Alek D. Epstein
Center for Research
in Contemporary Art
(Jerusalem – Moscow – Paris)
alekdep@gmail.com

Discovering The Holy Land's Historic Landscapes through Art: Peter Gluzberg, a Graduate of the Kharkiv Institute of Art and Design, in Israel

Roots and Routes: From Kharkiv to the Holy Land

The eminent Israeli artist Peter Gluzberg was born in Moldova, but spent seven years in Ukraine, which were of great importance for him. "For me, Ukraine and particularly Kharkiv always bring back lots of memories," says Gluzberg:

> It all began in 1972 when I was serving in the still Soviet army and our garrison was stationed on Kholodna Hora. I still remember my first visit to the city on military leave. It was in the summer, and I took a tram headed to the downtown Kharkiv that was passing along Sverdlov Street. As it was crossing a bridge over a river I saw the beautiful embankment and a stairway leading up to the Transfiguration cathedral upon a hill. And all those wide streets and green parks... I can still see those bright images flashing by behind the tram window. The very same day I splurged all of my scarce savings on sweets at a candy store named *Oriental delights*... I really loved the city, and I came to love it even more when I became a student.
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> I entered the Kharkiv Institute of Arts and Industry in 1975. The building itself looked like a fairy house, and I really enjoyed studying there. Though I had to work a lot, I still managed to squeeze in some leisure, such as good movies and theater. I vividly remember interactive conversation-like lectures on the theory of color by Mikhail Aleksandrovich Shaposhnikov as well as art history lessons by Elena Aleksandrovna Voloshina. She was the one who introduced me to a lot of extraordinary people in Kharkiv. Among them was a doctor, who put together a spectacular collection of 1920s–1930s paintings; in addition, he had a unique painting by a 15th century Italian artist. Another was Adolf Iosifovich Strakhov (Braslavskii), a painter, who passed away in 1979. And, of course, there were friends, who are still with me. And I owe it all to Kharkiv. After graduating from the institute in 1980, I was assigned a workplace in Chisinau, where I spent the following ten years before immigrating to Israel.

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Filling a Lacuna: Creating Impressionist Landscapes of the Land of Israel

Gluzberg has an outstanding place among emigrant artists as well as among contemporary Israeli painters.

As a matter of fact, Russian and Soviet art never truly embraced the ideas and traditions of impressionism that had taken over French and all of Western European art in the late 1870s. Russian artists skipped straight from the obsolete Salon academism to realism, then to symbolism and finally to post-impressionism. Thus, Cézanne's late works came to be a major influence on Russian art, and his Russian followers such as Pyotr Konchalovsky and Ilya Mashkov now top the most prestigious auction listings. Still, the vibrant universe of subtle shades and nuances blending into a wild mixture of brightly beaming colors, invented by Auguste Renoir, Claude Monet, Edgar Degas and their contemporaries that have been enthralling viewers for a whole century and a half, never actually made their way into Russian art.

As pointed out by Vyacheslav Filippov in his book *Impressionism in Russian Art*, "all throughout its history Russian impressionism seemed incomplete; it never actually made its appearance as a distinct movement but rather got entangled with other artistic styles." The only impressionist in Russia and in Russian emigrant art turned out to be Konstantin Korovin (1861–1939), who often visited Paris in the 1900s and 1910s and who spent the last sixteen years of his life there. Korovin, who was born to a Moscow-based religious merchant family, came to be the one and only "ambassador" of French impressionism in Russian art. All the other Russian painters who were inspired by impressionist ideas, such as Valentin Serov, Vladimir Borisov-Musatov, Nikolay Mesherin and Igor Grabar, were never actually impressionists. Some of them still stuck to realism, both personally and artistically, some were deeply involved in social themes, while others were more attracted to symbolism or even religious art that had nothing to do with the core life philosophy of impressionism.

As for Israeli art, it never shared the impressionist experience. Contrary to what one would imagine, despite its huge importance for the world's spiritual history, Jerusalem was a rare source of inspiration for painters up until the 1920s, as were other Palestine locations. Numerous landscapes by the Scottish artist David Roberts (1796–1864) created during his visit to Palestine in 1838–1839 happen to be the only extensive series of paintings dedicated to 19th century Jerusalem and its suburbs. However, these works appeared when impressionism was yet to arrive, both as an artistic movement and a creative method, and Roberts was hardly aware of the Barbizon school that had just emerged in those years. In Erets Israel, there was no actual art until the arrival of the so-called "second aliya," which goes back the first decade of the 20th century.

