

THE

Australian Jewish News

ISRAEL AT WAR - DAY 647

VOICE OF THE AUSTRALIAN JEWISH COMMUNITY SINCE 1895

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JULY 6, 2025, 12:28 PM

The portrayal of Jews in art

Through his own art, artist Jacob Pichhadze sought to convey his impressions of Jews and Judaism, which countered negative stereotypes.

By DR AMIR PICHHADZE

This article was originally published on July 6, 2025, in the Australian Jewish News, and can be accessed through this link: <https://www.australianjewishnews.com/the-portrayal-of-jews-in-art/>. The article is reproduced here to provide relevant links to sources mentioned in the article.

Recently in *The Jewish Post & News*, Professor Lionel Steiman shared his insights on the history of antisemitism. As he explains, over time and around the world antisemitism has taken different forms, such as the portrayal of Jews as having stereotypical characteristics.

Numerous types of [stereotypes](#) of Jews can be referred to. As an example, Lionel notes that “Jews were depicted in various art forms as devil-like creatures, [with horns](#) and tails and cloven feet.” In addition to stereotypes about the physical features of Jews, there have also been stereotypes about their character and intentions. For example, [Yaëlle Azagury](#) traced and explained the motif of the ‘beautiful Jewess’ (“[la belle Juive](#)”), an evolving trope that has been depicted in Western literature and the visual arts. As Yaëlle explains, “*la belle Juive* became conflated with the image of the *femme fatale*... The Jewess was seen as threatening because she was Jewish, but also because she was a woman with voracious desires and uncommon ambitions.” This trope suggests that the Jewess is “[sly, coquettish, overall sexual, dangerous and destructive](#).” “[The typical appearance of la belle juive includes](#) long, thick, dark hair, large dark eyes, an olive skin tone, and a languid expression. Often, she will be depicted wearing exotic oriental clothing and jewellery.”

Some examples of these stereotypes in art are available in the Katz Ehrenthal Collection, at the [United States Holocaust Memorial Museum](#). The collection consists of over 900 individual objects depicting Jews and antisemitic and anti-Jewish propaganda from the Medieval to the modern era, created and distributed throughout Europe, Russia, and the United States. The same hateful stereotypes reappear throughout the collection, spanning centuries and continents.

Such stereotypes have been so prevalent and influential that some conducted research to determine whether they were true, though expectedly their research failed to reveal truth in such stereotypes. Nevertheless, as Lanny cautions, even in today's era we know too well that dangerous beliefs can persist despite overwhelming evidence against them.

From an early age in Georgia, my father, [Jacob Pichhadze](#), was exposed to [Georgian Orthodox Christian](#) art and was educated in traditional art making techniques and styles such as those of the Renaissance period. Yet, through his own art, he sought to convey his impressions of Jews and Judaism, which countered negative stereotypes. He sought to convey an image of the Jew as proud, strong, confident, modest, and beautiful. He also sought to convey the aura of introspection that exist in Jewish life through prayer and contemplation. He began this exploration through his art when he immigrated to Israel from Georgia, in 1972. In 1982, in an article published in the [Israel Review](#), [Jizchak Kol-Ami](#) commented on Jacob's artworks on this subject:

"Jacob's unique talent reveals itself in two series of paintings which are devoted to new themes – the Georgian Jewish woman ('pictures of women') and the Jew at prayer (called 'Judaica' by the artist). The paintings come from the higher and more mature level which the artist has attained along his creative path. These paintings possess a magical strength from which it is difficult to turn away.

This phenomenon of strength is not easy to describe. A single look at the paintings is a thousand times more meaningful and convincing. When you see the 'pictures of women' or the 'Judaica', you believe that you have the creation of the great masters before your eyes – the same realistic, almost precision in the contours of the body. In a word, it is the same style in which the Renaissance portraits or Russian religious paintings were created. Then suddenly you are confused. Something is different from the classical works. Jacob has succeeded in a masterful way in 'modernizing' the bewitching style of the great masters...

