

## 14 Substantive Questions in 1985

### 1. *What were the style and subjects of the first sculptures you created during your studies with Danziger in Tel Aviv (the year of 1939) and during your studies in Chicago?*

In 1939 or 1938 Danziger returned from his studies in London to Tel Aviv and opened a studio in North Tel Aviv. A small informal group coalesced and started working from models in clay. The models were young women we knew and once my sister Nava sat for us and Itzhak [Danziger] made an ancient Canaanite bust from her. We made masks and “primitives”. We were curious to discover how to work in clay, in stonecutting. He encouraged us to practice stonecutting at professional stone cutters

He invited us to work with him and never asked for tuition and it did not cross our minds that it was “studying.” He believed in work in groups “like in the Middle Age” and even in the collaboration of two artists on the same work... There was in him hunger for archeology and the mythos of Egypt, Canaan, Assyria and Babylon and that was very important to me because my parents thought that this was proof that “the kids are playing” or “wasting their lives”.

I had much in common with Danziger. We were both ardent romantics who grew up in “small” Tel Aviv and were educated in Herzliya Hebrew Gymnasium by the same art teachers (Israel Paldi). We were both educated in the West (he in England and I in the USA), and were from homes of university graduates who were educated with culture and literature -- parents who ensured that their firstborn sons would be educated for practical life, albeit with “ideals”, parents who had arrived here with a load of culture (literature, poetry, music, etc.) and the need to “rebuild the Land of our Fathers...and be revitalized by it”. My parent from the Lovers of Zion and Yitzhak’s from the “*balau vars*”, in short sons of good bourgeois who believed in private initiative.

There were two differences between us: first, in the Gymnasium Danziger was senior to me by four cycles. But it was the same Tzvi Nishri, the athletics teacher, who had drafted each of us in his time to the Hagana, and it was the same Hana (or Chana) Orloff, the sculptor from Paris, and her 1936(?) show in the Municipal Museum in Beit Dizengoff on Rothschild Boulevard, where, for the first time, we saw real sculpture and since then I did not want to do anything else. At the time I was already at Mikveh Israel because until then I was thinking of becoming an agriculturalist and when we had a choice between studying French or Arabic I chose Arabic. France was very far and Arabic was spoken in Jaffa and the neighborhoods. We wished to be “local boys” with all our hearts and all our beings. And of special draw were Masada, the Negev, and Ein Gedi, and in the Galilee,

Geon ha-Yarden, and the Valley of the Jordan, Josephus Falvius, the Zealots, Matthias the Hashmonite, and of course, Jerusalem.

Second, Danz has just returned from London full of impressions and stories: 'how real sculpture is done in London' and 'what is the British Council'... Years later I met a few of his friends from that period and they all mentioned Peter Danziger (as he was called in London) as a good man, gentle and sensitive, and very serious ("too serious for his own good.."). He was exotic to them (as I was exotic to the Americans). The exotica were the viewing angle of life, the universe, and human history. We were romantics searching for our past in the bible of the present. Even the interests in the landscape (and for Danz the vegetation too) and the climate of-course was from the national, or, nationalistic perspective. We attempted to learn from the Egyptians how to make a bas-relief in a climate where the sunlight was so strong that the thinnest shade doubled or tripled the visual depth of the bas-relief. Shade that crawled on the sculpture's front from west to east... Danz did not forget, and did not let us forget that the ancients in the Near East did not know another universe and were from birth and by tradition completely immersed in the land (and from here emerged his additional love for designing parks and excursions in the country). I visited archeological sites any available opportunity with Beno Rothenberg (the survey of the Negev, the Copper route in the Arava) and with friends from the army or the Ministry of Labor in order to reach isolated "biblical" places. Once Arik Sharon (at the time the commander of the paratroopers) assigned me a truck to go to the Upper Galilee to find a basalt rock "with ancient character" to place as the headstone on his first wife grave. It was a fantastic mischief trip and the basalt rocks I brought to Ramat Gan to my eyes were like ancient pot shards from Hazor – my personal rock of ages.

When Danziger chiseled (or sculpted) his "Pelican" I was very, very impressed by the vitality of the bird which had become heraldic, from the time of the Middle Age knights – while concurrently was a descendent of Mei Merom. He had a fantastic sense for landscape, animal life, and plant life.

