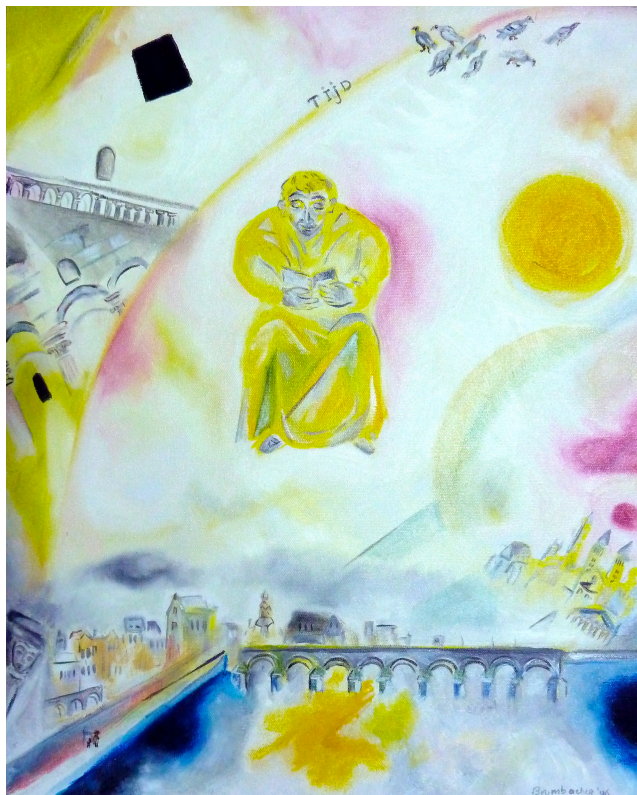


Fleeting memories and loneliness.



Many artists travel to get inspiration. Some move their studio from city to city, from place to place to find new artistic perspectives, new galleries, an inspiring new environment, or new love. And some don't. I mention two of my favorite artists who had very different lives. Rembrandt, who was born in Leyden (Holland), moved to nearby Amsterdam and stayed there until death took the brush from his hands. He and others like him found enough inspiration in one place. Artists like Marc Chagall, on the other hand, were forced by the vagaries and vicissitudes of life to wander, not only to seek new skills, knowledge and experiences, but to escape poverty, revolution, and war. Chagall was born in Vitebsk (Belarus) in Eastern Europe, went to St. Petersburg, Berlin and Paris, returned to Belarus where he became trapped because of World War 1, after the war he returned to Paris, fled the Nazis to New York where he lived from

1941-1946 and lost Bella, the love of his life, went back to Europe, lived in South France, and traveled. Nearly his whole life he painted people, cities and circumstances that were—temporarily or indefinitely—inaccessible to him or simply did not exist anymore except in his memory, like the Eastern European Yiddish shtetl world and the Yiddish culture that were annihilated by the Nazis. Vitebsk had changed unrecognizably. His own Vitebsk existed only in his memories which he transformed into paintings. These experiences must have cut holes in his soul and wounded his heart deeply. This is not uncommon. An other—less famous—Jewish artist, Mayer Kirshenblatt aka Tamuz, started painting at an advanced age after living in Toronto for many years and brought his destroyed shtetl of Apt back to life in great detail, all from memory.

Ultimately, all that remains of many places and events—good or bad—in our lives are the memories. Because even in less dramatic circumstances we come to understand that we and our outlook on life change, places change, indeed, the whole world is subject to change. It