The first art school in Israel, called *Betsalel*, was founded by Boris Schatz (1867–1932) in 1906. While the Impressionists organized their exhibitions (there were eight of them: the first one took place in 1874 and the last one in 1886), there was barely any art

in Erets Israel. The first artist who painted most Jerusalem landscapes in the first half of the 20th century was Ludwig Blum (1891–1975), who studied in Vienna and Prague and moved to Erets Israel in 1923. However, by 1923 European art had already left impressionism far behind, and while Blum was never a member of the avant-garde, his works still have very little in common with paintings by Alfred Sisley, Armand Guillaumin, and Camille Pissarro.

As for pastoral art in Israel – a predominately rural country during the 1920s and 1940s – it was mostly developed by Blum's contemporary Reuven Rubin (born Zelicovici, 1893–1974), who studied in Paris in 1913–1914 and moved to Palestine in 1922. Rubin was neither a proponent of avant-garde nor an abstractionist, though his art was clearly more heavily influenced by the European modernism of the 1910s rather than by impressionism. Over the years both Blum, who became an honorable citizen of Jerusalem in 1967, and Rubin, who received the Israel Prize in 1973, created a considerable number of works that are obviously marked by an impressionist influence, though, just like Serov, Borisov-Musatov, and Grabar, they could not be viewed as impressionists.

As time went by, art in Russia and in the emigrant circles as well as in Israel followed their own paths, still heavily influenced by European and American art trends as well as political tendencies imposed by highly ideological societies striving to create "the new Soviet man" (Russia), "the new Jew" as opposed to the Jews in the Diaspora (Israel) or to preserve "the genuine Russian spirituality free of Bolshevik contamination" (Russian emigration). And with time, art was more and more dominated by abstractionism, then it switched to conceptualism, and as society demanded socially unequivocal art, it did not favor the impressionist celebration of the beauty of an ever-changing landscape. In the second half of the 20th and in the beginning of the 21st century, artists were supposed to be ideological, either by introducing new art paradigms or by promoting certain ideas. In a world like that, there was no place for reflections of light and gentle whiffs of airy breezes, the very core objects of impressionistic contemplation.

Thus, Peter Gluzberg not only draws upon both Russian and Israeli artistic traditions, but also fills a lacuna in the culture of both countries. With his works he introduces a new style that could be described as Mediterranean or even Erets Israeli impressionism, a rare example of *en plein air* painting celebrating the uniqueness of nature's every mood instead of man and his deeds. In recent decades Israeli art has clearly switched to ideological concerns: the political reality of the Arab-Israeli conflict has invaded Israeli art and has become the central theme of most works by contemporary artists. The renowned art researcher Ronald Fuhrer chose a very suitable title for his English monograph *Israeli Painting: From Post-Impressionism to Post-Zionism*, stressing the shift from artistic dexterity, individual style and school traditions to political ideas. Yet Peter Gluzberg rejects politics in favor of his own world where a swift moment blends into eternity. In his paintings, rivers flow peacefully and leaves fall down with a rustle, trees rock from the gusts of the wind and waves crash on the shore, but those everlasting changes of the landscape stay unchanged, whatever the political circumstances. One would say that Gluzberg develops the impression-

ist traditions of both Russia and Israel, but the point is there has been no impressionist tradition in either country. Without any such ambition in mind, Gluzberg becomes one of those who recreate the open air impressionist painting tradition in a place where it did not emerge earlier due to certain historical reasons. As a result, most of the places depicted by Peter Gluzberg had never caught an eye of an artist before, and now thanks to his work they have got a place in the art for the very first time. Some of the paintings created by Gluzberg, a relatively recent immigrant (he has lived and worked in Israel since 1991) have already been successfully sold at the auction sales organized by *Tirosh*, the greatest auction house in Israel. He has also received glowing acclaim from art critics that resulted in his receiving the Jacob Fichman Prize. Several decades ago the same prize was awarded to the prominent Israeli artist Nachum Gutman (1898–1980), one of only five artists in all of Israeli history who were posthumously honored with personal museums dedicated to their art.

Peter Gluzberg receiving the Fichman Prize certificate, Tel-Aviv, 2009

Celebrating Eternal Jerusalem

As a rule, those who paint Jerusalem usually choose to focus on some part of the imposing panorama of the Old City. As it rests upon a plateau raised over the Kidron valley, the Old City can be seen from different locations, and while painting, some artists stand on one of the viewing terraces (there are three of them) in the Armon-Hanaziv district in Southern Jerusalem. Others choose the Yemin Moshe district, and some go to the Liberty Bell Park. Peter Gluzberg also created one such painting, featuring the impressive David Citadel near the Jaffa gate close to the entrance to the Old City in Jerusalem. The David Citadel with the Old City in the background was a source of inspiration for the 19th-century painter Adrien Dausatz, and such 20th-century artists as Ludwig Blum, Nachum Gutman, Aharon April and others. However, after this traditional tribute to the popular image of the "eternal city" Peter Gluzberg turned around and decided to paint the district of Yemin Moshe itself instead of the old fortress, looking at it from the Old City. David Citadel with its recently discovered archeological findings going back for more than 2,700 years adding to its rich symbolic and historic grandeur rather scares away Peter Gluzberg who is loyal to the impressionist tradition of celebrating the simple things in life.

