

Artist of the Month

Tamar Hirschl: 'Jerusalem/New York'—What's the Connection?

By Ellen Freed

NEW YORK — Tamar Hirschl's life has been sprinkled with danger from the time she was born in Zagreb, Croatia at the start of World War II. Her childhood was dominated by such horrific events as the abrupt arrest and eventual execution of her father in the Jasenovac concentration camp, an unsuccessful escape attempt by Tamar, her mother and sister to a detention camp in Hungary, and their subsequent release and journey back to Zagreb on foot. In 1948, the family relocated to Israel, and again, as the new state struggled for its existence, Tamar experienced the chaos of war and destruction. She lived there for the next 50 years until a move to New York City occurred in 1999. For Tamar Hirschl, 9/11 was not a

Navy Pier.

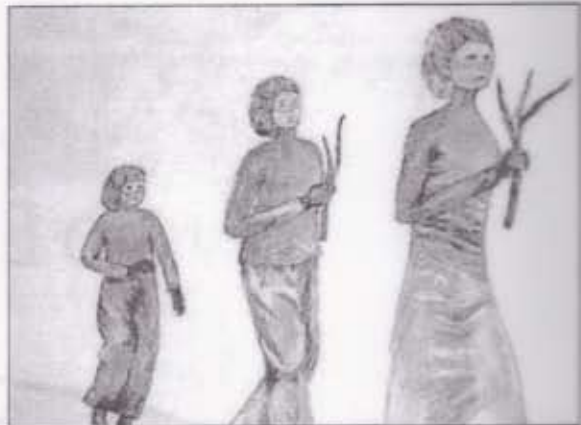
Hirschl's work is in the permanent collection of the Queen's Museum of art and in many private and corporate collections, including that of noted Jewish contemporary art collector, Sigmond Balka. A documentary entitled *Bridges of Memories* about her life as an artist and narrated by Martin Sheen, was produced by Jakov Sedlar of Jerusalem Films and the Government of Croatia.

The Hebrew Union College—Jewish Institute of Religion Museum* in New York City is currently featuring Hirschl's art in an exhibition entitled *Jerusalem/New York* (see box below). The centerpiece of the show is "The Golden City," a mixed media horizontal scroll

women of different heights, appear more peaceful and elegant and seem to be walking toward the future, carrying plants to create a new beginning. The three finely drawn figures in each drawing float on a plane lacking any details. There is no indication of time or place, yet they could be in Jerusalem or New York or, for that matter, any location on the planet. They seem to be looking for danger in order to be prepared for action.

Untitled (Deer #348) demonstrates the use of traditional painting techniques combined with contemporary media. Images are painted in acrylic and ink with X-ray collage on acetate. One sees a cityscape composed of a complex of buildings and a mysterious herd of deer inked in and poised to infiltrate the metropolis. Hirschl frequently uses the deer as a metaphor for the unwanted outsider, but this image also represents what "man" has done to nature by invading its territory and using animals for hunting and decoration.

Hirschl admits that the visual landscape of New York City with its towering architectural scope, flashing neon billboards in Times Square and bustling energy everywhere has greatly influenced her art. In contrast, Jerusalem provided this artist with a quiet, peaceful atmosphere of spirituality, a soft golden light that glows off the local stone building material, and a smaller urban space in which to develop her talent. However, both Jerusalem and New York are micro-



Searchers II

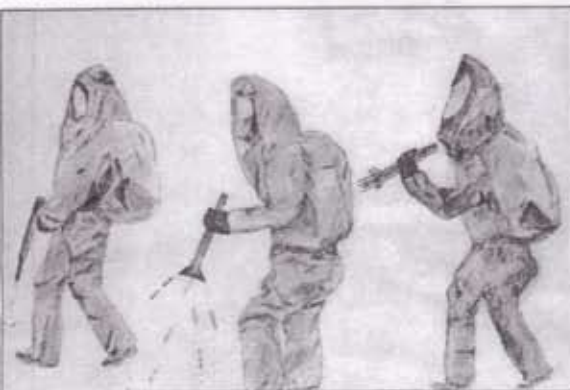
cosms of our world—powerful urban centers of creativity that house melting pots of cultural, national and religious diversity where people live together in peace.

Tamar Hirschl is truly a global citizen, having lived in Zagreb, Tel Aviv and New York. She speaks five languages, and as an artist, her work contains a powerful message, provocatively delivered. As Jean Bloch Rosenhaft, Director of the Hebrew Union College Museum explains:

Tamar Hirschl demonstrates the role of the contemporary artist as prophet. Having survived the trauma of the Holocaust as a young child, she is a witness to the ultimate consequences of inhumanity and intolerance. As a participant in the birthing of the state of Israel, she attests to the human capacity for survival and renewal. Her personal in-sights into these

two formative events of 20th-century Jewish experience are expressed through powerful works that confront the dangers threatening us in our own day. Her artistic vision is a call to action.

**In conjunction with Sotheby's ARTIS 2007, Israeli Contemporary Art In New York*



Searchers I

new experience but rather a familiar reminder of the lurking dangers that can so suddenly appear without warning.

Art has been a part of Tamar's life from an early age when she was encouraged by her mother to draw. She studied at the Bezalel School of Art in Jerusalem, the Tel Aviv Kalisher School of Art and the State College of Art in Tel Aviv. Hirschl's professional career began as a teenager when she worked on theatrical sets and designed textiles, and over the next five decades, she has established herself internationally with solo shows from throughout the United States and Israel, and in Germany and Croatia as well. In 2000, her painting, *The Window*, was selected as the official poster for the 38th New York Film Festival, and this summer, she has been invited to participate along with such notables as Jim Dine and Maya Lin in the 2007 *Cool Globes* initiative—a city-sponsored public art project along Chicago's lakefront adjacent to The Field Museum and at

that depicts the cosmic sweep of Jerusalem and positions the viewer in many locations and time frames at the same moment, creating the illusion of moving forward or backward at will. While spotlighting the city's architecture, sculpture, performing arts and urban planning, this work also includes Arabs in mosques, Jews praying at the Wailing Wall and churches as well as the modern marketplace—a daily meeting place for all. In the background, the Judean Hills serve as bridges simultaneously connecting and dividing the different cultures living side by side in peace.

Two recent graphite drawings, *Searchers I and II*, show the artist's concern with the vigilance that is needed in order to survive in an increasingly chaotic and unstable world. In *Searchers I*, one sees three tough-looking men of equal size, dressed in hazmat suits, searching for potential hazardous material. At random, one aims a gun, another a magnetic tool, and the third, a flashlight. In *Searchers II*, three veiled

*Tamar Hirschl: Jerusalem/New York Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion Museum
One West 4th Street (between Broadway & Mercer)
New York, NY 10012
212-824-2205
Through July 7, 2007
Hours:
Mondays-Thursdays: 9:00 AM-5:00 PM
Fridays: 9:00 AM-3:00 PM
Selected Sundays: 10:00 AM-2:00 PM*