

## Jack Jano | The law of Superposition

A Hebrew installation, Venice 2017

Geological time is the rhythm of occurrence of geological events. Duration so slow and long which is difficult to perceive in our mind. One of the tools with which geologists measure geological time is the law of superposition: this law which was proposed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Nicolas Steno, holds that a solid body will cause any other solid formed around it to successively conform itself to his proper form. This simple principal proposed by Steno is fundamental for understanding geological processes: every geological stratum is laid upon an older one in an uninterrupted sequence of sedimentary rocks. The upper stratum will be younger than the one who lies directly underneath it. When we look at a mountain we can see only the external stratum, but the layers and the depths are many.

The artist Jack Jano lives on a mountain that from the east overlooks a valley of olive grove and the Mediterranean Sea from the west. For the artist, that studies matter and non-matter through cultural depths, the mountain had become like clay in the hand of the potter. The studio and the house which stand on the mountain become a living being that grows and expends like a pulsing heart or like a cultural Amoeba, and underneath all that resides history in silent layers, one atop the other, matter compresses matter, layers of life and death, of abundance and drought, layers that witnessed and heard everything, the languages of Eber and those of Shem, of the Canaanites, the Egyptians and that of the Philistines, old Hebrew as well as Mishnaic Hebrew of the Tannaim. From this studio, located on the top of the hill, the Hebrew letters resurface again in their various forms and break out to the air as an organized sequence of word and meaning made by matter and shape.

And through the matter that lies between the form and the letter the eye admires the occidental light reflected on the waves of the sea which carries on its ripples the load of the Hebrew culture that was aggregated in the land of Israel and forged by its history only to be later scattered and deported towards the countries of the sea, Greece and Rome. And from there the road was short for the establishment of a minority for whom the substance of his essence is the letter. Not a form nor an image – a letter. A foreign element in a world of idols.

500 hundreds year ago a wall was build on an island that during the late period of the Byzantine Empire had become an important commercial center – Venice. The inhabitants of the island – refugees fleeing in fear of the Lombards and the Huns – had agreed to a Jewish settlement in the Ghetto (derive from a term used for “foundry”). During the day this strange minority was allowed to go around the islands in search for work, but as evening came down the bridges were blocked and the gates were closed, none went out, and none came in. this is just one out of many historical layers that are present in the collective memory of a people.

Jano creates for this exhibition seven installations to be presented in the Giudecca island and an eighth one for the Jewish museum of Venice. In Giudecca, alongside an ancient venetian Gondola welcoming the visitors will be located a rusty metal skeleton of a boat carried by two seemingly dancing figures, inlaid with words and phrases in Hebrew from

the Song of songs, “Behold, thou art fair, my love; behold, thou art fair” and “God formed man of the dust of the ground”. The boat refers of course to the island but also echoes in the personal biography of Jano, which during the 1950s, at an early age, arrived to Israel from Fez, Morocco with his family on a rickety boat along with hundreds of other refugees which fled the riots that were afflicted upon them by their Muslim neighbors.

The exhibition is assembled in layers arising to a height of three floors. At the entrance, glass houses are cumulated and piled up on a wheelbarrow, upon which Hebrew metal letters, cut with the forging fire, are spelling: “I form the light, and create darkness”. If you rock the glass houses they will break to pieces. However through piling up a glass city in a wheelbarrow, the same one which the artist used for building his home and studio in the hills of Klil, and bringing it to Venice – a city where glass is one of its famous symbols – Jano intends to construct a new and contemporaneous bridge between the Hebrews of a coerced past and a new Hebrew man, one that builds and distributes the light of the Hebrew culture while looking toward a future of understanding and tolerance.

On the second floor the *Upside-Down City* is installed: its houses and towers pointing downwards while being suspended in the space between matter and no-matter, and on top of it an earth made mountain is erected towards the sky. The city, a memory of human construction, and the mountain are safely positioned on four towers of ivory and wisdom, how could a similar city be erected without the four elements: Fire, Earth, Water and Air. It is wisdom and the basic human instinct of survival that make possible this kind of construction, which alludes to the fact that underneath the solid structure, on top of which we are now standing and looking at the installation, reside an element – Water. The buildings of Venice’s islands are supported by pillars that have all their foundations rooted in water. as an artist, profoundly influenced by the past, Jano leaves the city and goes to the fertile land where powerful cultural symbols naturally sprout, he is climbing to the top of the mountain where time stand still.

On the wall across from the *Upside-Down City*, dozens of portraits are arranged in a pyramid shape, also overturned. At the top of it we find a portrait above which rows and rows of portraits, framed with a great variety of techniques, are constructed. Occasionally a single detail from the portraits which are all different one from another becomes delineate: Rabbis and Qadis, Popes and Presidents, Kings and known Artists. But a closer look at the details reveals that all of them are Jano. Jano, the man and the artist, is watching the overturned city from all the rows/strata as the founder of a dynasty which opens upward, to infinity.

From the other side of the mountain a white brick wall is erected, and from the aperture of this whitened wall we notice some white flattened heads, sometime squeezed together in group and sometime isolated, silently looking. The people squeezed in cubes, closed and surrounded by the white wall, with their unrecognizable faces – white masks of death - are in fact a monument for the inhabitants of the Ghetto. This is the invisible layer. Going up the stairs, around the mountain, towards the upper balcony we come across white houses, some of which are without roofs, and we see three legs coming out from the base of each one, as if they were bug-houses, built in high density and with impossible angles. Are

these the homes of the white masked people appearing from the wall's apertures? It may be so. The density and the disequilibrium are suggesting just that. The light that breaks through the windows that overlook the island's buildings and gardens give us hope.

Coming out to the stairway we come upon an opaque curtain, underneath which a bluish light is faintly shining. Moving aside the curtain a room is revealed with a rusty house at its center. The first chapter of Genesis is written entirely with letters cut in flames and the bluish light shines through them: "*In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth ; Now the earth was unformed and void...*" and the reading of these letters, embellished by their antiquity, is not just the reading of words written in matter, it's the reading of light. The bluish light shines through the letters and the words of the void. Only light and letters which are dancing on the room's walls and ceiling, hovering in space. In his works, Jano makes a lot of use of sky blue – the most sublime color in the Temple. This is the color that separate light from darkness, that symbolize the golden path between heaven and water. this is a color by which the Jewish people preserve their past: the Jewish man always wears on his body a fringed garment called *Tzitzit*, where eight special knotted fringes, one of which is sky blue, are attached to its four corners. The bluish *Tzitzit* is a constant reminder of us being a people who were aggregated and united, scattered and dispersed, but will always carry in its collective memory the color of the sky and of the water, the color of the sacredness of infinity.

Twenty two letters the Hebrew language contains, twenty two ancient letters with a material form that is drawn from Sumerian, Canaanites and Babylonians roots. The Hebrew people have nothing sacred but the Hebrew letter, which for thousands of years, throughout the Diaspora, had survived and developed overcoming great difficulties. The letter is the all-embracing Truth. The letter is also an image of communication between people, a representation of a constant intention toward a good life and benevolent actions between man and his fellow man as well as between man and his community and his environment. When an idea is embodied in language that is being conserved and studied for generations, no wall could ever block or disconnect the continuity of the dynasty, nor cancel that which is imprinted in the deep layers of the DNA of a people whose essence is abstract and incomprehensible unless one assumes upon himself the burden of the dynasty and becomes an uncompromising part of the Hebrews. This is a Hebrew installation.