The Yemin Moshe district started out as only two condominiums built in the 1860s for the least fortunate Jerusalem-based Jews, with the initiative and support of Sir Moses Montefiore (1784–1885). At that time it was the only Jewish district outside the Old City. The plot of land was purchased in 1855. In 1857 an eighteen-meter-high windmill was built near Mishkenot Shaanaim to provide the city's inhabitants with affordable high-quality flour; this windmill is featured in Gluzberg's painting *The View of Yemin Moshe* created in 1998. The name of Mishkenot Sha'anaim can be translated as "a peaceable habitation" and comes from Isaiah's prophecy book (32:18): "And my people shall abide in peaceable habitation and in safe dwellings, and quiet resting-places." Later the fund set up by Moses Montefiori sponsored an expansion of the district and it was later named after the philanthropist.

Apart from Yemin Moshe, Peter Gluzberg also worked in the district of Meah Shearim, whose first houses were built in 1874. The name of the district is usually translated as "hundred gates" – "Then Isaac sowed in the land and received in the same year a hundredfold: and the Lord blessed him." It is common knowledge that this particular chapter was read by religious Jews (the only kind to be found in Jerusalem then) during the week that the district was founded. It became the fifth Jewish district outside the walls of the Old City. Symbolically, Yemin Moshe and Meah Shearim appeared at the same time as did Impressionism, the artistic tradition to which Peter Gluzberg belongs.

Like Meah Shearim, Yemin Moshe has barely changed over the years and still looks the way it did in the late 19th century, though its population has dramatically changed twice, at the least. After the First Arab-Israeli War of 1948 this district found itself on the boundary between Israel and Jordan (which controlled all of the Old City from 1948 to 1967), and its inhabitants left immediately, and their homes were used by newly arrived immigrants from Turkey. However, after the Six-Day War of 1967, Jerusalem was united once again and proclaimed the capital of the Jewish state, so the district found itself in a central position. The authorities who hoped for its further development practically forced its inhabitants out of their homes, and even a lawsuit filed in the Supreme court did not help them. Gradually, Yemin Moshe came to be one of the most prestigious districts of the newly united Jerusalem and now is home to representatives of the liberal professions, including some artists. In his works created between 1998 and 2011, Peter Gluzberg conveys the unique atmosphere of the district buried in the verdure with its restored houses that have preserved their original appearance. Yet Gluzberg leaves out the brand-new hotels that can hardly be missed if you look at Yemin Moshe from the east (and that is exactly the location that the artist must have chosen since there is no other way to observe the city at this angle). He omits more recent buildings incompatible with the genuine spirit of the first Jewish district outside of the Old City walls, so only the 1857 windmill dominates Gluzberg's Yemin Moshe. So, these works could have been just as well painted by Camille Pissarro, the only ethnically Jewish founder of Impressionism had he visited Jerusalem a century ago. However, though his works are showcased at the Israeli museum in Jerusalem, Camille Pissarro himself never came to Jerusalem or painted it, and neither

Jerusalem. Yemin Moshe. 1998.
50 × 60 cm. Private collection

did any other impressionists. So, Pissarro's windmill is not the one in Jerusalem but the one seen in the Belgian town of Knokke, and he found the harmony of architecture and nature in the Saint-Martin abbey in Pontoise, where he spent thirteen years, first in 1866–1869 and then in 1872–1882, and that is where his museum is located. Those were the same years that Mishkenot Sha'ananim emerged and later expanded to Yemin Moshe. It is as if Peter Gluzberg takes us on a time machine ride a century back and shows us the way Jerusalem would have looked to the eyes of the greatest innovative artists of the time. But still, Gluzberg has his own style. He does not copy French impressionist classical works either in theme or in style, but while following the impressionist tradition he not only follows but also develops it.

Peter Gluzberg painted several works inside the Old City walls. Apart from his painting of a street created in his typical manner, he also painted two seemingly trifling but actually quite important sites in Jerusalem. Usually, tourists rush through the fortress walls without paying any attention to them, as they simply need to get somewhere, whether to The Lord Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the Alexander court, the Saint Jacob Monastery, or somewhere else. Peter Gluzberg, consistently loyal to the idea of celebrating the simple things instead of the great (though the great ones are the only kind to be found in the Old City), painted three out of the eight Jerusalem gates: the Golden, Zion, and Jaffa gates.

