

# Baruch Elron la Muzeul Castel

## Fragmente de Catalog



Castel קסטל  
מוזיאון הצייר משה קסטל



**ISRAEL – LOSS OF HOPE,  
RESURRECTION, HEROISM AND VISION  
IN THE ART OF BARUCH ELRON**

2024

Editura SAGA 2024

# Baruch Elron's Exhibition at the Moshe Castel Museum of Art

by Hagai Sasson, Director General,  
The Moshe Castel Museum of Art in Ma'ale Adumim

The Moshe Castel Museum of Art is not just a global center for the study of Castel's legacy, although that is certainly our primary and most crucial task. Rather, its goals are much more ambitious, as it is also a vibrant cultural center whose importance far transcends the urban space, and a venue for exhibitions by Israel's best painters, most of them Moshe Castel's contemporaries – who, even though they are no longer with us, still remain relevant to us, to our consciousness and spirit. We believe that the museum must not be a place of silence, frozen in time, but, rather, the exact opposite: The art museum, like the world of culture as a whole, must help us all find the answers to the questions that trouble us. "Art for the people" is not a hollow slogan, but a practical vision that guides us.

I assumed the post of the Museum's director general a mere six months ago – and, for most of that time, the people of Israel have been engaged in a new War of Independence. Our soldiers and officers are defending us all, and our thoughts, actions, and prayers go with them. Many other cultural institutions have stopped their activities, but not us: Our Museum has remained open – through October, November, and December, down to the present day. Throughout this period, we have held some twenty activities for the benefit of the public, all of which have been free of charge. Moreover, we have abolished the entrance fee to the Museum. The home front can make its own contribution to the war effort, and this is exactly what we have done. Our stance has been vindicated by time, and the steps we took, which were regarded by many as "too drastic, in light of the situation," have turned out to be correct. Nowadays, everyone understands that cultural institutions must remain open, even though we have yet to return to peacetime routine (which is still a distant goal). It is my privilege to say that we were among those who charted this course.

Our soldiers and officers are fighting not just to return the abducted citizens, on the one hand, and to restore peace in the border regions and throughout Israel, on the other. They are also fighting to preserve Israel's character as a free, Jewish, and cultured state – and these are the very values that we uphold at our Museum. I am excited to announce that this is the second exhibition that we have opened since the "Black Saturday" of October 7, 2023; and, just like the first one – a retrospective of the great artist Pinchas Shaar, which we closed down on January 10, 2024, – this one, too, is an exhibition on an international scale. We often hear that people are canceling various projects "in light of the situation." We take the opposite view: In light of the situation, it behooves us all the more to make it clear to our enemies, and to all those who hate us, that they will never





מנכ"ל מוזיאון קסטל חגי ששון בשיחה עם אלמנת האמן, עו"ד לידיה אלרון, 8 בינואר 2024

Hagai Sasson, Director General, The Moshe Castel Museum of Art in Ma'ale Adumim,  
in conversation with the artist's widow, Adv. Lydia Elron, January 8, 2024

break our spirit, nor force us to take down our flag and give up on our aspirations. The People of Israel will stand firm in their Land, as is their right, and the staff of the Moshe Castel Museum, with me at their head, will always offer rich and diverse cultural activities to our people. When our soldiers and abductees are safely home, they will need to return to a country that is spiritually and culturally – as well as economically – prosperous, and this is why we must remain active.

Baruch Elron is a stunning artist, and I fell in love with his works after visiting his widow, Attorney Lydia Elron, to whom we are grateful for her contribution to the exhibition. I feel myself walking by his side through the beautiful landscapes of our country, sharing his pain and sense of grief, which he conveyed so profoundly and authentically in his artworks. I would like to thank Dr. Alek D. Epstein, the curator of the exhibition and the Museum, who has taken care of all the elements of the exhibition and the catalogue with his customary professionalism and maximal responsibility. Like all the past exhibitions held at the Castel Museum, this one, too, is not merely an exhibition, but a large-scale endeavor that includes lectures, tours, meetings with artists and art scholars, film screenings, etc. I invite you to come visit us, and I guarantee that you won't be disappointed. Together, we will pray for the return of our captives and abductees, and for the safety of the soldiers of the IDF. Together, we will fill our souls with modern Jewish art, which we have every reason to be proud of.



