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Osias Hofstatter: Polish Holocaust Painter

Osias Hofstatter: polski malarz Holokaustu

Abstract: Hofstatter survived the Holocaust as an artist and as such, managed to rehabilitate his life in Poland with his wife Anna after losing most of his family during World War II. It was art that led him to an insight that he would not have the capability of expressing himself under a communist regime. Even though having undergone tragic life circumstances and hardships that tainted most of his life with intense colors of survival, art was the pivot of life of the painter Osias Hofstatter.

Even after moving to Israel, despite the hardships in making a solid connection between his art and the need to have a source of livelihood and the struggle of making a living in his first years in Israel, he did not abandon creative work. A meeting with Irena and the late Yaakov Wodislavsky changed Hofstatter's creative path. The Wodislavsky's became the artist's patrons from their first encounter to the day he passed away. The ability to direct all his energy and most of his time to painting led to a significant change to the pace and volume of his work.

Keywords: Osias Hofstatter, painter, art, polish, Holocaust survivor, Israel.

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Introduction

Hofstatter survived the Holocaust as an artist and as such, managed to rehabilitate his life in Poland with his wife Anna after losing most of his family to the Holocaust. It was art that led him to an insight that he would not have the capability of expressing himself under a communist regime. Even after moving to Israel, despite the hardships in making a solid connection between his art and the need to have a source of livelihood and the struggle of making a living in his first years in Israel, he never abandoned creative work. Despite having undergone tragic and life circumstances and hardships that tainted most of his life with intense colors of survival, art was the pivot of life of the painter Osias Hofstatter.

This is narrative research and as such, it is based on a story that reflects a certain social reality. The narrative research was very popular in qualitative research at the first half of the twentieth century, but its glory dimmed after World War 2 in favor of other research methods. In the 1970s, interest in narrative research was rekindled when researchers were looking for the capability to understand and interpret human experiences. This led to a change in direction referred to as the Narrative Revolution, which in essence is comprised of three components: a) character or characters, b) plot and c) a person or an angle that tell the story.¹

This study is entirely dedicated to describing and analyzing the the opportunity formed by the joining of the Holocaust survivors who wished to commemorate, each in his or her way, the events, experiences and human tragedy of Jewish and other people who have become victims of Nazi ideology. This narrative research² is based on personal stories, press coverage, historical events and artwork.

The purpose of the study is to highlight, understand and document Hofstatter's way of being able to leave his artistic contribution behind for posterity, a contribution commemorating the Holocaust.

- 1 A. Hamenachem, *Narrative Research: Theory, Creation and Interpretation* [Review Article], „Mifgash for Pedagogic-Social Work”, 32 (2010) pp. 212–127.
- 2 G. Spector-Mersel, *Narrative Research As an Interpretive Paradigm*, „Shvilei Mechkar” (Hebrew), 17 (2011) p. 64.

Osias Hofstatter

Osias Hofstatter was born in Bochnia in Galicia in 1905 under the Austro-Hungarian Empire. When World War 1 broke out in 1914, his family fled to the Austrian capital, Vienna and from there to the Hague in the Netherlands. Between 1918 and 1920, Hofstatter attended the Jewish Gymnasium in Frankfurt am Main. Right after that, he returned to Vienna, where he lived until 1938 with his parents and two brothers. In 1938, an event took place that he referred to as an “Apocalypse”, in which the Gestapo raided the family’s apartment and arrested the entire family. The parents were slain by the Nazis and Hofstatter and his brothers were put in prison. Later, he fled to Luxembourg, while his fiancée, Anna Schebestova, fled to Czechoslovakia. They were reunited later. After Anna converted to Judaism, they were married, but the war separated them. Hofstatter was forced to move from one labor camp to the other, under harsh circumstances, from 1940 to 1943. Then Hofstatter applied to the American Unitarian Service Committee in Geneva, that examined the paintings attached to the application and as a result, he was released in order to attend an art school in Zürich.

The painter described his life with a personal prayer constituting a mixture of personal and philosophical insights, belief in God as the one influencing human beings’ mental powers and understanding that a person is facing potentially spirit crushing hardships. All these are not separate from the art, which he weaves among the components of understanding humans.

