



Untitled, mixed media on cardboard, 2014 (Courtesy Ruth Weinstein Paporisch)



Ruth Weinstein Paporisch. (Carl Hoffman)



Untitled, mixed media on canvas, 2014. (Courtesy Ruth Weinstein Paporisch)

Her father was a teacher

Ruth Weinstein Paporisch has created and mounted an exhibition dedicated to her late father, a principal founder and the author of geography textbooks only previous generations will remember

By CARL HOFFMAN

With clever insight Meir Ahronson, director of the Museum of Israeli Art, wrote that "There is nothing more alive than a dead father" in his introduction to Druse artist Asad Azi's 2009 exhibition "My Father Is a Soldier." The exhibition reflected Azi's years of trying to come to terms with the major traumatic event of his life – the death of his soldier father when Asad was six years old.

Sayah Azi, who had proudly enlisted in Israel's Border Police in 1956, was killed while on active duty on May 30, 1961, shot by a Syrian sniper. Asad Azi's exhibition was composed largely of paintings of his

father in uniform, based on one old photograph, with captions like "My Father Is a Dead Soldier" and "Your Dream Killed My Happiness."

The death of his father, occurring almost 50 years before, continued to haunt the artist to the point of being perhaps the defining event of his life.

"Even after the passage of all these years, I am still feeling the same thing – weak, fragile and hurt," he told me. "I'm still orphaned. I'm still someone who does not have the opportunity to go with his father to the zoo, to the sea, to hug him and feel protected. These are all the things I was raised with and cannot get free of."

Three years later, internationally acclaimed Israeli film director Amos Gitai built and opened the Munio Gitai Weinraub Architecture Museum in Haifa, in homage to his own long-dead father, along with an inaugural exhibition of his father's life and work. This came close on the heels of exhibitions that Gitai had presented in memory of his father in Ein Harod, Jerusalem, Paris and Tokyo.

When I observed that we all have had fathers, but most of us don't mount exhibitions and open museums in their honor, Gitai replied, "I was 19 years old when my father died. When you're that age, you don't have many occasions to speak intelligently to your parents. And I think I went

to study his craft, spending nine years to do it, in order to keep talking to my dead father."

And now artist Ruth Weinstein Paporisch has created and mounted an exhibition called simply "Paporisch," dedicated to her father, a founder and principal of Tichon Hadash High School in Tel Aviv and pioneer and leading figure in the teaching of geography throughout Israel. Arrayed throughout all three floors of the HerzLilienblum Museum of Banking and Tel Aviv Nostalgia, the exhibition comprises some 30 original artworks, as well as displays of geography textbooks written by Dr. Paporisch, some of his personal possessions and mementos, along with video screens showing photos from his life in a continuous loop.

Asked why she used her father, who died in 1992, as the focal point for this, her third solo exhibition, Paporisch explains, "Two years ago, I was thinking about what to paint. My teacher suggested I do something about myself. I had been thinking about doing something about my father, whom I liked very much, and appreciate very much because he was a very important man. Today, the world has changed. Education has changed. No one really learns geography anymore. He knew that his style of textbook writing would be finished after he was gone. And it's true.

Only people from around my generation remember his name today because they all studied from his books. So I decided to do something about him and his work."

The result of this decision is "Paporisch," a multimedia celebration of her father's professional life.

"This exhibition involves two things – geography and my father. My father was the first to write geography textbooks for Israeli schools. He was also one of the founders and principal of Tichon Hadash. This was a very special school. The idea behind it was different from other schools at the time. It was private. The students did not wear uniforms, and they called their teachers by their first names. Today, that's the way it is all over Israel, but in those days it was not like that. Tichon Hadash was the first school to do this, and my father was one of the people who initiated it," she says.

Paporisch began her creative process by gathering some of her father's professional work: booklets and books written by him; sketches, notes, and even doodles he had made in copies of his published textbooks, notebooks, diaries, and other odds and ends. She scanned the items and printed them on pieces of old paper and cloth. She then added paint blots, brush strokes and other coloring to the paper and cloth, along with written

captions in Hebrew and a few in English. She took small fragments and sections of her father's books, illustrations, maps and charts and transferred them to the paper and cloth as well.

