



Dear colleagues,

After I showed the picture ("Father and son") of my son Noam during my presentation on the conference 'Verbindend Gezag' (18th of April 2017), some of the participants asked me about our relationship and collaboration. The answer appears in this text "Don Quixote and Sancho Panza: Noam's way into art and my way to becoming his shield-bearer".

This experience has a lot to do with how I came to develop the concept of the "anchoring function" as a necessary condition of secure attachment. One of the aspects of my activity as Sancho Panza for this Don Quixote is the writing of texts for his pictures and exhibitions. Noam is possibly the youngest artist in Israel that works and exposes with the greatest intensity. This year he was the first artist in Israeli history who had three completely different exhibitions in three successive months. Some of the texts that I write (together with the pictures referred to) are sent about once a month to the friends and colleagues that figure in our mainling list. I invite you to register and have a look at the upcoming mail. The link is <http://eepurl.com/cvtaDv> . Thanks, Haim Omer

Don Quixote and Sancho Panza: Noam's way into art and my way to becoming his shield-bearer (by Haim Omer, 2013)

Noam's way into art began with a mental collapse at the end of highschool. My way to becoming his shield-bearer began when I became his chief support in his attempts to survive the crash. Noam is highly ambitious, in spite of the severe learning disabilities that affect him. This combination proved explosive, as Noam set himself the goal to pass his high-school finals with flying colors. This outcome seemed mandatory for him, lest he feel completely worthless in a family with a professor for a father, a doctor for a mother and intellectually endowed siblings. Noam's dedication to his goal bordered on self-sacrifice. In the last year of high-school he would study every day until midnight (including weekends). But the harder he tried, the less he achieved. Noam succeeded in passing his finals with average grades, but this was all but a failure in his eyes. The experience signified for him the end of all his dreams. He became depressed, his self-esteem plummeted, he was paralyzed. He was so devastated that he was incapable of talking to anyone his age.

For two years Noam's life became like a sojourn in hell. His rehabilitation was excruciatingly slow, beginning when he apprenticed himself to Shalom Harari, a video animator. Noam then found out that if he defined a strict time unit of three hours, he could withstand the inner pressures and concentrate on what he was doing. The idea of setting himself a strictly formal framework for work became a stabilizing axis in his life. The video-editing was attractive for him because of its visual and musical elements. He started to create video-

clips made out of photomontages, drawings he made on the computer, texts he created, and musical combinations. Noam remembers the exact moment when he "discovered" drawing: he was sketching faces on the computer's drawing-pad and found out that he could create emotional expression through shading. This started an obsessive interest in faces, lasting over a year, in the course of which he made literally thousands of faces.

During this time he got acquainted with Eti Katz, a specialist in learning disabilities with a broad artistic background. She saw Noam's works in the computer and told his skeptical parents: "Your son must be an artist!" We received this piece of news with sad doubts. She said Noam should learn at the Midrashah Art School, but we knew he wouldn't stay there for five minutes! Eti quickly became Noam's mentor, supporter, and art-critic. She helped him channel the inner pressure of feelings and images to which he was prey into artistic moulds. She understood Noam's difficult position as someone with severe cognitive disabilities in a family of intellectuals and as someone whose qualities had been all but invisible to his teachers, classmates and himself. She took him to the Art School again and again, to help him get used to the surroundings and overcome his ghastly fear of young people. She took him to meet Yair Garbuz, the head of the art school. Garbuz offered to have a personal study program tailored for Noam, he told him his door was always open for him, and finished the meeting with the remark: "I think you have no choice but to become an artist!" Noam would later add jestingly: "Of course I have no choice! I am completely unable to do anything else!"

Noam's integration in the Midrashah was all but easy. At the beginning he kept thinking that he was going to be kicked out because they had found out he was an impostor. But the Midrashah was to prove an ideal nursery for him. Noam received enormous support from the teachers. Some of them (Eti Yakobi, Doron Rabina, Naomi Siman-Tov) encouraged him to exhibit in the school's internal venues. Noam had an individual exhibition already in the first year of his studies, something very unusual in the Midrashah. He was always eager to show even if only a small portion of the paintings that kept piling up at his place. The first exhibition was made out of faces-faces-faces. He stuck them not only on the walls but also on the ceiling. At a given moment he thought of placing a mirror on the ground to reflect the faces on the ceiling, to express the pressure of faces that was flooding him at the time. During his four years at school he exposed eleven times, seven of them individual exhibitions. The first time he agreed to have his works subjected to open criticism (a stressful ritual at the art school), Noam presented over a hundred paintings. The acceptance and support he received at the Midrashah turned the transition into the "real world" into a threat. How would he manage outside of the nursery? Noam's extreme isolation precluded the possibility that he would get help from other students, or even maintain contact with his teachers.