When I was a member of the planning committee of the 1962 international sculpture symposium in Mitzpe Ramon I hoped that Danziger would come and make his "altar" (he, obviously, was on the original participant list). In the end he decided not to participate, in a certain measure, due to Turnbull who was to arrive from London and Yitzhak could not stand him.

The sculpture garden in Mitzpe Ramon gave me appetite to dream of a private sculpture garden in Magdiel, on land my father had bought and developed 60 years ago, in

1925,...a fantastic tool to, on the one hand, develop roots while, on the other, to develop something of our age, a watchtower to a future of quiet security.

It must be understood that I was raised by parents who were very nationalistic. Father said that the Jews have enough “head” and what was needed was to construct the “body.” He wanted to realize this idea and to become a farmer. He planted a citrus grove with his own hands, and then he and his brother dug there a well. They went to their *Rebbe* in Mikveh Israel, Mr. Yedidya, whom I knew personally because he was also my agriculture teacher in Gymnasium Herzliya. He told me about my father (stories my father was too modest to tell me).

Magdiel of my youth was a dream comes true. Hebrew land, cultivated by Hebrew hands, speaking Hebrew obviously,...(until today I do not speak Yiddish properly). The “developing city,” as he called Tel Aviv, had streets ending just beyond the school of Tel Nordau followed by the dunes and the grapevines of “Musa the Guardsmen,” behind whose back we used to steal unripe grape clumps.....

**2. *What were Danziger’s method and views in teaching sculpture?***

Danziger’s method of teaching was simple, in the style of the Middle Age, we learned by *observing* in a very social atmosphere. We stood in a circle; Danziger, Tammuz, Naomi Henrick and I, and my sister Nava set for us as a model for a portrait. The portrait that each of us produced was different. Danziger made an ancient Hebrew head, Hittite or Canaanite, despite the abnormal similarity to a 17 years old youth. And where I “exaggerated”- he hinted. Tammuz’s was the most realistic. We did several portraits of female friends who volunteered.

With regard to stonework he encouraged us to befriend a stonecutter in Nahlat Yitzhak and to work in their yard on a stone of their.

**3. *What were your impressions of the art of the ancient world (Egypt, Assyria, Canaan) and the archaeology of the Land of Israel?***

I once went with Beno Rothenberg to Timna and Ein Gedi. I got tired of Tel Aviv and I called him and offered to be a Jack-of-all-trades. Beno made me “protector” of his expedition which meant a Beretta pistol in the belt and the need to climb to the top of a promontory as a scout. Of course, when you were sure the environs were devoid of people it was also possible to lay back and daydream/imagine. Once when the sun was sinking in the west I saw drawings on some stones on the ground. I took them to Beno and he discovered an undisturbed Nabathean cemetery and my satisfaction and pride were unbound. In my imagination I saw myself as a Nabathean, a caravan man who took some clay in his hand, kneaded it and created a form that we, the young Hebrew, would

discover the whole world in its shape. I returned to Tel Aviv with the thought that what I created in sculpture was fantastic raw material for the archeologists of the future, a fantastic expression of the search for roots in the late 1930's...or the early 1950's.

The Egyptians and the Assyrians were too "polished" for me; too stylish. The Canaanites with their simple clay (the Shragot, the Ashtoreths, and the Ba'als), were better accessed and closer to the heart, because I took clay and kneaded it just like them.

**4. *Did the interest in ancient art continue during your studies in Chicago?***

Yes! And quite intensely, because all I had to do was to climb the stairs from the cellars (of the art school) to the upper levels of the museum to experience a wide concentration of fantastic examples of Egyptian and Assyrian art. To my teacher, Zeller, my work in stone reminded him the ancients. Once he commented that, similar to the Bible where there is "repetition through variation" such as "Adonai's hand is strong, Elohim's arm is powerful," he found this repetition in my work of the time.

**5. *Were you also impressed by African or American art?***

On my way to the USA I stopped over in Paris for 14 days and I almost slept in the Louvre, especially after I discovered the primitive collection. First, I felt primitive in comparison with the shining surroundings (Paris...). Secondly, I was preoccupied with the techniques employed to capture and create a *sensation* of, let's say, "Supreme power", "mystery", and delivering it in crystalized form.

