

JERUSALEM: BENEATH THE SURFACE

Uncovering the Eternal Truth

The Art of Avner Sher

Museum of Biblical Art Dallas, Texas February 20, 2020 - May 31, 2020

Production: Aviva Petroff Layout and Design: Vicky Jayroe Printing: Jayroe Printing, Dallas, Texas, USA

Exclusive North America representation of Avner Sher Art:
Marble Arch Fine Arts
http://www.marblearchfinearts.com/
Aviva Petroff
Avivapetroff@gmail.com
310-993-1094

Jerusalem: Beneath the Surface Uncovering the Eternal Truth

The art of Avner Sher

Jerusalem - its name resonates in the hearts of Christians, Jews and Muslims alike and echoes through centuries of shared and disputed history. It has been conquered, destroyed and rebuilt time and again, and every layer of its ground reveals a different piece of the past. Often the focus of stories of division and conflict among people of different religions, it also contains a unifying power for their inner spiritual connection, as well as reverence and veneration for its holy grounds.

Jerusalem plays a central role in the spiritual and emotional perspective of the three major monotheistic religions. For Jews throughout the world it is the focus of age-old yearnings, a living proof of ancient grandeur and independence and a center of national renaissance; for Christians it is the scene of Jesus' agony and triumph; for Muslims it is the goal of the Prophet Muhammad's mystic Night Journey and the site of one of Islam's most sacred shrines. For all three faiths it is a holy city, a center of pilgrimage, and an object of devotion.

Of Jerusalem's beauty during the Herodian period, the Talmud tells us: "Whoever has not seen Jerusalem in its splendor has never seen a lovely city."

Lest this seem a parochial judgment, we have the confirming view of the famous Roman scholar Pliny the Elder, who referred to Jerusalem as "by far the most renowned city of the Orient, and not of Judea only."

Josephus Flavius, the first century Jewish historian, knew and described the Jerusalem of his day in detail. The "Royal Stoa" which Herod constructed on the southern part of the Temple Mount overlooking the Temple courtyard, Josephus described as a structure "more worthy of description than any other under the sun."

The Old City of Jerusalem (roughly one square kilometer) has grown over the centuries into an architectural patchwork reflecting the styles, beliefs, and priorities of conquerors past. The rulers who rebuilt or repurposed these structures are long gone, but evidence of their ambitions remains—both above and deep below its grounds.

Yet, beneath the surface of explosive conflicts, divisions and chaotic tensions lies the universal Truth which is deeply rooted in our collective consciousness: Jerusalem represents a mental realm, a holy and spiritual atmosphere, where the harmony and unity of the world - the unlimited kingdom of Heaven, is present!

Abraham the Patriarch had caught a glimpse of its spiritual reality when he had "looked forward to the city that has foundations, whose architect and builder is God." (Hebr. 11:10). Through his art, Israeli artist Avner Sher embarks on a quest to explore and examine the deep universal meanings of Jerusalem.

In his words.

"In its 3,000 year history, Jerusalem was repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt; it experienced more wars and conquests than any other city in the world. The deep layers of disputes and controversies, which are entwined with holiness and mysticism is what attracts me to Jerusalem: the process of destruction and reconstruction, and the fundamental Truth which underlies its harmony."

Sher was born in Israel, an only child of Holocaust survivors. His parents lost their entire family and loved ones. "I hardly knew my mother. She died when I was very young. My father raised me. He never shared his past with me and never told me about my history. He was, however, firm in his ideas on survival and subsistence, education and hard work. My father was in the Dachau concentration camp, and managed to survive. For me, his survival is a symbol of the triumph of the Jewish people. My creativity is a tangible symbol of my parents' bravery: They overcame the trauma of the Holocaust and established a new home in Israel.

"But I, myself, lack the knowledge of my origin. Through my artwork I try to bring things to the surface. I always have the feeling that there is a secret behind everything that I want to uncover. Like an archeologist who sifts through and pieces together fragments of his findings, then delves deeper to discover their inner significance, I, too, search for the spiritual origins and deeper meaning behind the material evidence.

"In my art I create chaos: If you look at my cork maps and obelisks, you can see how I scratched them and poured red wine and iodine on them. It is a very aggressive, even brutal process that starts instinctively. If I find myself thinking, planning or pondering, I know that my sense of intuition or gut-feeling is clouded, and I must then immediately leave my studio. For me, my artwork is less about conceptual ideas and more about instinctive expressions. In my art I have the full freedom to express my deepest inner spiritual intuitions.