One of his chief survival mechanisms is to impose upon himself a strict formal framework. This framework not only furthers discipline, but also gives some order to the chaos that threatens to engulf him. Noam's work day includes five hours of painting + a fixed number of hours looking at art books, taking photos (which he uses as sources for his paintings) and searching for materials. Sometimes he defines strict formal requirements for a series of paintings. For his first individual professional exhibition ("The World" – see catalogue and critical reviews in this site), he charged himself with the creation of 40 acrylic, 40 charcoal, and 40 acrylic+charcoal pictures in a similar format and with pre-determined subjects. His attitude to his work bore fruit: In the seven years after completing the Midrashah, Noam had 12 individual exhibitions in Israel, Germany, Belgium and the US (Kibbutz Gallery, Tel-Aviv Artists' House, Yanko-Dada Museum, Migdal Shalom Gallery, Kolvenburg Museum in Muensterland-Germany, On-Off Gallery in Hamburg, Kayma Gallery, Ramat-Gan Museum,

Eretz-Israel Museum, among others). Yair Garbuz remarked that there is probably no Israeli artist who would not be jealous of his output.

These developments took place in spite of Noam's deep difficulties in forging personal or professional links. In this respect, Noam's difficulties create an almost unpassable barrier, for his handicaps are particularly marked in the social field. Whereas other young artists may organize themselves in groups (for instance, jointly running a gallery, or initiating a group event), know how to join communal projects, for Noam these options are all but closed. This liability, and the understanding that Noam has no alternative to his career as an artist, led to the creation of our father-son partnership, where I am responsible for all contacts with the art world. Since Noam is the spiritual mover in our partnership, I see us as a Don Quixote-Sancho Panza duo.

Like the original Sancho, my role gradually merged with that of Don Quixote's. In addition to the correspondence with people in the art world, I started to write texts for Noam's catalogues, exhibitions and also to individual pictures. The texts would originate in conversations with Noam, or with Noam and the curator of an exhibition (e.g., with Yaniv Shapira who was the curator of four of his exhibitions). Noam participates in all the meetings I arrange with art people and pretty quickly he starts speaking in his unusual way, which little by little became part of his artistic trademark. The reason why the way he speaks about his art is so special is that in the current art discourse, the conceptual aspects are part and parcel of the work's presentation. Noam does not express himself in such ways: he talks about his works more like a craftsman. He talks about brushes, ways of diluting the color, texture, stains, and dirt, but also about how one part of the picture impinges on the other, and how the eye creates the composition and the space. He is a sort of dinosaur in the way he expresses himself: the concept, the "aboutness", the hidden meanings of artistic discourse are foreign to his mind.

My partnership with Noam is one of my chief activities, I might even say, a second career, stocked with emotional highs and lows. The rejection of an article or book that I wrote never caused me such pain as a gallerist's or curator's refusal to meet with us. I am, of course, the recipient of the refusals, but Noam sometimes gets some of the fallout. Fortunately, he is slowly learning to react to these situations, simply by adding some hours of work to his weekly schedule. Sometimes he feels strengthened by the confrontation.

Our collaboration is coming closer and closer to the actual contents of his art. For example, Noam may create a series of works dealing with stations in my own personal life or in the life of my family of origin. For instance, a joint project (which was held in Germany), where I and my friend Arist von Schlippe told about the experiences of our respective families in the Second World War, and Noam painted the people as they are today, coping with the afflictions age, illness and death. In this project, Noam listened again and again to recordings of the family's stories, and after he had soaked himself in those memories, he created a pictorial synthesis of the events or family characters. I am glad to say that in some of Noam's pictures of my parents, I have been helped to become more acceptant of some of their qualities with which I had difficulty living before. It is as if my son had metabolized my parents for me in ways that allow me better to digest them.