

The House in Midwood

A House in Midwood Jumpstarts an Artist's Career

Esther Maxwell

by MENUCHA CHANA LEVIN

Esther Maxwell grew up in Flatbush, New York. One vivid memory from her childhood is going to Brighton Beach for *Tashlich*, bringing huge bags of challah for the excited seagulls.

From a young age, Esther decided to become an artist after understanding the *pasek* in *Az Yashir*, "This is my G-d and I will beautify Him." Connecting to Hashem and sharing the authentic charm of *Yiddishkeit* through her artwork turned into her goal. Enthralled by the paintings of artist Gadi Pollack, he served as a role model and "a huge source of

inspiration" by capturing Jewish themes in detailed illustrations which "bring you into his world."

Esther took art lessons and attended an atelier, the workshop of a professional artist where students and apprentices work together to produce fine art. There she also learned the structure and skills of artwork.

Her specialty is portraits, which began in ninth grade when she would draw pictures of her classmates. She discovered that she enjoyed the process of capturing the characters and their



Sheves Achim



A Father's Pride

message in each portrait.

After taking graphic design classes at General Assembly Art College, Esther settled into a job but did not find the real enjoyment and satisfaction she was hoping for. Ironically, despite the complications of the COVID-19 pandemic, it gave her the opportunity to stay home and work on art she truly loved.

However, the actual start of her art career was somewhat unusual.

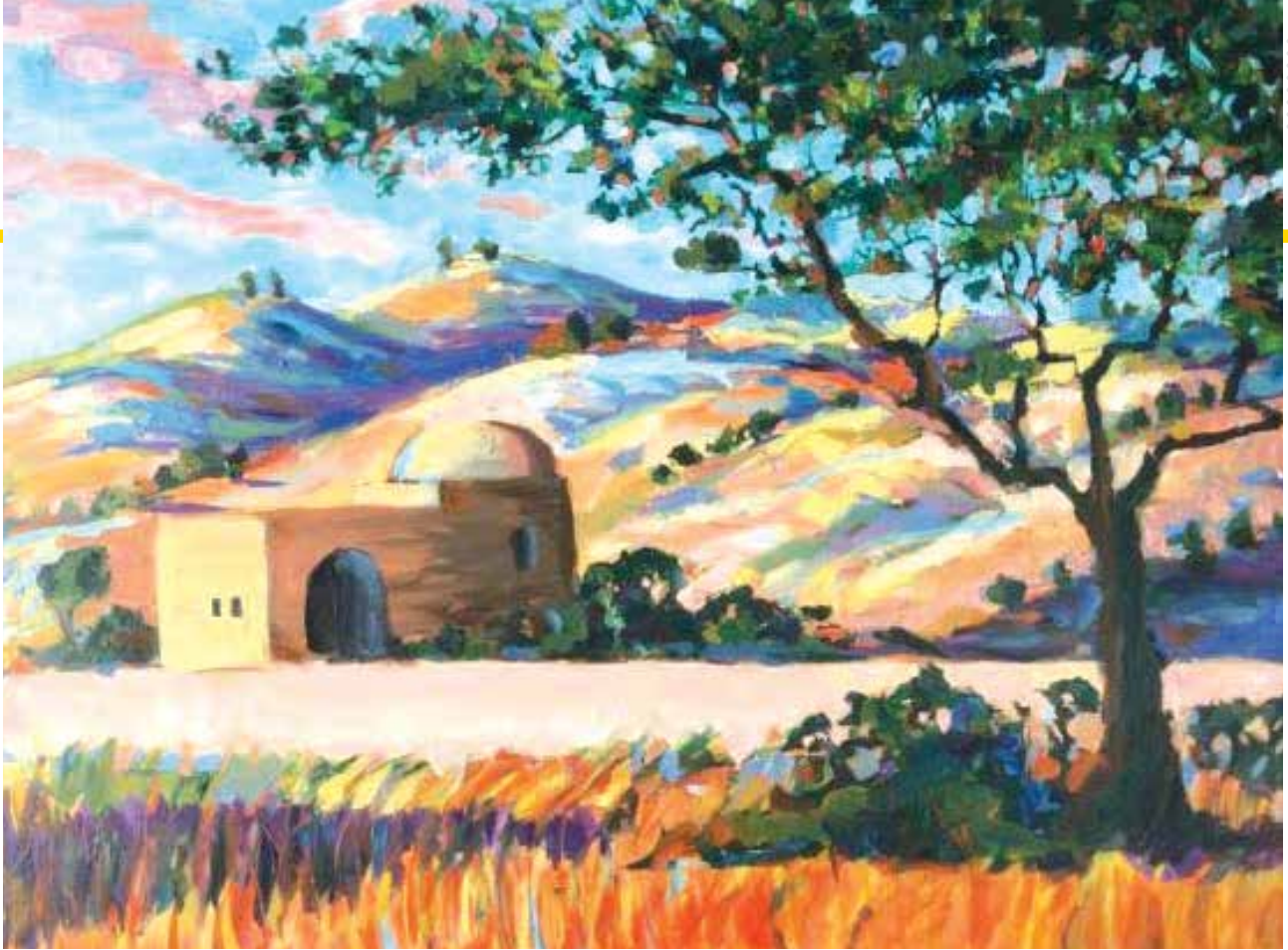
“I went down to the West Midwood neighborhood in central Brooklyn with my art materials and painted a picture of one of the pretty houses,” she explains. “After completing the painting, I knocked on the front door to show my piece to the owner. I was shaking like a leaf when the door was answered. Art is very personal. This was my first time presenting my artwork, and I didn’t know how it would be received. The owner looked at my representation of her home and was so warm and enthusiastic about it. I wasn’t really planning on selling it, but her praise gave me the confidence to offer the piece to her. She accepted my price and actually gave me more for the piece than I had asked!”

