intricate assemblages of vintage glass, tubes and domes engraved with ancient scriptures inviting the audience to witness a new laboratory of creation and myths. This complex glass assemblage is filled with collected antique objects, beakers from the 1920s, 30s, or 40s, and clamps mounted on metal armatures. Walking through this installation, one feels as if they are walking through a laboratory used by ancient Gods to create the world and life that we are so familiar with.



*Ghiora Aharoni, "The Genesis Series", (detail), image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery.*

Inspired by the first book of Genesis, which was the first book of the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament, Ghiora's process follows a scientific method where he deciphers the origins of creation while blurring notions of time. His designs are carefully crafted, creating new historical narratives and montages. His inspirations take from various religious practices and deities in India, Africa, the Middle East, and Europe. From his understanding of ancient scribes, he created his own languages, "Hebrabic" a hybrid language made from a combination of Arabic and Hebrew, and "Hindru", a melding of



Indian and Hudru. His in-depth studies of creation myths texts go back to the Enuma Elish, a Mesopotamian creation myth dating back to 1200 BCE which may have inspired the Book of Genesis. Further recent excavations in the 19 century, found physical evidence for historical corroboration supporting the fact that the origin of a number of biblical narratives was actually of Mesopotamian origin. Informed by these discoveries, Ghiora brings to light a fabric of humanity that is inherently interwoven, shifting our ideas of languages and cultures by mixing them in different contexts. Adding to this knowledge, the artist interweaves notions of scientific theories on evolution and natural elements.

Beginning in 2008, “The Genesis Series” comprises seven large assemblage sculptures as a metaphorical conversation between myth and science. Each sculpture stands alone and is conceptualized for the viewer to engage at eye level and in a revolving way around. Each piece is a self-contained universe. Upon entering the gallery, “*Day I*” welcomes the visitors with the presence of two antique Indian female deities standing at the top of the structure above tubular lights representing the rationale of scientific truth. Sitting back to back are Pave, the Goddess of poverty and humility, and Shiva, the Goddess of destruction, altogether sparking interrogations in how we perceive the source divine. Engraved with the Genesis text in Hebrew, multiple glass domes highlight the composition of each assemblage sculpture with alternative symbols such as trees, birds, antique figurines, and representations of Adam and Eve.

The other works outside of the Genesis series include “The Immanent Transcendental”, an ode to Moses and the tale of Noah’s Ark, “Crossroads” an assemblage of early Christian and Ethiopian icons on a steel base highlighting a crown of thorns, and “Make me a Temple Within”, a fabulous collection of ancient prayer boxes where the deities are replaced with video montages of monks’ devotional rituals and pilgrimage of prayer and self-sacrifice.

The many facets in Ghiora’s sculptures are inviting us to critically look at our religions, cultures, and traditions. While embellishing the sacred and the worship, Ghiora aims to surpass our standard notions of cultural classification. The idea that the fabric of humanity is interwoven pertains in all of his works. Parts of Ghiora’s work also encompass gender equality. “Thank God for Making Me A Woman” is a work he has presented during his residence at The George Washington University Museum - The Textile Museum (<https://museum.gwu.edu/cotsen-studio-residency>) - where he invites us to examine original Hebrew texts and further codes of modesty imposed on women in certain Islamic parts of the world. Through the act of embellishment, Ghiora invites us to progress on negative connotations in systemic traditions. His ultimate mission, as we continue to change and evolve, is to help us break language barriers and cultural bubbles. Ghiora draws inspiration from a famous Gandhi quote: “Be the change that you want to see in the world”.



*Ghiora Aharoni, "Make me a temple within" and "Crossroads", exhibition view, image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery.*

Beyond the commentary on creation myths intertwined with scientific theory, there is an element of playfulness in the artist's studio. I asked Ghiora a few questions:

**Coco Dolle:** You have exhibited in museums around the world. Your works are part of the impressive permanent collections of the Metropolitan Museum, The Morgan Library, The Vatican, Centre Pompidou, and Kiran Nadar Museum, amongst others. "Inception" is your first major exhibition hosted by Sundaram Tagore Gallery. It is also the first time your complete sculpture series "The Genesis" is being shown together. One of these sculptures was to be exhibited in Moscow a month ago at The Museum of Tolerance. Since the recent invasion of Ukraine, you have decided against this. Was showcasing your work in Moscow an ethical dilemma? What led to your decision to pull your work from this museum?

**Ghiora Aharoni:** It was an incredibly difficult decision, especially as the exhibition was exploring the energy of restoration and oneness, which is the antithesis of the invasion. However, I could not in good conscience send my work to Moscow when there was an overt threat of an imminent invasion, so I withdrew my work a few weeks prior to the invasion.

**CD:** You were born into a multicultural family from Israeli and Yemenite backgrounds. Your upbringing is embedded with the learning of sacred texts from Jewish mysticism to Aramaic language. At one point, you invented a combined language between Hebrew and Arabic, "Hebrabic". How important was it for you to create a new syntax where these cultures coexist?

