



"Apple Harvest" by Sarah Raz (Israel), 2007

# DELIGHTFULLY NAIVE

AS YOU ENTER GINA GALLERY OF INTERNATIONAL NAIVE ART NEAR THE NORTHERN END OF TEL AVIV'S FAMOUS DIZENGOFF STREET, YOUR EYES ARE IMMEDIATELY DRAWN TO THE INTRICATELY DETAILED PAINTINGS THAT ADORN ITS WALLS. A JOYOUS BURST OF COLORS GREET VISITORS WARMLY AT EVERY TURN, PROVIDING A TANTALIZING WINDOW INTO THE LIVES OF NAIVE ARTISTS WORLDWIDE

Liza Rosenberg

**T**his one-of-a-kind gallery is the brainchild of naive art lover and collector Dan Chill. Chill, whose background is in international law, developed an interest in the genre while working in the corporate sector. His responsibilities often took him traveling, and it was during a trip to Tegucigalpa, Honduras in 1983 that he first encountered naive art. "After negotiations ended, I wandered into a gallery that was across the street from my hotel because I was very attracted to the paintings in the window," recalls Chill. "I spoke with the gallery owner, who introduced me to Honduran naive art," he adds.

During that visit, Chill bought one painting. When he realized how much pleasure it brought him, he decided to seek out naive art whenever he traveled, speaking to hotel concierges to find local galleries and

the artists themselves. As time passed, Chill brought home more works of art and his home began to fill up with naive paintings.

According to Chill, what happened next was very interesting. "Guests would visit, and those who had previously discussed other subjects were now talking about the artwork," he says. When it happened once or twice, he thought people were being polite, but when it happened repeatedly, Chill realized that the paintings spoke to a lot of people's hearts, and not just his.

"I started to think 'what's so special about what I have on the walls? What's different?'" he remembers. Chill realized that it was the first time people were seeing the genre with styles from all over the world.

## Heart and soul

Naive art is the oldest art genre in the world, dating back 32,000 years



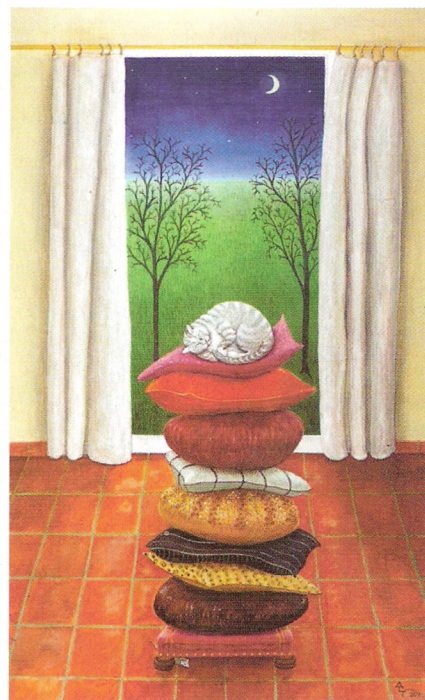


"Morning in Las Violetas" by Eduardo Ungar (Argentina), 2011

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when cavemen began to paint on walls. As opposed to other genres, naive art is timeless; it celebrates the human narrative and allows people to see what's happening in an artist's life at a particular time. Some of the more well-known naive artists include Henri Rousseau, Grandma Moses (Anna Mary Robertson) and Israel's own Shalom Moskovitz, known as "Shalom of Tzfat."

Naive art is a genre that is comprised of many different styles and is characterized by several distinct attributes that hold true across the genre, regardless of the artist's location and time period. Most of the artists are self-taught, and their works show an enchanting degree of innocence. There is an idealized view of the scene, which is usually painted in strong, heartwarming colors and is very detailed and precise. The paintings



"The Princess and the Pea" by Anneke Linkamp Truyen (Holland), 2011

are easy to comprehend and don't require the outside intervention of a commentator in order to understand the imagery being portrayed. In addition, the artworks display a childlike perspective, where scale does not have the same rules of importance that it does in most other genres.

Chill points out that the lack of a proper education doesn't determine talent. "The paintings draw you in; they remind you of a bygone day," he says with a smile. He finds it natural to use words like "heart" and "soul" when describing both the paintings and the artists themselves, as well as the effect that naive paintings have on people. He likes to say that "the artist dips her brush in her heart and begins to paint, and we feel the message from the heart of the artist in our own hearts." Chill notes that naive art is also the least appreciated genre. "The art world is invested in a completely different direction, and it can't get off that branch," he remarks.

### From around the world

Chill established GINA (an acronym for Gallery of International Naive Art) more than 20 years after he began collecting naive art. Once — as he puts it — his avocation became more interesting than his vocation, Chill decided to leave the legal profession, and sought a gallery name that would be most suited to what he was trying to achieve. He proudly admits that GINA is the only gallery in the history of the world that was





"Grazing in Paradise" by Marie-Louise Batardy (Belgium), 2010



"The Weekend Market" by Fausto Perez (El Salvador), 2011

EVERY COUNTRY HAS ITS OWN STYLE OF NAIVE ART, AND CHILL TRAVELS THE WORLD IN SEARCH OF PAINTINGS AND ARTISTS, VISITING EACH ARTIST'S HOME

highlight the differences in style between two countries, such as Spain and Portugal or the differences in South American styles as dictated by Incan or Mayan influences.

The newest exhibition showcases Israeli naive art, displaying roughly 90 pieces of art painted by 25 Israeli naive artists. This is the first time that such an exhibition is taking place in Israel, and participating artists come from as far north as Rosh Pina and as far south as Beersheva. It includes most, if not all, of Israel's leading naive artists, and Chill hopes to draw attention to the world of Israeli naive art. Chill and his team devised the idea for this latest exhibition after being asked to find approximately 100 pieces of Israeli naive art for the annual naive art festival held in Katowice, Poland, where Israel will be the guest country. The Katowice festival will be open from June 15th through mid-August.

Over the past eight years, GINA has averaged 30 to 40 visitors a day, and sells an average of one painting per day, a claim that no other gallery in the world can make. It is also the only naive gallery on a main street in a city of importance. Chill believes that there needs to be a greater investment in the genre. Paintings must be displayed in the right place and with the proper atmosphere. "The atmosphere needs to enable the artwork to speak for itself through appropriate lighting and beautiful catalogs and brochures," he says.

Through its exquisite display of international naive art, the eye-catching catalogs, brochures and even business cards, Chill and the rest of the GINA staff have succeeded in doing just that. ♦

established to show the entire genre of international naive art. "This is the first time that people are being given the opportunity to understand what international naive art is all about," says Chill. Other naive art galleries around the world have a tendency to show only those works created locally.

The gallery is a warm, welcoming space with an exceptionally knowledgeable staff whose members are both professional and friendly. Its 200 square meters are spread over two floors, containing a small library corner with books about the genre and exhibiting the works of at least 200 artists from more than 30 different countries, including Guatemala, France, Canada and, of course, Israel. Every country has its own naive art narrative, and Chill travels the world in search of paintings and artists, visiting each artist's home no matter where

he or she lives. "It's very important to me; the artist deserves my respect and honor," he notes. These visits allow him to interview the artist, to discern the environs and influences, and to view all of the available paintings, enabling him to determine which pieces are best suited for the gallery. Chill makes return visits to the artists, and depending on how quickly the paintings sell, he might even visit two to three times a year.

### Special exhibitions

At any given time, approximately 100 paintings are on display on both floors. There are also many exhibitions throughout the year, with each one usually being six to seven weeks in length. The gallery holds general exhibitions with multiple artists as well as comparative exhibitions that