

הירקון 3 בני ברק, מגדלי LYFE בניין B טל. 03-5635050 פקס. 03-5617166

יפעת מידע תקשורת

26.13x30.77	1/3	10 עמוד	the jerusalem post - in jerusalem	06/2026	98006827-0
בית האמנים ירושלי - 12572					

: Painting through the ashes

## Spotlight

# Painting through the ashes

'A believer': In conversation with Ronen Siman-Tov, whose solo exhibition opens tomorrow at the Jerusalem Artists' House **BASIA MONKA**



Ronen Siman Tov, fourth-generation Jerusalemite. (Kino Kitchen)



'The Sikra Thread.' (Photos: Michael Amar)

his art; about his decision to cancel his previous exhibition, after almost two years of working on it, and what happened next that led him to create the works that viewers can see in his new show.

**You are about to open your solo exhibition "The Dread of Isaac." In your earlier paintings you often referred to biblical stories. Why did you focus on this particular theme, now?**

The exact name of the exhibition in Hebrew is different. I couldn't translate it properly even if I wanted to, because the name in Hebrew is "Hapahad Yitzhak," with the letter "hei" before the fear. It's also "The Dread of Isaac," the deep fear of Isaac, because we know that he was at the altar, and he was the sacrifice. But the Hebrew "Hapahad Yitzhak" [meaning, "the fear will laugh"] gives it another level.

**The laugh that comes from the meaning of the name Yitzhak? From the Hebrew verb 'litzhok,' to laugh?**

"Hapahad yitzhak" means the fear is going to laugh. "Pahad Yitzhak" is the best known Hebrew term for the event that was very devastating for Isaac [the Akeda, the Binding of Isaac]. But the Hebrew letter hei [the definite article, meaning "the"], added to this term, makes the fear also laugh. It's a wordplay that doesn't work in English.

**So it has a double meaning. And why did you want to focus on this subject?**

Well, it's my story, and it's the story of our nation, our history, of the Jewish people and the Israeli people. Most of my works speak about personal and collective experiences. It's a work in process over the years.... In terms of the nation, it's like a phoenix. It's like something is burning and...

**And are we coming out of the ashes?**

Coming out of the ashes, and [then] we are burning again, and so on.

**Speaking of the ashes, this is one of the unique materials that you use in your work, together with oil paint. Why**

Ronen Siman-Tov – artist, architect, and lecturer at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, born (1959) and based in Jerusalem – is to open his solo exhibition "The Dread of Isaac" at the Jerusalem Artists' House on June 6.

Siman-Tov presents a rich body of work, combining landscape, myth, politics, and the memory of his beloved Jerusalem, a city with which his family has been linked for four generations and, at the national level, for thousands of years.

In his gray-pinkish, as he describes the colors used in his paintings, created on canvas, walls, paper, wooden panels, and sacks found at Jerusalem's Mahaneh Yehuda market, the artist takes us through the ashes, with a deep belief in repair. "I am a believer," he told me.

As a painter, Siman-Tov explores the tension between place, memory (personal and collective), biblical stories, and politics. As an architecture teacher, he helps students to understand how to build places that bind people to the building, site and landscape, and that form connections among people.

Siman-Tov spoke to me about his artistic research, his memories of the First Lebanon War, which influenced

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26.1x28.83	2/3	11 עמוד	the jerusalem post - in jerusalem	06/2026	98006812-4
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'Open Tent.'

**have you thought of implementing ashes into your paintings?**

I had planned an exhibition in 2021, a series about the Prophet Jonah. I had been working on it for about two years, and then one of the great, famous curators in Israel came to my studio, looked at my works, and said some very harsh words about some of them. Because he appreciated my work very much, he could say some very hard critical words.

I decided to cancel the show, but then I didn't know what to do. How would I start again? How to start with painting? What is painting? It brought me to the fundamental questions about what painting is and what are the basic tools or elements or things that are necessary to make a painting.

So, then I went out of my studio, and I dug in the courtyard, and I brought some soil to my studio, and I had some burlap. And I painted with the soil and [did] some oil paintings, black oil painting. And this was the beginning of a sort of mourning for the exhibition that didn't work out, didn't exhibit.