# Between Art and Citizenship: Baruch Elron – Surrealist Painter and National Artist

Dr. Alek D. Epstein,  
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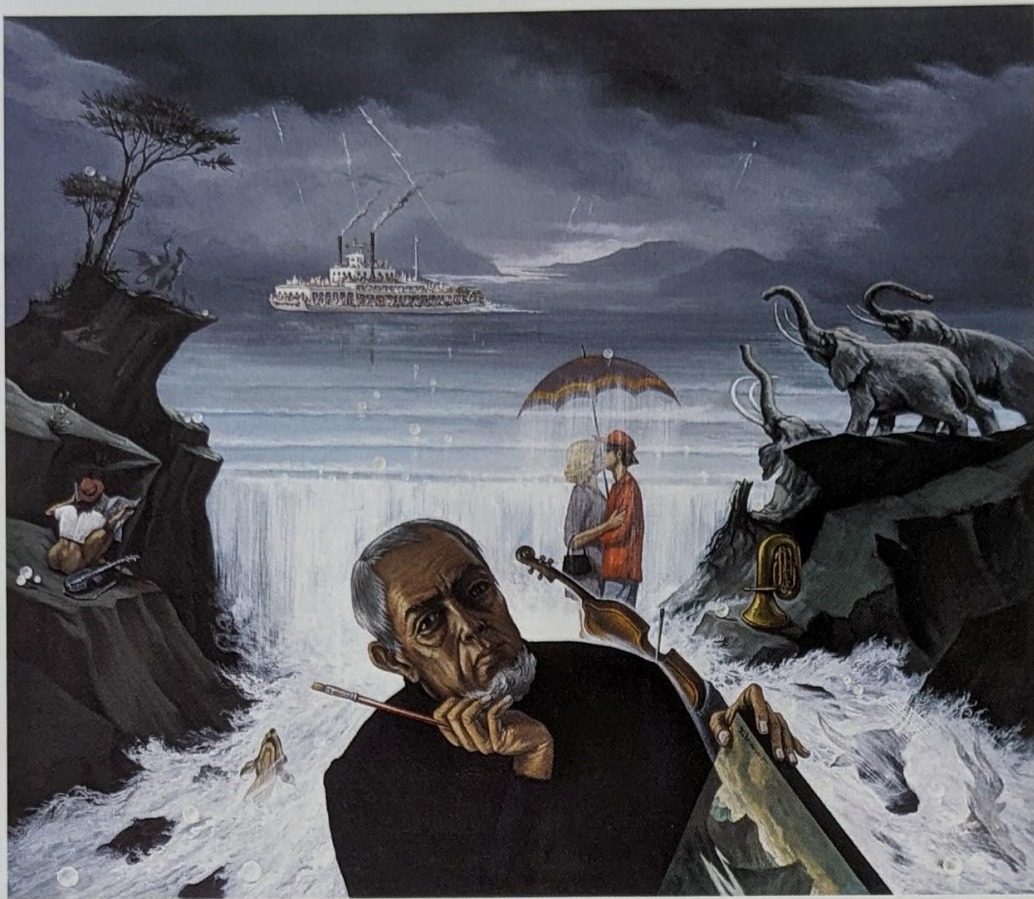
Baruch Elron (originally Barbu Theodorescu) was born in Bucharest in 1934 in a Jewish Sephardic family, and immigrated to Israel in 1963. Today, as we celebrate the 90th anniversary of his birth, this exhibition at the Moshe Castel Museum of Art in Ma'ale Adumim serves to remind us of one of the most original, brilliant, and unique artists to have worked in Israel.

Baruch studied painting at the Nicolae Grigorescu Fine Arts Academy. As a student, he traveled to Moscow, Prague, and Budapest, where he visited museums and discovered the works of the great masters. After graduating from the Academy, he began to work as a book illustrator and graphic artist, receiving a prize at the Dresden Book Fair in 1960.

