

Bus 18 Then: A Portrait of “Eluds” by A Young Artist Now Grown Old

Vladimir Tamari

Although we were born in Jerusalem, we grew up in the windy freedom of al Bireh and Ramallah, the twin towns nestled on hills, and surrounded by villages. My very frequent visits to Jerusalem were a natural extension of our daily life. Jump on bus number 18 and obey the sign “Do not Spit or Smoke. Do not Talk to the Driver. Do not Put Your Head or Your Hands out of the Window.” A few minutes later the bus clears a hill and there is Jerusalem, splendid and welcoming, spread below across all the fields of one’s vision. Soon I would be entering Damascus Gate, past the beautiful beige-grey-ivory-pink walls, and into the world of the *souk* and the holy places and the crowded houses. I always carried a sketchbook and drawing materials and would draw the beloved faces and places. We were a clique of four friends from Jerusalem: Kamal Boullata, my soul-mate as a painter, Hani Jawhariyyeh with whom I talked about films for hours on end (and made some as well), and Ibrahim Souss, who would enthrall us with his brilliant piano performances of Liszt and Chopin at his home in Sheikh Jarrah.

There are too many other memories of “Eluds” (as we said it) for me to keep track of: singing The Messiah at the Jerusalem YMCA with my sister Tania and our school choir, working at a mechanical workshop to construct the prototype of my invention of a 3D drawing instrument, visits to Adranly’s eyeglass shop, the thrill of awe while praying in the Holy Sepulcher and the Dome of the Rock, a walk with my father through the alleys of the Old City with him pointing to a hole-in-the-wall door and telling me our ancestors had lived there, designing a ceramic panel of my Arabic lettering still there at the Church of the Redeemer.

Working in Tokyo a lifetime later, I just released the same lettering as a computer font; I call it al-Quds, it brings me some consolation. We will never forget our Jerusalem.

Vladimir Tamari’s sketchbook and paintings were part of an exhibit entitled “Jerusalem: Lexicon of Colours,” curated by Vera Tamari and Tina Sherwell, and held in al-Hoash Art Court in Jerusalem (spring 2009) and the Birzeit’s Ethnographic and Art Museum (summer 2009). The text is excerpted from Vladimir Tamari’s contribution to the catalogue of the exhibit.