"I delve into historical monuments and geographical signs imbued with the imprints of erosive time, spawning new configurations, either concocted or based on ancient maps. I subconsciously deal with fracture and its healing; deconstruction and reconstruction; the tension between past and present. Amid the features of Jerusalem as a divided city I introduce spatial and political questions. I also look for the unifying spiritual truth that is the principle of eternity!

"I find harmony and build new worlds out of chaos. This is one of the inspirations for my city maps made of cork. The cork trees are fascinating: forest fires cannot harm them. Once harvested the tree remains bare but regenerates and develops a new bark which can be harvested again every nine years. I associate this with human nature - our hopes and belief in our own ability to get up and rebuild our lives. That's how I describe the principle of my art: Finding the core spiritual Truth and use it as my guide to finding the way out of chaos and into newness, hope and unity!"

ZERO AMPLITUDE:

"I grew up in a religious household. I wore a yarmulke until I was 18 years old. Today I am no longer religious, but the memories and deep influences remain. Bible stories and Jewish customs find their way into my work. When I look at my cork works, I discover motifs from the Bible and the Jewish tradition.

"Since childhood I have also discovered the power of silence: through it I have the ability to completely blur my surroundings and get into a meditative state in which I feel that all is possible, there are no limitations, I am free to try everything.

"I call this state the 'zero amplitude' - in contrast to the ups and downs of everyday life. My art is made from it: scratching is not a gentle procedure, and when you scratch cork, you don't get smooth lines like on wood, but scratches like on your skin. These scratches are deliberate: I cause injuries with my art. But then, the curative process begins."

The traditions of both prehistoric and European art form the foundation for Sher's entire oeuvre. He converses with art history as well as mythology for inspiration, while also corresponding with primitive cave drawings, Greek vase paintings, Egyptian hieroglyphs and Assyrian reliefs, ancient letters and symbols, as well as naïve art and childlike paintings by Jean Dubuffet. Joan Miro, and Paul Klee.

Klee once described art, his own art specifically, as "taking the line for a walk." Sher, too, takes his lines for a walk. In a primordial language that transcends cultural differences and celebrates symbols, traditions and myths, he concocts imagery that is both universal and individual, suffused with his own biography yet offers viewers a map of their inner layers of the world in which they live, its origins and yearnings.

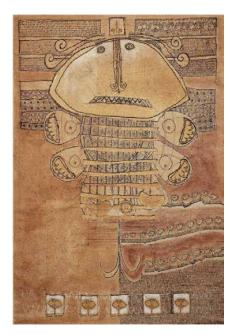
Sher creates bridges: He first examines the deep layers within Jerusalem, as a nucleus of history, an intellectual, political, religious and ethnic junction of strife and creativity. The many tensions in Jerusalem between the eternal and the transient, religions, nationalities and ethnic groups all become part of the intricate narrative he shares with the viewers. He then creates an artistic dialogue with the rest of the world, by blurring the physical lines and gravitating toward higher spiritual grounds. From this altitude he invites the viewer to observe a euphoric vision, similar to an astronaut's Overview Effect: From space, national boundaries vanish and the conflicts that divide people become less important. Apollo 14 astronaut, Edgar Mitchell recounts - "....I had a profound sense of connectedness, with a feeling of bliss and timelessness. I became profoundly aware that each and every atom in the Universe was connected in some way, and on seeing Earth from space I had an understanding that all the humans, animals and systems were a part of the same thing, a synergistic whole. It was an interconnected euphoria."

Sher's starting point is Jerusalem – "For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." (Micah 4:2)

Maps of Jerusalem are intertwined with maps of Berlin, Torino and Palermo; fictitious puzzle pieces, each engraved with tiny symbols of diverse places and cultures form part of one unified work; tall obelisks, evoking the memory of the mighty Egyptian grandeur, are flooded with cryptograms of the Ten Plagues.

In his book - *Open Closed Open*, Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai discusses the peeling of history's layers, moving like a pendulum between times, broken feelings, and memory fragments which entrench themselves in the mundane reality.

Avner Sher concludes - "My works are typified by an act of forcefully wounding the cork boards and cork peels. And then comes the great panacea. The ultimate expression of hope that out of the destruction, underneath what seems to be divided and discordant, rests an undeniable eternal universal truth of harmony; undivided common denominator for all people; the emergence of wholesome unifying spiritual truth that is the principle of eternity!"