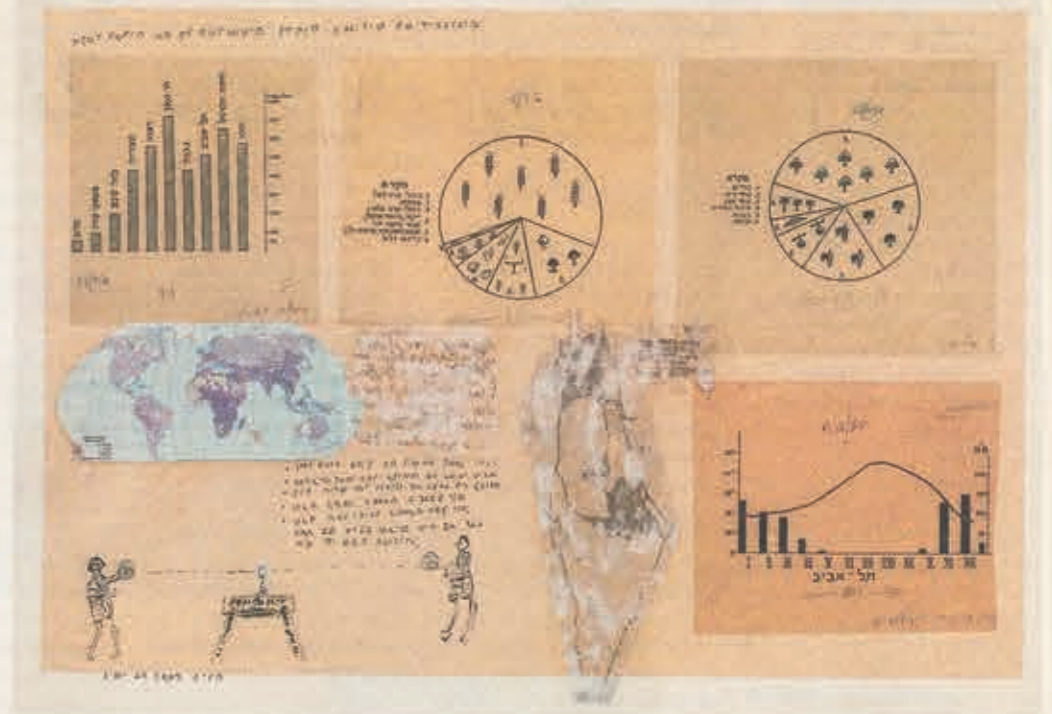
The resulting artworks are extraordinary and somewhat beyond categorization. Words like "painting," "collage," "montage," "drawing" and "sketching" approximate but do not quite describe the oeuvre presented in this exhibition. Working in mixed media such as oil, ink and acrylic, in addition to the scanned materials, Paporisch creates her visions on canvas, cardboard and paper. The paper, specifically, is the decorative endpaper found in older hardcover books – glued to the inner cover of the book to hold the cover and pages together. The resulting images are amusing, often puzzling, and occasionally childlike, as if still seen through the eyes of the little girl that Paporisch was when her father was at the peak of his career.

Writes curator Arye Berkovitch in the exhibition catalogue, "The childhood experiences, youth and adolescence, alongside the distinctive and esteemed father, have been substituted by his daughter Ruth into artistic values, combining written texts (the product of her father's pen), photos, books and items that have different meanings, along with blots, shapes and images,

arranged by compositions that are inspired by the rational, naive and symbolic arts. The pictorial language in the works is multilayer with multi-monochromatic pastel colors. The artist builds multi-dimension space with a metaphoric expression under the inspiration of naive Fauvist painting, the French painter Raul Dufi, and his Israeli parallel Nahum Gutman."

Added to Paporisch's paintings, by way of context and points of reference, are installations of the textbooks her father wrote for the schoolchildren of the young State of Israel. We

are able to see the actual items on which the artist has based her artistic vision. Especially amusing are the works created around some of the workbook sections of her father's books, in which students had to write answers in the four or five lines that followed every question. There is also a glass case full of her father's Hebrew adaptations of the iconic *Around the World* geography booklet series published in the United States in the 1950s, which I recall struggling with in a Boston elementary



Untitled, mixed media on paper, 2014. (Courtesy Ruth Weinstein Paporisch)

school.

Paporisch's exhibition not only provides a homage to her father and his professional career but also serves as a time capsule from a period in Israel's cultural history, a moment in time that is now slowly fading from memory.

Asked what she plans to do next, the artist replies, "My next project will focus on the times when I was young, the 1950s, '60s and '70s, in Tel Aviv and in Israel. It will be about how it was then: the life, the neighborhoods, growing up,

being in the Scouts – everything. I'm still thinking about how I want to present it

"Paporisch" is on display until January 31, 2015, at the HerzLilienblum Museum of Banking and Tel Aviv Nostalgia, house in the historic and beautifully preserved Beit Schiff. Built in 1910 and one of the first houses in Tel Aviv, Beit Schiff stands at the corner of Herzl and Lilienblum Streets. Visiting hours are Sunday to Thursday 8 a.m. to 3:45 p.m. Friday 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. And I appointment. For further information, call 1-700-558-000.