Please, oh God, grant tremendous strength to all those you challenged with a simple or important task; so they will not be discouraged in what they do, so they will not tire, so they will not give up; even though humanity’s power is enormous and seductive. Please, grant them power to see the pure beauty, the blooming flowers by the road, and the flame within the lightening, even when it is dark.³

In 1946, after the war was over, he managed to obtain a visa to Vienna. This led to his reunification with his wife, Anna, after separation of five years. Later,

3 O. Hofstatter, *Osias Hofstatter, Paintings*, Givatayim 1989, p. 56.

in 1948, they left together for Warsaw in an attempt to get reconnected with the Marxist ideology, with which he identified⁴ since moving to Vienna with his family before the war. In 1957, after an almost ten-year period in Warsaw, during which he worked for living in odd jobs, in some painting was involved, the couple moved to Israel. Hofstatter was 52 years old at the time and found a job as a night watchman in a factory in Netanya where he worked until 1970 when he quit his job and for the first time in his life, dedicated himself to painting. Hofstatter places humans at the center of the universe and detaches his artwork from any connotation, location of time.⁵ According to Dorit Levita, Hofstatter in focusing on the cosmic unknown, the cryptic and the mystery of human existence.⁶ Hofstatter said about himself,

... I work with inner voices and it is not easy for me to hear them... I am neither familiar with pure suffering, nor with pure joy... My art could resemble Ecclesiastes...⁷

It should be noted here that the reference to true friends includes first and foremost the couple Irena and Yaakov (Kuba) Wodislavsky who have sponsored Hofstatter, granting him the opportunity to create art without limits and with neither economic, nor existential worries. Since 1938, Osias Hofstatter painted some 5000 paintings. Over a thousand of those are owned by Ms. Irena Wodislavsky.

Art Characteristics in Hofstatter's work

Since he made Aliyah, Hofstatter ceased from mentioning the year of creation on his paintings. This stands out in two aspects: first, it is customary that an artist marks on an artwork the time of conclusion of work on it, either vis-

4 Ibidem.

5 O. Petersburg, *Poetry Mockery and Lament*, „Art in Israel”, 1 (1989) No. 3, p. 16.

6 O. Hofstatter, *Hofstatter*, Tel Aviv 1980, p. 9.

7 L. Inbal, *Hofstatter, Be Humble*, „Koteret Rashit”, Jan. 15, 1986, pp. 25–26.

ibly or in a hidden place. Second, Looking at Hofstatter's works during World War 2 and later shows the date of creation by his signature.

This lack of mention of the year of creation on Hofstatter's paintings drew the attention of art critics who mentioned this and even presented the artist with a question about the meaning of this salient change. When Ofer Petersburg asked, Hofstatter answered, "I do not wish to have people look at my works from a perspective of time..."⁸ Hofstatter claimed that "Time is an illusion..."⁹ And that it immaterial when the artist painted his creation. He said, "... *My painting is not history, but a panorama...*"¹⁰. Rachel Sukman also tells of a conversation she held with the artist in which he claimed that does not tend to classify his artworks by dates since this has no significance to him.¹¹

This is how Benyamin Tamuz so skillfully summarized Hofstatter's creative characteristics:

.... There three sheets of paper there that were inked black and within the black space, images of men and women were suspended. Even animals also stood out from the chunks of human flash and sometimes, merged with it. These were drawings of defeated nakedness that refused to give up its passions and calling and continued to cry or hush as if time had not wronged the magic that was in it beforehand. An autumn passion swept from the pages and a gust of defiance covered them, as if saying, "I am not ashamed, since need say no more, and if saying is needed, we should not feel shame..."¹²

Dalia Manor had an impression that despite the fact that the Holocaust's memory being carved into Hofstatter's personality and artistic characteristics, these do not constitute the only key to understand his artwork, but that states of despair, sorrow and anxiety do not refer to a specific place or a given event and that the images and ghosts appear in his art as if from within a perpetual

8 O. Petersburg, *Poetry Mockery and Lament*, p. 18.

9 Y. Hirsch (director), *Osias Hofstatter – an Artist's Portrait* (film), Jerusalem 1986.

10 Ibidem.

11 O. Hofstatter, *Hofstatter*, p. 3.

12 Ibidem, p. 16.

nightmare. She also notes that unlike in Goya's work, Hofstatter's images combine comfort, love and optimism.¹³ His creative work's duality moves between the private and the universal, between spirituality and creativity, between death and fertility, between heaven and hell, between tragedy and optimism, between despair and hope.¹⁴

Anyone observing his artwork, especially the critics, lingered on the special connection between Hofstatter and the painting paper and found, in varied and different ways, definitions that refer to physical traits, fidelity and suffering. Hofstatter's creation begins in treating the paper on which he intended to paint. Every painting paper that landed in his hands underwent processing prior to serving as a substrate for the painting but using sandpaper on it. Dorit Levita proposes an analogy between this technique and the artist's life and explains that this technique reflects the suffering Hofstatter underwent in his lifetime and that this is reflected on the paper.¹⁵ Ofer Petersburg refers to the painting paper as "Hofstatter's first love" and argues that, "the alliance between himself and the paper demands physical loyalty..."¹⁶