Danziger had a friend in London, who had come from Chicago, and who had told him about the school there. Danz was impressed by the method of "university" teaching of art where several teachers, each speaking differently, and at times one against the other, so that at the end you were left to form your own way and what, in fact, they were teaching was the technics of making. The second method (the European) was to work with one teacher, e.g., Zadkin (Osip Zadkin), let's say 4 years - the "apprentice" method. Thus, it will take you four years after you were done with him to get rid of the teacher and reach independence by your own bootstraps...total study time 8 years.

In the Art Institute of Chicago's method you were spread over seven days and when you finished it took you 4 years to collect yourself into one piece and become independent – total study period...8 years.

**6. *Following your return to "The Land", was the contact with Danziger or his students renewed?***

With my return to “The Land”, quite naturally, the contact with Danziger was renewed. Population-wise “The Land” was small and everyone knew everybody. It was Zaritzky who, in 1948, had invited me from Ein H̄arod to exhibit with “New Horizons” in the Museum of Tel Aviv. We were a small group of individuals interested, on the one hand, in modern art and, on the other, in the “Land of Israel” – in the Bible, archaeology. After all, which country in the world had placed archaeological news on its newspapers’ front page?? We saw “patriarchs” and “matriarchs” in every hole and every corner of “The Land”. How could one climb the Tabor without reciting the Song of Debora, or “see,” with a bit of imagination, the chariots of the enemy?

**7. *Did you have contact with (or criticism of) friends from the Canaanite Movement or their ideology?***

The contact with the Canaanite Movement was Yonatan Ratosh – long conversations here & there and in [Café] Kassit of H̄etskel [Yehezkel]. It all began with his question: why “Eloul” instead of “Skorohod”, from where came the name? The question was surprising because the subject was Benyamin Tammuz and his newspaper article. Personally I appreciated Ratosh’s poetry which spoke to my heart very much and although we were friends I did not join the Canaanites because they focused on the sub-layers of Biblical identity and I repeatedly asked them ‘what and why?’ And ‘from here to where?’ and I never received a satisfactory answer! Romantics of roots, Yes! But spiritual satisfaction – No, and I missed the Judaica that enriches the soul, the universal aspect of the soul. I missed a spiritual perspective which hugs the world of the soul-- a God of “all creation”; a belonging to the universe and to all that exists. I always told them “you are beautiful roots but you are at a loss.” They, from their side, viewed me as one of them who had changed his name at the end of the War of Independence from Skorohod to Eloul. Ratosh had something serious “against the Ghetto” and, of course, against the “gypsy Jews” and we all had a spiritual need to sink roots in the past – the danger, of course, was that you lived in the past (hence the preoccupation of the Canaanites with the Holiness-Harlot.)

The cult of Ashtoreth did not capture me although the concept of “our Forefathers face East while their rear-ends to the Temple” (to quote the prophet) well attracted me – I identified with the Land and with the common folks – the peasants, the vine growers, the shepherds -- not with the priests of the Temple, polished by ceremonialism.

I looked well at the Egyptian bas-reliefs depicting the captive Canaanite slaves – even the Aramaic bewitched me because the words had ancient smell (when compared with the Hebrew of the “Enlightened” generation). The Canaanites had a major rejection of the Judaism of Russia-Poland; “the Pale of Settlement,” “the Ghetto,” etc., etc., etc. On the other side, Zaritzki, and Yanko talked about “embracing the world,” that is to say, about Paris, about Paris, and about Paris, or more specifically about Jewish artists (Russian) settled in Paris....in the end, what was left for us was to observe ourselves: Danziger on

me and I on Danziger, on Tammuz, and on Naomi Henrik (Tzlering) and simply prepare an exhibition of, what we thought, best represented us.