Beautiful scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

Beautiful:

This work suggests the portrayal of Queen Esther, a beautiful maiden who was taken to the King's palace. She is very beautiful and yet, very sad. An orphan raised by her uncle, Mordechai, young Esther was taken as a beautiful virgin to Persian King Ahasuerus, who loved her "above all women" and made her the Persian Empire's Queen. When she learned of the scheme to eradicate the Jews, Esther understood that she had a mission and that she could shape reality rather than passively suffer through it. Sher compares this historical event to a current song, which is inscribed in this work in Hebrew – "The Prettiest Girl in the Kindergarten," by Yehonatan Geffen:

The prettiest girl in the kindergarten Has the prettiest eyes in the kindergarten... When she smiles, I smile When she's sad, I don't understand how it's possible to be sad when you are the prettiest girl in the kindergarten

Maps of Jerusalem and Spolia:

These two series refer to the concrete and imagined architecture of Jerusalem and the maze of longings and rage woven within its very fabric. Sher follows the history of the city maps from different eras and places, some are familiar while others are esoteric. The artist wanders through various perceptions of Jerusalem, cross-matching sensations, religious axioms, historical data and personal associations to weave together a hybrid depiction of living things and inanimate objects moving between various periods, utopias and dystopias.

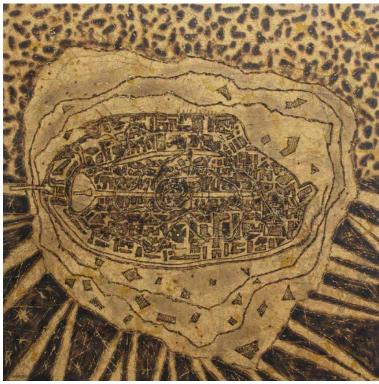
Contemporary maps, like ancient ones, delineate the spiritual and urban geography of the city, reflecting a continuous dialogue of deconstruction and construction, destruction and rebuilding, secondary use and repurposing of ruins – these are some of Jerusalem's outstanding characteristics.

Jerusalem Map #2:

This work is based on a present-day map of the Old City of Jerusalem, where the holy sites of all 3 Monotheistic religions are located: The Wailing Wall, the Church of Sepulcher and the Al-Aqsa Mosque. There are miniature drawings that fill the various neighborhoods – illustrating infinite differences between nations, communities and religions, all living together within the walls of the Old City. Three large "eyes" oversee from above the co-existence of Jews, Christians and Moslems within this tiny space. One may also see lines or "fences" that tear through the city.



Jerusalem Map 2, 2016, 61x61 inches, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood



Jerusalem Map 10, 2017, 61x61 inches, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

Jerusalem Map #10:

Akin to Jerusalem Map #4, this work is also based on a Christian map of Jerusalem, that was found on a floor mosaic of an early Byzantine Church in Madaba, Jordan (also known as The Madaba Mosaic Map). The work is based on the idea that Jerusalem is Divine, like a star in the sky, outside of our sphere. In the center of the map there is a "navel" (hub) symbolizing the center of the world - the center of Man.



Jerusalem Map 14, 2017, 61x61 inches, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

Jerusalem Map #14:

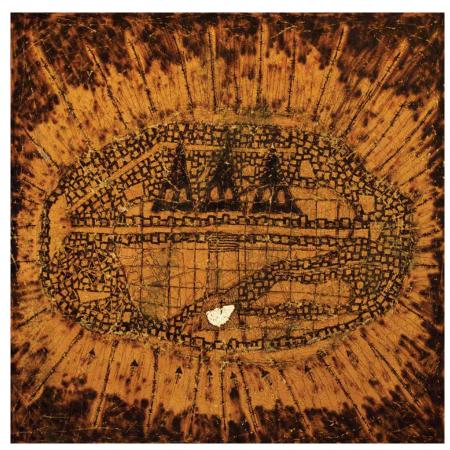
This is a series based on ancient and contemporary maps of the Old City of jerusalem, each with a different emphasis on the perception of the area of less than a square kilometer as seen by various religions. The temple Mount is prominent, decorated with gold leafs, but not necessarily in its location; the size and placement of the other sites, such as the Holy Sepulcher, are marked according to the mapmakers convictions, reflecting desires which are stronger than geographical

Jerusalem Map #4:

This work is based on a Christian map of Jerusalem, which was found on a floor mosaic of an early Byzantine Church in Madaba, Jordan (also known as The Madaba Mosaic Map). The Madaba is a map of the Middle East, and part of it contains the oldest surviving original cartographic depiction of Jerusalem. It dates to the 6th century AD. As is common in Christian maps, the Via Dolorosa is illustrated in the middle of the city. In the same manner, the Church of the Holy Sepulcher is also depicted in the center of the city. In both instances this drawing is fictional.