Benyamin Tamuz also refers to Hofstatter's paper processing and defined this as "an alliance between him (Hofstatter) and the paper"¹⁷. According to Tamuz, the paper in Hofstatter's creative work is "puppy love"¹⁸, while applying "abstract ghosts"¹⁹ unto the paper. Tamuz is impressed with the paper processing style and speculated that Hofstatter never threw away paper, but drew on the same paper time and again until he managed to generate work that satisfied him. It is true that this was just a speculation on behalf of Tamuz, but Irena Wodislavsky confirms this, "when Hofstatter worked as a night watch, he did not have money to buy painting paper, so he painted and erased, in his unique way by scraping the paper, and painted again on the same piece

13 D. Manor, *Bloches Floating in Chaos*, „Yediot Aharonot”, January 24, 1986, p. 25.

14 T. Rapaport, *Religious and Instinctive Existentialism*, „Davar”, March 2, 1990, p. 9.

15 O. Hofstatter, *Hofstatter*, p. 12.

16 O. Petersburg, *Poetry Mockery and Lament*, the foregoing note 4, p. 16.

17 O. Hofstatter, *Hofstatter*, p. 4.

18 Ibidem.

19 Ibidem.

of paper until he was satisfied with his creation..."²⁰ According to Tamuz, from the moment Hofstatter laid his hands on a sheet of paper, it ceased to be just an ordinary piece of paper and turned into a paper under Hofstatter's responsibility, "... he damaged it, distorted it, fixed it and saved it – the damaging hand will redeem it."²¹

Il. 1, Osias Hofstatter, *Districts of Nowhere* (1978), MutualArt.



20 From an interview with Irena Wodislavsky, October 3, 2019, „we knew Hofstatter when he still lived in Netanya in a small and shabby room. It was from a time when Hofstatter worked as a night watch, he did not have money to buy painting paper, so he painted and erased, in his unique way by scraping the paper, and painted again on the same piece of paper until he was satisfied with his creation. Back then, I was sure he does this because he could not afford painting paper; he was so poor. The salary as a night watch was not enough for food for him and Irena and he also had to pay rent.”

21 O. Hofstatter, *Hofstatter*, p. 5.

Yoav Dagon referred in many ways to Hofstatter's paper processing without one way colliding with the other, „burrowing, etching, constant dialogue between form and background”²². Dagon also notes that he detects in Hofstatter two distinctive periods of treatment of the painting paper: the first, between 1950 and 1970, in which there is a dialogue between paper and creation and the post-1970 period, in which the background becomes a minimalist stage and there is emphasis on a definite division between the background and the images that Dagon titles “actors of the theatre of life.”²³

According to Petersburg, Hofstatter's creations are not something a spectator would consider easy to take in and they are “simple, but not simplistic...”²⁴ Most of his critics were wise enough to compare his work to that of Francisco Goya (1746–1828) both for embracing a style of engraving as well as for the motifs he chose to use such as *Los Caprichos* and *Los Desastres de la Guerra*. However, Hofstatter claims that he differs from the Spanish artist since, according to him, Goya does not have mercy, whereas Hofstatter sees in his paintings certain dimensions of optimism alongside the atrocities he describes. He sees his own life as a war that he is part of. “... I do not have the talent that Goya had to express the things his eyes have seen... Goya's war battles lack compassion... This is not how things are with me...”²⁵

II. 2, Osias Hofstatter, *Their Last Way*.



²² O. Hofstatter, *Hofstatter*, p. 36.

²³ *Ibidem*.

²⁴ O. Petersburg, *Poetry Mockery and Lament*, p. 18.

²⁵ Hofstatter's words in Hisch's film.

Upon the end of the war, as he settled in Poland, after the journey he made with his wife, Anna, he was influenced by the demands made by the regime and specialized in paintings that matched the Communist essence that was forced upon the Polish society at the time. A vivid expression of this is the painting of the underground railway²⁶ that was being built in Warsaw, seemingly a realization of the dream of modernization after the release from Nazi occupation.

Hofstatter began changing his style of painting in 1948, and upon his arrival in Israel in 1957, this style has finally set. It seems that the sense that he is free to create by his belief, perception and personality left an impression on him right after moving to Israel. During World War 2, when Hofstatter was in the different camps, he painted mostly landscapes and characters that were around him. It is evident that Hofstatter is beginning to alter the character of his creative work and gradually tends to draw human images with a character and form that are unique to him with their sexuality making a strong and central expression. In a painting named "the Woman" he painted in 1946 while still in Europe, we can see the foundations that he will incorporate later into the style of the paintings from after his moved to Israel, among which are the element of hands, resembling animal hooves.