The mythos of Canaan attracted me and I truly believed that it was a fantastic *beginning*, a foundation (for the establishment of a glorious Israeli art), a return to the roots, and if our Forefathers worshiped Tammuz while their rear-ends to the Temple that so intensely angered our prophets there must have been a good reason for the event...it could have been that the Temple priests were not very sympathetic all the time...on the other hand no way was I going to give up on Jacques Lipchitz or, for instance, on Soutine, Luchansky, Carman and Chagall. Alternatively, the Bible itself and the archaeology were already in my blood. And Zaritsky always talked about an exhibition in Migdal David “as a beginning” “for painters of course” and for sculptors? Tami Manor hit the bull’s eye - “roots”, because for us the Talmud was far less real than the Canaanites who popped out of every archaeological excavation - Yodfat, Massada and wound into the present issues, the Hagana (the athletics teacher, Tzvi Nishri who got us into the Hagana, was the brother of Hana Orloff and at age 16 I saw most of her works in a big exhibition in Tel Aviv Museum (*Beit Dizingof*) on Rothschild Boulevard. An impression that caused me to AWL school, find a piece of sandstone and start carving it with a primitive chisel.

Moreover, the exhibition impacted me so fundamentally that it demolished agriculture for me. I spoke with our drawing teacher, Israel Paldi, and he only encouraged me. He also introduced me to Danziger and asked him to help me with tools and materials. Itzhak was three years my senior and already had an organized studio.

When I returned to “The Land” I left Shfeya for Ein H̄arod as teacher for art and Arabic, a double role. Ein Harod charmed me and the collective assigned me a shack to use as a personal work studio. One summer in 1937 I volunteered to work in Yagur and I was happy to leave behind me Tel Aviv and Gymnasium Herzliya and milk cows and participate in the collective’s life including the hay stack at night. The shack in Ein H̄arod served me well but I felt disconnected from Tel Aviv. This was in 1948 and during the War of Independence I was in Ein H̄arod, a medic in the battle for Mazar on Mt. Gilboa against the irregulars. [Lea Porath recorded a program for Kol Israel on the “Medic from Mazar” in 1949 or ’50.] An altar (Canaanite?) saved my life when suddenly, from the east, they snipped on the wounded I was bandaging and me. I would never forget the rapid descent on foot to the truck that took us to the hospital in Afula. I thought of the early Israelites, of swords and spears and when I returned to Ein H̄arod I was milling around with a bandage on my left leg and I drew and later made the sculpture ‘how the brave had fallen and tools of war were lost’.

8. *Was the style of your sculptures at that period the result of formal artistic reasoning or imbued with the intention to create original Israeli sculpture which returned to original sources as well?*

Formal artistic reasoning was the result of a personal need to make each subject which occupied me into a simple, basic, and styled only in as much as the formal style assisted in clarifying, emphasizing, and simplifying (i.e., simple and clear) the subject. The subject itself was chosen by a pulsating feeling of the need to draw power from our national past; the physical past (the archaeological finds in 'Palestina-E'I' of the Mandate period), of the mental climate of the Near East (Assyria, Babylon, Egypt, and certainly Canaan, the crossroads, in the center, blood relations and family relations...).

If we speak of influences, then I was deeply influenced by Avigdor Hameiri and his series of lectures; "the ancient Hebrew," "the pre-biblical Hebrew", Abraham-Isaac-Jacob as founding heroes to Moses, the judges, and the prophets.

Of major importance for me was the living connection between the Land and the Bible and the Land and its population; the physical aspect of the Land and the physical-cultural aspect of its population.

**9. *Were you interested in the Bible, the variety of Eastern mythos or in ancient religions?***

My interest in the Bible passed through many stages. At the beginning, in kindergarten on Sirkin St. (1925-26) as children stories; Grade 1 and 2 in the "school" on Betzael St. with the teacher Ze'ev Tznuavsky; preparatory classes 4 and 5 in the Hebrew Gymnasium Herzliya (HGH), a talented teacher for Bible class. In high-school (HGH) it was David Shim'oni, and of course the annual trips every Pesach to Yodfat, Masada, Caesarea, etc. The focus was on the Bible, the Mid-East mythos's and ancient religions, while personally I participated in the adventures of Gilgamesh and much that happened in the ancient past was happening in the present of my daydreaming. The writing of Binyamin Tammuz and Moshe Smilanski was the key to all my Biblical experience, "Children of the Prophets" for example with the result of sculptures like "The porter" and "prophet's bust."

