

## An eye for detail

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Ruth Beloff, THE JERUSALEM POST

'Once you get into it, you can't stop,' says Nira Spitz, whose 24 paintings of Jerusalem street scenes are on exhibit at the Rebecca Crown Gallery of the Jerusalem Theater.

Drawing and painting since she was a little girl in Haifa, the artist - who is now 60 and has five children and 24 grandchildren - has a prodigious repertoire of oil paintings, watercolors, portraits, character paintings and calligraphy.

But it is this Jerusalem collection of modern everyday life, entitled "Footprints in the Stone," that she has chosen to put on display until September 23. Although over the years Spitz has exhibited her work with other artists in such locales as New York, London, Rio de Janeiro, Caracas and Hong Kong, this is her first solo exhibition.

At the elegant vernissage last Thursday evening, guests had the opportunity to view Spitz's artwork, as well as meet the artist and some of her family. And, I might add, they were also treated to one of the most tasty, tasteful and artistically presented receptions this writer has ever seen in these parts, catered by Café Ba'teatron - the Jerusalem Theater's restaurant.



Although Spitz (nee Rosental) was born in Haifa, her ancestry is deeply rooted in Jerusalem. Spitz is a direct descendant of the Rivlins, "one of the 10 families that were sent by the Vilna Gaon in 1809 to settle outside the walls of the Old City," she says.

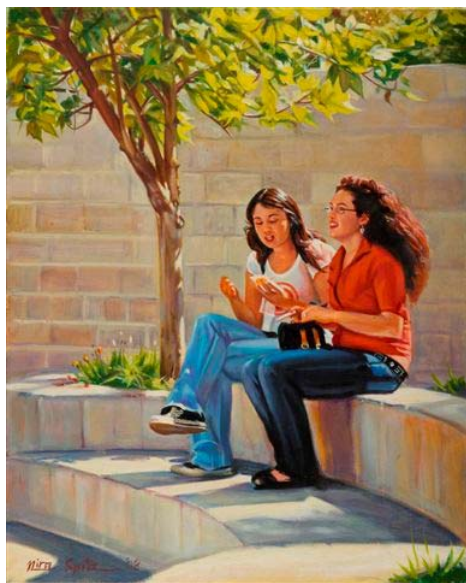
It is no wonder, then, that her pictures of Jerusalem are painted with such loving strokes.

All the works on display, which are done in oil paint on stretched canvas, depict the nooks and crannies, people and pastimes that characterize Jerusalem. Painted between 2006 and 2009 (except for *Jerusalem Courtyard*, which was done in 2003), they bring to light and to life the daily activities with which we are so familiar, such as strolling down the street, having a chat, eating a snack or talking on the cell phone. But captured in those activities are the vivid colors, animated interactions and specific details of the surroundings that give each painting its resonant quality.

The subject matter for this collection was gathered by Spitz's walking around the city and taking many photographs. "I look at each picture and I choose," says Spitz. "I zero in on the part that interests me the most in order to make a good composition. Then I add, take out, crop and cut until I have the scene that I want. And then I work from that," she explains.

Fascinated by the light of Jerusalem, Spitz says she always tries to take the photos before or after midday to get the full effects of light and shadow. "That renders a three-dimensional effect and gives the pictures more form," she says.

What makes the light of Jerusalem so special? "Israel is a Mediterranean country, so the sun is strong," she explains. "The light in Jerusalem is more clear and more direct than in Tel Aviv, for instance." And as Jerusalem is in the mountains, she especially looks for the interplay of sun and shade to see how they fall.



This is well illustrated, for example, in her painting entitled *Olive Trees, Yemin Moshe*, in which the eye is led down a shadow-streaked, tree-lined path.

In fact, pathways, alleys, doorways and corridors figure largely in Spitz's collection. Be it a scene in *Baka*, *Nahalat Shiva*, *Rehov Yoel Salomon* or *Jaffa Road*, the perspective is often narrowed down to a tapered, long-range view.

"That leads you into the painting," says the artist. "It makes for an interesting composition because there is movement rather than a flat surface. The eye gets led down that path. You enter into the scene and there is a new detail in a corner, and then another. The eye moves around the painting when you have something to focus on."

Another focus of Spitz's attention is people. Although her paintings are often composites of the many photographs of people and places she has taken, the figures in her paintings tend to bear a striking resemblance to the actual people she photographed because her specialty is portraiture. In her painting entitled *Girlfriends, Center of Town, Jerusalem*, the two girls sitting on a stone ledge under a

tree look so lifelike, the viewer feels as though he were looking at them through a window rather than in a frame.

What inspires Spitz in her choice of subjects? Beauty. Vibrant colors. Positive atmosphere. "I like beauty, and I enhance it," she says. "The details are the highlight for me. I love to do that. But first it takes a lot of building up to form the basis of the composition, and that requires time and patience - to wait for the colors to settle, for example. But the details are the icing on the cake."

OVER THE years, Spitz has honed her skills in many different countries. Born in Israel in October 1948 to a Sephardi mother and an Ashkenazi father, Spitz and her parents moved to New York when she was 10. She graduated from Queens College in fine arts. In 1967 she married Elliot (Elly) Spitz, a dynamic businessman who deals in commodities.

In 1976 the couple and their five children went to live in Caracas for several years for business purposes. That began a series of moves that included a stint back in New York and then living in Rio de Janeiro, Hong Kong, London and Sao Paulo. "Wherever we lived, I studied at the local art academies," says Spitz. In London, for example, she studied under Clarence Crawford, regarded as one of Britain's foremost portrait painters.

In each place, she draws inspiration from the environment around her. "In each country there are different colors, different landscapes and, of course, such diverse people," says Spitz.

For the past 15 years she and her husband have made their home in London, although they currently live in Sao Paulo. They also have an apartment in Rehavia, which they consider their second home. They visit often, as most of their children and grandchildren are in Israel.

"It is a great honor to have this exhibition in Jerusalem. It is a very special place," stresses Spitz. And she adds, "I hope to have many other shows in the future."

In the meantime, viewers can enjoy the exhibition of Jerusalem scenes and landscapes at the Rebecca Crown Gallery of the Jerusalem Theater until September 23. And as a bonus, they may avail themselves of a selection of complimentary postcards of six of Spitz's paintings. The hours of the exhibition are Sundays to Thursdays from 3 p.m. to 9:30 p.m; Fridays from noon to 3 p.m; and Saturday nights after 9:30 p.m.

To get a glimpse of the artist's other work, you can visit her Web site, [www.niraspitz.com](http://www.niraspitz.com).

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