The Golden gate is the oldest in Jerusalem and the only one leading right to the Temple Mount. The Romans built the Golden gate after the destruction of Jerusalem during the Roman-Jewish war of 66–71 chronicled by Joseph Flavius. Today the entrance is completely sealed off, but the traces of the arch on the wall still linger. The Golden gate actually used to comprise two separate gates known as "the gate of repentance" and "the gate of mercy," respectively. Most the Jews and Christians believe the gates to be the ones mentioned in the Ezekiel prophecies: "Then said the Lord unto me; This gate shall be shut, it shall not be opened, and no man shall enter in by it; because the Lord, the God of Israel, hath entered in by it, therefore it shall be shut" (Ezek. 44:2). According to Jewish tradition, it is through this gate that the Messiah will

Peter Gluzberg with his painting *Street in the Old City. Jerusalem*. Alek D. Epstein Family Collection, Jerusalem

enter Jerusalem. The faithful believe that when that day comes the stones blocking the Golden gate will fall down and those buried on the Western side of the Mount of Olives will be the first ones to see the Messiah.

Under the Byzantine Empire the gate was reopened, and the Byzantine emperor Heraclius (575–641) entered Jerusalem through it after his victory over the Persians. As the legend has it, the emperor intended to pass through the gates in glory, on his war horse, but as he approached the gate it suddenly closed, and a voice from the skies thundered: "Jesus entered these gates modestly, and an emperor must enter them the same way." Then, Heraclius came down from his horse, took off his shoes, and only then did it open again. In the 12th century, the Crusaders opened the gates twice a year: on Easter, in the memory of Jesus Christ's entrance in Jerusalem, and as a tribute to Emperor Heraclius.

After the Ottoman Empire took over Jerusalem in 1517, Suleiman the Magnificent (1494–1566) ordered the gates to be sealed off in 1541 to prevent the Messiah from entering the city through them. The Sultan ordered mosques to be built inside the walls, and a Muslim cemetery on the outside. Though five centuries have passed and Jerusalem's rulers have replaced one another, the gate has stayed closed. And that is how Peter Gluzberg depicted it. However, from it issues such a gleam that it draws you in so that you can hardly believe that it still does not fulfill its main goal of leading visitors to the sanctuaries of several religion.

The Zion gate stayed sealed off for a long time as well. It was built in 1541 and served as a connection between the Armenian district of the Old City to Mount Zion. Both for Christians and Jews, Zion is a symbol of utmost importance. The gate also known as "the gate of David," for it is located right next to the crypt where the legendary king David is believed to be buried. On the second floor of the building with the grave of the king David, there is the Cenacle, the presumed site of the Last Supper. It is unclear why the legendary Mount is not included inside Jerusalem's fortress walls, so the Zion gate connects the most sacred sites of the Old City to one another.

The Golden Gate. Jerusalem. 2008. 60 × 70 cm. N. Saveliev collection, Moscow, Russia

The entrance of the Zion gate was designed as a curvy line broken line in order to prevent enemy soldiers from entering the city during a siege, just like the Jaffa and Damascus gates. However, in 1948 during the First Arab-Israeli War the gate was a site of a fierce battle. It was significantly damaged, when Israeli soldiers made an unsuccessful attempt to force the Arab legion militants out of the Old City. Multiple cracks and scratches on the Zion Gate are still visible and remind us of those tragic days. Up until the unification of Jerusalem the gates remained closed, and the borderline separating the Jordanian forces based in the Old City and the Israelis located on Mount Zion passed in front of it.

After the Six-Day War the Zion gate was reopened and restored. In Gluzberg's painting it seems to be open, but still hidden in shadow, so that the viewers wonder whether they could enter it, and this question is even more unclear as the painting does not feature any people, just like all the other works by Gluzberg. It seems as though Gluzberg managed to bring together two historic realities: the one where the Zion gate leading to the war-torn Jerusalem of 1949–1967 is closed and the one we live in now where hundreds of people pass through it every hour of the day, among them Jews living in Jerusalem, Christian and Muslim Arabs, Armenians as well as countless tourists and pilgrims.

The Jaffa gate, built in 1538, is the best-known and most vibrant one in the Old City: it is the main entrance to the Christian and Armenian districts. It once greeted the German emperor William II in 1898 and the British general Edmund Allenby in 1917 after the defeat of Turkey and the end of the four-century Turkish rule in Palestine. But the painting depicting it is strikingly different from the two previous ones: the artist does not picture the gates at all, for that is where he stood while painting a three-storey house in the Christian district of the Old City, right in front of the entrance to the world-famous Jerusalem market. Pursuing his principle of celebrating the simple things, he manages to find the least imposing spot that one could see from the Jaffa gate. The walls of the house are as light as the air, and while there are no trees in the painting (a rare occasion for Gluzberg), the building seems to fit perfectly into the surrounding landscape.

The Zion Gate. Jerusalem. 2005. 60 × 70 cm. The Blue Dot Gallery, Toronto, Canada

The Jaffa Gate. Jerusalem. 2005. 60 × 80 cm. Simkovich Gallery, Kfar Saba, Israel

The Jaffa gate was named after the Jaffa Road that starts right behind it and which leads to the Mediterranean sea port of Jaffa. Gluzberg seems to have traveled all of it as an artist.