**10. *What is the common to the many sculptures of mythical women you had created (Eve, Leda, Michal, Jethro's Daughter)?***

The "mythological woman" intrigued me as a "symbol" more than the separate individual identities of the stories. I never saw myself as a biographer or an illustrator but as a 'poet-in-matter' who described an epic poem (saga) each woman symbolized. For instance, Debora of "the Song of Debora" was not for me Ms. Debora (a specific individual) but an abstract concept, like Homer who constructed for us the form of the epic ballad; thus ('Bat Jethro') in the spirit of Shaul Tchernichovsky. 'Eve' was not seen as the mother of all life, sort of the goddess of fertility, but as the drama, 'Eve and the Snake' (erotica). 'Leda and the Swan' (erotica), after all, when you are 28 to 48 erotica is a drawing force. We are talking here of the second period of Kosso, Kosso the 2<sup>nd</sup>. Kosso the 1<sup>st</sup> was until 1944 and age 24 (including Chicago). The year of my return (1945) to Palestine (E'I) -

the Mandate period, the English are in "The Land," playing chess with the Jews and the Arabs... Teaching art in Shfeya (45-56) and Ein Harod (47-48).

**11. Who were the Israeli, American, and European artists you knew and appreciated during that period?**

Israeli artists I knew? All of them. Europeans? Henry Moore, Turnbull, Coveillo(?); Nino Franchina, Giacometti, Brancusi, Ettore Colla, Jacques Lipchitz, Europeans in the symposia and in visits; Austria (1960), Yugoslavia (1961), Berlin (1963), Paris, Switzerland, Greece, Italy (1962), Israel (1962), Montreal (1964), California (1965), New York (1968-74), Toronto (1968 onward).

**12. How did the "New Horizons" [ofakim hadashim] movement influence your style and the subjects of your work?**

*ofakim hadashim* 1948-62: I contributed to the organizational side so much that the artists outside *ofakim hadashim* unfavorably coined me "the impresario."

*ofakim hadashim* influenced and increasingly impacted the tendency toward the abstract in "The Land" as a whole. My figurative work increasingly shifted until it turned abstract (like 'Double Object,' etc.). It was a natural process because my true subjects were always contradictions and contrasts, to quote: "a thing/word and its contrast/contradiction" (*davar vehipukho*). For example, 'Leda and the Swan' (who? does what? and to whom?). The abstract subject ('Double Object') enabled "the opposite explains" (*ifkha mistabra*). 'Good-Bad Object' permits speaking about 'good-bad' not as 'a thing and its opposite' but about 'good-bad' in the same-self object. 'Beautiful-Ugly', the duality of Hormus and Ahriman of the ancient Persian religion. 'Duality' (subject).

**13. How did you view the sculpture "The Sacrifice" ["In Chains"] and what was the source of this subject? (Was shown in the "1953 Israel Artists Exhibition" in the Tel Aviv Museum).**

Aztec influence. Received the Dizengoff Prize in Museum Tel Aviv in 1951. Brazilian wood. Young man, bound hands. Sacrifice to Moleh (years later I read in *Aztec* a description of a "primitive" ceremony of the Aztecs that to my complete surprise it revived in me the process; what I had seen in my imagination, the sacrifice to Moleh among the Canaanites. That is to say, each sacrifice is sanctified to God, the spirit of the ancestors, the motherland, the political dictate.... A sacrifice is a sacrifice...and who is not a sacrifice to something?

**14. What is the meaning of the names and subjects of the sculptures "Object Altar", "Object Good-Bad", and "Object Double" that were exhibited in Ein Harod in 1963?**



The meaningfulness of the names and subjects exhibited in Ein H̄arod in 1963? (AICA Exhibit, *Ofakim*)

The concept “object” – form, shape; the names are more related to life.

--“Object Altar”; all the Land of Israel is one big altar, on which we all felt as sacrifice + Aba Tsanitan, a sacrifice for a sacred task.

= “Object Good-Bad” – Yin/Yan

= “Object x2”

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To Tami Manor -----

Forgive me about the disorder \_\_\_\_\_ but.....

I hope you would enjoy deciphering

Yours

Kosso Eloul

3/17/85