

Unlike my usual curatorial writings, today, on November 6, 2023, a month after the harrowing events of October 7 shook Israel and the global Jewish community, I choose to convey this message in a deeply personal manner. On this day, we had originally planned to set up the artworks for "ACTIVATE" at the Jerusalem Theater Gallery in anticipation of the grand Jewish Biennale. Yet, as I gaze at these artworks through mere digital representations on my computer screen, my heart is heavy with sorrow.

The calamitous toll of this war, marked by countless human, national, and global tragedies, has cast a shadow over our ability to celebrate art. In today's Israel, celebrating art has become a luxury we can ill afford. Nevertheless, it's vital to understand that this war has not robbed art of its intrinsic power, particularly not the kind of activist, profoundly motivating art showcased in this exhibition.

In these trying times, we find solace in the meaning of art. A poignant experience awaited me during a visit to the Tel Aviv Museum of Art, which has become the base for the families of hostages and a hub for protests. Here, artists have erected activist installations, like the "Hostages Shabbat Dinner Table," and performers have lent their voices in gentle harmony. It's here that I witnessed the true potential of art—to help us, at the rear of this war, confront, share, and express our deepest personal and collective emotions.

This power of art is evident in the process of grieving and in the multitude of remarkable artworks created in response to the horrors of October 7. It manifests in the way art can retell stories, reshape narratives, and create new symbols, much like the art gallery in Be'eri, reduced to rubble but with its inspiring curators, Sofie Berzon MacKie and Ziva Yalin, who have been through the horrors and yet, they are determined to craft a new story. Art also gives voice to the silenced, shouting out what we need to learn and understand, as seen in the public installations worldwide that demand attention to the hostages.

The therapeutic and healing space created by art is a sanctuary for countless artists, children, parents, and elders. In the hundreds of workshops, lessons, shows, and concerts that artists now offer to those who have lost their homes, art proves its importance as mental first aid, and remarkable ability to mend and console.

From my personal perspective, it's challenging to celebrate art today, because art has been recruited to the collective fight; and yet it demonstrates how essential it is to our culture, lives, and also personal souls. I am grateful that this exhibition is opening on its original date, November 9, as all the works were conceived long before we could fathom the horrors we face today. It serves as a powerful testament to art's capacity to motivate and activate us, urging us to take action and effect real change in the world—a positive message we all desperately need.

Joseph Beuys once said, "Every man is an artist," recognizing the creative potential within us all. He saw art as a tool to engage individuals in shaping the world, particularly in the aftermath of war. I believe the artists who activate us are the ones who make this transformation possible, catalyzing a profound process of healing.

Hadas Glazer
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