

**David (Dudu) Gerstein** is an Israeli painter and sculptor. He began as a figurative painter and illustrator of children books and was recipient of the Israel Museum Prize for illustration. Gerstein's post-pop art style is characterized by bold colored, multilayered cutout steel. His outdoor sculpture "Momentum" is Singapore's tallest public sculpture.

## Biography

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David (Dudu) Gerstein was born in 1944 in Jerusalem to parents who immigrated from Poland. The family moved to Ramat Gan when he was four years old. Both he and his twin brother, Jonathan (Yoni) Gerstein, showed artistic talent from an early age. David's teacher, Batya Uziel, encouraged him to study painting. At the age of thirteen he was sent to a camp for the arts in Jerusalem, which he attended for several summers in a row. In high school, he took classes at the Beit Zvi Art Center in Ramat Gan with Rina Balktovsky Arnon. During his military service in the paratroopers he was stationed at Ein Gev for one year, where he painted a series of oils of fishing docks, boats and kibbutz landscape. While there, he met the artist Aharon Giladi, who encouraged him to pursue art. Upon completion of his military service, David applied to the Bezalel academy of art and design, Jerusalem, where he met Avraham Ofek, who had a marked influence on Gerstein's style.

In the mid-1960s, Gerstein left Bezalel and enrolled at the Ecole national superieur des beaux art in Paris,<sup>[5]</sup> where he studied under Chaplain Midy. After two years in Paris, he moved to New York and attended classes of the Art students league, where he learned portrait painting and printmaking.

Gerstein returned to Israel at the age of twenty six and began teaching at Bezalel. At first, he taught drawing and then became a faculty member of the Department of Jewelry Design, which was then undergoing a process of renewal under the direction of Aryeh Ophir; evolving from the outmoded, tradition style of "Bezalel" to introducing innovative concepts influenced by modern art. Due to his background in the fine arts, as opposed to jewelry design, Gerstein was responsible for closing the gap between jewelry design and the world of modern art.

In 1973–1974 Gerstein earned an M.A. in graphic arts at Saint Martin school of art in London. Having learned lithograph and silkscreen printing in that framework, he sought to combine the two media, which had not as yet been integrated. Upon completing his studies he was awarded first prize and two awards for excellence in an end of year competition at St. Martin's. Gerstein returned to Bezalel and applied some of the ideas he had formulated during his M.A. studies. He used silkscreen techniques, prevalent in modern art at the time, to the medium of enamel. Already then, his tendency to integrate different mediums and advanced technologies in creating art was discernable; a tendency that was reflected more strongly in his use of laser in the '90s. He continued in his position as senior lecturer at Bezalel until 1985.

Gerstein's first exhibition in Israel was held in 1971 at the Engel Gallery in Jerusalem, comprising figurative drawings and watercolors. Thereafter, he exhibited at Jerusalem's Artist's House in 1972 with large oil paintings dealing with interiors and the seaside, work that received enthusiastic reviews. Among others, Gerstein was compared to David Hockney due to the fact that "like Hockney, he, too, had been first and foremost a master drawer with an excellent color sense". During those years, Gerstein led a struggle to legitimize figurative art, anomalous in the mainly conceptual Israeli art scene.<sup>[6]</sup> The conceptual art trend was irrelevant for him and he chose the less accepted orientation at the time, figurative painting. Gerstein numbered among the few artists, such as Avraham Ofek, Ivan Schwebel, Avishai Ayal, Uri Lifschitz, and others, who focused on narrative-figurative painting.

At the same period, parallel to conceptualism, an opposite trend developed: hyper-realism, inspired by Israel Hirschberg. Here, too, Gerstein did not find his place. He aspired to creating

figurative paintings informed by a personal, free style; an "accessible" art. Gerstein later explained his approach by comparing it to a literary work whose greatness lay in its different levels, so that it could be enjoyed both as a story as well as on a "deeper reading".

Gerstein's aim to portray the daily experience of Israeli life came to fruition in the 1980s. Gerstein figuratively describes chapters from the Israeli experience, derived, among others, from childhood memories in Tel Aviv. The first series depicts Tel Aviv with its Bauhaus -style balconies, with a humoristic irony.<sup>[10]</sup> This series was based on Gerstein's memories of his parents' generation of "little Tel Aviv"; people whom he regarded with wonder and humor. These paintings express the tension between the sabra generation of the children and the relatively "exilic" generation of the parents. The series contain elderly people, the "old world" reflected in their faces, as seen from the eyes of a sabra child looking at the "generation of the desert"; the generation that founded the country, having had immigrated at a young age, yet still marked by the heritage of the "exile". The origins of this series can be found in Gerstein's watercolors and gouache on paper from the '70s, parts of which were adapted to canvas oil paintings. In the '80s, Gerstein developed this into another series of paintings, those of bathers in the Dead Sea, about which Avraham Eilat wrote, "the residents of the balconies have gone down to the Dead Sea where they lie about on the shore, covered in mud, exposing their pinkish bodies to the mercy of the sun's rays and the salt and get slowly fried".

Gerstein is known for his outdoor sculpture, many of them decorating city squares. His sculptures can be found at the entrance to the Rehovot Mall, Ra'anana Park, Avda and on the campus of the Hebrew university in Jerusalem. His sculpture of a Roman warrior is in Bromford, London. His sculpture in the Singapore business district is 18.5 meters high.

Gerstein's use of vibrant, bright colors has been called "decorative" and "commercial." Gerstein says: "The forms and colors in my work are my way of communicating. Those who taste the fruit will discover that it is not only beautiful, but also replete with vitamins. My work "The Human Circle" resembles a huge flower or bouquet, but beneath the surface is a tacit criticism of human life; the insight that we come from nowhere, are going nowhere, and in the meantime, are going around in circles, chasing our tails. Whoever chooses to see the work as a decorative bouquet, is welcome. But if you look at the characters comprising the "Human Circle", you will see that they are not pretty. In fact, they are even ugly. But the overall picture is beautiful and seductive".

On his use of serial, as opposed to individual works, Gerstein replies, "Warhol made silkscreens". It does not really matter if an artist paints a work with his own hands, or if they are painted by assistants or printed. Gerstein believes that "everyone deserves art, even art on the level of a silkscreen that's bought the way one would buy a quality wine". There are different levels. I don't choose to brand myself as an artist for only the top decile, but for all. It's only right that everyone gets to enjoy art".