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After a major renovation of the Israel Museum, a worker hangs million-year-old horns of a wild bull, the oldest item in a collection that links many cultures.

Cleaning Up an Intersection Of the Ancient and the Modern

By ETHAN BRONNER

JERUSALEM — The director of the Israel Museum was leading a visitor to see a provocative contemporary sculpture of a naked African youth when, stepping over protective cloths and around an exhibit of late Canaanite sarcophagi, he nearly ran into four workmen carrying the million-year-old horns of a wild bull.

The horns are the oldest items in the museum's col-

The horns are the oldest items in the museum's collection, and something about the juxtaposition of contemporary social consciousness, ancient ceremony and prehistoric beast summed up the museum's refocused mission as it completes a three-year, \$100 million renewal. As described by the director, James S. Snyder, the museum offers a series of unexpected aesthetic links across cultures and their histories, like the way 2,000-year-old carved ritual cups that are on view in the museum near the Dead Sea Scrolls are somehow evocative of Brancusi.

For the last 45 years, the Israel Museum has been both the crown jewel of this country's cultural heritage and a bit of a mess. It has the most extensive holdings of land-of-



A new Anish Kapoor sculpture was commissioned as part of the renewal project.

Israel archaeology anywhere (including a heel bone pierced by an iron nail with wood fragments, the world's only physical evidence of crucifixion), an encyclopedic collection of Judaica and an exceptional group of Modernist artworks. It sits on a 20-acre campus atop a hill at Jerusalem's western entrance, holding pride of place along with the architectural and national landmarks that surround it, including the Knesset, or parliament, and the Supreme Court.

But as any past visitor can attest, finding one's way around the museum's art and archaeology has not been easy. Visits have begun with an uphill trek from a parking lot exposed to the hot sun and, inside the galleries, a feeling of being overwhelmed by quantity and mildly perplexed about substance.

That is about to change. On Monday the museum opens

That is about to change. On Monday the museum opens new galleries and public spaces. There will be far fewer objects on display, with twice the space to view them, as well as richer links and explanations. In some of the new spaces

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The Israel Museum occupies a 20-acre campus atop a hill at the western entrance to Jerusalem, above the 11th-century Greek Orthodox Monastery of the Cross, in the foreground.

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oft light enters through filtered flass walls, the Jerusalem land-cape a dreamy background resence. And a climate-conrolled path leads to a central oncourse from which the works an be reached.

The idea is not simply to make he museum easier to navigate ut also to suggest interesting onnections among objects and etween the particular and the niversal. That is never an easy ask in this city of stones, where ach culture has long sought lominance and where the interlay between preservation and ransformation causes endless eartache.

And today, here in the capital f the Jewish state, there is a endency to see the world purely hrough Jewish history and cul-ure. That is precisely what Mr.



leadying a Byzantine-era dislay of a synagogue, a church nd a mosque prayer niche.

Snyder, an American Jew who spent 22 years at the Museum of Modern Art, has sought to avoid. Rather, he has emphasized the commonalities of cultures and tried to place Jewish history and practices in a broader and clearer context.

One example is a new display that focuses on the Byzantine era. On one side is a restored syn-agogue; next to it are a church and the prayer niche of a mosque. Roughly contemporary struc-tures, they are placed in a way that highlights both their distinc-tiveness and their commonality. Meanwhile, the sections that

used to be devoted to Judaica and used to be devoted to Judaica and Jewish ethnography are now merged into "Jewish Art and Life," connecting the secular with the religious. The Judaica gallery used to feed inexplicably into French Impressionism. Now it sits near costumes and jewelry of the Jewish world and the early sources for modern art in Israel. A nearrity and takes shape. A narrative arc takes shape.

"A lot of Israelis consider Tel Aviv to be the center of the country's culture, but Jerusalem is the center of the world," Mr. Snyder said. "It's a bridge that connects Africa, Asia and Europe, a multi-cultural city, and I feel the power of that every day."

