

FEEDBACK ON CROSS PURPOSES: IMAGES OF SHOCK AND CONTEMPLATION IN
IMAGES OF THE CRUCIFIXION

HELD AT BEN URI GALLERY, THE LONDON JEWISH MUSEUM OF ART
23 June – 19 September 2010

I visited the exhibition a week ago. I thought was well curated and very interesting and did not change my view any religious ideas I may hold.

As with other exhibitions in the past there could have been no better publicity for it. Mayor Guilliani in New York when he criticised the Black Madonna and the controversy of the Myra Hindley portrait in the Sensations exhibition, both achieved the result of many more visitors than could have been hoped for.

Another couple in the gallery were visiting to see what the fuss was about.

I applaud the Ben Uri Gallery for showing these works.

disgusted with a jewish museum wanting to show the image which has caused hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of jews to be murdered throughout history. Totally agree with Mr Perl's views.. Next u will try and justify showing art related to holocaust denial Shame on u.

Darren Shaw, Israel

Sorry to hear that you feel able to celebrate the art of Crucifixion of a Jew but unable, in response to my suggestions, to celebrate the art, at least equally valid for a "mainstream museum with a proud ongoing Jewish heritage and context", of documents such as the Medieval Jewish Manuscripts.

Eli Abt

Abt Architecture & Planning, Herts

I honestly think it is ridiculous to complain about such subject especially as it comes in the form of art. London is one of the most open and diverse cities in the world, cultures races and languages mix here in great harmony and it is what makes it so special and accommodating to us all.

Debates and different point of view should be encouraged not discouraged. Cant Jews have points of view, feelings, and visions on other religions and historic events other then their own? Do we (Israeli and Jewish artists have to be penalised for being such? Does it really matter?

As an artist you will find very little in my artwork about my cultural background or about my religion I am simply interested in other subject. A Jewish gallery shouldn't limit its exhibitions and artistic vision to subjects relating to its own religion.

I think it is admirable for the Ben Uri gallery to host this exhibition, and I applaud you for your boldness and progressive approach.

Michal Ohana-Cole (Israeli!) artist and a Londoner for the past 14 years.
(Also finalist in the 2004 Ben Uri's Jewish artist of the year competition)

I wish to support the exhibition, which is one of the best ones I have seen.
The topic falls squarely within the remit of the Museum.

Yours faithfully,
Michael Haas

Michael Haas, London

I now recall that one of the most moving books I ever read was MY NAME IS ASHER LEV by Chaim Potok .It was all about a young Hasidic student who rebelled against his background and became a famous artist. His most celebrated picture was of the Crucifixion with himself as the central figure with his mother and father on each side.

For a Jewish Artist to paint a Crucifixion is a defining act of rebellion. And for a Jewish Museum of Art to put on an exhibition about the Crucifixion is equally an act of rebellion.

Charles Corman, London

Nice subject for a show; it goes some way to challenging the ever-pervasive, and safe, Jewish ideology of victimhood. Which is perhaps why many don't like it.

Adam Kossoff

I for one support you whole heartedly. Indeed I would not be a supporter of the Ben Uri were you any less enlightened than you clearly are.

For goodness sake consider we are meant to live in a liberal democracy. The greatest thing about Jewishness is it's truly wonderful capacity to stand for 'Everyman'. Jewish suffering can be used as a kind of neurosis to cloak essential anxiety of identity or it can be creative. Chagall of course, as you know painted the crucifixion and in so doing to my mind gave the world an understanding of itself that could have come from no one else. He was of course an Hasidic Jew.

Please stand proud in your embracing the whole business of art and dont let yourselves be cowed by certain narrow almost sectarian views that seems to be in the ascendant. It does not help build a better world.

Name withheld

I was not at the above exhibition so do not feel able to criticise or otherwise. I can understand the feelings of some of your visitors that the crucifixion is an emotive issue for Jews but would take the line that art is sometimes meant to shock and the trustees of the museum must have given a lot of thought to the planning of this exhibition.

Name withheld

Sorry when I saw it was about Christ I deleted it. i am not interested. As a Jew there are other more important subjects for Ben Uri to exhibit.

Name withheld

Keep doing what you are doing – and follow an academic, professional and open-minded path - true to a museum of the highest order.

Name withheld

Good art, whatever the subject matter, should never be censored.

This was a brave and stimulating exhibition.

Monica Winner.

Sirs,

I don't know how many supporters of the London Jewish Museum of Art "have reacted furiously" to the Museum's exhibition which addresses the subject of The Crucifixion, but I would like to assume that there were not many. I prefer to believe that people coming to an art exhibition are interested to see the subject (or, for that matter, any other subject) through illustrations of its evolution, in particular a subject that they are prone to know little about it although it's one which had such a great impact on their national history.

But when Marcus Dysch cites one of them who says "What type of material is this for our Jewish museum? This would never happen in New York or Jerusalem", I resent it not only because it's far from being correct, but also because it casts a shadow of ignorance on me and on an Israeli audience. As well, I suspect that New York Jewry might welcome such an exhibition that, as David Glaser phrased it, traces representations of the Crucifixion over the past 100 years illustrating the evolution from wholly sacred and Christian iconography to now more universal and generic in contemporary culture.

