

<https://www.haaretz.co.il/gallery/art/.premium-1.6412399>

Translation of the original article published on Haaretz by Maya Oshri on August 26, 2018.

Katzenstein was one of the most prominent Israeli artists, winner of the Sandel prize, represented Israel in Biennales, and characterized himself in a blunt fashion. In his work in Vienna, he wrote on a wall with his own blood: "In our culture the language is secret". He was a member of some musical groups, one of which included Ohad Pishuf.



Picture: Moti Milrod

Katzenstein in 2015 next to his work: "Backyard"

Katzenstein was considered one of the pioneers of performance art in Israel, but in recent years he has become famous for his sculptures. During his career, he won several prestigious titles and prizes, including the Dizengoff Prize (2017) and the Sandel Prize (2014). His last exhibition was exhibited earlier this year at Hezi Cohen Gallery.

Katzenstein was born in 1951 in Tel Aviv, the only son of German-born parents who immigrated to Israel before the Holocaust. In 1973, he participated as a reserve soldier in the Yom Kippur War, from which he returned with post traumatic stress disorder. He studied art at the Avni School in Tel Aviv and then went to the United States. He earned his first degree at the University of Indiana and an MA in San Francisco. After his studies, he integrated into the performance scene, which took a significant place in the art world in New York. He introduced his works in some of the most important spaces in this field in the 1980s, such as The Kitchen and No-Se-No.



Faraway in a vast, vast forest,
Далеко в лесу огромном

Uri Katzenstein, from his last exhibition, taken from the video art "Anna's Mission", 2017

His first works were characterized as extreme and relatively violent, in a style that was not known then in Israel. In an interview with the gallery in 2015, he said that the artist who most influenced him was the sculptor and performance artist Chris Burden, who taught him in San Francisco. "There's one sentence he told me that I carry with me to this day, I submitted a photo shoot and he said to me, 'Uri, you have to start putting yourself in.' It was the simplest but most formative sentence for me... Like him, I too felt my violence, but I took it to my own districts."



To watch the video, click here: https://youtu.be/HcNU_codHM

In 1985, he returned to Israel and began to participate in exhibitions for young artists. He presented his first solo exhibition, "Fatschgan", in 1993 at the Israel Museum. Since then, his style has softened somewhat. He also began to focus on sculpture, video works and installation, and exhibited in Israel and abroad. Among others, he participated in the biennales in Brazil, Poland, Turkey and Argentina, where he won first place in 2002. A year earlier, he was elected to represent Israel at the Venice Biennale.



Uri Katzenstein, from his last exhibition, taken from the video art "Anna's Mission", 2017

"In Venice, he wrote in his own blood on the wall, 'In our culture the language is secret'." Yigal Zalmona, who curated Katzenstein's pavilion in Venice in 2015 said. "I think one of his main messages is that we are all made of contradictions and if we listen to them, a change will come through art, he believes in the ability of art to change people... I think he is an idealist."



To watch video click here: <https://youtu.be/jZUNLgCINWg>

The Backyard exhibition (2015), a huge, semi-retrospective exhibition, was exhibited at the Tel-Aviv Museum of Art. The exhibition received great reviews and great success. "The exhibition shows the volume of creativity, artistic, emotional, and intellectual coping ranges that are suitable for museum proportions," wrote the art critic for "Ha'aretz" Galia Yahav. "Not only because of the constant preoccupation with the scale, but also because Backyard is one of the generous, lush, sexy, and violent exhibitions of an old artist worthy of full appreciation for his unique language. This language can perhaps be called narrative hyper-realism, which is so different from the language of abstraction and minimalism in Israeli sculpture."



"Backyard" by Uri Katzenstein, the chair is controversial, to the left of the center piece Photograph by: Revital Topiol

For all the praise it received, the Backyard exhibition contained some controversy. One of the exhibits was a chair in the form of a swastika, which succeeded in arousing the anger of Culture Minister Miri Regev. The minister complained to the Tel-Aviv Museum, and finally spoke with Katzenstein himself, who explained the idea behind the work, which was first exhibited in 1988 and a similar copy is in the collection of the Jewish Museum in New York.

Regev understood his explanation, but the plastic artists' union still protested against her initial intervention.

In addition to his art studies in the United States, Katzenstein also began to engage in music. Upon his return to Israel, he performed with the musician Noam Halevy in the "Midas" ensemble and in 1993 participated in the rock opera "Samara", written by Hillel Mittelpunkt and the "Tractor's Revenge" band. At the same time, he began collaborating with musician Ohad Fishof in several projects. Among other things, they released an album in 1999, Skin O Daayaba, which also became a show. When Katzenstein showed up at the Venice Biennale, he produced "Home", a joint work with Fishof and choreographer Renana Raz. In his last years, Katzenstein was a member of the musical ensemble "He-Coidem", with Ofir Ilzetzky and Danny Meir.



From the exhibition: "Backyard" by Uri Katzenstein, 2015

Katzenstein also combined his two fields of activity and built various musical instruments, many of which were exhibited in his exhibition at the Tel-Aviv Museum in 2015. "Of all the materials I work with, sound and music are, of course, the most flexible and motile, so they are a great vehicle by which ideas move from place to place," he said in the same interview from 2015. "When I started doing art, I quickly realized that music is the thing I love the most in the whole world."

Since 2003, Katzenstein has been teaching at the Department of Art at the University of Haifa. "To teach is to breathe," he said. "I suddenly learned that I had to learn to be a teacher, because I was not born a teacher." About the work in Haifa he told Meital Raz in an interview with Time Out last year, on the occasion of his winning the Dizengoff Prize. "80% of the female students in Haifa are Arab, and that changed my thinking pattern, I feel that I am a kind of fifth column, I show them all the important things that they will see." In regard to the students of today he added: "I want to wake them up. They have something off, they create with less desire, as if everything has already been done before them. When you see burnt out youth it is really terrible for them and terrible for the world."

In the same interview, he was also asked about the artistic legacy he would leave behind. "We're actually talking about death, it's very complicated, at least for me," he replied. "I do not know what will happen to my works if I do not throw them in now. Art is a wide and complex process, and many people leave behind things and the generations that follow them make it the norm. I do not think about it, it's too narcissistic."