The style in the process of crystallizing in Hofstatter after 1948 is a type of expressionism, albeit influenced from the moves of history that he has been experiencing. One can find in his works repetitive motifs of expression of anxiety, concern and nightmares. Dagon interprets this as a tension between the horrific experiences of the Holocaust and an existential-religious horror...²⁷. At the base of Hofstatter's concept are philosophical and religious motifs influenced by his experiences during the Holocaust in Europe, by his suffering and by his understanding the human psyche. Some of his works seem minimalist, drawn with tooth brushes using black ink. Irena Wodislavsky recalls how sometimes, Hofstatter asked her husband, Yaakov, to provide him with used tooth brushes so he could add them to his collection of painting tools²⁸. Dagon

26 Painting of the underground railway in Warsaw, from the Irena Wodislavsky collection.

27 O. Hofstatter, *Hofstatter*, p. 36.

28 Interview with Irena Wodislavsky dated January 31, 2020, I will tell you something odd: Osias ask Kuba to bring him used toothbrushes. Kuba asked him why and in response he explained that he uses them for ink painting with toothbrushes.

asserts that Hofstatter places the human being at the center of his world²⁹. His work is influenced by two main needs: one is the pure painting that expresses his art. The second need is aimed at manifesting the truth as he sees it. According to Michal Karpik, Hofstatter was an artistic movement by himself. She tagged him as an autodidact with artwork, just like his own personality typified by antitheses and skepticism.³⁰

Even the matter of religious belief is given an outstanding expression in Hofstatter's artworks in a similar way to how it occupies his cogitation. Despite the fact that religious elements do not appear in an explicit and unambiguous way, skepticism is evidently expressed. Hofstatter said about this: "... Where there is doubt there is faith..."³¹ Levita deduced from this quote that there is religious iconography in Hofstatter's work, to which she is indicating in reference to symbols, imagery and ways of description present in his works. Men, women and hybrids constitute the main characters in his work since he moved to Israel, with animalistic elements applied to people, while generating androgynous creatures and a variety of fetuses typifying his entire creative work. For every image Hofstatter creates, he wishes to assign to it a face, including within body organs³². Hofstatter does not refer to the human image as a fixed symbol, but within a certain process in which it undergoes metamorphosis as part of a dynamic dimension.³³ The entire metamorphosis can be analyzed and reviewed either in a negative way, or in a positive one. Based on the negative connotation, the image of distortion can be distinguished as a being. However, when taking a positive look at this, we can follow a process of repairing and rebuilding. Rachel Sukman writes: "... in a world that is heaven and hell... It is of no wonder that distortions erupt to the extent of blurring the meaning of sex or race..."³⁴

Since then, from time to time, Kuba bought for him in the market such cheap toothbrushes in all sizes. He refused to give him use toothbrushes!"

29 O. Hofstatter, *Hofstatter*.

30 M. Karpik, *Tragic Optimist*, „Studio“, 17 (1970) p. 36.

31 O. Hofstatter, *Hofstatter*, p. 14.

32 Ibidem, p. 15.

33 Ibidem.

34 Ibidem, p. 3.

Hofstatter looks at himself and the result of his artwork and determines that he is an “tragic optimist”³⁵ and identifies with Ecclesiastes. Europe and the war formed him and his spiritual world. He tells, “... When I was in camps and looking for food on the ground like a dog... I felt that I have to love living and life... My art stems from this...”³⁶ He even refers to his critics and clarifies his point of view to focus his unique style. “Anyone who sees just tragedies in my art failed to understand it... After all, a person cannot be miserable all the time...”³⁷. Hofstatter is particular on mentioning that his outlook regarding human suffering is universal and does not see just the Jews and their suffering in the camps, although he does see day to day human life and how these make his life hard³⁸. Sukman explains this by showing that Hofstatter’s art is human art and that his spiritual life led to the fruition of his art as his feelings, either joy or agony, are expressed throughout the years of his expression, either in Europe, or in Israel.³⁹

.... There is no art without a clean soul... It is not about what the person paints. It is about what he has to say. I hope that one day they will see in my work how I felt life...⁴⁰

Yoav Dagon follows on Hofstatter’s work and describes how landscapes cleared the way to human images whom he names “actors of a Hofstatterian tragicomedy”⁴¹. Dagon does not find in the twisted images marks of invalidity, but “... internal harmony...”⁴² Hofstatter related to his paintings as mapping of the soul. He said about himself, “... I don’t paint images, but souls”⁴³. Harel