Baruch and Lydia Elron immigrated to Israel in 1963, two years after their marriage. It was a very difficult time to start an artistic career in a new country, yet he was determined to pursue his dream. Crucially, in the 1950s Romanian art was dominated by realism, although a certain influence of Impressionism was palpable, as well. And, since Romania regarded the Soviet Union as its political and cultural guide, all forms of abstract art were banned unconditionally. The situation in Israel was strikingly different: the "New Horizons" artistic movement, which had been founded in 1948, and soon virtually took over the galleries and exhibition halls, greatly valued and closely followed the abstract expressionist trends that dominated contemporary American art. Naturally, figurative painting as such was considered utterly obsolete, especially when it came to realism.

Despite this, Baruch Elron was determined to follow an artistic destiny. However, his background was insufficient for a position at the Bezalel Academy or the Avni University of Art and Design in Tel Aviv, then the leading institutions providing artistic training in Israel. So, he took the jobs that were available to him, even though they could not improve his social standing. To name a few, he worked at the Popular University, as well as at the Warrior's House (the center for assistance and rehabilitation of veterans), where he taught painting years before art therapy became a widespread curative technique. Naturally, none of his students could become professional painters, because those who viewed art as their vocation would rather apply to Bezalel or the Avni Institute. However, Baruch Elron eventually managed to establish himself as one of the country's top artists, earning wide recognition and glowing acclaim. He was finally noticed, and began to exhibit nationwide, as well as abroad.





האמן כנח לאחר המבול, 1999, שמן על בד, 120x140 ס"מ

The Artist as a Noah after the Flood. 1999, oil on canvas, 120x140 cm

In 1966, his first solo exhibition took place in Tel Aviv, and it was followed by many others, including a number of exhibitions in the USA, Canada, and Germany. The preface to the catalogue of his exhibition in Germany said: "He constructs a bridge between the worlds of the West and the East. Baruch Elron uses a language that borrows vocabulary from Judeo-Christian mystique and symbols. He owes his mode of expression, to a great extent, to the Italian Renaissance style. The artist succeeds in shaping the image of a personal reality, one which penetrates the viewer and which the viewer must accept. Yet, this does not provide him with an escape hatch. Elron's works are accessible, through their meaningful content, to the viewer, as much as they are to the artist himself. Thus, the artist shows a profoundly human path, one full of hope and optimism".

Baruch Elron started out as a follower of philosophical realism, and evolved into a surrealist, yet he always remained a figurative artist. He was a philosopher-painter. One of the great examples of his profound philosophical vision is the series of fifteen paintings titled "Beyond the Word," which deal with a range of subjects, including stories from the Book of Genesis (e.g., Noah's Ark, the Tower of Babel, the Binding of Isaac), the Tablets of the Law received by Moses on Mount Sinai, the conquest of Jericho, and the lives of Samson, Jonah, and Jeremiah, but even these paintings present contemporary interpretations of these events and characters. As Belgian art critic Stephan Ray put it,



“Baruch Elron’s works are painted with astonishing technique; they stunningly combine symbols and allegorical images, some borrowed from the Bible, and some taken from the myths.” However, the crucial point is that Baruch Elron gave a new meaning and dimension to all the events and stories he used. In his interpretation, the ancient heroes seem to relate to the present day.

Upon their arrival in Israel, Baruch and Lydia Elron started a new life in Pardes Katz, one of Israel’s poorest regions. All he had was his talent and devoted enthusiasm. The couple lived there for seven years, before moving to Petah-Tikva, and then to Herzliya. They finally settled in Tel Aviv in 1994. The story of Baruch and his wife Lydia is a rare example of an immigrant family that is able to enter the social and cultural elite of a new country, something that became all the more obvious when Baruch was elected chairman of the Israeli Painters and Sculptors Association. He retained this position for seven years, during which he supported artists of all ages and expanded the international ties of the Association. He participated in numerous group exhibits, and also held many one-man shows in Israel and abroad (São Paulo, Paris, Basel, Dusseldorf, Cologne, New York, etc.). Even in his final years, he persisted in his artistic endeavors, and was particularly fond of teaching. He passed away at the age 71, on Sunday, March 6, 2006.