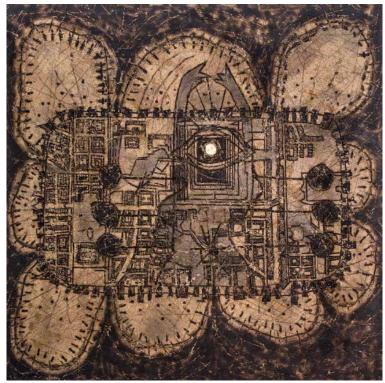
The three black hats represent the three Monotheistic religions – each with a blind religious belief that the city belongs to them. This belief was, historically, the root cause of continuous religious conflict.

The rays surrounding the map symbolize the fact that Jerusalem radiates its holiness throughout the world! However, when one examines the image closely, these are actually barbed-wires, a symbol of divided nations that, throughout generations attempted to conquer the city. In the bottom part of the work, there are fish bones, symbolizing that all attempts to take over the city were not successful.



Jerusalem Map 4, 2017, 61x61 inches, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

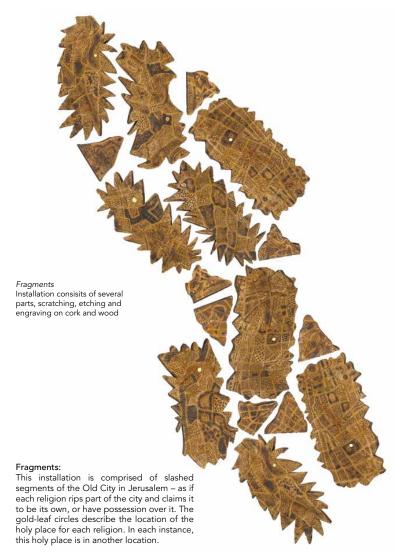
13



Jerusalem Map 9, 2017, 61x61 inches, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

Jerusalem Map #9:

This is a series based on ancient and contemporary maps of the Old City of jerusalem, each with a different emphasis on the perception of the area of less than a square kilometer as seen by various religions. The temple Mount is prominent, decorated with gold leafs, but not necessarily in its location; the size and placement of the other sites, such as the Holy Sepulcher, are marked according to the mapmakers convictions, reflecting desires which are stronger than geographical facts.





Quarter #1, 2017, 22x22 inches each, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

Jerusalem Quarter #1, #2, #3, #4:

These works depict alleys and streets in certain areas of the old City of Jerusalem. The streets are illustrated in disproportionate sizes, alluding to the division and disputes between diverse religions, nations and communities, spanning thousand of years. The gold-leaf circle depicts a holy place - a church, a synagogue or a mosque, in each work it is placed at another location, as was the historical case throughout the ages.



Quarter #2, 2017, 22x22 inches each, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood



Quarter #3, 2017, 22x22 inches each, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood



Quarter #4, 2017, 22x22 inches each, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood



Past Present 15, 2017, 33x74 inches, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood



Past Present 12, 2017, 33x74inches, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

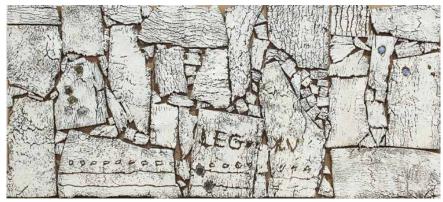
Spolia - Past Present Life Series:

Spolia is a series whose title is a Greek word referring to the secondary use of elements from destroyed buildings in new structures. The term "Spolia" might imply that these fragments were taken at random from other monuments and simply reused. This repurposing creates a chain of "rebirth" in the new buildings, conserving the memory of the past within the present, embodying future promise.

It is characteristic to Jerusalem that every corner contains within itself the history of many religions, different times, and the whole city is filled with layers upon layers that are interconnected with each other.