35 Hofstatter’s quotes Ibid.

36 Ibidem.

37 Ibidem.

38 Ibidem.

39 Ibidem, p. 4.

40 Hofstatter’s quotes (Ibidem), p. 5.

41 Ibidem, p. 36.

42 Ibidem, p. 36.

43 From Hirsch’s film.

draws a line from Hofstatter's world to that of Isaac Bashevis Singer, where there are demons and characters.⁴⁴

The images in Hofstatter's paintings can be divided into three groups: man, women and hybrids (images combining animalistic elements with humans.) Tamuz describes Hofstatter's paintings where women's images are huge in relation to the paintings in which they are part. These women have very large breasts, are hairless and their hips seem to be without boundaries over the painting. However, despite that, these women do not come across as erotic⁴⁵, but rather ironic. Their facial features lack a clear form and Hofstatter's woman seems to be a creature that is more body than a thinking person, "... flesh contradicting spirit..."⁴⁶ According to Levita, the women's images have a monstrous and even depressing element to them.⁴⁷ Hofstatter said, "... My wife is my muse. A woman is braver, more positive, have a greater connection to life than a man and as a result, she will outlive him."⁴⁸ Compared with those women, the men in his paintings seem to be sexless. Ofer Petersburg believes that these images are not easy to absorb by the spectator, despite the fact that Hofstatter places men in the center of the universe.⁴⁹ As for the hybrid creatures, Benjamin Tamuz portrays an evolutionary process Hofstatter's images undergo as the artist works as a type of process the images themselves undergo.⁵⁰ He described how an image of a puppy in one of his paintings, "... underwent many metamorphoses before turning into a one-legged half-man, escaping and faltering in panic of the cry of the woman on the back of the old man..."⁵¹ Rachel Sukman claims that the characters in Hofstatter's paintings are foreign to one another. According to her, this is evident by the way their gazes are aimed at different directions with neither eye-contact, nor focus. Sukman considers Hof-

44 K. Harel, *Hofstatter in Herzliya*, „Maariv Pnai", November 30, 1990, p. 3

45 O. Hofstatter, *Hofstatter*, p. 5.

46 Ibidem, p. 17.

47 Ibidem, p. 15.

48 Hofstatter is quoted in his own words, p. 5.

49 O. Petersburg, *Poetry Mockery and Lament*, p. 18.

50 O. Hofstatter, *Hofstatter*, p. 16.

51 Ibidem, p. 16.

statter's creative work a stage on which the characters function "... within chaos, sans hope and death..."⁵²

It is evident that Hofstatter is particular on painting in his artwork faces and human organs in any possible place, thus creating the main characteristic of his art. This makes it possible to distinguish physical deformities, which are explained by Levita as a result of composition and comprehension of human complexity, being an aggregation of parts of the whole that includes its inner part and problems. Levita notes that in the eyes of Hofstatter, man symbolizes a process and not a fixed thing and the man in his paintings is part of a dynamic dimension, constantly undergoing metamorphosis. Levita presents two connotations of this metamorphosis: one, negative, representing the twisted part of humans and the other, positive, demonstrating the repair and building processes.⁵³

Il. 3, Osias Hofstatter | Two-Faced and Trans-Erotic, Trait pour trait: Portrait of the Museum, Collection +, Curators: Yinon Avior, Ruth Golan, Sep. 16, 2017 – Feb. 3, 2018, Herzliya Museum.



Hofstatter's art highlights a sway between faith and doubt. Hofstatter draws man in the way he exists. Mystical belief that accompanies him leads his way when he draws man in the image of his God, but uses a character with distorted

52 Ibidem, pp. 4–5.

53 Ibidem, pp. 13–14.

human features. Hofstadter said that he believes himself to be a religious artist.⁵⁴ "... As far as I am concerned, art is tied to morality and religion. Although I am not religious in the conventional aspect, I struggle to have faith..."⁵⁵ Although it is common for an existential outlook to accompany an agnostic person and focus on the human, freedom, meaning and will, it is possible to detect in Hofstadter "religious existentialism."⁵⁶ Hofstadter's existentialism does not end in despair, but in faith. Levita sees in some of Hofstadter's paintings numinous⁵⁷, by having doubt in his artwork. She indicates to the fact that this skepticism can be found in his works including *Monologue*, *the Angels* and *the Man with the Skull*, whereas in others faith is found as in *Pieta* and *Hasid*.⁵⁸ Following are pictures of the works *Monologue* and *Pieta*.

... Even though I doubt everything, and I am even skeptic of religions, at the same time, I am certain of my religiousness, because I have learned that if I am not humble, I am like a clown... Anyone who knows his meekness and tries to get out of it, becomes religious...

