

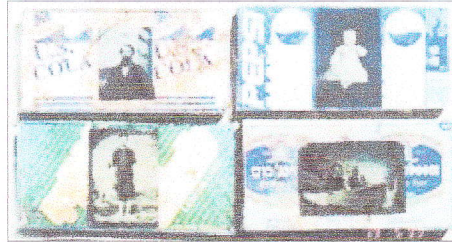
The Arts:

A Tale of Two Cities

By Sara K. Eisen

Jerusalem is known for its religious hot spots, Tel Aviv for trendy secularism. But what they share, as any gallery-goer will clearly see, is a love for the visual arts.

"There are no real galleries in Jerusalem," declared one Tel Aviv curator with a derisive wave of her hand when I told her my assignment—to seek out 10 "must-see" art galleries in Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. I was not surprised by the conceit (although I believe she was expressing her conviction about selling art versus living it); the healthy overdose of self-esteem and the sibling rivalry with Jerusalem are among the charming idiosyncrasies that define Tel Aviv, particularly its cultural scene.



Courtesy of the new gallery, Jerusalem

As for the capital: Jerusalem is known for its historical and religious landmarks, which somehow loom larger than its rich cultural life. But Jerusalemites are serious about broadening their horizons and their collections (although they are less likely to hold culture sacred for its own sake) via theater, music and art.

Despite their differences in approach, both Jerusalemites and Tel Avivians, down to the last bespectacled sophisticate among them, welcomed with disarming warmth the presence of my (at the time) 5-month-old baby boy on our great June art tour. Shaged and I bumped up and down several flights of granite, chrome and stone; we smiled at curators, collected information and commenced a very, very early contemporary culture education. We could not, sadly, afford any of the art, although we were genuinely tempted several times, almost to the point of drooling.

Here, then, are the galleries we'd like to recommend for your next visit to either of these great cities.

Jerusalem

While there are significantly fewer art galleries in Jerusalem than in Tel Aviv (there was some basis for the curator's comment), that's not the same as none.

A good example of a place that might have pleasantly surprised her, even though it has a commercial bent, is the Artspace Gallery in the German Colony. Owned and run by poet, art agent and

collector Linda Zisquit, the gallery (which doubles as her husband's law office) is located in half of her romantic old Arab home; the dappled light of late afternoon, arriving through the high windows surrounding the long, narrow stone gallery, is especially striking, almost church-like.

In addition to more seasoned talents like conceptualist Larry Abramson and conceptual realist Ruth Ben-Dov, Zisquit represents a number of emerging artists. The gallery recently hosted a retrospective by students of the Jerusalem Studio School; there's always something in the tiny place worth dropping by to see.

But what is most special about Zisquit's gallery is her consignment room in back: It's a treasure trove. My favorite artist in the copious and always surprising stacks is a young Israeli woman (currently working abroad) named Noa Shay, whose visceral hyper-realism, including exquisite rendering of necks and shoulders, gives me the shivers. I asked Zisquit to save for me (for a day) an arresting painting of a boy asleep. I could have talked to Zisquit for hours. She is an engaging hostess and an amazing promoter of her artists.

On our next art outing, Shaged and I visited the **Jerusalem Artists' House** in the center of town. Once the Bezalel Academy building, this official home of the Jerusalem Artists' Association collaborative is a historic, large stone villa with an inviting courtyard.

On view in the changing exhibition space upstairs was "Pilgrim," a photography show from actor Richard Gere, a Buddhist who produced an impressive collection of images from his treks through Mongolia and Tibet. Gere's focus was the blurring of the natural and the esoteric in that part of the world and the intersection of the spiritual with the everyday. No better place to hold such an exhibit than Jerusalem.

But Shaged and I spent most of our time in the front room, where artists deliver their pieces for show and sale—this is *the* source for work by the city's artists. Manager Shulamit Efrat had infinite patience in discussing the contents of her crowded consignment room where, she says, artists "bring things fresh."

From the Artists' House we walked to Rivlin Street, by all accounts a happening part of town. By day, the pedestrian-only cobblestoned street is full of business lunchers, tourists and window shoppers; by night, young people hang out at the cafés, clubs and jewelry stands. Above it all (literally) is **Vision**, Neil Folberg's photography gallery, one-of-a kind in Israel in its exclusive dedication to that medium. The gallery is a restored 100-year-old stone house perched at the top of a steep flight of stairs above a popular restaurant courtyard—totally charming but hard to ascend with a carriage.