

## Itzhak Greenfield: Exploring Jerusalem

### The Colors of His Life

On a secluded street in Ein Kerem, stands a building of Jerusalem stone, caressed by the leaves and sweet, aroma of a one-hundred-year-old fig tree heavy with fruit in the summer sun. Once an olive oil factory and flour mill, it is now the home and studio of artist Yitzhak Greenfield. Upon entering the gate, down a narrow, shadow spotted path that leads into a Provence style garden, and into the artist's studio, one cannot help but notice the vibrant and bold colors of the abundant art work in this space. These are the colors of Greenfield's Jerusalem, the colors of his life.

Majestic scenes in blue, gold and indigo, radiating spheres and grand expanses hover above architectural forms and clusters of Hebrew letters, revealing dreamlike realities. These are the creations of Yitzhak Greenfield who works in watercolor and acrylic paints layered with collages of painted papers, discarded book materials, and fragments of his own prints. Applying parts of broken furniture, clock springs, iron locks and keys, the artist forms assemblages that hint at familiar settings, resonating the past. For Brooklyn born, Israeli artist Yitzhak Greenfield, these visions are the essence of the Jerusalem landscape, inspired by the city's ever-changing magical scenery.

The exhibition *Yitzhak Greenfield: Exploring Jerusalem* is a celebration of color and textures as Greenfield explores Jerusalem and its multi-faceted attributes while exploring a wide range of media and diverse materials. This exhibition is in a sense a sort of retrospective of a life's work of an artist who has found inspiration in the city of Jerusalem. With his profound perception for both the city's aesthetic and symbolic qualities, which supply him with an inner resource of images, Greenfield creates his own Jerusalem landscape, where the Jerusalem in the heavens is joined with the Jerusalem of the earth.

For generations, Jerusalem has been a focal point for the Jewish people. It is the center of Jewish life, faith, hope, history, and consciousness. Jerusalem holds a particular significance for Greenfield, who moved to Ein Kerem, Jerusalem over fifty years ago, after living on a kibbutz. Greenfield is a Jerusalem artist, and he remarks: "Living and working in Jerusalem is a special journey for me. My works are visionary landscapes, which are reconstructions of Jerusalem, not always relating to specific sites." The artist has always been intrigued by the historical and dynamic nature of the city, as he constantly explores his own connection to the traditional and spiritual forms of Judaism. Greenfield's art is linked to Jewish and Israeli history and symbols, such as the Hebrew letters, Jewish amulets, and the Ten *Sephirot* (emanations), containing aesthetic qualities of the material and the spiritual.

Greenfield incorporates found objects that have symbolic meaning in his work, books and pages, amulets and Kabbalistic writings and symbols. Sometimes he refers to his work as *Genizot*. Greenfield uses the scraps of pages from a book of amulets written by Yemenite Jews and given to him by his father-in-law Rabbi Shalom Sibahi,

These amulets were originally used to bless, heal and protect. In the artist's collage work they take on new meaning. Once on a visit to New York, to a printing company that was closing down in the Lower East Side of Manhattan, Greenfield found a treasure of old copper printing plates with Hebrew letters. *Meditation on the Alef Bet* is just one example of how he has applied them in his artwork.

Greenfield has always been fascinated by the Hebrew letters and he is emotionally tied to them from the days when he attended *Cheder*, where the Hebrew alphabet is traditionally taught at age three. The Hebrew letters are an important part of Greenfield's life, as he reflects, "Whenever I touch a Hebrew letter, a light goes on inside me." Greenfield found a place for the Hebrew letters in his landscapes of Jerusalem, in which he uses many combinations that appear in his collage paintings and assemblages, as well as in his prints, where the Hebrew letters assume multiple connotations.

In contrast with the square letters, and rectangular buildings and books, the shape of the circle is a reoccurring motif in the artist's work. The artist's reference is to the *Sefirot* system, which is fundamental to the world of Kabbalah. The sphere also represents the *Ein Sof* (infinite). Greenfield adopts the circle shape as a format for his paintings and prints. The round format or *tondo* dates back to ancient Greece, where it was applied on vases and later became popular again in paintings during the Renaissance. Greenfield has restored its place in art, using it to depict Jerusalem landscapes, as he sees Jerusalem as the center of the world.

Many times, in Greenfield's work, it is the ideas behind the things which are not apparent that give it its significance. Letters and numbers can suggest hidden meanings, while objects can hint at absent landscapes, such as in *Exploring Jerusalem*, 1995. In this assemblage, the letters and numbers have mystical connotations, representing the *Sefirot*. The locks without keys represent the locked gates, doors, and towers of Jerusalem. Only the hidden keys can reveal the city's secrets.

Working in a distinctive modernist method, Greenfield's artwork lends itself to rich possibilities of expression. The exhibition *Yitzhak Greenfield: Exploring Jerusalem* comprises three main series from the artist's career, which span over the course of many years and continue to this day; *Jerusalem Visions*, *Jerusalem Assemblages*, and *Landscape and Meditation on the Hebrew Letter*. These artworks portray timeless dream-landscapes of Jerusalem. The hidden secrets of the city are locked away in assemblage constructions, and prints depicting Hebrew letters illuminate into mystical meanings. The spectator travels along with Greenfield through his creations, exploring Jerusalem and experiencing a spiritual and living Judaism, in which the artist constantly searches for the expression of his cultural and spiritual legacy as he reconstructs Jerusalem.

**Shira Mushkin**, Exhibition Curator

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## **Yitzhak Greenfield: Biographical Milestones**

**1932** – Born in Brooklyn New York, U.S.A.

**1946** – Studied ceramics at Aimee LePrince Voorhees's studio. Worked with sculptor Elie Nadelman. Studied drawing and sculpture with Louis Lozowick, Aba Ostrowsky and Haim Gross at the Educational Alliance Art School, N.Y.

**1948** – Art studies at Thomas Jefferson High School in Brooklyn, N.Y. Received Art Award at graduation.

**1951** – Aliya to Israel with a group of *Hashomer Hazair* (The Young Guard), and settles in Kibbutz Galon in the Northern Negev.

**1953** – Studied drawing, painting, and mural painting with Perli Pelzik, Yohanan Simon, and Naftali Bezem in Givat Haviva Art Seminars.

**1956** – Received *The Dizengoff Art Award*, Tel Aviv. Marriage to Zipporah Sibahi.

**1959** – First solo exhibition *People and Landscapes*, Chemerinsky Gallery, Tel Aviv. Moved with family to Kibbutz Ein Hashophet.

**1960** – Received the *America-Israel Culture Fund Scholarship* for studies abroad. Studied print making in Venice with Italian artist Borin. First solo exhibition in Europe at *Il Torchio* Gallery, Italy.

**1964** – Moved with Zipporah and children to Ein Kerem Jerusalem. Began teaching at the Israel Museum, Ruth Youth Wing, Jerusalem.

**1967** – Served as a soldier in the Jerusalem Battalion during the Six Day War. Began working on collage and acrylic paintings of *Jerusalem in Black and White Light* series, and thereafter on the *Jerusalem Visions* series.

**1982-1987** – Taught art workshop classes at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

**1990** – Began working on the *Jerusalem Assemblages* series, and continues print making.

**2008** – *Cycles of Heaven and Earth* Retrospective exhibition, at the Artist's House, Jerusalem.

**2017** – *On Consciousness and Interiors*, joint exhibition with daughter Gila Greenfield, at *Artspace*, Tel Aviv.

Lives, works and teaches art in Ein Kerem. From early career to present, has participated in numerous solo and group exhibitions in Israel, U.S.A., Canada, and Europe, with art works in collections throughout the world.