My searches for God are not constant, because I am not pious, but the search for what might be holy is forever in me. This search from darkness to the light...

must be expressed in my work. This is my religiousness...⁵⁹

Irena and Yaakov Wodislavsky

Irena and Yaakov Wodislavsky were born in Poland and have a firsthand experience of the harsh experiences Jews underwent during World War 2. As Holocaust survivors, they have dedicated a considerable and significant part of this

54 Ibidem, p. 11.

55 From Hirsch's film.

56 O. Hofstadter, *Hofstadter*, p. 17.

57 Otto claimed that religion has a-rational (unlike irrational) aspects. Refer to P. Miranda, *Numinous and Religious Experience in the Psychology of Carl Jung*, „Diálogos Junguianos/Jungian Dialogues”, 3 (2018) No. 1, pp. 110–133.

58 O. Hofstadter, *Hofstadter*, p. 15.

59 Hofstadter's words about his religious faith in Hirsch's film

life for cultivating and commemorating the remembrance of the Holocaust in Israel is many cultural areas.

Irena was born in Zakopane near Krakow in 1936. A short time after the beginning of World War 2 and after her mother's disappearance due to her arrest by the Gestapo, she was smuggled out of the ghetto by a friend of the family, thus beginning a line of transfers from one Christian family to another that raised her and took care of her for different periods of time. Yet, she was always out of the family. When the war was over, her father located her and brought her back to him for a while since the father had a new family and Irena had to grow up in boarding schools without a family. In 1957, Irena made Aliyah to Israel and settled in Kibbutz Gesher. Later, she got married, worked as a chemist in the Ministry of Defense and lived in Haifa with her first husband. When she was just forty years old and without children, she became a widow. In 1978, she got married with Yaakov Wodislavsky and together they built a new home in Israel. Commemorating the Holocaust and heroism became the focal point of their mutual life.⁶⁰

Yaakov (Kuba) was a young boy just after his Bar Mitzvah when the Nazis took Poland. He was sent with his family to a ghetto and later he was transferred to a forced labor camp in Częstochowa from which he managed to escape and hide with the Hajdas family that was acknowledged later as Righteous Among the Nations. When the war ended and he stepped out of his hiding place, Kuba was highly motivated to be part of establishing the Jewish state in the land of Israel. So, after the war was over, he took to the road on his wandering way through Europe, a path that led him to making Aliyah to mandatory Palestine with other youths and with the aid of Itzhak "Antek" Zuckerman,

60 Interview with Irena Wodislavsky, August 14, 2019, "... After I became a widow, I was asked if I would like to meet Kuba. He came to me in Haifa and we went for a walk. He came with his dog. At the end of the first date, he asked me if I wanted children and I told him that no, I am not interested and that this does not suit me... Perhaps this was because my father sent me off to boarding schools after the war when he got remarried. I am not sure... On the next date, Kuba proposed to me. He said he was very impressed with how I related to his dog. That was enough for him. Three months later, we got married and I moved with him in Ramat Gan. I sold my apartment and we bought another apartment in Ramat Gan. Actually, this was the flat we gave Hofstatter..."

one of the senior figures of the Eyal organization that led the Warsaw Ghetto mutiny in April 1943.⁶¹ In January 1946, upon arrival, he was sent by the British to a transfer camp in Atlit. Later he joined Kibbutz Kfar Masarik⁶² and in January 1948, he volunteered to the Haganah. Later he was recruited to the Carmeli division of the IDF, fought in the War of Independence and even suffered a leg wound.⁶³ In 1987, he married Irena and together they began working jointly for commemoration of the Holocaust, an endeavor Yaakov referred to as “my revenge”, hence the title of his autobiography.⁶⁴ Yaakov passed away in May 2013. Here are the words that conclude his book, words that Irena embraced later when promoting his legacy:

... we are aware of the importance of our work... Me and my wife... cannot forget and cannot be weakened. Because I did not and will not forget the faces of those led to their death, calling to us, those left alive, to avenge their blood. Already back then, in that moment, I know that if I survive, I will follow their last testament. Throughout the years, I asked myself why I survived and why millions of other Jews did not. I understood that I and others remained alive to tell about them, **to bear witness of the truth**... I who survived am commemorating them in the consciousness of posterity... When I sit in our conference hall in the remembrance center, looking at the people listening to my stories, following with suspense the images of the film, asking, sounding their opinions, debating, wishing to know; when I see so many young faces, I know I am fulfilling the promise. And I know that the experiences they underwent in the remembrance center will remain engraved in them like their own personal experience. This is the revenge on the perpetrators of my people's genocide... This is my revenge.⁶⁵

This is what Hofstadter told journalist Toby Arbel in an interview to Ha'aretz, reviewing his history: “... I had an interesting dream... I heard you wish to leave

61 Y. Wodislavsky, *My Revenge*, Tel Aviv 2014, pp. 107–109.

62 *Ibidem*, p. 114.

