

A Short History of the “Yegar Sahaduta” Sculptors’ Symposium

Since Kosso had organized the 1962 “Yegar Sahaduta” Sculptors’ Symposium in Mitzpe Ramon I decided to provide a bit of historical detail.

Kosso got involved with the Sculptors’ Symposia movement in 1960 when he was invited to participate in the second symposium in St. Margarethen, Austria. The idea of Sculptors’ Symposia was hatched in Vienna between an art critic and the sculptor Karl Prantl. The two were discussing how to get sculpture out of the confines of a gallery and into open public places where size was not a factor, and where the sculpture could interact with the environment and passersby, not just gallery visitors. As result of these conversations, in 1959 they secured both funding, a site, and enlisted a group of sculptors to stage the first symposium: “*Symposion Europäischer Bildhauer 1959*”. The site was a deserted Roman limestone quarry near the village of St. Margarethen. The idea was to provide material (stone), room and board, and some spending money (primarily for cigarettes and wine) to a group of 15-20 juried sculptors for a period of two months. The sculptors brought their tools and left the finished works on site, which over the years accumulated quite a large number of sculptures. Kosso was invited to participate in the second symposium of the following year (1960) where he left two semi-abstract sculptures and got infected by the symposia idea and abstract sculpture. Next, in 1961, he was invited to participate in one of double symposia in Yugoslavia: a stone symposium in Portoroz (nowadays in Slovenia) and a wood one in Kostanjevica. Kosso went to Kostanjevica and left there two abstract wood sculptures. In-between these projects he worked on organizing and securing Government funding through the Ministry of Education and Culture for a sculptors’ symposium in Mitzpe Ramon, Israel for late summer 1962.

Kosso’s participation in the Symposia movement was a natural growth of his own ideas about sculpture. Already in 1951 he wrote that the place for sculpture is “out of doors! within a garden and next to waters. Let it stand by the highway!” (Catalog Dec. 1951), so when the invitation to join the symposium in Austria arrived he was more than ready.

Mitzpe Ramon at the time was a small planned settlement on the northern lip of Ramon, or The Great, Crater which slanted from NE to SW. The town was composed of three-floors condos and a few duplex homes, a restaurant, a garage, and few stores. There was also a new experiment in the town – an ‘urban kibbutz’ whose members worked in a variety of jobs including a restaurant for tourists on the road to Eilat. The restaurant was located on the edge, right above of the crater looking 250 meters down into its depth. Kosso chose that location for the symposium because since his youth when he had worked with Itzhak Danziger he was always fascinated by the harsh light of the eastern Mediterranean, or as he phrased it: “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...”. That desert light provided the challenge while the settlement provided habitation and services. Kosso also invited the participating sculptors from the pool that was involved with the Symposia Movement because not all sculptors were capable of completing a large outdoors piece within two months.

When the sculptors arrived, they were taken to the stone yard of Solel Boneh (lit., *Paving and Building*; the construction and civil engineering cooperative of the labor movement in Palestine and later in Israel) to choose their stones which were then loaded on semi-trailers and sent to Mitzpe Ramon. When the stones left the yard, the sculptors were loaded on a bus that deposited them at their habitation in Mitzpe Ramon, a three-floor condo. There were 8 sculptors from abroad and 3 from Israel. The guests were: Agustín Cárdenas (Cuban living in Paris), Pat (Patricia) Diska (USA), Janez Lenassi (Yugoslavia), Yasuo & Kiyoko Mizui (Japanese living in Paris); Jacques Moeschal (Belgium); Karl Prantl (Austria), William Turnbull (England); and Sepp (Joseph) Wyss (a Swiss), while the Israelis were: Dov Feigin, Moshe Sterenshus, and Kosso. When the semi-trailers arrived, the stones were unloaded in the locations chosen by each sculptor for his stone, along the northwestern lip of the Crater which became the site of the symposium. Unfortunately, Yasuo Mizui's two stones fell one on top of the other and the upper one broke. There was no time to go back to Haifa to choose other stones. Thus, the next day Kosso took Yasuo to choose a new stone in a nearby Solel Boneh quarry where Mizui chose a single larger stone. The stone arrived a couple of days later but it slowed down Yasuo's progress a bit. Turnbull got cold feet when he realized he would need to finish his piece in two months and about a week later he returned to England.

The symposium went well and was concluded with a short ceremony and an oration of Aba Elhanani representing the Ministry of Culture which funded the project. For Kosso, it was followed in 1963 by the 'Europaischer Bildhauer Symposium in West Berlin, Germany; and by the 1964 International Sculpture Symposium Montreal, Canada and the 1965 'The California International Sculpture Symposium,' in UCLB, CA, USA. After California Kosso left the International Symposia movement which continued in various countries around the world.

The international "Yegar Sahaduta" symposium in Mitzpe Ramon was followed in 1986 by another, Israeli, symposium led by Ezra Orion, one of Kosso's students, in the same general area.

By 1995, when I visited the site, Kiyoko Mizui's sculpture:



composed from individual large pieces of basalt, was stolen, probably by someone who had help lifting the heavy basalt pieces.

In 2011 the old ‘urban kibbutz’s’ restaurant above the turn of Rt. 40 down into the Ramon Crater was replaced by the much larger Hotel Beresheet of Isrotel, which encroached on the southwest edge of the ‘Yegar Sahaduta’ sculptures area. To view Kosso’s “Horizons” (12-2) one needs to trespass along the hotel’s fence which encloses some pools, while water seeping from the pools destabilized the larger ‘Untitled” (12-1) which started to tilt. As of December 2017, attempts to move 12-2 and stabilize 12-1 have failed to bear results.

Rohn Eloul, Jan. 1, 2018