Baruch Elron was, without doubt, a great master of the brush, of color, of vigorous artistic ideas. He used a language that borrowed vocabulary from the Judeo-Christian mystique and symbolism. Elron was influenced by Hieronymus Bosch (1450–1516), Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1527–1593), and by the Art Nouveau style of the turn of the 20th century. Despite absorbing various influences, especially the great Belgian painters René Magritte (1898–1967) and Paul Delvaux (1897–1994), he always remained independent. His work was outstanding in the balance between colour and graphic elements, and it transmitted a detailed and precise picture of his ‘wonderland’. In his artworks, Elron demonstrated a unique fantasy, thrilling irony, allegorical similes, an extraordinary technical brilliance, and outstanding imagination, combined with humor and grotesque. The backdrops of his works were painted with the same degree of detail as the subjects that represent the content and essence of the painting. Despite being highly susceptible to the vectors of the development of global art, the artist succeeded, thanks to the richness of his imagination and his dreams, in creating a body of work that is personal, luscious, surprising, sometimes troubling, and perhaps worrisome.

Baruch Elron’s style and manner were largely shaped by the influence of fantastic realism. However, some of his works display a hyper-realistic approach, which makes the graphic rendition of the story so piercing.

“Self-Portrait in Gas Mask,” created in 1991, is a perfect example. That was a dramatic year, in which Israel’s territory suffered more than forty bombings by Iraqi forces during the Gulf War. Every time there was an air-raid alarm, a military spokesman would appear on air, calling on the citizens to immediately put on gas masks and go down to the bomb shelters. A memorable photo shows the famous violin player Isaac Stern, who was giving a concert with the Jerusalem Symphony Orchestra, when an





זמן שאול. 2002, שמן על בד, 44x55 ס"מ

Borrowed Time. 2002, oil on canvas, 55x44 cm



יד ועין. שנות ה-70, שמן על בד, 55x70 ס"מ

Hand and Eye. 1970s, oil on canvas, 70x55 cm

air-raid alarm went off, and most of the listeners put on the gas masks they had with them, while the musicians left the stage. Still, Stern remained onstage and began to perform the famous Chaconne by J.S. Bach.

But even in those days, Baruch Elron never abandoned his artistic calling and continued working, no matter the circumstances. In the last years of his life, he was very ill, and underwent a number of complicated surgeries. Nevertheless, he worked until the very last day of his life. Even when he could no longer go outside, and had to stay indoors, he painted a whole series of original works inspired by the view of downtown Tel Aviv that opened up from his window. In these works, the city turns into a gateway enticing the viewer to join the artist on a journey through time and space.

The painting "Over the Roofs of Jaffa" depicts an empty attic room with old paint buckling and coming off the walls, exposing the bricks underneath, and a huge broken window that offers a view of the city's beige and brown tiled roofs. A patch of sunlight, apparently the reflection of yet another window you don't see in the painting, gleams brightly on the wall. Years ago, this was someone's home, but the people who used to live here are no longer there. So, over time, the attic has come to ruin and turned into a place of squalor, with no sign of human presence. A huge white falcon dashes into the room, with his wings spread all the way out, and with two racks clasped in his claws. Those are probably the last things left behind by the previous inhabitants, the last reminders of



the home that once existed here and gave shelter to a family. There is a piece of paper pinned to the wall right under the window, featuring the name of the family who lived here – and, once you look closer, it turns out to be the name of the artist himself.

Although Baruch Elron never actually lived in Jaffa, he adored the city and loved to stroll down its medieval streets. This might well have been his studio, the room where he could have worked and painted from life, enjoying the view... In the late 1940s and 1950s, Jaffa was a poor city, which still welcomed a wave of Holocaust survivors and immigrants from the Maghreb countries, who moved into the old houses, mezzanines, and attics. However, over time Jaffa developed into an upscale neighborhood of Tel Aviv, totally unaffordable to the poverty-stricken artists who still lived there, and who were forced to leave their homes. Metaphorically, Baruch Elron, who could never afford to move to Jaffa, depicted a corner of the city as his home. And now, the house where he might have lived and worked (though he never did) is being looted and plundered by predators who do not care the least bit about art or its creators.

