

David Baruch Wolk was born and raised in America. He graduated Magna Cum Laude in Fine Arts from Amherst College in 1981 and continued onto various post-graduate art programs and schools including Queens College, the New York Studio School, and Yale University, winning several scholarships, honors, praise and encouragement. Building upon a solid classical foundation in drawing and painting, his work began to become more abstract and personal as he focused all his energies upon developing his artistic response to the contemporary world. In 1986 he moved to Israel where he began studying and practicing Torah. He married, raised a family, and immersed himself in Talmud, and became a scribe specializing in very high-quality tefillin parchments. In 2006 he returned to the art studio emerging with the works that he now presents to the public. This unique work has been highly acclaimed by critics. He also has written extensively upon the subject of Torah and art, to explain the significance and meaning of his work.

Please introduce yourself

I was raised a secular Jew in America and attended college where I decided my direction in life, to become an artist. I graduated Magna Cum Laude in Fine Arts from Amherst College and furthered my art education in several post-graduate programs including The New York Studio School and Yale University. Art for me was part of my general search for spirituality and truth and in 1986 I came to Aretz Yisrael and entered Yeshiva. As I took upon a Torah Life and married and raised a family, I stopped painting. I became an accomplished sofer stam specializing in mehudar parshiot tefilin for over 15 years. I began to paint again nearly 7 years ago, and have dedicated myself to this with all my strength.

How long have you looked at yourself as an artist?

For over 30 years, yet for many intermediate years I stopped looking at myself as an artist for I didn't know that would return to it. Therefore I looked at myself as an artist from about age 20-28 and from age 47-54 (today), altogether about 15 years.

What is the relationship between your Judaism and your art?

I try not to make a single brushstroke without connecting this to my Judaism. Just as I daven before Hashem, so is my art before Hashem and not related to anything else.

What message do you want to convey through your art?

My art stems from my happiness at being a Jew and being able to ponder the true purpose in life and to understand how to serve Hashem as He desires. I seek to convey this in my art and to convey that a person is able to connect his creative powers with his inner life in the service of Hashem.

What is your view on realism Vs. abstract and how they relate to Jewish art?

As a student of art history (as I understood it as a practicing artist) I came to understand that 'abstraction' provided the greatest opportunity for an artist to express truth. I later found the artistic tradition insufficient for my search for truth, and only until I had spent some twenty years learning and practicing Torah did I reconsider that art could be a means for the expression of truth. The Holy alef bet are the universal symbols for which all searchers in these avenues have searched; and I find that all the principles and forms that I sought to realize in abstract painting found their full completion and

fruition when connected to the Holy letters. Although there are certain inherent problems in composing artworks with words, nevertheless, I find that the elements of painting as developed by the modern artists a perfect tool for expressing Torah concepts through the agency of the Otivot (Hebrew letters). I have written extensively on this subject as well as on other issues of Torah and art, some of which can be found on my website.

What is your creative process?

I do not set out with a particular image in mind: “I want the painting to look like this”, rather I begin and develop an artwork based on internal considerations alone. The essential matter in art is content; therefore the form must clothe the content; consequently the form that the painting takes on is at one with the content and emerges from the content alone. The process is one of building and taking apart and rebuilding, which is a matter of organizing and reorganizing thoughts, as expressed through the artistic building blocks of form, color, composition, etc.

Share a recent project.

In the last half-year I have been commissioned to paint a great number of pieces of various Torah themes, quickly, in a semi-representational manner. Although this is in contrast to my general thesis about art, nevertheless, it seems to allow access to many people who otherwise have difficulty connecting easily to my abstract works.

Who or what are your influences, inspirations? Judaic, artistic or other.

My main mentor in life is Rebbe Nachman of Breslov, z'l. I have been influenced in my life by many other great sages and tzadikim, too various to name. As an artist I had many painters that I admired most of the famous painters from the Impressionists to the abstract-expressionists, in particular Vincent Van Gogh.

Please recommend another admired artist/Creative.

Phillip Guston. A Jew who was courageous enough to develop a very personal artistic language, despite opposition, and through this created very powerful images.

What is your advice for emerging artists?

I will attach the words of a small essay which I wrote recently:

I believe that it is very important for an artist to learn to “work from life”; to draw and paint from what he sees in front of him: landscapes, still lifes, portraits. There is no other way to properly learn how to render form and space and to understand color. Yet, one who afterwards decides that he must paint “abstractly”; that is, from his imagination, in my opinion, he has taken on the real challenge of painting. For when one strips his painting of reference to something outside of itself, that which remains is only the pure elements of painting: color, form and line; and the success or failure of his work will depend purely upon his ability to organize the elements properly. Although the task can seem formidable, in truth this approach offers him an important advantage over figurative painting. For nothing can delude him from seeing the true structure of his thought and work, whereas with a representational work he will always see the represented form; this can blind him from seeing the composition. Thus the non-representational approach is like an “x-ray”, enabling one to see what is going on inside, so to speak.

Yet some are blocked from taking this approach, for they feel lost without a subject, and often their entire impetus for making art is from what they see with their eyes. But it seems to me, that one who is truly interested in making 'art', and not commercial products, should tire of working solely from life, especially in our time when photographs can render "life" much more successfully.

The true treasure house of a person is found inside of himself; one's inherent creative potential is rich and boundless. By persistently "mining" one's inner resources, he will find patterns and themes in his consciousness. Through time his work will lead him to develop his own language of expression.

In your definition; What is Jewish Art ?

The world understands now that all art is personal, primarily about the self. The Jew understands that the true self is the Neshama; this is me, my inner self, my soul. I believe that the more that a person is connected to his soul and seeks to express from the deepest parts of himself, this will result in true Jewish Art; ironically perhaps, the more personal the art is, the more universal it will be. Jewish Art, in my definition, is all about the search for truth, for truth is that which distinguishes Judaism from other religions and philosophies, etc. Jewish art, to me, is art stripped of superficiality as much as possible, it is art which seeks to connect all the elements of creation to their source in the Torah, it is art which transcends human wisdom and seeks to radiate Divine wisdom. I believe that Jewish art is an awesome tool for the expression and transmission of the highest levels of true spiritual attainment and has the ability to aid people in a powerful way to return to Hashem.