Tel Aviv–Jaffa and Their Suburbs: The Old-New City on the Mediterranean Shore

As many magnificent paintings as Peter Gluzberg has created in Jerusalem, he still remains a Mediterranean artist, and most of his works were painted in Tel Aviv–Jaffa, the biggest Israeli city on the shore. Gluzberg's works feature synagogues and mosques, streets and stairways, living homes surrounded by trees offering their inhabitants a little shade to enjoy during the hours of scorching heat. He contemplates beaches and parks, and of course the constantly changing sea. The city only stretches three to six kilometers from the sea while the shoreline surpasses thirteen kilometers.

From an administrative perspective, Tel Aviv and Jaffa were merged by the decree of the Israeli government on October 4, 1949, but their common urban area does not necessarily prove them to be historically and architecturally similar. Tel Aviv is a new city that only celebrated its centennial not so long ago. On the contrary, Jaffa is probably the world's most ancient seaport. Legend has it that it was founded by Noah' s son Japheth, and hence the name of Jaffa. According to Greek mythology, Poseidon chained the beautiful Andromeda to the rocks near Jaffa, and that is where Perseus, whom she later married, rescued her. Historians believe that Egyptian pharaoh Thutmose III founded the city in the 15th century BCE. According to Joseph Flavius, during the Jewish war Jewish rebellious ships tried to cut off Roman marine communications; in revenge, the Romans destroyed the city and set up a military camp on the site. However, under the emperor Vespasian (69–79 BCE) the city was completely rebuilt. Jaffa was granted autonomous rights and hosted a new Jewish community. Unfortunately, various invaders destroyed the city several times, and by 1268 Jaffa had practically ceased to exist for several centuries. It was only rebuilt in the 17th century, and the port was rebuilt, as well. This was no indication of peace, though: the city was taken over by multiple invaders, including Napoleon's army in 1799, but life in it went on. In the 1850s regular sea lines connected Jaffa to Marseille, Trieste (then a free city in the Austro-Hungarian empire) and Odessa, and in 1892 it was linked to Jerusalem with a railroad.

In 1923, Reuven Rubin was the first artist to dedicate a painting to Jaffa by creating an astonishing orientalist panorama of the city, and numerous artists have worked there ever since, but no one had ever produced any noteworthy impressionist works before. Thanks to Gluzberg's paintings featuring houses marked by a thousand-year history and boats flocking near the Jaffa port, even those who have never visited this city can visualize it just as colorfully and vividly. Like Claude Monet, Gluzberg admires the contrast between gently rippling water and colorful shades of the sunset and the bright boats and swiftly changing clouds. His paintings (especially the one entitled *The Sea Shore, Northern Tel Aviv*) are filled with metal-like tones of the rustling waves, with trembling reflections of the shores and barely visible houses on the land. The boats tied up at the shore painted by Gluzberg remind us of those depicted by Albert Lebourg (1849–1928) in Normandy (Gluzberg worked there, as well), though in terms of composition and color choice their works are very different. For instance, the color of the sea in Gluzberg's paintings varies from silvery and shiny as in *Winter Sea. Jaffa* to a blend of blue and green in *Morning in Jaffa*.

When Tel Aviv was founded in 1909, Jaffa was populated by forty thousand inhabitants including six thousand Jews who founded the Jewish districts of Neveh Tsedek (1887) and Neve Shalom (1890). Neveh Tzedek was founded by only forty-seven families, but by the 1920s and 1930s it became one of the most important places for the Tel Aviv intelligentsia: for years it was home to the Alliance Israélite Universelle. It welcomed the first cinema in the country in 1914 and harbored such renowned writers as Shmuel Yosef Agnon, Yosef Chaim Brenner and the couple of Joseph Aharonowitz and Devorah Baron. The artist Nachum Gutman lived there since the age of seven and

Winter Sea. Jaffa. 2011.
70 × 100 cm.
Collection of the artist

Morning in Jaffa. 2002.
50 × 60 cm.
Collection of the artist

now the district is home to his personal museum. Today this district, mainly made up of one-or two-storey houses, gets literally lost among the dozens of skyscrapers and hotels popping up like mushrooms in Tel Aviv and Ramat Gan; but if you are looking for the city's original spirit, this district is the place to go. Today's Tel Aviv is a cosmopolitan city, a huge banking and stock exchange hub, and the center of a diamond trade and tourism industry. On the contrary, the district of Neveh Tzedek lying somewhat far away from both downtown Tel Aviv and the shore, managed to preserve its authenticity and thus gives us an idea of what the first new Jewish city in the Land of Israel, a welcoming home and a rich inspiration for the most prominent writers of its time, looked like. Therefore, it is no surprise that Peter Gluzberg created two inspirational paintings (in 2005 and 2007) celebrating heartfelt poetic admiration of everyday life.

