

The Custodians

The first time I heard the music of the trio "Delyria" on the radio, I was astonished by the freshness, sincerity, and maturity of their performance. My second encounter with these young musicians occurred at the Mishkenot Sha'ananim Music Center in Jerusalem.

Shortly thereafter, in Milan, I attended an exhibition of Japanese screens from the 12th to the 20th centuries, alongside screens by contemporary European artists, organized by the Prada Foundation. Each Japanese screen was a magical world, inviting countless returns, each time revealing new facets of a great culture. The contemporary screens, at their best, were merely decorative partitions.

Nevertheless, a few pieces aimed for something more. They attempted to be a conceptual *Urbi et Orbi*, a proclamation of our civilization and culture. One screen, depicting a grater, elicited a smile (always a positive sign), while another, seen from afar, promised a chance for reflection: a screen-library. After all, a library and books can be not only culturally significant but also a powerful artistic image. Sadly, the creator's intent was disappointingly straightforward: on one side of the screen were books in Hebrew, and on the other, predictably, in Arabic. Similarly, books on one side were in Russian, and on the other, naturally, in Ukrainian.

This is what our era, our civilization, has to offer against Japanese art. Objects that require neither talent nor skill to create. The intellectual level (including imagery) of the creators of these works is such that, by comparison, the intellect of a diplodocus appears exalted. In short, there was no desire to return.

With nearly forty years of teaching experience at the Bezalel Academy of Arts in Jerusalem, I can confidently say that today, to become a famous artist, one need not know how to hold a pencil, draw a stool even passably, or think in the language of plasticity. One needs only to produce a message on the level of the creators of the "grater" and "library" screens, or something akin to "two plus two is four" or "two plus two is not four," which is essentially the same. There is no need to spend years learning the craft, rightly so, for practicing plastic art ceased being a profession about a century and a half ago.

The words of Giacometti, "Now I am only interested in reality, and I can spend the rest of my life copying a chair," will seem to them the words of a village fool, living by concepts from two centuries ago.

Words. Contemporary art is unthinkable without words. Words have pervaded everything: painting, music, dance. Our civilization is bogged down in words. However, the famous phrase from Saint-Exupéry's "The Little Prince," "What is essential is invisible to the eye," can be extended – the essential cannot be expressed in words either. Words lie. From prolonged and deceitful use, they have been devalued, losing meaning like an old coin worn by time. The most important, the most significant things in life are conveyed not with words but with a gesture, a touch, a glance, a smile, and of course, with music – an infinite world containing all our sorrows and joys, dreams and aspirations.

One screen depicted a bamboo stalk, created with a single brushstroke. A brushstroke executed in a second, yet backed by years of diligent

work and dedication.

I listened to these young people in the ancient house of the Mishkenot Sha'ananim Music Center. Outside, war raged. Behind the old stone walls, hatred, anger, and madness reigned – all that is antithetical to creativity and life itself. Yet here, in this small hall, three young people together (Zusammen) – significantly, as it implies attention and respect for one's neighbor, in every sense – these three young people, by their very existence and activity, stood as a clear antithesis to what was happening outside.

For years, they had learned to produce sounds of incredible lightness and beauty with their bows, and the pianist had strived to teach the grand piano to speak with a human voice.

In a world where all values are trampled, where ersatz thought, feeling, dignity, and honor reign, in a world ruled by charlatans where no one dares to say that the emperor has no clothes, these young people, as well as those who bravely compose music and create plastic art not in accordance with Prada trends but in accordance with the ever-renewing tradition, revealing its still unknown facets, these people are not just artists and musicians, they are Custodians. Custodians of a great culture that has retreated to the deep catacombs from the abominations of our days. They are the keepers of the flame, without which our existence is devoid of meaning.

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