In the portraits of the Judaica series, the old Jews seem alive, their eyes show a living soul, their expressions penetrating your inner being. Even the prayer shawl has a tangible quality – you can hear the rustling of the material. The ‘pictures of women’ remind us of Madonnas or religious paintings – the same style, the same creative manner, except that the women are typical Georgian Jewish women, personification of virtue and modesty. Jacob’s heroine doesn’t particularly demonstrate her femininity. She is dressed unpretentiously in the traditional dark clothes of the Georgian woman. She is reserved – the fire of her passion deeply buried...

He masters the magical art of light and shade with excellence... which have earned him the complimentary name “the Israeli Rembrandt.”

An early version of Jacob’s Judaica paintings depicts a Jewish man making his proclamation of Shema: “Hear, O Israel” (“Shema, Israel”; שְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל), “God is our Lord, God is one” (“Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad”). Throughout their history, this proclamation of the Shema prayer became the ultimate declaration of faith of the Jewish people. As [Rabbi Shraga Simmons](#) explains, Shema “is said upon arising in the morning and upon going to sleep at night. It is said when praising God and when beseeching Him. It is the first prayer that a Jewish child is taught to say. It is the last words a Jew says prior to death.” The late Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, [Jonathan Sacks](#), described the proclamation of the Shema as “the greatest of all commands... the last words spoken by Jewish martyrs as they went to their deaths.”

A version of this painting was displayed at an exhibition of Jacob’s artworks at the Beit Emanuel Museum in 1982 (Ramat-Gan, Israel). The exhibition was opened by guest speaker [Shimon Peres](#), who at the time was Leader of the Labour Party and subsequently became the Prime Minister and President of Israel.

“Hear, O Israel”

“שמע ישראל”

