

What is Jewish Expression in Art and Design?

Talia Tokatly

In preparation for a forum sponsored by The Adi Foundation on the subject “What is Jewish Expression in Art and Design?” I have chosen to examine my own works through the prism of Jewish art. I have done so by looking at my works from the years 2000–2006 that were exhibited in solo or group exhibitions. I found in these works an undetected thread that brought new and interesting insights into my ongoing personal dialogue.

For the sake of the present discussion I would place myself as follows:

World War Two ended in 1945.

Israel’s War of Independence took place in 1948.

And I was born in 1949 – here.

I grew up in Israel, was educated in the secular educational system, I am an artist.

First I will survey the titles of the works, describe certain aspects of each work, and will conclude with the personal insights gained as a result of this renewed look at them.

Following are the titles of the works:

Boy | Girl | Animate | Flora | Inanimate

Territory / Terratalia

D.I.Y. (Do It Yourself)

Local Tourism

Light Sentence/ משפט אור

Doe I’ll Send You

The title of the first work *Boy | Girl | Animate | Flora | Inanimate* was also the title of a solo exhibition. The title is borrowed from the name of a popular game, but here I took out the names of the first two elements: country and city. One of the installations in the exhibition depicted a girl’s room. In the center was a bed covered in a down quilt and at its foot was a rug made of porcelain. Girl’s

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clothes made of paper hung on a hanger. Various objects rested on wooden shelves, among them a sewn pomegranate and a bandaged pomegranate. On the wall in another corner of the exhibition, hung small portrait photographs of Manya Shochat, one of the founders of “HaShomer,” and in place of her name was the phrase, “Her first steps in the country [the land of Israel].”

Territory/Terratalia is the title of a wall installation, in which are depicted three different environments that anchor the building of my identity:

A relief depicting part of the Mediterranean basin without the western coast, the coast of Israel.

Building remains from a village-like settlement, perhaps Jewish, perhaps Arab.

A map of a central European city.

Between these environments appear additional elements including an Israeli flag made of porcelain, in which I hollowed out the central Star of David and embroidered into it with yellow embroidery thread.

In the work *Build Your Own Home*¹ donkeys wander between new settlements undergoing a building boom that are filled with villas, and between the remains of villages or archaeological excavation sites. Is the Messiah’s donkey among them?

In the gallery in Um el Fahem I exhibited the work *Local Tourism*. Above a large floor installation I hung a cluster of green plastic jugs that I had found during my wanderings in the city. I borrowed the image of the cluster of grapes from the biblical story of the spies.

The work *Light Sentence/משפט אור* was exhibited in the Israel Museum, Jerusalem in the exhibition *Lights*. The use of two languages in the title of the piece hints at the double meaning that I would consider with regard to the essence of the concept of light. The work was displayed in a darkened room. The fragments were mounted in display cases and light shone from the base of the shelf on which the fragments were placed.

¹ This work was done in collaboration with Yael Robin.

I exhibited *Doe I'll Send You* in a solo exhibition entitled ARS CERAMICA. "Doe I'll send you," says Amir Gilboa in his poem:

Doe I'll send you to wolves not in the forest
even on city sidewalks you'll flee them without rest
terror in your lovely eyes...

My doe is made of porcelain, her body points forward, but her gaze turns backward.

I was surprised to discover how much Judaism is ingrained in my works. The secular education that I received allows me to borrow freely from Jewish symbols. Sometimes in my works I address charged questions, political questions, questions about source and authority. I use my Jewish "backpack" without cynicism, without fear, and without a sense of holiness. The symbols sail through my works because they are a part of my cultural world.

Moments of discomfort center round the question of place/territory and from birth a "genetic" fear of flight, which is also an imminent part from my personal position along the continuum of time and history.