**Can you identify what happened to you in this period that caused that artistic crisis? Was it the time of the**

**pandemic or anything critical in your life?**

Yes, I guess, but it also triggered some other things that were very deep inside of me, connected with the time when I was a soldier in the First Lebanon War.

**Sounds like deep wounds. And have you found an answer about what painting is?**

No, I'm still searching for it, but it was a beginning of a new way of painting, of a new way of making art.

**You paint on canvas, wood panels, and walls, and you draw on paper and even on the sacks.**

This was the first time that I started to paint on sacks. The sacks came from the market, not new. I was going to the market and talking with the people who sell spices and so forth. It was very interesting to investigate or to search for the roots of some of the sacks made around the world before they came to the market in Jerusalem.

**You were born in Jerusalem, and in your art, in the coming exhibition, but also in general, you are very much connected to it.**

My family story connects very deep-

ly to Jerusalem through generations.

**Which generation of 'Yerushalmi' (Jerusalemite) are you?**

Fourth. My grandfather and grandmother were living in Silwan village, in the Hinnom Valley. They moved to the Old City, and they had to move out again from their home in the Old City to Nahlaot. So this is the city of my parents, of my family.

**Being that rooted here, do you consider yourself a Jerusalem painter?**

I'm known as a Jerusalem painter. Whether I consider myself that way, I don't know, maybe yes. I was born here. I'm very connected to this place. I paint Jerusalem my way. I painted [for example] a big cryptic [painting] about the Hinnom Valley. It's 4 meters long, and it's my way to look at the graves from the time of the Second Temple. For me, it's a history of my family, but it's also the history of our nation.

**So, always a personal and a collective experience.**

Yes, the same story, and I'm trying to look at it from the eyes of something that is hidden. And I'm trying to find out what it is. For me, it's a riddle. And, it's something spiritual to touch the subject of Jerusalem; it is something very deep and something very ancient.

It's something that goes deep into my roots and into this earth. But it's also a very complicated and meaningful place for me.

**And you are showing Jerusalem also in the new exhibition. How many works are you presenting?**

Around 40, from the last eight or 10 years.

**What do you want people to take from this show?**

I don't know. I hope that they will stop for a minute when they are gazing at the works.... It's a very slow exhibition.

**What do you mean by that? By slow, do you mean intimate?**

Intimate and very silent, very introverted and not shouting.



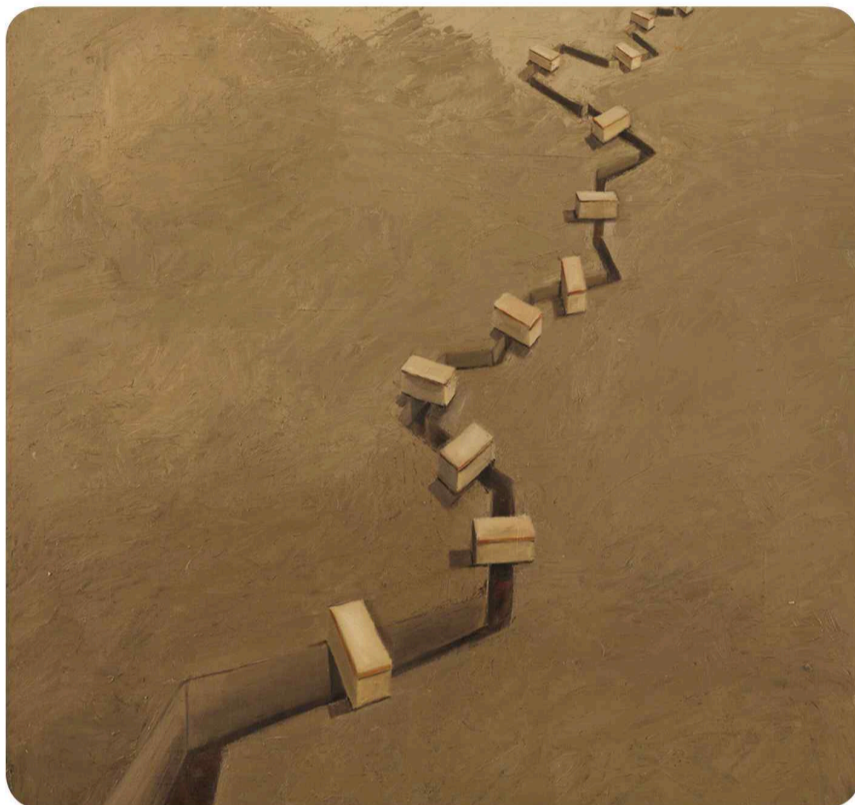
Painting in his studio. (Yael Lichtenstein)

