Making faces

Israeli illustrator Hanoch Piven couldn’t draw very well, so he began making portraits out of assorted objects and found his unique artistic niche

By MORDECAI SPEKTOR

Hanoch Piven introduces himself to the 2013 TEDx Jerusalem audience like this: “My name is Hanoch and I play. I play with objects. I’ve been making portraits with objects for a long time.”

Indeed, the Israeli artist began creating collage portraits of famous individuals using found objects, including fruits and vegetables, more than 20 years ago.

In the 1990s, after graduating from the School of Visual Arts in New York, he got assignments from many of the leading name faces and newspapers in the United States and abroad.

Hanoch Piven. Jan. 18 at Sabes JCC

Piven’s whimsical collage portraits have been published in Time, Newsweek, Rolling Stone, Haaretz, Maariv, The London Times, and many other periodicals.

As part of Culture Blvd IV, Piven will present his “Seeing Faces” lecture 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 18 at the Sabes JCC. He will also lead a hands-on workshop with objects workshop from 1 to 3 p.m. that day.

Piven has been conducting these creative workshops, in schools and in Jewish venues around the world. After a good long run as a magazine illustrator, he says, “I do that less than before, it interests me less than before… disconnected a bit. Also, the magazine world is not what it used to be, in terms of amount, the body of work that is available.”

Piven now spends his time “on teaching and on creating work that has some kind of educational relevance, or educational value. For instance, I’m working now — that’s actually what I’m doing today — I’m working on a TV program for Israeli educational TV. It’s a program that teaches creativity to children through my work, though creation with objects. It’s the second season that we’re doing.”

For those who understand Hebrew, the show is available online viewing, according to Piven, who also has written several children’s books, in English and Hebrew. His latest book, Let’s Make Faces, was published by Amherst in 2013.

Piven also mentions that he has created apps for iPhone and iPad. “So this is kind of the place where I slowly evolved,” he comments. “I’m less interested in journalistic work now.”

He still gets magazine assignments, but “much less than before.” Israeli press outlets are still interested in publishing his work, Piven notes.

“Someone the whole political satire that used to be very interesting for me when I was younger is less interesting for me now. It doesn’t really have an impact at the end of the day,” he reflects. “You can laugh at politicians, but it’s meaningless.”

And this is coming from a brilliant cartoonist.

For example, Piven’s portrait of Golda Meir employs steel wool for hair, bread dough for her face, a chicken thigh and drumstick for her nose, and an orthopedic shoe for her body. Not so flattering a picture.

Or take the portrait of the former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, which Piven created for the Israeli daily Maariv, in 2008. The firebrand politician’s face evokes the Purim holiday: his eyes are made from hamantaschen, his mouth is a grogger, a daggerr forms his nose and a whip end is used for his beard.

So, I’m a little surprised to hear that people commission Piven to create portraits.

The artist chuckles and says, “Yeah, I mean, you know, when I do a private commission, I sort of get a bit of a feel who the person I’m asked to depict.”

Usually it’s a friend of the subject who commissions the portrait as a gift, he points out.

“In those cases, I am definitely a bit more sensitive than in my treatment of politicians,” says Piven.

And he adds, regarding the caricature commissions, “If pays the bills.”

Hanoch Piven will speak on “Seeing Faces” 7:30 p.m. Sunday, Jan. 18 at the Sabes JCC, 4300 Cedar Lake Rd., St. Louis Park. He also will lead a drawing with objects workshop from 1 to 3 p.m. that day. Children under 10 must be accompanied by a registered adult. For tickets ($12 advance, $14 at door), call 952-381-3499, e-mail: tickets@sabesjcc.org, or go to: sabesjcc.org/events-happening.php. For information, call Eilat Harel at 952-417-2321, or e-mail: charel@mplfred.org.

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