These works are made of various pieces, each containing countless traces of different periods in history, mixture of decorations, several religions, coins and symbols.

In these works, Sher also connects between shapes and periods, as if someone is creating an archeological digging site, and then randomly connects the findings.



Past Present 13, 2017, 33x74 inches, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood





O'God, 15x15 inches, scratching, etching and engraving on blocks of cork

O'God:

The installation is comprised of small wedges of cork which look like little notes. Painted red, each one bears a wish in a different language. They allude to the diverse faiths and fervent beliefs of folk religion that developed regarding Jerusalem, especially the Jewish custom of placing small notes with prayers among the stones of the Wailing Wall. In this site-specific work, as in Sher's other works, he creates a symbolic language: the crimson red color creates a chain of associations: The temple priests' clothing, the sacrificial blood, life, fire, atonement and victory!



The Ten Plagues of Egypt, 20x20x122 inches each (ten obelisks), scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

Obelisks (Ten Plagues):

Obelisks are Egyptian monuments ornamented with small inscriptions - symbols of the Sun God, Ra. The ancient Egyptians believed that Ra created himself from the primordial chaos, and was a principal God, the Creator of the Universe, and the King of the Gods. The obelisks were also symbols of Egyptian military triumphs. Their engraved inscriptions were stories about battles and words of praise and glory for the Pharaohs. Interestingly, archaeologists found no obelisks dated after the time the Hebrew slaves left Egypt. This means that the obelisks in Egypt were probably built by Hebrew slaves.

Sher's Obelisks are 10 ft. tall, made of layers of cork on a wood skeleton. There are ten obelisks, each alluding to one of the ten plagues by using a visual narration of countless tiny images and clues, each depicting a specific plague. The minute images are etched, seared and engraved on the cork. The artist carefully navigates the symbolic space between meaning and history. In an act of defiance, Sher reverses the original significance of the Obelisks, Egypt's emblematic monuments of victory and glory, by using these same structures to depict the triumph of Divine Truth over man-made deific monuments.



Tears, 20x100 inches, scratching, etching and engraving on sheets of cork

Tears (Scrolls):

This work relates to fragments of scrolls and manuscripts which were found in archaeological excavations near Jerusalem. It depicts the fragmentary and patchy history of the Holy Land. This composition engages with ancient maps and continental models, thus simultaneously connecting Jerusalem to the ancient and contemporary, local and global and portraying its presence throughout the ages.



Scarabs, 9.5x9.5 inches each, scratching, etching and engraving on blocks of cork

Scarabs (Beetles):

The Scarab is generally associated with old Egypt which made this beetle one of their most important religious symbols. The scarab became favorite amulets and coins throughout history. Many of these coins have been found during excavations in and around Jerusalem. The engravings on their flat base depict the history of Jerusalem and its surroundings.







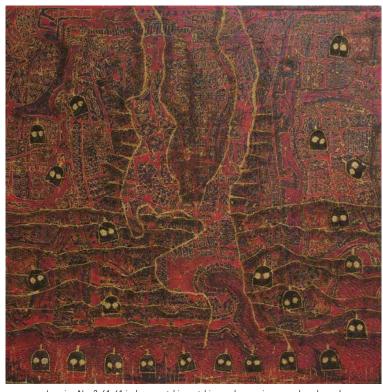












Invasion No. 2, 61x61 inches, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

Invasion No. 2:

The artwork is based on a manipulation Sher made by merging an old map of Palermo with maps of the Old City of Jerusalem. The work deals with the phenomenon of immigration and foreigners fleeing affliction in their native countries. This is depicted through black symbols (like Pac-man) spread across the city.



Invasion No. 3, 61x61 inches, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

Invasion No. 3:

The work is based on a manipulation Sher made by blending an old map of Torino with maps of the Old City of Jerusalem. It depicts, among other things, a wall that surrounds Torino, much like the wall that surrounds Jerusalem. In both cities, the wall was originally built for protection, and eventually became a symbol for separation of interests and religions. The work also alludes to the symbols used by warriors, crusaders and pilgrims.



Unity:

This large floor installation is made of pieces of compressed cork which together form a shattered map whose components have been torn by an invisible hand which scattered in all directions. Like a large floor puzzle, the pieces link-up to each other to create a hatched picture which is based on the intermingling of two maps: That of the Jaffa Gate and the Wall of the Old City of Jerusalem, and a map of a section of the Berlin Wall and the Brandenburg Gate. This imaginary map contains hints of familiar sites and areas that do not merge into a coherent picture.

