

the art of elias friedensohn

1924—1991



Bicycle Rider | Oil on canvas | 16"h x 12"w | 1982/88

Jerusalem Shadows

By Elias Friedensohn

I have always loved the past and delighted in ruins. One part of me is an antiquarian, archeologist, and failed historian. Searching for belonging amid the bits and pieces of myself strewn across aeons, I went to Israel in the summer of 1979 and again in 1982.

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The light was silvery and mournful in the winter of 1982 when I made sketches for the Jerusalem paintings. The "Bicycle Rider" moves down the street through lights and shadows that have no place or time. His black hat and coat, absurd shapes on that bike, announce the anonymous past alive in the present. He is about to be swallowed up in the dark space between the buildings.

Hasids, living in the past, throw stones at buses on the Sabbath just as Arabs, dreaming of the past, throw stones at Israeli soldiers. "We refuse to speak Hebrew," the Palestinian bartender at the American Colony (hotel) tells me. The local paper reports another riot in Mea Shearim against the use of automobiles on the Sabbath. Peace is as elusive as a ghost.

Walking the streets, I peer at dark shadows through which barely visible human forms move. In "Jerusalem Shadows," a disembodied hand flashes in the light and quickly disappears. The blackness absorbs names, places and time.

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Jerusalem Shadows | Oil on canvas | 60"h x 72"w | 1975



Oranges, Arab Quarter

Oil on canvas

24"h x 18"w

1984

In the shadows, I notice interruptions that signal life: the souks and markets of the Old City pulse with the rituals of buying and selling: putting out the meat, the fish and the fruit. On one corner, muted excitement. On another, a quarrel. The streets are washed down with soapy water. Shutters are closed. Emptiness. Until the repetition of life's demands asserts itself once again. ■



The Quarrel

Oil on wood

8"h x 10 1/2"w

1984

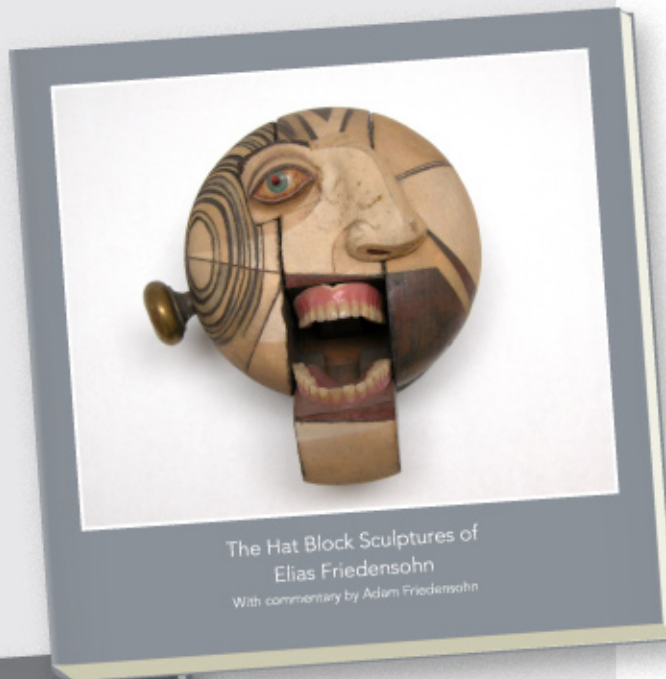
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