FIRST DIASPORIST MANIFESTO

R.B. Kitaj

Diasporist painting, which I just made up, is enacted under peculiar historical and personal freedoms, stress, dislocation, rupture and momentum. The Diasporist lives and paints in two or more societies at once. Diasporism, as I wish to write about it, is as old as the halls (or caves) but new enough to react to today's newspaper or last week's aesthetic amusing or tomorrow's terror. I don't know if people will like it to a School of painting or attribute certain characteristics or even Style to it. Many will oppose the very idea, and that is the way of the world.

My embarrassment at pressing upon my dubious pictures and upon you the case of the Jews, against the advice of wiser heads, begins to feel less uncomfortable. It is, of course, a universal art, something which speaks to the world, to the common reader, which every painter desires, as religions and poetry wish to speak of and to our world. The world being what it is, like our art, it is a poor listener and it remains divided, but artists at least tend to gentler, less killing divisions. For a while, I will presume to bore you with pictures of an imperilled world you may know only as imperfectly as I do, if at all . . . or should say — pictures of part of my world just now. My case is built on a cliché which may also be an insightful art lesson. It is that the threatened condition of the Jews witnesses the condition of our wider world. It is a radical witness. One hundred and fifty years ago, Heine warned that where books were burned, human beings would be. Keep in mind that art and life get quite conjoined (art-time) in our modern situation and sometimes blur. Later, when we are dead, the art is (life-less?) alone in the room.

For the moment, Diasporism is my own School, neither particularly unhappy practice nor proud persuasion. I would simply say it is an unselfed mode of art-life, performed by a painter who feels out of place much of the time, even when he is lucky enough to stay at work in his room, unmolested through most of his days. His Diasporism, to the extent that it marks his painting, relies on a mind-set which is often occupied with vagaries of history, of local homelands, the scattering of his people (if he thinks he may have a people), and such stuff. Is that not a general meaning of Diaspora. More particular meanings may leave deeper marks or even scars on painting. It's not for me to spell out the quite various Diasporic conditions proliferating everywhere now, except to say that Jews do not own Diaspora; they are not the only Diasporists by a long shot. They are merely mine. As if they were not in enough trouble right now, as usual, the Israel-Diaspora problem is as difficult to contemplate as the more usual problem of Jewish survival itself. Keeping to semantic readings now that Israel is reborn, the awful historical problem of Jewish political impotence is lessened, but I would greatly fear the consequences if most Jews were concentrated in the Holy Land, where it would be easier than ever to furnish them off in a place the size of Greater Indianapolis, with a bomb or two. Being Jews though, there's energy enough left over, while enduring siege by a billion enemies, to argue the very finest points among ourselves concerning the question of Diaspora — so not uninteresting arguments you can look up yourself, which I won't rehearse here except to say that the Jewish problem, which never seems to go away (see George Elliot), gave about a hundred years ago, to a serious Palestine-Diaspora equation which was to have delivered a "remoralizing" to the bloodied Jews and which now looks as elusive as the Messiah and the End of Days.

Since this is a manifesto, albeit not a very aggressive one (I haven't read Breton or Lewis or Marinetti and such since I was 18), I want it to be somewhat declarative because I think art and life are fairly married and I think I owe it to my pictures to put their stressful birth with some odysyncratic precision.

What I owe to my pictures, I guess I owe to my readers, mostly to those few attentive or curious enough to interest themselves in the peculiar genesis of these disputed words I call Diasporist.

Like an aging bear, I am not often brave or cunning. I try to proceed from my cave with caution because I tend to blot my copybook, as the English say. Out I come at the wrong season, when the world is bemused daily by Jews and their Holocaust, past and pending. As if that were not enough, I just read in an art column that the time for manifestos has passed. So I thought I'd write one, the Belated Bear stumbling forward, brandishing his paintbrush, into the tunnel at the end of the light . . .