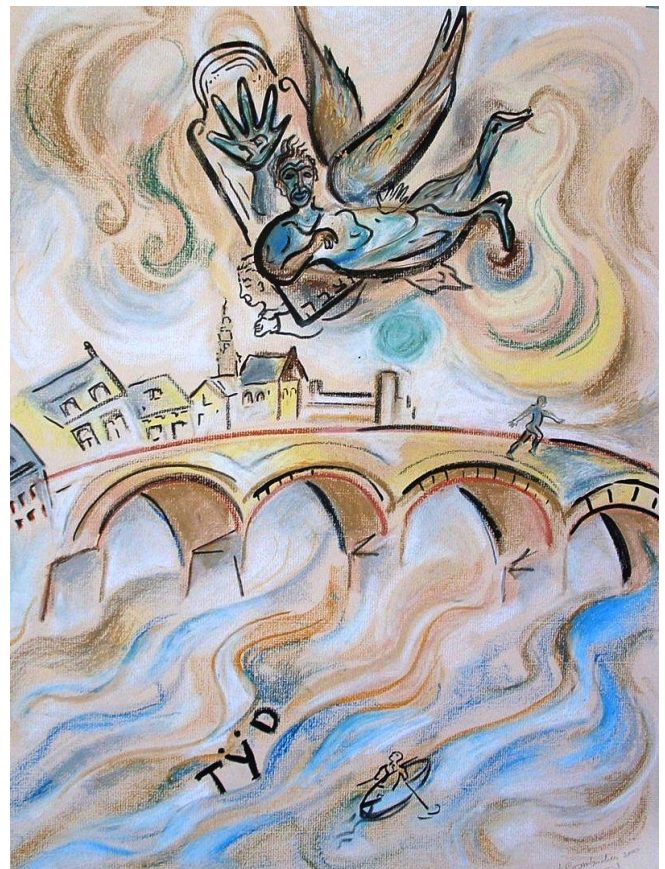


struck me a few weeks ago when I strolled through the ancient Dutch City of Maastricht in the Netherlands. Part of my childhood I spent in the vicinity of Maastricht with its Roman bridge, medieval city-walls, a basilica with Roman foundations and crypts dating back to the fourth century, a center with winding alleys and a tiny former Jewish Quarter, an interesting history of an industrial proletariat forced to work in kilns and pottery factories, cooped up in dirty, narrow streets which are now teeming with exclusive boutiques and wealthy Yuppy apartments. As a child, you see all these things in a different context than as an adult. And as an adult having moved away from Europe you have an even different perspective.

Looking at the medieval buildings (which I dearly miss in New York) I felt a feeling of great loneliness overcoming me. My whole life I have been torn between different worlds. Many of the people I knew

back then are gone, or they have changed, I myself moved to Berlin and later to Brooklyn, and my relationship to this city and many other places is now one of memories rather than real connections. Not that I always felt home in Maastricht back then. Not at all, but it was part of my world. My real home anywhere in the world is my studio with my easel, drafting table and bookcases. But here I was in Maastricht, to quote Proust, *a la recherche du temps perdue*, looking for the time that has been lost, and realized: *tempora mutantur et nos in iis*, times change and we change with them. And we all know that Jews tend to *shlep* around memories of many thousands of years...

It occurred to me that what we have lost and our memories are not lost for us and the world when you are an artist. It does not pay to stay in a melancholic mood because places are physically inaccessible part—or all—of the time or they have changed, sometimes beyond recognition. Our thoughts do not die and vanish with us. They develop, they are a long winding road. We can paint, draw, weave, sculpt, compose, write and express ourselves in



numerous other ways and embrace the fact that our past is a source of inspiration for us and for others. And that we have a kaleidoscopic view which makes the perception of our past change perpetually. Of course, we can only express ourselves in solipsistic ways and we have no—or little—control on how our work is interpreted by others. Because they have solipsistic views based on their own memories, not on ours. In a way, we will always be alone, this explains those feelings of loneliness of many artists. But that's no excuse not to express yourself. This idea—and coffee in a large bookshop located in an old abandoned monastery—lifted my mood and inspired me to start painting the mediaeval skyline of Maastricht and the Roman bridge over the River Maas (Meuse) which divides the city. Having just arrived in Brooklyn after a long and unexpected stay Europe I have a lot to do and to take care of here. The new work isn't ready yet. But I share with you here some older work I have made over the years since I came to New York several decades ago. And I wish all of us artists to share our memories and experiences with the world. In the language we understand most, the language of Art.

Shoshannah Brombacher, Brooklyn, January 2020

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