

In discussing the installation at hand, something of an obvious precedent within art history has been overlooked. Although the correlation is not exactly along the same lines, the overriding methodology remains true.

In 1928, Spanish born painter Joan Miró presented a series of works that were stylistically informed by a trip to the Netherlands. The works, all titled *The Dutch Interior*, were surrealistic interpretations of what Miró saw in Dutch art. Complete with requisite iconography and similar pictorial arrangements, the paintings all captured some element of Dutch genre painting. Like many painters of his generation, Miró was exploring the power of flatness as a formal element.<sup>1</sup>

The three works are in the collections of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, NY, the Museum of Modern Art, NY and the Solomon R. Guggenheim Foundation Peggy Guggenheim Collection, Venice.

We know that Miró was looking at these historical paintings because it is widely documented within his personal archive. While on holiday in Amsterdam in 1928, for instance, we know that Miró visited the Rijksmuseum and brought postcards of famous Dutch paintings back to Paris. Although slightly presumptuous, the fact that the works resemble those from the postcards and are titled *Dutch Interior* speaks against any such claims.

But it was not just Miró going through the motions of painting something in the likeness of the Dutch style. Rather he showcases his abilities as a Modernist painter by reflecting his artistic style against the more rigidly defined historical works. His interest was in analyzing the narrative qualities of the Dutch Golden Age. Plainly said, the Surrealist painter was creating Surrealistic paintings while observing the methods of Seventeenth-Century Dutch art.

The conjecture here is that, akin to Miró's investigation, Michael Blum made use of Dutch art history in a very similar way in his *Exodus 2048* piece. Where Miró's generation of painters was preoccupied with presenting a self-conscious art form, painting that was about painting on some level, Blum's generation of sculptors is closely investigating the space the works occupy and how they relate to their audience. Like Miró, Blum looks at Dutch painting for examples. But rather than highlight the iconography, Blum examines the unfolding spatial constructions of the works. He is analyzing the way the Dutch painter showed three-dimensionality<sup>1</sup>.



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<sup>i</sup> Archival images are available.

<sup>1</sup>Between 1934 and 1942, over 100,000 people attempted to illegally enter British controlled Palestine over the course of 142 sailings by some 120 ships. Ships named *Sturma*, *Patria*, *Milos*, *Pacific*, *Atlantic* and *Tiger Hill* were among the numerous sea vessels carrying the hopeful Jews. However, none other than the voyage of the *Exodus* left a deeper impression on public consciousness. A catalyst for a swifter development of the State of Israel, the notorious *Exodus* has been deemed by many as the ship that launched a nation. Amidst a range of denominations such as that of the refugee, the exiled, the displaced, and the illegally immigrated – Jewish passengers abroad this vessel began their Aliyah on July 11, 1947. Their voyage concluded in April 1948.

When the ship was built in 1928, little was to be expected of its tumultuous stake in world history. Originally a pleasure boat sailing along the Chesapeake Bay, *Exodus* (formerly named the SS *President Warfield*) was taken over for naval purposes in 1944 by the US military. Soon thereafter, under the command of a larger illegal immigration stratagem of the Zionist intelligence agency, Haganah, the ship set out carrying 4,515 Jews to the shores of British controlled Palestine. These Jews were seeking to set foot on their homeland, one they had never seen, but had always known. Persecuted throughout Europe for decades, Israel was their only remaining haven. The British, however had a very different plan and the passengers of the *Exodus* were not allowed to disembark on the coast of Palestine. Rammed, battled and barraged by gunfire, *Exodus* was unwavering. The Jewish passengers fought back with the little they had on board – potatoes, sticks and canned meat. Naturally, up against tear gas, truncheons and guns, there was little that could be won and in the end, *Exodus* looked “like a matchbox splintered by a nutcracker.” Harley Crum, the famous attorney and member of UNSCOP, even likened the incident to the Boston Tea Party. The defeated passengers were then transferred and turned back to France aboard three, more seaworthy deportation ships. *Runnymede Park*, *Ocean Vigor*, and *Empire Rival* were the prison ships that took the Jews to displaced persons camps. Crushed together in unsanitary confines, these passengers endured blistering heat with little food or water sailing from Cyprus, then to Germany. Conditions in the DP camps were also inhumane, as the prisoners were living behind barbed wire - an environment similar to their detainment during the Holocaust.

This event became a protracted political affair for the British, due to their overbearing bureaucratic conduct. The attention of the entire world was shortly focused on their restrictive emigration policy in Palestine, through the fate of the *Exodus* passengers. People worldwide were incensed by British policy, and sympathy grew among United Nations delegates for the creation of a Jewish State. On May 14, 1948, one day before the end of the British mandate of Palestine, the National Council of Jews in Palestine and the National Council of the World Zionist Movement in Tel Aviv proclaimed the sovereign State of Israel.

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<sup>1</sup> Art Historian Martha Hollander explored the issue of Dutch Golden Era painting and three-dimensionality in the book “An Entrance for their Eyes: Space and Meaning in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Art.”