His works *Midday* (with its whole composition focused on a tree painted in great detail, which is quite unusual for Gluzberg), *The Red House* and *The Blue Blouse* (in

Neveh Tzedek. 2007. 50 × 60 sm. Tiroche Auction House, Auction no. 138 – Israeli & International Art, July 17, 2010, reproduced on the cover of *The Israel Medical Association Journal* 13 (September 2011)

fact, the blouse is barely noticeable on the second-floor balcony of the painted house) as well as *Morning in Ramat Gan* (2007) are quite similar to the ones created in Neveh Tzedek. Today's Ramat Gan can hardly be viewed separately from Tel Aviv; it is now home to the greatest Israeli medical center (Tel HaShomer), Bal-Ilan University, the Diamond stock exchange, the National stadium and several skyscrapers. However, Ramat Gan first emerged as a rural settlement, and it was only granted city status in 1950. And the old houses built under the British Mandate are growing scarce as they are being constantly removed in order to make room for more and more skyscrapers. Gluzberg painted one of those houses in the dim light of dusk. The color choice in this painting is different from the usual palette of Gluzberg who barely uses the color orange (*The Pitchers* seem to be an exception). It looks like there is a small café on the first floor of the house; the artist makes sure that the viewer is not disturbed by its noises and bustle, and yet does not feel its emptiness or abandonment.

The painting *Ramat Gan* created in 2000 definitely stands out among Gluzberg's other works with its unique composition and color choice. Gluzberg admires the way Tel Aviv and Ramat Gan looked back in the 1930s, and to find out what that was like one can look at the panoramic view of the city created by Wilhelm Wachtel (1875–1942) in 1932 during his third visit to Palestine. Both Wachtel's and Gluzberg's paintings feature a two-storey house with a red roof in the foreground, but that is just as far as their similarity goes. If Wachtel meticulously paints every single shutter, Gluzberg merely creates a general impression, and in terms of style this work is more reminiscent of abstract expression rather than impressionism. The landscape is stripped of concrete details; it is like a game in which viewers must make out details as they look closer. The choice of color is quite unusual: the street in the center of the painting is blue, so it looks like a river shored by houses and trees. Since the very term "abstract expressionism" was coined in 1929, right when "the old Ramat Gan" was emerging, there is a certain his-

torical logic to the way that Gluzberg uses this particular technique when depicting the district. However, there is no lacuna to be filled here: Joseph Zaritsky (1891–1985) and other artists from the *New Horizons* group were loyal and devout followers of abstract expressionism and lyrical abstraction in Israeli art. Unlike impressionism which never made its appearance in the country, these movements of Israeli art rose to their prime, yet Gluzberg who made a short foray in those movements, still followed his own path.

Gluzberg keenly captures nature's colors and conveys their harmony, and when it comes to sharing nature's beauty and the lightness of the air, the impressionist techniques are the best choice. The front yard of a house buried in the verdure (*Side Street in Tel Aviv*, 2009), the trees bent in the wind (*The Yarkon Park*), are reminiscent of the landscape *Near the Lake* by the French artist Albert Lebourg – these impressionist paintings by Gluzberg catch your eyes, charm you and draw you in.

Most Tel Aviv-based artists are secular, so the city's Great Synagogue has never drawn their attention. The building designed by the architect Yehuda Magidovitch (1886–1961) and sponsored by Baron Edmond Rothschild (1845–1934) in 1925, has a complicated story. The district where it stands has gradually turned into a business hub where many people come to work but no one actually lives, not to mention that those who work there barely attend synagogue. So, the building that for years hosted the biggest Jewish house of worship (it can accommodate as many as 1 100 people) stays empty, and barely sees a dozen people coming to pray in it now. In the late 1940s, the synagogue was even used as a depot, but its heroic past is nothing but ancient history now, and even the 1969 reconstruction when concrete columns were added to the old walls in compliance with the modernist ideas, could not give it a new life. In the 1960s the district welcomed the 120-meter-high Shalom Meir Tower (*Migdal Shalom* in Hebrew)

Great Synagogue, Tel Aviv. 2006.
90 × 90 cm.
Collection of the artist

that became the main site of the area, so the Big Synagogue came to be seen as a mere addition to the nearby skyscraper. But Gluzberg shows the Great Synagogue the way it looked years before, as a true pearl of British-ruled Tel Aviv. The nearby skyscrapers look like light shadows fading into the blurry background that brings out the dignified yet not pretentious synagogue.