Baruch Elron created a special series of works dedicated to music. In them, he admires and celebrates the inseparable unity between the musician, the instrument they play, and the music itself. In the painting “Waiting for the Musicians,” a golden lyre with a human foot stands on a white rock in the middle of a green field, while snow-white winged arms appear out of the air and strum the strings gently and tenderly. In the foreground, a whole orchestra is playing along: a guitar, a trumpet, and a flute move around in the hands of invisible musicians, filling the air with their sounds. Still, the viewer does not see a single living thing around, except for a couple of white seagulls that soar into the sky...

In this and other paintings, the artist shows that, when a creative genius devotes themselves to creation, the tools and instruments they use, whether a violin or a brush, do embrace livelihood and energy. And, as the music fills the musical instrument with sound, that instrument turns into a living thing capable of feeling and hearing, and almost regains human nature. And, even if the composer who wrote the score is no longer there, the instrument that plays their music miraculously brings them back to life, thus defying time and oblivion.

The painting entitled “Tower of Babel” shows a tall building leaning to one side, all decorated with columns, pilasters, and molded cornices. Hundreds of quick feet at the bottom, wearing all sorts of boots and shoes, carry it around in the desert. The painting was inspired by the famous story of the Tower of Babel, which was never erected, because all the people who were building it had their languages confounded, so that no one could understand another, and the construction was never accomplished.

Just as in the times of the Tower of Babel, the building displays a blend of various cultures. The red walls with white windows and arches at the bottom, decorated with exquisite molded cornices, recall the famous Venetian mansions and palazzos. Farther up rises a classical capital that forms a multi-story massive stone dome covered with



fresh vegetation, like the legendary Hanging Gardens of Babylon. However, the artist gives the Biblical tower yet another meaning. In Babylon, it separated people from one another, but here, by contrast, it brings them together, creating a versatile blend of cultures and languages, multi-faceted and incoherent, but still solid and reliable, and this whole thing moves forward, pushed by the feet, which wear all kinds of shoes and slippers (some are even bare) and move at a steady pace. This could also be considered a metaphoric image of the State of Israel, as there is an Israeli flag fluttering over the wall. Truly, this is a country where people of different origin, faith, and color, speak different languages, but still put their efforts together to create a single nation, inspired by common ideals and dreams, and every one of them makes his own personal contribution to this versatile society. And the new gigantic tower, built from the vestiges of their past and from the elements of their heritage, different from one another, moves forward, carried by a hundred feet. The artist expresses his concern about the future of the state of the diasporas, and it is no coincidence that the tower closely resembles the tower of Pisa, and that there is a deep crack running all the way from the bottom up...

Baruch Elron also produced a unique series of landscapes painted on old window sashes and doorframes. It feels as though he looked through windows taken down from the hinges, and discovered the enchanting views of a sunlit seaside, a busy town marketplace, and the commanding walls of an ancient fortress. Remnant chunks of broken glass can still be seen in some of the frames, so one gets the impression that the artist metaphorically broke down the glass that had once separated the viewer from the worlds beyond, and allowed the light, the sun, and colors to stream into the world we call our own.

He gives a new life to the old windows, and this new meaning and goal turn out to be even more intriguing and eventful than the life they used to know. Some of the windows used to face backyards and trash cans, but now they serve as doorways to another reality; they are like portals that offer the view of the visions of the ancient glory of the Promised Land; they are now gateways to a different world. They are like supernatural portals: They light the way into the world of the artist's imagination and inspiration, being decorated with all sorts of frames made of wood – some bare and solid, and others exquisitely chiseled and meticulously inlaid with bright stones.

One of these painted windows looks onto the famous Tower of David. The commanding fortress, crowned with austere merlons, rises proudly into a serene cloudless sky, with bulky ruins scattered around a green lawn underneath. In the foreground, a bushy tree expands its gorgeous crown and casts a shadow on the grass, where white doves trot around in the soothing chill. The yellow-stone walls outlined with deep red-brown shadows emphasize the solemn grandeur and the unflinching strength of the fortress. Although the symbolic window has been broken, several pieces of glass still stick out of the frame, decorated with a mysterious ornament encrusted with red glowing gems. The sacred citadel, which has witnessed centuries of history, forms a bewildering unity with the ephemeral vegetation and fretful birds. Its rock-solid, motionless ramparts,





אלמנת האמן, עו"ד לידיה אלרון, עם אלק ד' אפשטיין, 2 באוגוסט 2016

The artist's widow, Adv. Lydia Elron, with Alek D. Epstein, August 2, 2016

and the shaking, rustling leaves over the moving grass, come together in a unique vision of harmony, a mystical dialogue between eternity and time, between motionless silence and living things, between silence and sound.