Parts of these maps are engraved, etched and printed on the puzzle pieces so that the Old City Wall, which separates East and West Jerusalem, connects with the Berlin Wall, which separated East and West Berlin. This newly created map fuses together both Jerusalem and Berlin. Among its emblematic details are the engravings and burns which emphasize the shadows of buildings but not the actual buildings - a symbol of impermanence, historical controversy and constant change.

The Brandenburg Gate, though originally built as a symbol of peace and unity, became an emblem of hatred, bloodshed and division when the Nazis used the gate to celebrate Hitler's seizure of power.

Similarly, the Wall in the Old City of Jerusalem where, for millennia, peoples, kingdoms and religions have been engaged in combat for control of this small area of ancient Jerusalem, where millions have lost their lives while placing the sanctity of the city above their own fate.

The puzzle also depicts the large number of Jewish, Christian, Moslem and other enclaves in Jerusalem, all separated from each other by their principles, beliefs and aspirations for differentiation.

This installation, as Sher's other works of art, with their rich repertoire of symbols and signs, incisions, scorched areas, rents and chaos, are also relevant to conflict zones throughout the world. The works critically observe the fundamentalism and self-righteousness leading to the unending war for every piece of land in which faith's flame burns encountering dark violence.

On the other hand, the puzzle represents the yearning and dream for unification, harmony, connectivity, blessing and perfection.







Floor Installation, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood



East West Berlin #1, 61x61, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

East West Berlin #1, #2, #3, #4:

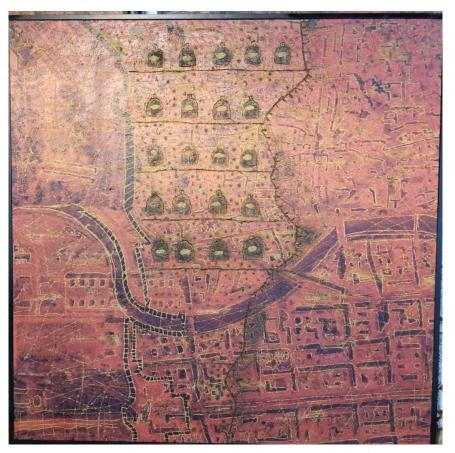
Avner Sher manipulates, fuses and combines maps of Jerusalem with maps of Berlin. This blending creates new imaginary maps that require deep study into the similarities between both cities, such as the walls which partition East and West. The engravings and burns in the maps emphasize shadows of structures - a symbol of impermanence, historical controversy and constant change. The choice of Berlin is not accidental. Berlin is the city where the Nazi regime rose and brought a Holocaust - mass murder of millions of Jews as well as millions of others, including Gypsies, intellectually disabled, dissidents and homosexuals. The Wall and the Brandenburg Gate are illustrated to hark back its original symbol of peace and unity which turned into an emblem of horror, when the Nazis turned the Gate into a celebratory monument to mark Hiller's seizure of power. Similarly, the Wall of the Old City in Jerusalem which separates East and West instigated division which led to many controversies, struggles, bloodshed, and victories.



East West Berlin #2, 61x61, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood



East West Berlin #3, 61x61, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood



East West Berlin #4, 61x61, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

Visual Esperanto – Avner Sher's Oeuvre as a "Third Space"

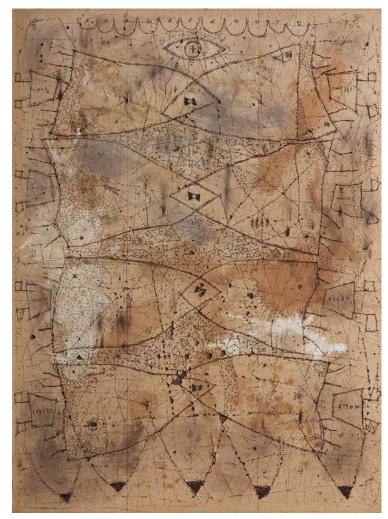
An article written by Smadar Sheffi, PhD

The realms Avner Sher creates in his works span eras and cultures in a language of "Visual Esperanto." His multilevel works contain images of gestures, emotions, body and domesticity in a primordial language that transcends cultural differences. More encoded layers refer to Sher's creating in Israel, in the heart of the Fertile Crescent, the "cradle of civilization" and eternal arena of clashes between civilizations.

