

צלופחים ממוסמרים ושירה רוסית בגוספל: זוכרים את אורי

[Nailed Eels and Russian Gospel Singing: Remember Uri Katzenstein](#) (translated in English)

**Uri Katzenstein was a boundless and groundbreaking artist who challenged the tools that were accepted and created strange and futuristic but also painful worlds. Three years after his death, the event "Who Comes After Us" will feature his unpublished works alongside works by 35 artists who were influenced by him and continue his unique path.**

*By Dr. Moussafir, October 7<sup>th</sup>*

About three years ago, the Israeli art world lost one of its biggest stars. Uri Katzenstein, an influential, groundbreaking, and award-winning Israeli artist and musician, died suddenly at the age of 67 after suffering a stroke. Until that moment, Katzenstein's mind did not rest for a moment. He was a curious creator, a master artist who touched on every material (more or less acceptable) and turned it into a professional and meticulous work of art. Katzenstein used human blood, nailed live eels to the stage and chewed glass; He created video art and music alongside carpentry, sculpted in polymers and bronze, and built motorized sculptures that move with the help of a mechanical motor - he marked a "V" on everything.

Many of the issues that arose in his works, such as gender and identity or futurism and mysticism, had not been seen before in Israeli art. The world Katzenstein created in his works was threatening, strange and alien, but also humanly painful. His works were at times extreme and violent, and at the same time charming and evoking empathy. Even when the content was difficult, Katzenstein spoke through his works - sometimes even in a real language he invented, with a complete and complex script.

Although he brought to the stage very extreme and enigmatic content and images, Katzenstein remains the artist that everyone loves to love. In 2015, there was a media incident with Miri Regev, the then Minister of Culture. She was furious about a work on display in his "Backyard" exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art with a swastika-shaped chair. Katzenstein initiated a conversation with Regev, managed to appease her, and she gave her blessing and even gave an official announcement that she appreciated his work. The "Who Comes After Us" event, which will take place on Saturday at the Holon Center for Digital Art, with the participation of about 35 artists, is another opportunity to honor his work. The event will launch a new award for the development of a work worth 70,000 NIS (New Israeli Shekel) in his name, and will present his works that have never been published - such as an electronic and obscure album that combines his musical works and his early video works found in the reels after his death.

Katzenstein was born in 1951 and was part of Israel's then alternative rock scene. After a traumatizing military service as a medic in the Yom Kippur War he moved to the United States to study art. He quickly integrated into the New York performance scene and performed in the most prestigious venues of the time. But during the 1980s he returned to live and work in his home country. During these years he worked on music and stage works with, among others, Ehad Fischhoff (hat bearers), Hillel Mittelpunkt, Ranna Raz, and Noam Halevi. At the same time, his works took on a more museum based direction - they were based less on a live show and more on video art. They featured sculptures with mechanical mechanisms of action and figurative sculptures - with his character repeating itself in different variations.

Over the years, his works have been exhibited in Israel and around the world, until the day he died. In his last days, he still managed to pack sculptures in his image for the "Institute for Ongoing Things" exhibition in Amsterdam and was preparing to present his work in Times Square in New York. The two exhibitions have, surprisingly and unfortunately, become memorial exhibitions. Now we can remember him here too. The event will accompany his work from beginning to end, from the early video works depicting simple actions that evoke intense emotion - such as cutting water with a knife or igniting a circle of matches to later works reminiscent of his actions on stage and hinting at the mysterious worlds he knew how to create. Like "Taking a Dance" – which features a dancing figure in a wide, black-clad field reinforced with a pipe that seems to activate it. The figure represents something between tribalism and futurism - motifs that are expected to accompany the artist to the last of his works - Anna's Assignment.

"Anna's Assignment" is a mesmerizing and pulsating video creation that shows Katzenstein at his peak. He focuses on a poem by the renowned Soviet-born poet Anna Akhmatova, who suffered severe persecution from the authorities (following her first husband's murder), and was forced to shelve the publication of the poems she wrote, and make a living from translating the poems others instead. The video opens with three-dimensional spaceships against a backdrop of pastoral landscapes and alternating views from space. Akhmatova's poem was translated into the enigmatic language created by Katzenstein, and is performed in gospel style by a person with an African appearance, with translations of the poem in Russian, English, the language Katzenstein created, and sign language running alongside him. The song feels like a touch of the origin of human culture, like a mythological story of another culture unfolding in poetry as it was practiced in ancient times.

"Uri Katzenstein was a very, very unique multidisciplinary artist, and also a friend. Uri is like the 'ancestor' of all kinds of young artists we meet today," says Udi Edelman, director and chief curator of the Center for Digital Art. Indeed, the artists exhibiting at the event were chosen for their ability to capture something of the Katzenstein spirit - of his playfulness, multidisciplinary and experimental talent that is presented meticulously and with a lot of humor. For example, the artist Adar Goldfarb will present "The Almost Room", an installation in which mechanical sculptures of things that almost happen - a paper ball thrown in the trash and floating above it, backgammon cubes that spin over the game board and a plug that almost connects to electricity. Hanan Ben Simon will present a colorful art music video with a futuristic touch in

which a bird speaks about its past as a dinosaur. Multidisciplinary performance works by artists such as Shachar Marcus and Nimrod Gershuni will be performed, and musicians such as Yuval Mendelssohn and Asaf Talmudi, Eran Zacks, Adam Sheflan, and others will perform. "We hope to create a community of 'successors' - artists and creators from all kinds of mediums, who mix the genres, and think about how to challenge this thing called 'art', its subjects, and its mode of operation - which is what Uri was to me," says Edelman.

The name of the event, "Who Comes After Us," is taken from the book of the philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy, it can be read simply as: A resounding question that wonders about the future of art, and of humanity in general. This is almost an answer to one of the iconic sentences that accompanied Katzenstein in many of his works, and even tattooed on his body: "I wanted to talk to you". This sentence is also buried in the compound of the Center for Digital Art in a time capsule - another memento of Katzenstein's thoughts on the future, the mystery that exists in it and the responsibility we have towards it. Shortly before his death, Katzenstein was asked in an interview with Meital Raz what he would leave behind for Israeli art. "We're actually talking about death... It's terribly complicated, at least for me," he replied. "I do not know what will happen to the works, if I do not throw them away... Art is a broad and complex process... A lot of people leave things behind and the generations that come after them make it average... I do not think about it, it is too narcissistic."