

Preface

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“After the School of Paris” is the title of two exhibitions appearing simultaneously in Haifa at the Mané-Katz Museum and at the Hecht Museum in the University of Haifa. Each exhibition has a different focus: the first presents works that exemplify the influence of the School of Paris on Israeli art of the 1930s-1940s, whereas the second present works embodying the influence of that School on the artists of the Artists’ Colony of Safad during the period of greatest achievement in its history – the 1950s and 1960s.

This collaboration, evidenced in the simultaneous production of two exhibitions deriving from and contributing to different aspects of the same theme, can be considered as a rewarding project for both museums. We believe that they and their visitors will benefit from this cooperation, and hope that it will prove itself as a cultural experience for art lovers.

The Arts Wing of the Hecht Museum has a permanent display of works by artists of the School of Paris, including Soutine, Modigliani, Utrillo and Jacob. These works allow visitors to the current exhibition a standpoint regarding the influence and inspiration of this School for the Israeli artists of Safad.

The artists’ community in Safad emerged from the same motivation as that of the artists working in Paris or in the villages in South of France – they wanted to live close to the views that inspired their works, close to their artist friends in order to exchange opinions about the subjects that preoccupied them, and in order to create an atmosphere of mutual productivity.

The proposed exhibition at the Hecht Museum of the works of Safad artists painting in the spirit of the School of Paris in the first two decades after the establishment of the State of Israel was not a random idea. My family came to Safad in the mid-1950s (when my father was appointed Chief of Police for Safad). At that time the Safad population was very small, and “everyone knew everyone”, including the artists of the Artists’ Colony, many of whom were my parents’ friends.

Anyone who grew up in this northern town felt isolated and remote from what was happening

in the centre of the country during the long cold winters. But when summer came, and with it the arrival of noted artists and sculptors of Israel, together with their poet friends, authors and actors, this feeling was replaced by a sense that Safad was the navel of the world. I was personally acquainted with many of the artists whose works appear in the exhibition because of accompanying my parents on their Saturday walks around the Artists' Colony. I even made 'creative' attempts under their direction – working with clay in the studio of Sonia Sacks, or painting with Sionah Tagger, with whom I remained in touch until her death in 1988. I even sat for Sionah, who made five portraits of me. The one I like best she gave me as a wedding gift, and it too hangs in the exhibition.

The encounter with the Safad artists enabled both myself and my friends, though we were not aware of it at the time, to become acquainted with some of the outstanding Israeli artists of the era. We watched them sitting in front of their easels, depicting the ancient synagogues, the lively market, the alleyways of the city, or the Metzuda Garden and its enchanting views. Thus, the exhibition is also an expression of my personal gratitude to the artists of Safad who have left their impress on the landscapes of our childhood and youth.

In 1971, the artists of the Colony collaborated to publish the album "The Artists Colony, Safad", in which each artist who was a member of the colony is represented. The introduction is by Meir Maybar, a native of the city and its Mayor at that time. I quote from his words that embody the pride of the city's inhabitants in their Artists' Colony:

....Picturesque Safad as an inexhaustible source of artistic-creative inspiration was already discovered by early artists in Eretz Israel during the twenties and thirties. But our city could only become a centre of art under Jewish authority.

The initiators of the colony came to us at the conclusion of the War of Independence. Safad was hurt and bleeding but proud of being Jewish. They took hold of its ruins, establishing their home with fierce faith and Hassidic application. In indescribably difficult conditions, they

concentrated all of their strength and energy with typical Jewish stubbornness. The scarcity of their materials was great and their struggle for a piece of bread was a literal one and an everyday feature of life. ...

But the endless beauty of our city and its environment, the spiritual and moral richness of Safad as a holy city, and her legends which capture the heart – appeared as realities in its winding passageways and connected them in unbreakable bonds of love and creation....

The artists' quarter is meaningful proof that Safad is capable of returning to the days of her former glory, the glory of the Torah, the glory of wisdom and the glory of art, to become once again a centre for all lovers of the fine and the beautiful.... (Meir Maybar, "To the Artists of Safad", in: *The Artists Colony, Safad*, 1971, p. 92)

We thank Dr. Sorin Heller, curator of the exhibition, and all those who have loaned works for the exhibition – Haifa Museum of Art; Bar-David Museum of Art and Judaica at Kibbutz Baram; the Frenkel Frenel Museum in Safad, dedicated to the works by this artist, one of the originators of Israeli Expressionism and educator of many of the Safad artists. The Museum, opened by Frenel and his wife Ilana at their home in the Colony in 1973, is evidence of the golden age of the Colony. Our thanks to Ya'acov Hadad, director of the Frenkel Frenel Museum and owner of the gallery in Beth Castel, where works by many artists of the historic Colony are displayed. Thanks to the Ha'aguda Lema'an Hachayal (AWIS) for the loan of works from its collection, and to private collectors – Edan Mordechai and Zvi Zitron of Haifa. Lastly, we are grateful to the Hecht Foundation for its initiative and support in creating this collaboration between the two museums.