

ART FAIR



An oil painting by Shai Azoulay, 'Monument.' (Photos: Shai Azoulay)



'Out of the Landscape,' another oil by Azoulay.



A portrait by Netanel Bollag. (PR)

Jerusalem receives a dose of contemporary art

• By KAYLA ROSEN

Within the Israeli art world, Tel Aviv is generally regarded as the home of contemporary art, with popular galleries like the Tel Aviv Museum of Art and the Helena Rubinstein Pavilion for Contemporary Art. On the other hand, Jerusalem is known for its classical art that reflects the standard ideas around Judaism.

But these notions are starting to change with the introduction of the MasterPieceS Contemporary Art Fair that takes place at Jerusalem's Rosenbach Contemporary through September 6. This fair features 300 works of art from 60 carefully selected Israeli artists, in order to better introduce Jerusalemites to contemporary art and to give these artists a venue, specifically in Jerusalem.

Unlike most art fairs where each piece has its own individual price, the art at MasterPieceS will be split up into four different pricing categories: NIS 250, NIS 1,000, NIS 2,500 and NIS 5,500. The reason is that the fair is all about accessibility, giving anyone the ability to purchase the art and not just the typical buyers.

"One thing that is unique about Jerusalem is there's not really a well-established group of collectors or consumers of art," said Uri Rosenbach, founder of Rosenbach Contemporary and the organizer of the fair. "When a collector gets started, they aren't going to spend NIS 30,000 to NIS 50,000 on a painting. They want to go entry level, so what we are trying to do is bring that entry level to a collector."

The fair is being put together by Rosenbach Contemporary with support from

the Jerusalem Municipality and the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design. Rosenbach, who was born in the US and moved to Israel in 1979, has worked in classical art both as a dealer and as an auctioneer. After 20 years on the job, he noticed a gap in Jerusalem's art industry when it came to contemporary art, so he opened Rosenbach Contemporary in October 2015 as a way to begin to fill that gap.

"Uri's vision for contemporary art is unheard of in Jerusalem," said Mindy Weisel, an artist who is taking part in the fair. "He does a lot of good with the space. He finds ways to improve working artists who don't have the opportunity and don't have an exhibit. And he creates enough space so everybody feels like they can have something on the wall. I'm 100 percent behind the gallery."

Now with MasterPieceS, Rosenbach is trying not only to give contemporary art a bigger platform in Jerusalem, but also to give younger artists a chance to gain exposure in a tough industry. He didn't choose for the fair only veteran artists whom he knew, but put out a call for artists on Facebook. From there, Rosenbach and the team that organized the fair narrowed down the artist submissions based mostly on the quality of the work.

"Something that came as a shock to me is that contemporary artists almost always sign on the back of their work," said Rosenbach. "One of the ideas behind this is that the quality of the painting speaks for itself. The fact that it's signed by Picasso does not make it good. It's good because it's a good painting or drawing."

One person who has played a major role and who also reflects the overall objective of the fair is the curator, Netanel Bollag. The 25-year-old graduated from the Bezalel Academy this year, and is still an emerging artist. Yet Rosenbach has given him the opportunity not only to show his work at the fair, but also to curate it, which entails picking the artists and pieces to exhibit. Bollag wanted to be a part of the fair, because it's important to him that contemporary artists work in Jerusalem.

"The obvious center of art in Israel is Tel Aviv, and when you are far from the center a very interesting process can happen," said Bollag. "People create a lot and try a lot in Jerusalem. Many young artists here are trying to find their own way, and also find a way to react to the city, which is so complex and has so many different societies in it."

Bollag is a painter whose work features various portraits and scenes that are inspired by everyday life. One time he was painting on the street, and he kept going back to the same spot in order to paint it accurately. Someone parked their car in the middle of the street before he had finished, but instead of painting around the car, Bollag opted to add it into his picture to capture the reality of the situation. For Bollag, contemporary art is less about the finished product and more about the process.

"When I paint something in my studio it's a long process, it's a creation," he said. "You like the idea in the beginning, you hate it in the middle, and you love it in the end. And when someone takes your piece home, it's saying that they are willing to take this process home and to see it and to have it in their living

room or their kitchen. Your piece has its own life."

But the fair doesn't only feature up-and-coming artists, it also offers work from those who are already established in the field. Shai Azoulay, one of the featured artists, holds a master of fine arts from the Bezalel Academy, has won several awards and grants, and has taken part in many exhibits. He is a painter whose work deals with daily life and stories that are inspired by his family, art history, things that he sees on the street, and the people that he meets.

"In some of my works I start with an idea or a small sketch that becomes a large painting," said Azoulay. "I try not to think so much. I want things to come out of the unconscious. I'm looking for their origin."

Azoulay had already been working with Rosenbach Contemporary, so he felt that it was a natural fit for him to participate in the fair. But he also understands the importance of having contemporary artists in Jerusalem.

"I show my work all over the world, but choose to stay and have my studio here in Jerusalem," he said. "It is the most difficult and inspiring place for an artist. It is a city with a lot of conflict, and conflict is what all art and artists need."

Jerusalem is an eclectic city that mixes the old with the new, the Orthodox with the secular, and the conservative with the liberal in a way that is out of the ordinary. With events like MasterPieceS on the horizon, hopefully it will be able to showcase this mixture on a grander scale.

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