63 *Ibidem*, pp. 118–121.

64 *Ibidem*.

65 *Ibidem*, p. 128.

Israel...".⁶⁶ Hofstatter explained that the meaning of the dream is his own destiny that changed after meeting the Wodislavsky s who enabled him to focus on painting and creative art that, among other things, commemorated the Holocaust. Despite the fact that Hofstatter arrived in Israel in 1957, only in 1968 was his art revealed to Israeli society. He even got to exhibit his artwork in a variety of academic and artistic frameworks abroad. The head of the Contemporary Art faculty of the University of Frankfurt described him as "the Jewish Francisco Goya"⁶⁷

Patronage defines the relationship between an artist and a sponsor that enables the artist to create, while investing funds to ensure the continuity of his work, without requiring the artist from generating another source of income for him- or herself.⁶⁸ Baranchuk refers to the main role of financing the operation of artists as part of an interaction between politics, aesthetics and power that exist since the birth of western art and titles it "cultural patronage."⁶⁹ It is also important to refer to the term "cultural treasures." This is a collection of man-made physical or conceptual creations within a given society with a load of historic heritage, reflecting a defined identity formed within this society. This is different from sponsorship that defines the relationship between the magnate and the artist, where the magnate provides resources for financing the creation and the artist's living expenses and in return receives financial rights or profits from the artist's products.⁷⁰ According to Lull Peñalba, these cultural treasures have a central role in the histories of peoples and certain communities based on the interaction between the community with those art creations.⁷¹

66 T. Arbel, *Tragic Optimist*, „Ha'aretz", January 24, 1986, p. 22

67 Ibidem, p. 2.

68 C. Lomba Serrano, *El Mecenazgo en el Siglo xx*, in: *Del Mecenazgo a las nuevas formas de promoción artística. Actas del XIV Coloquio de Arte Aragonés*, ed. J. Ibanez, Zaragoza 2017, p. 143.

69 M. Baranchuk, *Mecenazgo Cultural: Estado, Poder y Financiación de las Expresiones Artísticas*, „Estudios de Sociología", 12 (2007) No. 22, pp. 43–61.

70 M. Scaltsa, *Defending sponsorship and defining the responsibility of governments towards the visual arts*, „Museum Management and Curatorship", 11 (1992) pp. 387–392.

71 J. Lull Peñalba, *Evolución del concepto y de la significación social del patrimonio cultural*, „Arte, Individuo y Sociedad", 17 (2005) pp. 177–206.

Thanks to the Wodislavsky 's patronage, Hofstatter was able to paint many hundreds of artworks. Over a thousand are kept in Irena Wodislavsky's private collection in the Holocaust Memorial Center she has established with her husband in Ariel. Hofstatter's artworks are numerous and a large part of them were enabled thanks to the generosity of Irena and Kuba. Because of this, while in creative gusto and for no apparent cause, the artist decided to give some of his creations to the couple, without referring to a special event or without the couple asking him to do so.

Toby Harel wrote, "several months ago, Hofstatter moved to a small apartment in East Ramat Gan that was loaned to him by his admirers..."⁷² The couple provided the artist and his wife Anna a roof to live under, yet asked for nothing in return, but their anonymity. Irena and Kuba requested that their ownership over the apartment in which Hofstatter lived and created will not be made public, believing that the creative work is the thing that should be in public attention. This is what Hofstatter told journalist Yossef Bar-Yossef in an interview:

... This last apartment we have received is a gift from our friends... We bonded six or seven years ago. He liked me and my paintings, his wife liked my wife... I will not disclose his name, since he does not wish people to know... Just like in our case, they too do not have children...⁷³

The couple hosted in their home in their town of Ramat Gan an exhibition of Hofstatter's paintings, to which they invited public figures and people related to art who have later opened the road to making the artist accessible to public consciousness, museums and a variety of exhibits for the purpose of spreading the word of his artwork that was unfamiliar to the Israeli society before he met his patrons the Wodislavsky s. Upon the launching of the exhibit in the Herzliya Museum, dedicated to his creations, it was said that, "the hidden light is revealed this week, as usual, not in the center, but closer to the fringes..."⁷⁴