In my time, half the painters of the great Schools of Paris, New York and London were not born in their host countries. If there is nothing which people in dispersion share in common, then my Diasporist tendency rests in my mind only and maybe in my pictures . . . but consider: every grain of common ground will firm the halting step of people in dispersion as surely as every proof of welcome has encouraged smugness before in cosmopolitan centers. Rootedness has played its intrinsic and subtle part in the national art modes of Egypt, Japan, England, Holland and the high Mediterranean cultures and cities. I want to suggest and manifest a community (for painting) in dispersion which has merely been seen before only in fixed places, but, not unlike patrons who leave those centers or those modes, such as Cézanne, who left Paris behind for his epistolal old-age style at Aixon, or Picasso who left
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...these pictures betray confounded patterns. I make this painting mode up as I go along because it seems more and more natural for me; to imagine that I think I've been a Diasporist painter from the start without knowing, and then slowly learnt it in a twirl period, until it began to dawn on me that I should act upon it. Diasporist painting is unfolding necessity on its life-experience of contemplation of a transience. A Mihrab (exposition, expression of non-literary meaning) in paint and something collected, these paintings, these circumstantial illusions, form themselves into secular reactions to other's conscious confusion, un-at-homeness, groundlessness. Because it is of art, kind, the act of painting need not be an unhappy one. Although my Diasporist painting grows out of art, as for instance, Cubism or Surrealism did, it owes its greatest debt to the terms and methods (of content and medium) have come of age now for me. As the poet-Diasporist Grafman said, 'I wish to establish the right to dare anything'.

Aside from the always still endangered Jews (in a Mosadic Israel and in Diaspora), there are other resounding Diasporists – Palestinian prominent and suffering among them. Israel Zangwill (1864–1926) placed the Armenians at "the pit of Hell," and in 1920 bowed before their "higher majority of sorrow" There is a Black African Diaspora as terrible and outstretched as any other, which has disturbed my thoughts since early boyhood. Muscular Blackness and Pol Pot must have all but erased Diaspora traits of their bloody omen. What is left of this dispersed peoples finds as little peace as Ahabs rule himself. If the art of these Diasporists, as they emerge from historical fog, in the mist lies to feel at home, as a Diasporist painter like the Realist, the Cubist, the Expressionist and other painters, I would resist exacting codification (rightly). Nor can I speak cogently for even more complex and speculative realms of the painter's make-up, for "internal exile", the condition of the self-stranged sexual and racial. The Diaspora appears among emigrants and refugees, among the heirs of Surrealism, Naturalism, Symbolism and other aesthetics, among the home-grown, among nationalism and internationalism, patrals and patriots, in every polygot matrix, among the political and religious as well as those who do without politics and religion or are uncertain. In the end, the Diasporist knows he is one, even though he may see eye down town and sort of cease to be one. Many do not settle and that is a crucial which will affect and, I think, effect the art. If human instincts for kin and home are primal, as they often seem, then the Diasporic condition presents itself as yet another theater in which human, artistic instinct comes into play, maybe not primordial (1) but a condition, a theater to be treasured. As I write these, I also know that if Diasporists become treasured, their theater will close, and open under a new sign and name, maybe with a curse upon it.

Diasporism is my mode. It is the way I do my pictures. If they arise my
personalities both Jewish and Gentile (Zeitlin, etc.), by such absorbing figures as Ahad Ha'am (1856-1927), that it is Jewishness that condemns one, not the Jewish religion. It became reasonable to suppose that Jewishness, this complex of qualities, would be a possession in art as it is in life. In Diaspora, life has a force of its own. So would Diaspora painting, never before particularly associated with pariah peoples. For me, its time has come at last.

Diaspora (dispersion in Greek) is most often associated with Jews and their 2,000 year old scattering among the nations (forget by other accounts). What the Jews call Galut (Exile in Hebrew), had become a way of life (and death). This orientation, reconstructed from Diaspora which began when he arrived in 1932 and will die with me -- or live on as for instance Daumier? Katzerpois, has, I believe, an entire mountain. This idea is not new. It goes back to the moment when the formation of Diaspora as a phenomenon, representing blind spatial entity (which they also are) but profound ethno (belonging to Paris, Provence, shared history). Yes, Cézanne's mountain represents shared tribal (French) history -- the history of a bitter old Provencal genius wrestling with his art's relation to his own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground.

Diasporist art is contradictory at its heart, being both internationalist and particularist. It can be inconsistent, which is a major historical against the logic of much art education, because life in Diaspora is often inconsistent and tense; schismatic contradiction animates each daily. To be consistent can mean the painter is settled and at home. All this begins to define the painting mode I call Diasporist. My people are always saying the meanings in my pictures are not to be fixed, to be sealed, to be stable; that Diasporist, which interests exciting, creative misleading; the Zohar says that the meaning of the book changes from year to year! And now as I come to life again after 30, the room in which I paint becomes a sort of microcosm (room, the room or school to which I paint) in which art becomes what I think, dramatizing my mind's life, while the ancient religion itself whispers to Covenantal, mythic, Milne, heroic, artistic, religious, schismatic, Zaddik-ridden, arguements. There is a traditional notion that the divine presence itself is in the Diaspora, and, over one shoulder, Sefirot (divine emanations and "intelligences" according to Kaballah) flash and ignite the canvases towards which I lean in my orthopedic back-chair, while from my subconscious, from what can be summoned up from mind and nerve, and even after nature, other voices speak more loudly than the divine, in tongues learned in our wide Diaspora. These are the voices I mostly cleave to. Listen to them. They will tell you what a Diasporist has on his mind. (Michelangelo said you paint with your mind) as he strikes his censer.