As part of the renovation, the

museum commissioned a sculpture by the Indian sculptor Anish ture by the Indian sculptor Anish Kapoor that stands at the top of the campus. A 16-foot-tall pol-ished-steel hourglass called "Turning the World Upside Down, Jerusalem," it reflects and reverses the Jerusalem sky and the museum's landscape, a likely reference to the city's duality of celestial and earthly, holy and profane.

When Mr. Snyder arrived in



James S. Snyder, the museum director, in front of "Black Cloud," by Claudio Amorales.

eum's director, he had never been here before. He was stunned at the power of the mu-seum's site, built like a modular seum's site, built like a modular Mediterranean village in an intensely Modernist style. But he felt it was an unrealized vision and set himself the task of finishing it during his tenure. In his 13 years on the job, he has added a huge and hugely popular outdoor model of how Jerusalem is thought to have looked 2,000 years ago and has groomed and expanded the campus and its celebrated Billy Rose Art Garden, a Middle Eastern hillside with Western works by Rodin, Picasso, Henry Moore and Claes Oldenberg. The Shrine of the Book,

containing the Dead Sea Scrolls. the oldest known surviving copies of biblical documents, sits next to it.

next to it.

The renewal has been led by James Carpenter Design Associates of New York and Efrat-Kowalsky Architects of Tel Aviv, and their goal has been to respect the architecture originally designed by Alfred Mansfeld and Dora Gad in the late 1950s.

Mr. Snyder raised the money

Dora Gad in the late 1950s.

Mr. Snyder raised the money around the world and has added important pieces and collections. And now he has completed, on time and on budget, the biggest cultural development project in the country's history.

To some here, that makes him

a local hero. But Mr. Snyder, 58, is a local nero. But Mr. Snyder, 8s, 1s also an anomaly, and many people do not know what to make of him. He has never acquired Israeli citizenship or learned more than basic Hebrew. In a country where december of the more recommendation of the more recommendation of the more recommendation of the more recommendation. than oast: refore... If a country where dressing up often means donning a clean T-shirt, he has kept the look of an Ivy League professor of a generation ago: tortoiseshell glasses, perfectly knotted knit tie, herringbone jacket and a crown of coiffed sil-ver hair. ver hair.

In a society built on the idea In a society built on the idea that Jews here have come home, Mr. Snyder has caused some con-sternation. He says his contribu-tion to Israel is to help build a world-class institution and to

Photographs of the renovated museum and its collections nytimes.com/design

urge the society to look toward the universal rather than the pro-vincial.

He has also reached out to Is-

raeli Arabs, recruiting the first Arab member to the executive committee of the museum's is-raeli Friends group and extending educational projects to Arab school groups beyond Jerusalem, including sponsoring a Jewish-Arab sculpture project among the youth of Umm al Fahm, one of 18-rael's largest Arab cities. 19the plans to do similar work in Nazarsth powers.

plans to do similar work in Nazareth next year.

In the newly expanded museum, there is much more room for temporary exhibits. For the rest of the year, three of those galleries have been given over to Zvi Goldstein, Yinka Shonibare and Susan Hiller — an Israeli, a British-Nigerian and a London-based American — with each based American - with each asked to do an installation using

asked to do an installation using anything in the museum's collection of some 500,000 pieces. The other day, as Mr. Snyder was avoiding the ancient bifli horns, Mr. Goldstein was hard at work in his room. He had been filling it for 18 months, he said, and the objects he was mounting included drills and spears, furniture, paintings and a urinal. He selected 600 pieces for his 'finiture, paintings and a urinal. The selected 600 pieces for his 'finiture, paintings and a urinal. selected 600 pieces for his in-

stallation.

"The goal is to show how pieces of material culture shift in meaning over time," he said, "how they can make surprising connections."

Mr. Snyder could not have said it better himself.