72 Ibidem, p. 23.

73 Y. Bar-Yossef, *Osias Hofstatter*, „Bamahane", October 8, 1986, pp. 52–52

74 N. Meliniak, *Embracing Life*, „Ha'aretz", January 3, 1986. p. 4

Hofstatter used to take the opportunity of every launching of an exhibition or public event to demonstrate humble gestures towards his artistic patrons. Sometimes, he drew the couple's portraits on a printed invitation and write words of greeting in Polish and on rare occasions, even wrote in Hebrew or English. On the opening of an exhibition of his paintings in the Eva Gallery in Jerusalem on April 26, 1984, he drew on the invitation to the exhibit with green and blue markers the portraits of his patrons and added in Polish, *Oj waj waj Jaki raj* (oh, what paradise.) On the back of the invitation he wrote: "Welcome! Our true friends Wodislavsky" and added his signature in Hebrew by his childishly drawn portrait. This was his way to express his gratitude towards the couple on top off generously granting them his creations. His approach towards them s emphasized in view of the artist's words that, "Museums were not kind to me... There is a great deal of opportunism in the world and in Israel. Most museums are opportunistic..."⁷⁵

In a greeting he drew for Rosh Hashanah, Hofstatter remained loyal to his own style. He drew the couple joined in their faces with Irena's image standing out, detailed and bigger with Kuba intertwined in her face, smaller and simplistically drawn. This greeting is a good reflection of his style and the ratio he was so particular on between male and female figures.

Yaakov Wodislavsky considered commemoration of the Holocaust as the main purpose of his life. This was his revenge. As in the case of many other Holocaust survivors, Kuba also felt a moral obligation to commemorate the Holocaust for the sake of the victims, either from his own family, or friends. The Wodislavsky's chose to do so by promoting Holocaust surviving Israeli artists and their artworks. Osias Hofstatter is a striking example of this, since without the couple's support, he would not be capable of creating for the sake of commemoration, knowing he has financial backing. The two men felt deeply close to one another and a shared destiny.

75 T. Arbel, *Tragic Optimist*, p. 3.

Discussion and conclusions

The life of Osias Hofstatter is intertwined with the Holocaust, its remembrance and its significance. All his creations manifest his outlook resulting from his experiences due to the Holocaust events and his being a Holocaust survivor whose memories keep haunting him. This is the background of the connection between the artist and his patrons – the Wodislavsky s who are also Holocaust survivors and resolved to dedicate their lives, fortune and efforts to commemorate the Holocaust for the memory of the victims and for posterity.

Hofstatter developed a singular style of painting with slight adjustments from period to period, although the images he presents in his surreal artwork remained present throughout all the periods. Although there was time when he drew with nothing but black ink, while in others he used colored ink, his paintings were always done on paper that was processed and treated in advance and thoroughly by the artist, making this processing an integral part of his creation and unique style. Israeli critics embraced the concept held by their overseas counterparts who referred to Hofstatter as the Jewish Goya signifying a parallelism to the paintings of the Spanish artist Francisco Goya who was a painter in the court of Charles IV, King of Spain, and documented in his artwork issues related to the Napoleonic Wars as well as images of nude women. Hofstatter said to this, “Goya got through Napoleon, while I made it through Hitler...”⁷⁶

For the first time in his life, Hofstatter managed to dedicate himself to painting and to his art and this happened only after the couple provided him with a secure roof over his head and financial support. But this was not enough. Irena and Kuba promoted the public consciousness regarding his important creative work among cultural and artistic institutions and revealed his artwork before public opinion influencers in the Israeli society.

Streszczenie: Osias Hofstatter jako artysta przetrwał Holokaust, co pozwoliło mu odbudować życie w Polsce wraz z żoną Anną po tym, jak podczas II wojny światowej stracił większość rodziny. To właśnie sztuka doprowadziła go do przekonania, że nie będzie mógł swobodnie wyrażać siebie w reżimie komunistycznym. Mimo tragicznych

76 M. Karpik, *Tragic Optimist*, p. 36.

doświadczeń i trudności, które naznaczyły jego życie intensywnymi barwami walki o przetrwanie, sztuka stała się centrum życia Hofstattera. Nawet po wyjeździe do Izraela, pomimo trudów łączenia twórczości artystycznej z koniecznością zarobkowania i wyzwań związanych z utrzymaniem się w pierwszych latach po przeprowadzce nie porzucił pracy twórczej. Przełomem okazało się spotkanie z Ireną i śp. Yaakovem (Jakubem) Wodziszławskimi, które miało decydujący wpływ na artystyczną ścieżkę kariery Hofstattera. Wodziszławscy stali się jego mecenasami, wspierając twórczość artysty od pierwszego spotkania aż do jego śmierci. Możliwość poświęcenia niemal całej energii i czasu malarstwu przełożyła się na wyraźny wzrost tempa powstawania i liczbę prac Hofstattera.

Słowa kluczowe: malarz, sztuka, polski, ocalały z Holocaustu, Izrael.

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