

PARTERRE

עתיד הספר | The Future of the Book

עמרי הרמלין | Omri Harmelin

22.11.2025-17.01.2026

At the core of Omri Harmelin's practice lies an ancient question: What is it that we see — and what is it that we *think* we see? His work unfolds a constant tension between appearance and truth: the object, seemingly innocent, undergoes a quiet transformation — the book reveals itself as a carved block of wood, the bell falls silent, the dove heralds not redemption but ruin, and more. In each work, Harmelin seems to confront us with a moment of unsettling recognition — the moment when the familiar collapses into doubt, and what we thought we knew loses its validity.

Harmelin, born in South Africa, creates a body of work grounded in precise and restrained materiality, yet also infused with subtle humor, moral irony, and questions of truth, representation, and consciousness. He undermines notions of authenticity and invites the viewer to linger in a space of ambivalence: not to choose between truth and falsehood, but to recognize the fragility of that very distinction.

Harmelin employs the term *mimesis* — not as mere realistic representation, but as a double mechanism of imitation. At first glance, the sculptures seem to mimic the world: old books, precise in their details, resting on wooden shelves; a taxidermied pigeon carrying an olive branch; a concrete head bearing remnants of Western culture. Yet upon a second look, the imitation reveals itself as a trap. The books are carved from a single block of wood, they do not open, they contain no apparent content. The dove, which since the biblical story has carried a message of redemption, is placed in a hidden, inescapable corner — and becomes a *Pigeon fatale*, a symbol of moral collapse.

For Harmelin, mimesis is not faithful to reality but rather exposes the falsehood embedded within it. It is a doubled mimesis: an imitation of imitation meant to destabilize the very possibility of knowing, of holding onto stable truth, or of distinguishing between appearance and essence.

In his series *Books* (2024–2025), Harmelin transforms the book into a charged, quasi-sacred sculptural object. Each book is carved from a single block of wood, bearing an imaginary title that gives it a fictive yet convincing identity. The titles — *In the beginning, the end; Truth's Last Breath; Mankind Happened, Responsible; Reliable; The Well, The Wall* — function like openings to narratives that were never written, inviting the viewer to complete them in her imagination.

Harmelin treats the book not as a repository of knowledge but as a sculpture of potential. The title is the first gesture, the “handshake” with the viewer — but the reading never takes place. Instead of knowledge, there is silence. The books appear to have endured a long journey — cracked bindings, faded colors, marks of time — yet all of these are meticulously carved and painted. The illusory beauty generates both attraction and repulsion: the gaze longs to touch, open, read, but meets only silence, leaving the viewer with a closed, inaccessible idea. Who

PARTERRE

The Future of the Book | עתיד הספר

Omri Harmelin | עמרי הרמלין

22.11.2025-17.01.2026

among us does not know the feeling of an unread book lying on a shelf, a perpetual promise of knowledge or happiness deferred?

The title *I Agree to the Above Terms and Conditions* articulates one of the artist's sharpest gestures. The sculpture consists of three books standing together to form a single sentence. "I agree to the terms" — the most innocent declaration of the digital age, repeated daily without thought — becomes, for Harmelin, a moral moment that must be considered: the consent to a lie, the participation in a mechanism we do not understand, the making of a small yet binding commitment. The books, painted in authoritative colors — black, gold, green — ask us to reflect on the illusion of freedom within a system of blind obedience.

The same moral inquiry appears in other works. A faux-leather armchair with a book titled *Shared Reality* placed upon it tempts us to sit in it; likewise, a reading bench topped with a wooden book. Harmelin plays here with the tension between the elevated visibility of culture and the popular, between the faux wisdom of a classical cover and the emptiness within.

In *In the beginning, the end*, Harmelin presents a library of twenty-seven books. Each cluster produces the opening line of an iconic novel — from *Call me Ishmael* to *It was a pleasure to burn*. The library stands as a monument to beginnings, to the moment a story starts. The opening lines of each of these novels contain, in a sense, the entire narrative. Thus, the library becomes not only an act of preservation but also a distillation of potential. It represents the motion of reading itself: the promise that something will occur, yet will never be completed.

Bell is a bell from which a feather dangles instead of a metal clapper. The bell loses its voice, yet the viewer still "hears" it in the imagination. It is once again the Gestalt mechanism in which the mind completes what is missing. The bell, like the book, exists between material and imagined space — one can almost hear it echo in the mind. *Whale Tail* is a tale of a whale: a tail protruding from a bucket, as if caught between two worlds — sea and land, the real and the mythological. This image resonates with *Moby-Dick*, with Noah's story, and with humanity's fascination with the unseen, the threatening, the mysterious.

One of the central figures in Harmelin's visual universe is Pinocchio — a concrete-and-iron head pierced by a steel rod passing through both sides of the face, as though impaled by its own "nose of lies." The materials — concrete and steel — evoke elements of construction, turning the figure into a monument to falsehood as a foundational structure of culture. Walt Disney's version of Pinocchio, sweet and harmless, is replaced here by a darker one: a small liar who has become an archetype of contemporary humanity, built from the very bedrock of his deceptions.

The title *Truth's Last Breath* appears twice in Harmelin's oeuvre: once as a charred book, and once as an upright book mounted on the wall. It symbolizes not only the loss of truth but also

PARTERRE

The Future of the Book | עתיד הספר

Omri Harmelin | עמרי הרמלין

22.11.2025-17.01.2026

the desperate attempt to preserve it as a final myth. The book no longer opens, yet it still breathes — or perhaps gasps. In this sense, Harmelin's works resonate with contemporary questions about the nature of knowledge in the post-truth era. Is there still room for books, for words, for faith in content? Or is all that remains the object, the shell, the memory of something that once held meaning?

The gaze in Harmelin's work is not merely aesthetic but moral. It demands responsibility from the viewer — to identify the lie, but also to acknowledge its existence as an inevitable part of human experience. Each work places us before a mirror in which illusion is not an error but a tool of awareness.

Harmelin does not preach a return to truth; instead, he invites us to remain in the in-between space — the place where “this is not it,” as he describes it, the moment when we say, “Ah, it's not a book,” and then realize that perhaps it is precisely there, between illusion and revelation, that the true experience of seeing occurs.