

כלכליסט

## Painter Israel Hershberg: “There is a mutual distance between me and the world of Israeli art.”

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By Yekir Shagav



Photo: Yael Scalia

Even though Israel Hershberg is one of the prominent local painters, and his works are sold for hundreds of thousands of shekels, he rarely exhibits in Israel. Now, a rare retrospective of his work has opened in Berlin.

“I love the land very much, but I simply don’t feel like an Israeli artist in particular. I didn’t think there would be any interest in my exhibition in the Israeli media,” says Israel Hershberg, one of the prominent Israeli realist painters, now presenting the exhibition “Imago,” a small retrospective at Plan B Gallery in Berlin. Hershberg, 75, famous for his almost hyper-realistic depictions of still life, nudes, and landscapes, has had great success, especially overseas. He was born in a displaced persons camp in Austria, grew up in Israel until the age of 10, and was educated in the United States, where he also studied painting at the New York Academy of Art. For three decades, he was represented by the prestigious Marlborough Gallery, which sells works by Picasso, Miró, Francis Bacon, and Lucian Freud. His prices match his status, with two of his large landscape paintings, “Tel Kakhon” and “City Center, Jerusalem,” now valued at about half a million shekels each.

In Israel, however, Hershberg, who's School for Realistic Painting in Jerusalem has informally been named after himself, remains a distant and enigmatic figure. Even though he has been living in the country since the 1980s, currently in Pardes Hanna, he exhibits very infrequently, both due to the high demand for his paintings by private collectors and because of the extended periods of time required to complete his works. So far, he has had only three exhibitions in Israel: two at the Israel Museum and one at the Tel Aviv Museum, making each new exhibition of his works an exceptional event. He remarks, "There has always been mutual distance between me and the galleries and the world of art in Israel, and I have never exhibited in a gallery here, only in museums. In the art scene in Israel, I never took much interest, and in a similar way, they never took much interest in me, even though, of course, they came to study with me. It seems I am built for a different art environment."

How do you plan such an exhibition, which is essentially a small self-retrospective? "It was really difficult. We tried, within reasonable financial means, to bring the paintings from all over the world, but some of the collectors were no longer with us, some paintings disappeared, and others ignored the request. For example, a painting I really love, the one in the collection of a wealthy New Yorker, I failed to bring. After the opening party, I said to myself, 'God, this is the last time I will get to see my works displayed together.'" Do you really complete one or two paintings a year? "I wish. Much less. I erase and redraw the painting again and again. For example, the Italian landscape painting took me two and a half years to complete. They just require a lot of time, much of which I am usually not satisfied with my own result, so I scratch my head and start over in the painting. Some people are able to let it be and do other things on the side, but not me. The painting 'Valerie (Old Man),' for example, is not complete. At a certain point, I couldn't finish it. It was sold, changed hands, and disappeared from me until we found it in another collection. Now it is exhibited at the show, even though I think it may need further work."

**Israel Hershberg**

IMAGO

13.09.23–11.11.23

Plan B, Berlin