Some of the artist's "windows" reveal the hidden beauty of everyday life. Thus, the painting "Safed" shows a silent back alley lost at the heart of the ancient city. The two-storey houses cling together, with their curvy walls leaning down to the cobblestone sidewalk. Beige and pale bluish walls reflect the sunlight and shine brightly in the beaming rays. These humble dwellings preserve the memory of a thousand-year history. There is not a single soul out there, except for a lonely stranger who strolls around, thinking to himself, looking just as lost as the street itself. He pauses for a moment, as though admiring something, and then resumes walking. And every step he takes echoes all around him from the walls as he walks by.

Some of these colorful windows serve as frames to multi-dimensional complex compositions. The "Abandoned Mill in Tzipori" is one of them. A white stone mill crowned with a massive white dome rises from the bushes in the right corner of the painting. To the lower left, a curvy path twists between blooming fields and trees, and then runs farther on across the hills and meadows, which eventually form a multi-layered, richly textured landscape. The painting unfurls itself in layers of color and contrast before the viewer's eyes, while the path leads all the way to the horizon formed by green forests and rectangular fields. These fields, tilled by humans, and the virgin forests coexist



peacefully in perfect and undisturbed natural harmony, and the white stone wall that fences off the mill rhymes perfectly with the sand and clay on the ground. The human presence does not disrupt the serenity of the lazy afternoon, imbued with a thousand colors and the suave fragrances of the gorgeous chrysanthemums that sprout vigorously in the foreground. And it feels as though the last pieces of glass barely holding in the corners of the frame may fall down in a minute, and then there will be nothing standing between the viewer and the artist's world.