JACOB PICHHADZE

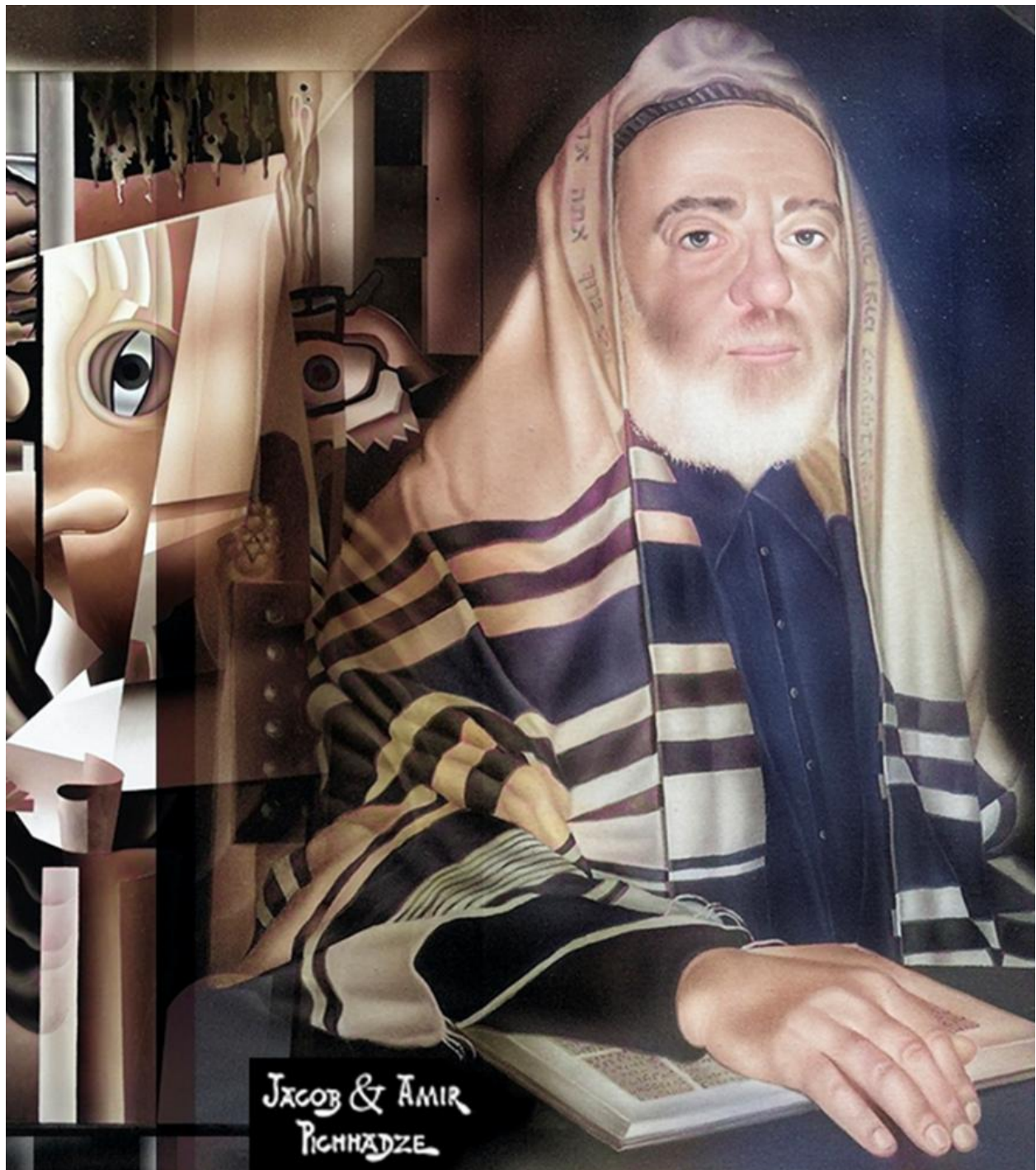


Photo from Exhibition at the Beit Emanuel Museum (Israel, 1982)

From Right to Left: Shimon Peres (former President and PM of Israel), Artist Jacob Pichhadze.

Over time, Jacob and I have been collaborating in the creation of artworks. A recent Judaica painting we created is called ‘Jewish Scholar’. It depicts a Jew engaged in religious studies. This artwork’s integration of realism and surrealism is suggestive of the scholar’s engagement with the reading of religious text and spiritual contemplation.





Some early examples of Jacob's portrayal of Jewish women were also displayed in his exhibition at the Beit Emanuel Museum in 1982 (Ramat-Gan, Israel). One of these is his portrayal of the biblical figure Rachel, who was the wife of Jacob and the mother of Joseph and Benjamin. Below is the original version, which was featured at the Beit Emanuel Museum, as well as a more recent version which was created by the collaborative work of Jacob and I.



Photo from Exhibition at the Beit Emanuel Museum (Israel, 1982). From Right to Left:  
Zinaida Pichhadze (artist's wife), Shimon Peres (former President and PM of Israel),  
and artist Jacob Pichhadze.





"Rachael". Artwork by artists Jacob Pichhadze & Amir Pichhadze

Jacob and I have been cooperating in creating artwork, dealing with numerous themes, styles, mediums and techniques. One of our objectives has been, and continues to be, to provide a positive and inspiring portrayal of Jews and Judaism through art, in contrast to art that is negatively, unfairly and unreasonably stereotypical and harmful. We hope that our art will inspire others to do the same. Together we can contribute to the shared objective of making the world a better place for all, an objective which in Hebrew is referred to as '[tikkun olam](#)'.

#### About the author

*Dr. Amir Pichhadze is a Renaissance man. Driven by his varying interests and utilizing his mixed talents, skills, and diverse knowledge, Amir's activities have been impactful in a range of spheres. His activities have included creating visual art, working as an art dealer, lecturing and teaching at universities and conferences worldwide, conducting and publishing academic research on a range of subjects, providing policy advice to government agencies, editing law journals, providing peer-reviews of journal submissions, working as treasurer, conducting philanthropic projects, among other things. Under the guidance of and in collaboration with his father, the master artist Jacob Pichhadze, Amir has been creating visual art using a range of mediums, styles and techniques, and explores different subject matters.*