Kfar Saba – A Town of Gardens on the Former Plantations of Baron Rothschild

There is yet another settlement whose history is linked to the name of the philanthropist Baron Edmond Rothschild, and where Gluzberg painted a series of spectacular canvases. It is the town of Kfar Saba located sixteen kilometers to the north of Tel Aviv. The history of Kfar Saba goes back for centuries: the town is mentioned in *The Jewish War* by Joseph Flavius and in the Babylonian Talmud. In the times of Zionist colonists this land was purchased by a group of enthusiasts headed by Yechiel Michal Pines (1843–1913) and his son-in-law Noah Karlinsky in 1892, and later in 1896 Baron Rothschild sponsored the acquisition of additional plots of the then completely abandoned land. The newly bought land was used for agriculture, namely for vineyards, as well as olive, almond and citrus plantations. The first settlers, including the future head of the State of Israel David Ben Gurion who joined the group in 1907 and came to Israel a year earlier, lived in clay-walled barracks; the first twelve solid houses in Kfar Saba were built exactly one hundred years ago, in 1913. Disasters and epidemics that plagued Palestine during the World War I, as well as anti-Jewish pogroms orchestrated by Arabs in May of 1921 in a show of protest against Zionist immigration, practically destroyed the town, so in the summer of 1921 its reconstruction began. In 1930 the settlement consisted of 207 houses and 1,405 inhabitants, and by 1937 the community's population had reached three thousand people. In 1962, Kfar Saba was granted town status, though vast relic plantations and gardens still make Kfar Saba (now populated by one hundred thousand people) look like a garden-town.

Gluzberg took a liking to this town and frequently painted it in 2011–2012, and curiously enough, only one of the works created in Kfar Saba features a recent building, though it is still lost in the background (*The Autumn Light*): all the other landscapes look like they could have been painted seventy or eighty years ago. Though he always pursues the same images of worn-out houses and bent old trees, his art is anything but monotonous. The rich and deep colors of his *Spring Day* dominated by white is nothing like the *An Old Tree* filled with mourning of the summer slipping away, and the lonely house surrounded by a fence in *The Autumn Light* taking us back to Reuven Rubin's *Pink House* buried in the verdure, has nothing in common with the crammed houses of *The Old Kfar Saba*. All his paintings feature the verdure, though it is shown differently: in *The Old Kfar Saba* blurry shadows of green represent shrubs at the doorsteps and pink flowers on the balcony, while *An Old Quarter in Kfar Saba* is dominated by eight tall eucalyptus trees. In *The Old Tree*, the two houses (though painted in

The Autumn Light. Kfar Saba. 2012. 70 × 90 cm. Simona Gluzberg collection, Ramat-Gan

much detail, judging by the standards of impressionism) are lost in the background, while the composition revolves around the doings of nature rather than men, and that is why this painting reminds us of another painting created by the great Tel Aviv-based painter Haim Gliksberg who set a bushy tree in the center of the painting entitled *Rothschild Boulevard*. In Gluzberg's *Kfar Saba*, the tall trees and their foliage barely outlined with some speedy brushstrokes are only gathered on the right side of the painting, while *The Old House* is completely dominated by the scrupulously painted bare trees in the foreground. This painting perfectly embodies the dynamism and swiftness of autumn with its rapidly changing scenery, like the patterns of a kaleidoscope, and it seems like the leaves are falling right under our feet. One of the works features a barely noticeable small café or a shop under an orange canopy. The paintings created by Gluzberg complement one another and recreate an integral image of Kfar Saba, its genuine atmosphere and take us back to the years when the Land of Israel had yet to face urbanization and Israeli statehood itself was nothing but a dream.

All Around Israel with an Easel

Gluzberg's painting *A Street in Ramla* is quite similar the Kfar Saba series created in 2010, in terms of composition and color choice. Just like An *Old Quarter in Kfar Saba* created two years later it features small houses covered with red roofs with luxurious treetops rustling over them, with everything in its place. Ramla lies at the same distance from Tel Aviv as Kfar Saba, only to the north. The Khalif Suleiman founded the town in 716, and he viewed it as the future capital of Palestine; he built a fortress, a market and a big mosque there. The only remnant of those times is the 27-meter-high minaret finished by Baibars I in the 13th century. During the First Crusade Ramla became a key fortress for the Crusaders, and in 1799 it hosted the military headquarters of Napoleon's army. During the First Arab-Israeli War, on July 12, 1948 all the people had to flee the city, which turned a new page in its history, as it was now part of Israel. Economically, Ramla is quite moderate-

ly developed, but Gluzberg ignores this; yet one of the houses in his paintings has an odd extension that means that the family has grown bigger but they do not have the money to buy a new home. However, Gluzberg does not explore social conflict; rather he admires peaceful houses beneath branchy eucalyptus, he enjoys the perfect harmony of modest architecture and neglected vegetation, and these simple images really speak to the viewers and invite them to indulge in nostalgic contemplation.