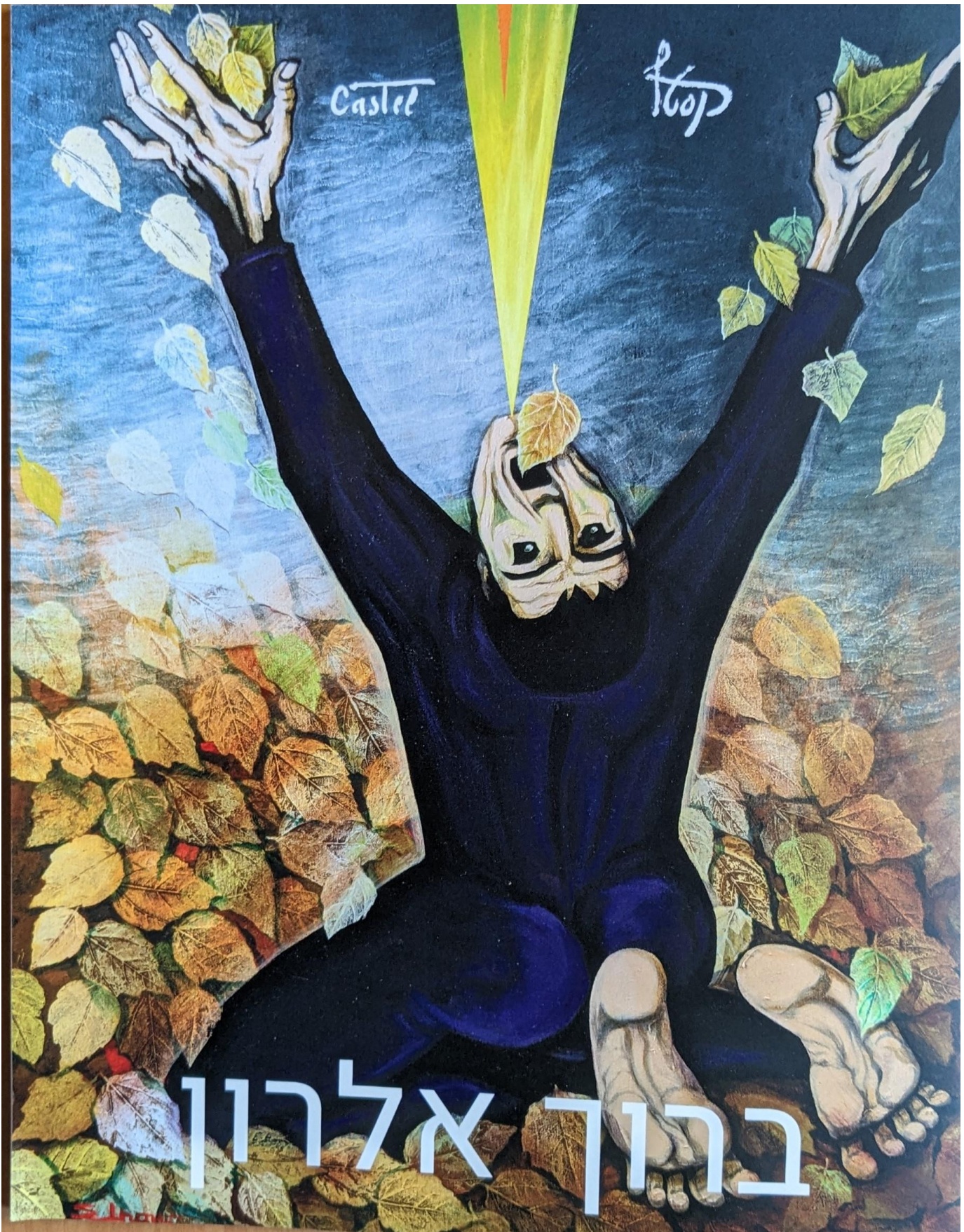
This work recalls yet another painting by Baruch Elron depicting a panoramic view near the road to Jerusalem. The landscape is dominated by a white temple whose heavy domes rise majestically in a valley below. The gentle slopes of sandy hills are painted in warm beige and silvery hues in the rear of the painting. In the foreground, some sort of white stone fence or handrail covered with ivy can be seen, as if the viewer were standing on an open terrace facing the temple, surrounded by cypress groves and clay paths.

In these masterpieces, the artist not only gave a new meaning to the old thrown-out windows, shutters, and doorframes, but also invented a whole new world, picturesque and colorful, a world that awaits beyond the window and is open to anyone who is ready to take a moment and contemplate the views captured by the master....

Baruch Elron often used a creative symbolic language and left it up to the viewer to decipher his message. The painting "The End" shows a huge brush that is tied up in a knot like a ribbon or rope, resembling a wondrous living thing sitting on a wooden pier by the sea. Crystal-clear waves splash around it, crowned with transparent foamy crests, glittering with fleeting reflections of the sunbeams. The fantastic creature gazes at the distant bluish horizon that blurs into the sky. In this painting, the artist finally pays tribute to his loyal friend, which has given form to all his dreams and images, but has always stayed out of the picture – the brush. To honor it, he paints some sort of portrait, where the brush is a living thing, a live character. All its life, it has faithfully served its master; it has always been there for him to help him pour his heart out on the canvas, to guide his creative hand. And now, it has earned the right to rest and sit by the seaside looking at the waves. The artist has finished his last canvas; the journey on earth is over for him now, and so it is for the brushes that have made all this possible. They will never feel the touch of his deft hands again, and neither will he dip them into the paint to create a new work of art...

The history of art has seen many self-denying and devoted widows who carefully preserved the legacy of their husbands. Lydia Elron is one of them. Her devotion and loyalty to her husband's memory and legacy is truly astounding. She organizes exhibitions and helps prepare books and catalogues of his works. Books and articles on Baruch Elron's legacy have been published in English, French, Spanish, German, Romanian, as well as in Hebrew. Thus, more and more people who appreciate genuine art will get the chance to discover his works and take a breathtaking journey into worlds unseen.





Castel

קסטל

ברוך אלון