Creative

# Cooperative and intergenerational art

Amir Pichhadze · Posted: February 13, 2025 | Updated: February 13, 2025



"Contemplation" by Jacob & Amir Pichhadze. (Photo Courtesy of Amir Pichhadze)

## Artist Statement

Recently in the *Cambridge Journal of Law, Politics, and Art* (CJLPA), I addressed the question of when an artwork is finished. I suggested that rather than focusing on a particular composition at any given time, the pertinent question ought to be when has the artist finished achieving their intentions. As was famously suggested by the Dutch artist Rembrandt, "a work of art is finished when an artist realizes his intentions."

In my article in the CJLPA, based on my own experiences as an artist, I identified that an artist's intentions and/or opportunities may change over time, and therefore the artist could rework their art to fulfill their changed intentions or take up changing opportunities (such as the availability of new mediums), over time. For example, I referred to a painting I created in 1995, which was intended to serve



particular objectives at that time, using the mediums which were available to me. Yet, over the years, in response to changing socio-political circumstances, I rethought my intentions and modified my artwork accordingly. In my reworked composition, I also utilized new additional mediums which were previously unavailable.

Here, I take the opportunity to add further insights to this question. Again, based on my experiences, I exemplify that the artmaking process can be cooperative and intergenerational. Artists could choose to cooperate in the art-making process, dynamically taking part in developing their objectives, planning, and executing their art. While this process could take place and be completed during the lifetime of all the cooperating artists, it could also be intergenerational and thus continuous beyond the ongoing active participation of any one of the cooperating artists.



Exhibition at the **Beit Emanuel Museum** (1982, Israel)  
*From Right (Top):* **Shimon Peres** (former President and  
Prime Minister of Israel), artist **Jacob Pichhadze**  
*From Right (Bottom):* **Amir Pichhadze**

For example, my father, Jacob Pichhadze, and I have been cooperating in the creation of visual artworks. Our engagement in this process has been dynamic, both in terms of planning and executing the artworks. One of our artworks is titled "Contemplation." The painting's early version, created by Jacob, was featured in 1982 at the Beit Emanuel Museum in Israel. In its original version (see above), the painting features a woman in a gesture of contemplation. More recently, Jacob and I modified that original composition by adding to it elements associated with the experience of contemplation, such as books, musical instruments, and a bottle.

With our example in mind, we encourage other artists to likewise explore the opportunities made possible by cooperative and intergenerational artmaking.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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By **Amir Pichhadze**

A FATHER/SON DUO

## Jewish morals in art: an example

'Growing up, I closely followed my father's teaching of art and morality. As my knowledge and skills developed, we increasingly cooperated in creating art.'

By [DR AMIR PICHHADZE](#)

April 30, 2025, 3:54 pm



Art can have a role in conveying and inspiring Jewish morals. This role is exemplified in this article through the collaborative artworks of Jacob Pichhadze, my father, and I, Dr Amir Pichhadze.

During his studies at the Tbilisi State Academy of Arts (Georgia), Jacob Pichhadze was gaining recognition for his artistic abilities and accomplishments. For example, his works were featured at the Georgia National Museum (1969). Driven by his ambitions and abilities, Jacob and his wife (my mother, Zinaida), sought to immigrate to the West, where opportunities for artists were more extensive than in his native Georgia. Yet, Jacob's plans were derailed by the unfortunate occurrence of his father [Shalom Pichhadze] passing away due to a stroke. To support his mother, Hannah Pichhadze, who decided to immigrate to Israel in the early 1970s along with Jacob's siblings, Jacob and Zina deferred their personal goals and followed their family to Israel (1972).