After that, Esther taught herself the fundamentals of the arts and business, but even more importantly she discovered that “my art is sellable, and I can make a *parnassah* from doing something I love.”

Pouring life into her paintings, each one is infused with emotion that is clearly visible. She now works full-time on her art career, about six hours a day drawing or painting and four hours marketing



Cheder Children



Kever of Rochel Imeinu



At the Kosel at Sunrise

and shipping her work. One small painting of 11x14 inches can take about five hours to complete.

“My art has always been full of color and life,” explains Esther. “I don’t believe a painting should be a noun. It’s a verb. It has energy, a story, a life — just like you and me. I add as many colors as I can in my paintings because color carries a much greater story than neutrals do. Yellow is happy, pink is playful, blue is calm. The subjects I paint are scenes that speak to me

of my experience with the world. My favorite paintings are the colorful portraits which hold a lot of life and energy.

“The most enjoyable part about being an artist is when I talk to clients about their ideas for commissions. At this stage, things are all creativity-based. It doesn’t matter if the compositional sketches don’t look like the people they represent, it doesn’t matter if the colors are a little off— all that matters are the ideas and the imagination. This is my favorite stage of the commission process, as well as my favorite part about being an artist. The hardest part about being an artist is facing a painting long after the freshness has gone, and the painting is still unfinished. It takes a lot of determination to complete work that isn’t turning out the way you imagined,” she points out.

Asked from where she gets her inspiration, Esther replies, “My favorite quote about inspiration is this: ‘Inspiration comes during work, not before it.’”

Sheves Achim

This painting represents brotherly love, connecting one Yid to a fellow Yid. There is a cord among us all that changes strangers to family and feelings of loneliness to feelings of protection.

Pomegranate Tree

Referred to numerous times in *Tanach*, pomegranates were used to decorate the *Kohen Gadol's* clothes, the *Beis HaMikdash*, and were even printed on coins. This fruit symbolizes Eretz Yisrael and abundance.

At the Kosel at Sunrise

In Judaism there is holiness inside time, person, and place. The Western Wall is one of the most powerful places in the world and this painting of a beautiful sunrise *minyan* (*neitz*) with its early worshippers combines all three levels of holiness.

Portrait of Harav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zt"l

Harav Nosson Tzvi Finkel was *Rosh Yeshivah* of the *Mirrer Yeshiva* in *Yersushalayim*. During his tenure from 1990 until his passing in 2011, the *Mir* grew into the largest yeshivah in Israel. He was known for his Torah erudition and his warmth and concern for his *talmidim*.

Cheder Children

This painting is a symbol of the way a *Rebbi* educates his young students, through example of gentle leadership.

Kever of Rochel Imeinu

Everyone needs a mother. That feeling of protection and compassion is a medicine for our pains. Anyone who has been to the *kever* of *Rochel Imeinu* can agree that our universal mother is loving us and listening to us.

A Father's Pride

This is one of a series of father-and-son paintings I did. Judaism is passed along through role modeling and teaching. It is this chain of father-to-son relationships that has allowed Judaism to survive and will ensure our future survival as well.

The House in Midwood

This painting was the first picture I ever sold. ■

Esther Maxwell can be reached via Hamodia.



Portrait of Harav Nosson Tzvi Finkel, zt"l



Pomegranate Tree



Yerusahalyim