There is no doubt that Jerusalem will welcome such an exhibition, as "Jerusalem", namely - Israel, had long ago reclaimed Jesus as a decent Israeli fellow, and acknowledged the crucifixion as a visual symbol of sacrifice for a cause, regardless of what it meant in Christian art or religion. Thus several Israeli artists had artistically treated Christian themes, the Israeli sculptor and painter Yigael Tumarkin is a formidable example to illustrate my point.

His oeuvre relating to Jesus started with an intellectual interest in Jesus within European culture, presenting a central stylized figure in 'A Tribute to Grünewald' (1961), thus acknowledging its source of influence (Germany!!). He continued the subject of The Crucifixion with a free composition on a cross-like setups - 'An Awkward Crucifixion' of 1967, and later developed his artistic vocabulary toward a personal interpretation of aspects relating to Jesus - in a version called 'Angus Dei' (1968) and to the relating 'Ecce Homo' of the same year.

These compositions bearing names of Christian themes were done after the Six-Day-War, in spite of the almost hysterical victory-applauses for the loot of the war, and apparently as a contradiction to it. The Crucifixion, thus, was made to represent Israel's political and social affairs, in which Tumarkin's expressive presentations of metal-assemblages projected its cost - human suffering entangled with personal-national connotations, bearing titles related to the paradigm of suffering for a cause; Jesus.

All those works were presented in the big Israeli Museums, and no one made a comment in the nature of "What type of material is this for our Jewish museum?" cited by Mr. Dysch.

Moreover - the last phase in Tumarkin's artistic development with the notion of crucifixion is its complete detachment from Christian or human connotations, and its application to abstract concepts that, due to circumstances, are sacrificed; thus, in 'Bedouin Crucifixion' of 1982 it's the tribulations of Bedouin culture, and in 'Field of Blood' of 1984 it is the earth itself (or the land) crucified for human environmental misdoings.

We witness in Tumarkin a Jewish-Israeli artist, one among others, challenging the Christian concepts and attributes of the crucifixion from a vantage point of a Jewish-Israeli. These concepts were incorporated - in spite of philistine attitudes that existed after the Holocaust among Jews, into the artistic vocabulary within a hostile Jewish culture in which, during the 60's when Tumarkin started his work,

an inverted 'T' used to mark the addition-sign, because the common cross-sign was commonly avoided.

If what Dysch wrote indeed reflects notions of many people, then I can only deplore his and their attitude which, unjustifiably, is extended also to the artistic illustrations. To my mind, the evolution of the Crucifixion-symbol from a purely religious notion to universal human context and personal expression is a plausible phenomenon that deserves to be presented, in particular at a Jewish Museum - anywhere.

Sincerely
Dr. Raquel Gilboa.
Tel Aviv

It should be noted that Jews have never crucified people, it was a Roman practice. Many Jews were crucified, including Jesus. It is about time this was pointed out to the world.

We have no problem with the exhibition as such, but it would have been useful to have made this point and to counter the propaganda that it was a Jewish event. The exhibition could have been used to bring together factions rather than inflame this long-lasting sore.

So all in all why not have the exhibition but a little better discussion/publicity about it, which would help change a badly debated aspect of history.

Regards, David Davies

Catholics and Protestants alike accept that Christ was a Jew, and the Jewish religion does not, as far as I know, deny this, or deny that he was crucified. While the Jews have been tortured in many ways over the centuries, Crucifixion has never been looked at from the Jewish perspective before, so it is a novel idea. For these reasons, I can't see how it could be inappropriate for the gallery to curate an exhibit on the crucifixion in art. The exhibit should now be judged on how well the concept is executed, not on the subject matter.

Yours faithfully
Joyce Glasser

I have a very orthodox friend who would almost certainly share the views of your critics. I find this strange, because by profession he is a pathologist. He has spent his adult life studying, and teaching about, diseases; but no one in their right mind would accuse him of approving of them. Similarly, why assume that

examining and comparing the depiction of crucifixion throughout the ages implies approval of the process?

Name withheld

Sir,

A report in your columns on 24 June has moved me to write in defence of the Ben Uri Gallery which makes a unique contribution to the cultural life of this country. As a non-Jew, I am amazed at the excitement generated among some Jews by the exhibition 'Cross Purposes' at the Ben Uri Gallery. The 20th century works in the exhibition were not conceived as devotional objects, nor have they been viewed as such over the past 100 years. The Crucifixion as a theme for painting has long been absorbed into the wider canon of artistic iconography; to see it in any other terms is the worst kind of obscurantism

Yours faithfully

David Wyatt CBE

The Ben Uri Gallery should be commended rather than castigated for its courageous and challenging crucifix exhibition. Its purpose is to make visitors reflect and ask difficult questions. As a teacher of Jewish-Christian and Jewish-Muslim relations I also emphasise to my students the value of asking each other difficult questions. Judaism is a religion of questions and Ben Uri is fulfilling a task that Jews have undertaken from biblical times to the present day. It should not be prevented from doing so.

Dr Edward Kessler
Woolf Institute, Cambridge