**GA:** These two cultures do co-exist, though with conflict—and that's not something that's indigenous to Israel. While melding languages metaphorically joins the respective cultures, it also can foster a notion of commonality in the mind of the viewer, rather than being prescriptive. In the exhibition, there is a wall sculpture in Hindru, which is a phrase-

based melding of Hindi and Urdu, two of the languages spoken in India, where there is also a conflict between cultures. What if we could speak the language of “the other”? I imagine there would be less conflict and more empathy.

**CD: Your works are somewhat challenging to the fundamental principles of the Abrahamic religions, creating an original dialogue between faith-based and fact-based theories of creation. Do you consider yourself a bridge between science and religion?**

**GA:** I see the work as a juxtaposing of creation narratives—bringing them into a conversation with one another—rather than challenging any specific one. There are references to narratives from Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Judaism and science as well as mysticism. It’s about an expansive view of humanity...not that we are the same, but that we all carry some notion of how the world was created, and in that notion, we are all one.

**CD: There are seven main sculptures presented in “Inception”, each corresponding to one day of the book of Genesis. How is your reinterpretation of the creation of the world different from the creation myths which your work draws inspiration from?**

**GA:** When I began *The Genesis Series*, each of the seven sculptures was dedicated to a single day in creation described in the book of Genesis—with the engraved text and icons referencing a specific day. When I finished, I took elements from each of the days, and placed them in sculptures from other days—for example references and text from day four of the book of Genesis might now be in the sculpture entitled *The Genesis Series – Day II*. And that was my commentary on our thinking about time and creation: that neither one is linear. I also added text from the *Enuma Elish*, which is the Babylonian creation narrative that was written in cuneiform and pre-dates the book of Genesis. There are a number of elements in the book of Genesis that are similar to those in the *Enuma Elish*, so it situates our relationship with Genesis as *a* story of creation, rather than *the* story of creation.



Ghiora Aharoni, "The Genesis Series", *Day II* (detail), 2021, image courtesy of Sundaram Tagore Gallery.

**CD: The notion of interconnection while blurring concepts of time is an important part of your work. How challenging is it to transcend socio-cultural norms in our modern society as an artist in our time? How do you go about it?**

**GA:** Altering or recontextualizing familiar objects or sacred text—things that are obsolete, or seem mundane or that are routine—gives them a new identity that is no longer bound to an idea of a specific time or place, and also a new meaning in the eyes of the viewer. And in that moment, it asks the viewer to re-consider and to question its original meaning. A sculpture I created in both Hebrabic and Hindru is the phrase, *Thank God for Making Me a Woman*. It's a modified version of one of the daily prayers of Orthodox men, "Thank God for *Not* Making Me a Woman," where the word "Not" has been removed. Altering the phrase subverts the original text's denigration of women, and creates both a meditation on gender status, as well as a transcultural veneration of women.

**CD: Your background as an architect reflects upon your compositions. It seems there is both an element of control and of improvisation in your assemblages. Each sculpture in this series stands as a large-scale multimedia installation set on metal armatures. What is your design process in the making of your sculpture works? How do you know when a piece is finished?**

**GA:** I cannot thank you enough for this question. When I install or deinstall one of these sculptures for an exhibition or in a private collection, I am always examining the dialogue between the architecture of the armature—which I call scaffolding—and the art itself. When the structure is bare, you see only the scaffolding, and the complexity of the composition comes to life. And as my studio director always says, a piece is never finished until it leaves the studio.

**CD: "The Genesis series" could be perceived as in line with the deconstructivists, i.e. Marcel Duchamp and Robert Rauschenberg. There is a scientific rationale behind all your works. How does the practice of deconstructionism fit into your work? How do you reconcile science and art in your work?"**

**GA:** Objects are infused with the narrative of how they are used as well as the energy of those who made use of them. Recontextualizing an object in an artwork brings all of that energy into the narrative of the assemblage, and at the same time, it gives it a new identity, and it's infused with new meaning. And the more my work investigates the relationship between science and art or between science and religion, the more I see them as coalescing rather than colliding, as speaking to each other in a shared language. **WM**



**COCO DOLLE**

Coco Dolle is a French-American artist, writer, and curator based in New York since the late 90s. Over the past decade, she has organized numerous acclaimed exhibitions and programming for independent galleries and art fairs, including for The Untitled Space (<http://untitled-space.com/tag/coco-dolle/>), Spring/Break Art Show (<http://www.milkandnight.com/2022-springbreak-art-show-la-jamie-clyde>), Catinca Tabacaru Gallery (<https://catincatabacaru.com/projects/trans-ville>), 11 Newel Gallery (<https://11newel.com/effervescent-reflections>) and Select Fair Miami Art Basel (<http://www.milkandnight.com/select-fair-miami>). Her curatorial works and projects have been featured in high-end publications including Forbes (<https://www.forbes.com/sites/adamlehrer/2017/03/16/feminism-takes-many-forms-in-coco-dolles-milk-and-night-curatorial-project/?sh=18a9edcf2381>), ArtNet (<https://news.artnet.com/art-world/editors-picks-november-11-2019-1692394>), NY Observer