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25.79x28.37	3/3	12 עמוד	the jerusalem post - in jerusalem	06/2026	98006813-5
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'The Rift.' (Elad Sarig)

**Could you tell me more about the colors that you're using? They seem to be very reserved, if I may say this about colors.**

Yes, I tried to do it differently, but I come to the same palette every time, so I'm trying to make my palette more colorful, but the result is more gray-pinkish [smiles].

**You came to painting with a background in architecture. You studied it in Holland. Why there?**

After the First Lebanon War, after a lot of time in the army, I decided to study abroad because I thought that I had to take time out. I knew people who had already studied in Holland, so I just bought a ticket there, and I did my two degrees in architecture. I spent about seven years in Holland.

**Did you ever work as an architect afterward?**

Yes, I worked for some years in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. But at some point, I was thinking about what a medium could say about life and death. And architecture is a wonderful medium, but I thought that art connects more with metaphysical things.

**So then you decided to study art at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design?**

Yes, I got my MFA. When I graduated, I decided to focus on art, on painting.

**But you didn't completely abandon architecture. You have been teaching it at Bezalel for many years.**

Yes, in the Orthodox branch (just for religious women) and in the regular Bezalel. I teach in a first-year architecture studio there, but it's something that's very open. How we make a place in this world and how we connect to a place. I mean, it's questions that are closer to my questions in art rather than making buildings or structures.

**We are living in very unstable times, especially in Israel. After COVID, we had two-and-a-half years of war. Recently, we had another 40 days of war, and we don't know whether there will be another war. So, in these unstable times, your way of teaching, of finding the place, sounds to me very relevant.**

Yes, how to find a place in the world, or how to make place, build the relationship with the place, and also the relationships between people in a place. Your question is very good, because in the COVID time, it was also a question about how you make place when you are isolated in your home and you can't go out, but there are also different ways to define place-making in extreme times.

It's a very dynamic process of



At a Jerusalem cafe. (Yasmeen Siman Tov)

looking for place-making, or looking for a place. No matter which kind of crisis is coming up, we are asking the same questions, and we have to figure out, or try to find out the answers.

**Do you sketch before making a painting, or do you paint right away using the main medium?**

It depends. Sometimes I'm making sketches, studies, and sometimes I'm working right on the surface.

**Do you usually know what you want to achieve, or does it come with the process?**

No, I don't know. It's more like talking with myself, and my thoughts, and my feelings. It's not a sketch to reframe or rephrase something that I'm obligated to do; it's more like refreshing my feelings, my thoughts, and a process begins.

So I'm not making a model to make a house. It's not like that. I'm mak-

ing sketches to understand what the atmosphere is; it's more like feeling what I want to say, and how I connect myself with the world, and with my thoughts and my ideas.

**I'm listening to what you're saying, and I think you leave the architect in you outside your art studio.**

Yes and no. I'm not an architect by practice, but I'm an architect; it's part of my education, my expertise. I'm very satisfied with teaching architecture, but practicing architecture is less [interesting to me now].

**What is architecture by definition, in the way you teach it?**

Something very high; it's very spiritual, it's a connection between the building and the site and the landscape and the people. It's a way to get people to connect with each other. That's [what] architecture is for.

**Do you think your paintings can have a similar effect on people? Can it help people to connect to each other or even heal their wounds?**

I don't know, at least I'm consistent with architecture and art, and painting. I don't know if it can repair something, but I want to believe it can. I'm a believer. I believe that there is a repair to things; and also in my works that are very dark, sometimes you see a slight light coming up from the back page of the painting, so there is always something to look for and to hope for.

I don't know if I'm very optimistic, but I have some hassidic soul in this. My desire is to repair things. ■



'Tower in the Water.'

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