The voices speak nervously about things unheard in painting for long forgotten - of olums, of historical memories and cultures, of ancestry myths and of heroes. Abraham's journey from Ur becomes, in the name of "good" picture-making (at my own ease), for a secret's secret, becomes an army of "we" and the voices, reconstructed from Diaspora which began when he arrived in 1932 and will die with me -- or live on as for instance Daumier? Katzerpois, has, I believe, an entire mountain. This idea is not new. It goes back to the moment when the formation of Diaspora as a phenomenon, representing blind spatial entity (which they also are) but profound ethno (belonging to Paris, Provence, shared history). Yes, Cézanne's mountain represents shared tribal (French) history -- the history of a bitter old Provencal genius wrestling with his art's relation to his own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground. That's what I want to be, a tribal existence, wrestling with my art's relation to my own sacred southern ground.
It is one of its self-definements, Diasporis, my sort of Diasporism, has been lived and acted out in its true, Western, privileged, uninhibited, uncensored, permissible, élite cloud-cuckoo lands of Modernism. Diasporism in art has been largely Assimilationist and Modernist, played on a diffuse stage with few constraints. Assimilationism is the prevailing mode in the art of our time. Young people are taught that they must strike chords which agree with art ("advanced" or not) without much regard to origin, myth or creed - and so they may in our very few democracies. My own Diasporism merely rests (generously) on the absolute wisdom of assimilation in art. I would rather feed the energy to do for Jews at least what Morandi did for tree. Then I could take summers off like he did and paint landscapes or something. The Diasporist in the me would deny neither painting, as it asks to be continued, nor the themes and obsessions which quicken my mind and heart. Looking back on my own time, I'd like to identify a First Auteur (ascent) in Diasporic painting, which, in its time, accorded with a faith in Modernism and which was assimilated to it more than to any idea of one's origins. These Diasporists, aside from those Jews who ascended to Paris, may include honorary Jews like Maudran, Picasso, Beckmann, Hofmann, the Surrealists and the Bauhaus people, many of whom escaped the Enemy of the Jews, often to find refuge among Diasporic Jews themselves, especially in New York. Painters like Picasso, Bonnard, Matisse and Munch who did not have to flee, were touched and encouraged throughout their lives by what may even be called a Jewish Diasporist aura of friends, collectors, dealers, writers, curators, historians, etc., some of whom were to go up the chimneys (another ascent in Diasporist destiny). Although Diasporism in refugee Gentiles may be my speculative construct, it is very real for Jews. And what is real for Jews is real for Jewish painters. I suspect that even those who go out of their way to isolate art from the imagined mirror or demon of being Jewish art, in the very doing, anointing art with the troubled wand of Jewish Diasporism. To my mind, something intrinsic with one's culture enters into any art. And so the lost and soon to be murdered world of East European Jews - cultured the art of many Jewish painters, even as they assimilated to the powerful charms of the new Modernism. We know that from the School of Montparnasse. Those early modern Diasporists lived and worked outside my own experience. The Kingdom of Death they left in the Pale, and the bitter-sweet Paris of their brief freedom is not for me to reconstruct. Nor is the amazing American sanctity from 1900 to the present moment, when Diasporism achieved its Golden Age according to many people, and Diasporic painting reached its modern coming (for my little history lesson). Before 1900 doesn't concern me here because Jews were not yet prepared to arrive at the time. Any existing life of the mind will keep changing one's art. 

I suppose Kitzaj and, after the war, my grandmother King. I am not only a Diasporist but a Bibliographic Heretic, among other things, and so I have a peculiar faith and interest in the influence not only of past art acting on one's pictures - everyone agrees about that - but also of one's youth, upbringing, friends, colleagues. Can anyone doubt that we are not the art? And so our most crucial role in the art of our time. I am given to my own art as in any pictures. I talk in my pictures. Our pictures speak our particular culture and the languages of general as well as tribal cultures which interest us most. That picture-speech is uttered through personality, which is something peculiar to Jews, like all cultural stuff. I'm not content that the vivid marriage of forms and contents in painting be known aside from our particular, even singular cultures and practices. I like to think this cultural marriage may be seen to do-suds up in pictures. Picasso said it: "It is not sufficient to know an artist's works. It is also necessary to know when he did them, why, how, under what circumstances."