While the process of immigration was challenging, Jacob's determination and skills enabled him to quickly find grounds for pursuing and realising his ambitions and potentials as a visual artist and art teacher. As was noted in the Israel Review (Aug 20, 1982), an internationally published magazine, Jacob was given his first opportunity to feature his artworks at the Beit Am Jewish Community Center (Jerusalem, 1973), with an opening reception that included the Minister of Justice, Jacob Shimshon Shapira, among others. This was followed by numerous other solo and group exhibitions at other museums and public centres in Israel. These exhibitions were typically supported and attended by large crowds and prominent public figures such as Presidents, Prime Ministers, Mayors, leading entrepreneurs and celebrities. Many of Jacob's exhibitions were fundraisers for different public needs such as charities, hospitals, immigrants, social organisations such as B'nai B'rith, among others. Jacob's accomplishments as a visual artist, as well as his contributions to his community, were widely noted in the Israeli media and recognised. For example, David Peled, the Director of Beit Nurit, a Charity which Jacob supported, commented that "Jacob Pichhadze, an artist and teacher, is a man of inspiration possessing powerful artistic expression. He is, as well, a public personality of the highest order among the Jewish immigrants from Russia and Soviet Georgia." (1987)

As Jacob was gaining recognition, he was also receiving professional opportunities abroad. Yet, considering his mother's need for support, he remained close by and committed to support her. His dedication was based not only on love but also on his sense of morality. He was particularly inspired by the lessons of morality drawn from the biblical story of Ruth and Naomi, which were instilled in him since childhood.



Painting Ruth and Naomi by Jacob Pichhadze.

In this biblical story, following the passing of her husband, brother-in-law, and father-in-law, Ruth's mother-in-law, Naomi, decided to leave Moab to return to her homeland Judah. Naomi encouraged her two daughters-in-law, Ruth and Orpah, to stay in their own homeland to start a new life. They were young enough to remarry, Naomi told them. Also, Naomi recognised the risk that they may not be welcomed in Bethlehem since they were Moabites. While Orpah welcomed Naomi's suggestion and turned towards a new path, Ruth refused to leave Naomi unattended and instead insisted on following her in her journey back to Judah, notwithstanding the unforeseen challenges ahead. Ruth's reply, which has been described as "the highest and noblest of all expressions of faithfulness," was:

"Entreat me not to leave thee,  
And to return home from following after thee;  
For whither thou goest, I will go;  
And where thou lodgest, I will lodge;  
Thy people are my people, and thy G-d, my G-d.  
Where thou diest, will I die, and there be buried;  
May G-d do so to me, and more also,  
If aught but death part thee and me."

With little concern over the prospect of poverty and hunger, Ruth accompanied Naomi to the land of her late husband, putting her hope and faith in Gd that He would not forsake them in their need. In their journey, to support them, Ruth turned to the fields to harvest by picking up leftover grain. Boaz, the owner of the land, took notice of her efforts. He inquired about this young woman and saw her sacrifice on behalf of Naomi. He not only allowed her to continue harvesting behind his servants, he also offered her protection as she worked. At hearing of Boaz's generosity, Ruth fell before him in gratitude. Boaz responded to her gesture, "All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told to me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before. The LORD repay you for what you have done, and a



full reward be given you by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge!” Boaz and Ruth were blessed with children, and Ruth lived long enough to see her great-grandson David become king of Israel.

It has been commented that whenever our sages want to point to a shining example of womanhood, of self-sacrificing devotion to the higher things in life, of loyalty and modesty and excellence of character, they speak of Ruth. This inspiring story and its lessons has influenced my father personally, as reflected by his own self-sacrifice and loyalty towards his mother. He also sought to convey the story and its messages through his art, through numerous compositions over time. An early version of this series was featured at the Beit Emanuel Museum ((1982, Israel), in a solo exhibition that was attended by guest speaker Shimon Peres, former Israeli President and Prime Minister.



Exhibition at the Beit Emanuel Museum (1982, Israel).  
Artist Jacob Pichhadze, Shimon Peres, artist's wife Zinaida Pichhadze and artist's son Dr Amir Pichhadze

Hannah got to see her son Jacob feature his artworks in numerous other exhibitions in Israel, such as the exhibition at Yad Lebanim (1979), which was opened by guests of honour Shimon Peres, former Prime Minister and President of Israel, and Menachem Rothchild, Mayor of Bat-Yam.