Stylistically, this work is quite similar to four other paintings created in farming settlements and rural youth communities: *Moshav Nir Zvi*, *A House in a Moshav, A Courtyard in Kfar Batya,* and *In the Backyard*. The first one is special for its whitish colors conveying lightness of the air, a technique no one has used since Reuven Rubin. The second one is centered upon a branching tree painted with tender green shades, almost fading into the azure sky, and a one-storey house with a palisade and a red canopy protected by the branches of the mighty tree, while its white walls virtually shine in the sunlight. The third one and even more so the fourth one are quite different as they are dominated by lush yellow, and while in the *Courtyard in Kfar Batya* it is used to outline the fence and the path, the painting *In the Backyard* is overwhelmed by the yellow treetops. These works created in 2005–2012 bear the mark of Gluzberg's artistic maturity as he is capable of capturing and sharing every state of nature in its rich palette.

The paintings *Memory* (2013) and *A Spring Day* (2008) also center on lonely trees, but they have nothing in common with Gluzberg's other trees. These are bare and cold – they are silently waiting for the next spring when they can give much desired rest to those craving for shade. The artist scrupulously paints every bend of a twig and every crack in the bark eager to capture all the details and create a historical portrait of the trees unable to tell their story themselves, to share what they have witnessed in the years gone by. The house in the first painting and the field in the second are nothing but the stage where the trees older than the state they grow in, play their leading roles.

The breathtakingly magnificent landscape entitled *The Eucalyptus* (2008) featuring a lonely tree with partly withered foliage is reminiscent of the works by Alfred Sisley, Konstantin Korovin and other

Peter Gluzberg standing against a poster of an exhibition held in France that he participated in during 2012. Photo by Alek D. Epstein

The Eucalyptus. 2008.
80 × 80 cm.
David Spielman collection

impressionists who authored similar works. Still, Gluzberg's art remains unique as it shows how the artist can use all the possible colors and shades to recreate fickle nuances of light and three-dimensional images.

All these paintings show how far Gluzberg has come since his 1996–2003 works. A new nostalgic lyricism rooted in the impressionist tradition and a desire to pursue its further development replaced his earlier forceful and austere images of nature (such as *Khamsin*, *Autumn. A Study*, *At the Source of River Jordan*). His *Autumn* is quite similar to Konstantin Korovin's *Summer landscape* (1914) and Maurice Vlaminck's *Landscape with a House on a Hill* (1926). Despite the obviously different color choices, the small house with a red roof is the only distinct building standing out of the whole view in all of the three paintings. Yet, the mood is different, as well, and Gluzberg manages to address the works created in the first decades of the 20th century by world-renowned masters and still sticks to his own individual manner.

In the painting *Kinneret* created in 2008 featuring a chain of mountains far behind the famous Lake of Tiberias in the background; also the *View of the Kibbutz Gonen* and At the *Source of River Jordan* painted ten years earlier are dominated by mountains, namely the Golan Heights. Kinneret, the lowest freshwater lake on Earth and the nearby mountains have attracted many Israeli artists (such as Aharon Schaul Schur who painted it in 1935), so Gluzberg also created an image of the Lake of Tiberias of his own. Still, though he prefers to work outdoors, Gluzberg has also produced several works in his studio. Those were also inspired by nature, but eventually nature's images only serve to convey his inner thoughts and feelings. For instance, that is the case with his impressive diptych *Sonata in Minor* and *Sonata in Major* (2001) reminiscent of the best works created by maritime painters.

Gluzberg could be described with the same words that Emile Zola used to describe Camille Pissarro: he "stands face to face with nature, with an intention to convey horizons

Kinnereth. 2008. 30 × 42 cm.
Rita Meerguzov Collection,
Ness Ziona, Israel

in their austere simplicity without any interference of the imagination; he is neither a poet nor a philosopher, he is a naturalist, recreating the earth and the sky. You can imagine anything you want – he paints what he sees. In these paintings you see the voices of the earth, you feel the great life of the trees..." Gluzberg's paintings are full of light, and they are brimming with joy, celebration of the spring, with gentle breezes and blossoming trees.

His paintings, free of useless details and often quite small in size, seem to open windows on the walls, and once you look out such a window you will see all those fields and gardens, the Mediterranean sea and boats on its violent waves, the sky with rare clouds and almost all the colors of nature. You look at these paintings, and they carry you away and bring up the memories of the places we have been to and make you dream of the places that are yet to be discovered. Gluzberg not only paints but also works with many students, sharing his gift with them. Nine solo exhibitions of his art have been organized in nine towns of Israel, not to mention his participation in multiple collective exhibitions in various museums and galleries in Israel, Germany, Norway, France and other countries. Gluzberg's art opens a door to the unique world of beauty and harmony, and that is a solid guarantee that his art will be appreciated and admired for years to come.