Sher's artwork is both universal and individual, suffused with his own biography yet offers viewers a map of their inner world, its origins and yearnings. Sher's main material is corkboard, which he selected for its unique properties and possibilities of processing. Recently he began to work with layers of unprocessed cork; the choice of the unprocessed material impacts the content of the artworks and deepens their meanings.

Cork is the external bark of the Cork Oak tree, peeled off the trunk once every nine years. The trees are not only in a constant process of regeneration and growth, but also in repeated trauma. The choice of cork began as an aesthetic preference and is now a deliberate choice referring to the essential nature of cork as bearing its history and a regenerative capacity. The concepts of destruction and rebirth associated with the history of the Jewish People and of the Middle East have links to Sher's work in terms of material which is flayed yet flourishes.

Sher treats the cork, marking it, thus making it his. He aggressively etches, scorches, burns and floods the cork with color from unusual materials such as wine, laundry detergent, ink and ketchup. With these means, Sher creates an archaeology and history for the material. The texture obtained is reminiscent of tortured parchment. In his works in desert colors and wine hues, or on a row of obelisks, he seeks answers, making fears and hopes present.



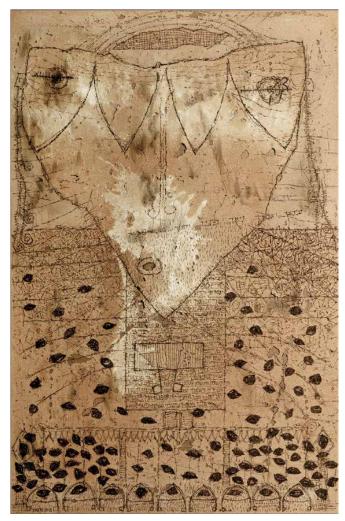
Unity, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

Within the marks created from the extended processing, in stains, tears and scratches, Sher seeks a thread of narrative or form. These residues of action are read by him as trail markers to the primordial myths of humankind, such as the Creation and the Flood. References to biblical figures revered in Christianity and Islam reappear in many works, such as the recent Jacob's Ladder (2013), Jonah (2013), or the Ten Plagues on obelisks (2014). Other works originate in later Jewish texts. Sher weaves together the marks and wounds in the material by transforming them into forms and letters, healing them to build a world of broad philosophical and formal gestures which are often surprising and touching.

Extensive historical associations arise from the work. On corkboards mounted on wood, he creates works which are painting, etching and intaglio. Through his mode of work he enfolds memories of ancient visual languages, from cuneiform to hieroglyphics, hints of the Babylonians, Assyrians, Hittites, Egyptians and others. Other immediate associations are to American action painters of the mid-20th century (Jackson Pollock, Franz Kline and Willem de Kooning) as well as the childlike scribbles of early modernism (Joan Miró comes to mind). Violent scratches, delicate zones of minimalistic, rhythmic cross-hatching, range from the Ancient Near East to Muslim and Persian ornamentation. Occasionally, images emerge that are reminiscent of the aesthetics of the early computer games like Nintendo, Pacman and Tetris.

The broad use of writing emphasizes the proximity of Hebrew writing to the early inscriptions of the region – Phoenician, Assyrian and Egyptian. The etched letters, so full of vitality and power, often refuse to be deciphered.

Sher narrates a story and captures moments of personal and cultural ambivalence. Beyond the improbability in *Good Morning* (2013), a piece like *Bless You* (2013) is almost a self-portrait.



Bless You, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

In most of his works, similarly to ancient art, size reflects importance, not spatial perspective. His gaze moves between coming closer and distancing, between mythologizing the concrete – houses, animals and objects – to concretizing the mythic, such as the image in *It Must be God* (2014). Issues of faith, power and experience in exposing the universe's modus operandi reappear in works such as In the Beginning (2001) or *Unity* (2014). In these and other works, the lower section is treated differently from other sections, thus constituting anchor-like weights on towers of associations, dreams, and laws of gravity and history.

A double gaze stands at the foundation of the fascinating complexity of Sher's artworks: they connect to ancient cultural traditions and Islamic religious beliefs of the region, but the western gaze at the Orient is also visible, since the region is the "middle" only for those gazing at it from Greenwich.