Following his mother's passing, Jacob and his family immigrated to Canada, where Jacob featured his artworks at Galerie Heritage in Toronto. There, as well, another version of Ruth and Naomi was displayed.

Growing up, I closely followed my father's teaching of art and morality. As my knowledge and skills developed, we increasingly cooperated in creating art. Also, like my father, I pursued opportunities to use my art for philanthropic purposes. For example, while studying visual art at York University (1996-1999), I initiated and organised a fundraising art exhibition to benefit student scholarship. Deputy Mayor of Toronto, Case Ootes, one of the guest speakers at the opening reception, commented as follows: "Your donation of proceeds from the sale of your artworks to an annual student scholarship fund at York University is an admirable deed, and one that should be applauded by all those who benefit from your generosity." (Exodus, June 1998) He went on to say, Amir "is helping to define the soul of the new city through culture ... obviously from what I've seen, he's got a promising future" (York University's Excalibur, March 4, 1998).



At Jacob Pichhadze's art exhibition at the Holon Theatre Gallery (1979, Israel)

When asked at the time about my future plans in an interview for the university's Excalibur newspaper, I commented that law school was my next step; though perhaps foreshadowing, I added that "art, I believe, is something that is always going to stay with me." Indeed, I ended up pursuing legal studies at the LSE (LLB & LLM-Taxation, 2003-2006), the University of Toronto (NCA, 2008-9), and the University of Michigan Law School (2012-2017), and also worked as a Judicial Clerk at the Tax Court of Canada (2009-2010). Following these studies, my interests branched further into teaching and lecturing at universities worldwide, along with extensive research and publications.

After three years of teaching law at Deakin Law School (Australia), I took time off to pursue an MSc at the University of Oxford, where I undertook research in legal pedagogy. Yet, halfway into my studies, my father unexpectedly suffered a stroke. In response, after completing my studies at Oxford, I decided to withdraw from my teaching in Australia, so that I could stay in Canada to support my parents in their time of need. Together, my father and I returned to our previous cooperation in creating art. Under the new conditions of my father's stroke, my role was expectedly more engaged. I undertook the task of both finishing previously commenced works while we also engaging in cooperating to create new artworks together. Among these is our revisit of the theme of Ruth and Naomi.



In these new versions, unlike previous ones which focused on portraying the characters themselves, we attempted to place them in a context that is more suggestive of and related to their story.

The first of these (left) places them in an environment of a landscape with fields, suggestive of their journey.

The second artwork places them in a field of harvest (see featured image at top of article).

Finally, the third (see below) uses the transition of from Black & White to color in order to suggest their transition from hardship to reward.

My father's experiences in dealing with my grandfather's passing as well as the need and desire to support my grandmother, inspired him to convey those experiences and challenges through the portrayal of the story of Ruth and Naomi.

Hence, his art imitated the biblical story as well as, indirectly, his own life experiences and moral lessons derived from the story and from his life experiences.

As I was growing up, that art taught and inspired me, and perhaps also others. Now, having found myself in similar circumstances, I have drawn inspiration and guidance from that art. Hence, my life imitates and is inspired by art. Moreover, in this cycle of influences between art and life, we revisit and further develop our art, based on our new life experiences, insights, and emotions. Hence, the relationship between art and life can be cyclical, dynamic and evolving. This gives art an ongoing and valuable role in life. Our example, I would suggest, gives valuable and additional perspective on, and examples of, the concept addressed by Oscar Wilde and others on the relationship between art and life. Oscar Wilde famously commented that "life imitates art far more than art imitates life".

In conclusion, our artworks, beyond their aesthetic value, have served other roles. They have made it possible to convey Jewish moral values that guide and inspire us. They have also provided an opportunity to revisit and (re)build our cooperation, which gave new life to our bond. In sharing our experiences, I hope to inspire others to also explore and experience the value of art well beyond its aesthetic value.

