

# July 2019 Culture Connection

## Jerusalem's Summer Palace of Windows and Loss

A brief Culture Connection, to make up for the “limited edition” of our last one! (The publishers of the Rosner–Fuchs book asked us to postpone our piece until after their English–language version came out, and we happily obliged.)

Some thirteen years ago I was first introduced to a “revolutionary photographer” called Yoram Amir. This tall, scruffy-looking man with magical eyes took me on a walk through Jerusalem, and changed the way I see cities forever.



Yoram Amir, showing us some of his wedding work...

While working as a wedding photographer, he'd started to find it more and more difficult to photograph a couple against a back–drop that hadn't been spoiled by the latest architectural monstrosity of Jerusalem's real estate boom. So many beautiful, exotic stone buildings had been spoiled either by the high–rise that loomed beside it, or by a second or third storey that had been squashed on top.

“You see the arched windows here on the ground floor? Now look to the third storey. They built an extension. You see the windows there? Boxes. Cut and paste. Cheap stone. You see?”

And suddenly I did. From then on I was unable to walk around the ancient beauty of Jerusalem’s houses and buildings without also noticing where it had been ignored, or spoiled. As Amir once talked of the wedding liturgy he would hear while working as a wedding photographer: “At night I hear *If I should forget thee Jerusalem...* and in the morning it’s *I’ve forgotten thee...*”

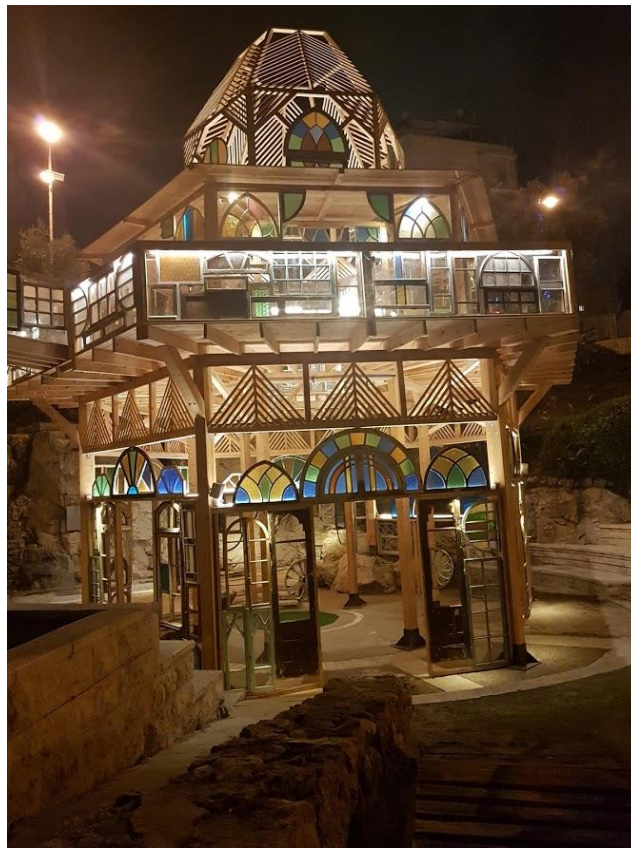
Yoram would take Makom groups on tours around Jerusalem, bringing us inside his heart and his eyes. “Jerusalem is a beautiful city. A city that was built slowly. Now we build too fast. For centuries people came and gave the beautiful city some beautiful jewels – its buildings. If we love Jerusalem, I think we should give it many many jewels...”



And as he guided people to see the devaluation and destruction of these architectural “jewels”, he also took to rescuing their “precious stones”: Their windows and window-frames. Over a period of a few decades he had gathered thousands of unique window-frames.

And then he fell sick.

Friends, fellow-artists Itamar Faluja and Lili Peleg, Jerusalemite activists, and the amazing Mekudeshet Festival, came together with him to help realize a dream he would not live to see: The Summer Palace of [Window Stories](#). Made of over 500 of Yoram’s rescued windows, this palace stands in the center of busy Jerusalem. A monument to a man’s love for this ancient city, an installation of peace and sanctity surrounded by the honking of car-horns and the dazzle of street lights, this palace is open to everyone throughout this summer.



Rather than share more of my inadequate photos snapped from my cell phone, I really encourage you to [click on this link to an article in Haaretz](#). Even if you don’t read Hebrew, the images photographed by Olivia Fitoussi speak far beyond page and screen.



A few days ago I spent an evening sitting in this miraculous palace, a modern fable of Jerusalem or a secular temple. All these windows that were defeated by “progress” are united in gentle defiance, brought together by their savior the late Yoram Amir and his talented and generous collaborators. The palace hints at the ways in which humanity can spoil a city, and at the same time quietly glistens with the ways in which humanity can sanctify a city too.

The Hebrew title for the piece is חלונות מתגשמים - *Chalonot Mitgashmim*. It's a play on the Hebrew for “Dreams Come True” - *Chalomot Mitgashmim* - חלומות מתגשמים. Instead of dreams coming true, becoming real, it is the windows - *chalonot* - חלונות that are made flesh.

When wandering Jerusalem with the sight Yoram Amir had gifted me, I would always see the harsh juxtaposition between ancient stone homes and hard new apartment blocks as a painful affront. *Chalonot Mitgashmim* offers, if anything, an even more dramatic contrast between the square angled apartment blocks and the arching nostalgic transparency of the palace's windows. Only this time, here, this summer, this brand new combination of ancient windows completely overpowers its harsh urban surroundings with light, beauty, and peace.

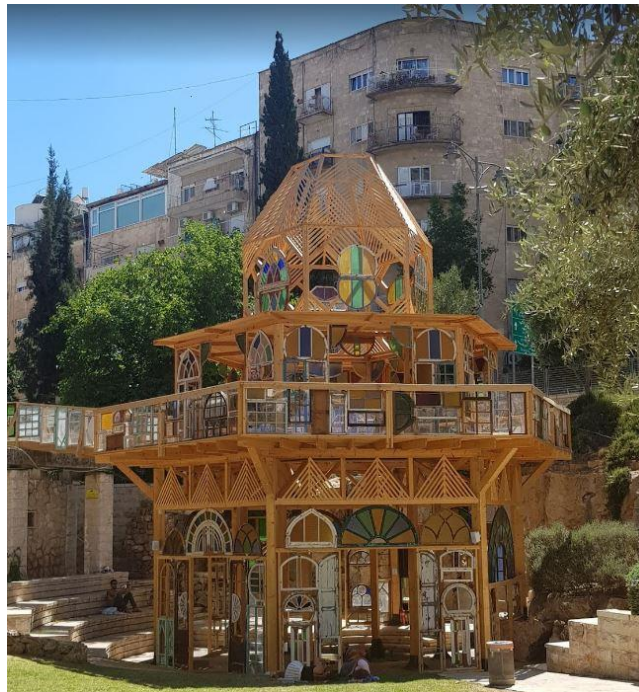


Photo by Anat Naveh, grabbed from Google Maps

If you can get to Israel before the end of the festival – go to Gan haSuss! And if you can't, send a friend there with a zoom connection and get them to take you on a virtual tour...