Sher's dual gaze is linked to Early Modernism, with associations to pioneering artists such as sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska (1891-1915), Jacques Lipchitz (1891-1973), and, of course, Picasso, who drew inspiration from ancient civilizations as a source for his modernist language. In the Israeli context, we can think of Yitzhak Danziger, whose sculpture Nimrod (1939) is an iconic image of the "New Israeli." Danziger (1916-1977), who was born in Germany and immigrated with his family to Eretz Israel, had deep connections to the aesthetic legacy of the Fertile Crescent formed through his visits to the British Museum during his studies in London.

The postcolonial context is essential to thinking about Sher's work. His artistic associations are rooted in contemporary western art no less than the heritage of the Middle East. Art can be characterized as a "third space" as in the concept coined by cultural theoretician Homi K. Bhabha. Bhabha, one of the towering figures in postcolonial and multicultural theory, pointed to the "third space" as one that challenges the perception of homogeneity of history and culture, exposing the option of "otherness" as enriching and expanding the understanding of the world. In works such as *Lucy in the Sky* (2014) or *Alone with a Cat* (2014) there are differences aplenty, orchestrated into a symphony of forms and writing. It is tempting to think of them as a cultural hybrid.



It Must Be God, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

Sher's artwork is located in the present continuous tense: memory functions like archaeological structures within the landscape of the present: the pyramids in Cairo, the Western Wall in Jerusalem; the obelisks in the major sites of Washington D.C., or Place de la Concorde in Paris (a double memory of ancient Egypt and the days of colonialism) – all are sites where history is present, and which impact the future.

Sher's oeuvre is characterized by equilibrium between ego drives and spontaneity and what is planned and orderly, but there is "method in his madness." If Sher's first stage of processing is aggressive treatment of the platform, in the second stage, the work transitions to contemplative observation. Similar to a mystic's reading of coffee grounds or a psychologist's interpretation of a Rorschach Test, the work opens before him into a narrative or a state of being.

The distance between the worlds of mysticism and faith in science is as big as the space between folk beliefs and modernism. Sher mediates and bridges these gaps with an aesthetic as rich and fascinating as it is complex and disturbing. We can think of Avner Sher's oeuvre as a kind of Rosetta Stone, comprising text and translation together, artwork which embodies keys to understanding, an encounter between cultures and histories and a visual declaration of independence.



Good Morning scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood



Lucy in the Sky, scratching, etching and engraving on cork and wood

Lucy in the Sky:

This work portrays the praise of a beautiful and beloved woman, as depicted in The Song of Songs—"I am the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the valleys. As the lily among thorns so is my love....."
The woman is beautiful, with impressive hairdo, jewelry and ornaments. This beautiful woman blossoms higher than a whole field of flowers. Her Divine beauty, her imaginary celestial splendor and magnificence is communicated through the song of the Beatles—"Lucy in the Sky."



Avner Sher Artist Statement

I am both an artist and an architect who lives and works in Israel.

laundry detergent and ink. Working with cork boards, using a wood scorching pen, screwdrivers and hammers, I scratch, tear, engrave and burn the surface, and then splatter on it "healing agents" such as wine, iodine, began to explore other creative methods and techniques and started to deconstruct the surface. In my early works I painted colorful compositions of oil on canvas, in the Cubist spirit. I later I have always been interested in the relationship between construction and deconstruction.

simpler and childlike desire, the power to demolish and then rebuild. This basic desire came authentic instinctual expression. from a place where there are no rules, no library of knowledge, science or engineering: Just an Closely surrounded by expressions of big narratives, my initial drive has always been a much

internal intuitive urge. Only at the end does my conscious message and point of view emerge embodies an attempt to let loose, release control. I then feel total freedom to create from an The first stage in my creation process is done without thought, an intuitive process which

and creating passionate anticipation for a better world: A suggestion of man's strength, belief The journey turns towards revealing the beauty within the superficial ugliness and abomination, and motivation to create wholeness and harmony on a personal, national and global level.

My works are an expression of hope in the face of chaos.

I am interested in the region of the Middle-East, with its history, archeology, ancient manuscripts and languages. My works are rooted in the graffiti and the iconography of the Levant and fuses contemporary art aesthetic while addressing the status of men in the universe. My art contains many layers that are the outcome of my personal experience, my cultural background, both personal and collective history and the neighborhood where I reside.

