



Anat Manor: 'My father said I don't know the meaning of roots... I do know what that means, I live in Germany.'

Working in threes

• By BARRY DAVIS
Photos: ANAT MANOR

Anat Manor has a tendency toward triplication. For starters, her new exhibition, which opened last week at the Romanian Cultural Institute in Tel Aviv, has a triple-barreled title, “Abba, Tata, Papa – A Tribute.” That title alludes to the 50-something artist’s diverse cultural roots: Manor, born in Israel and a long-time resident of Germany, has dedicated the exhibition to the memory of her Romanian-born father, Yeshayahu, or Saica, who died two years ago.

“Abba, Tata, Papa” is a multifarious venture whichever way you look at it. All 25 works in the show utilize multiple materials, textures, techniques and disciplines, and the triangle, as both a shape and a concept, is a recurrent theme. Many of the items in the exhibition are also assemblage creations, which attests to the artist’s varied educational background: Her training, both here and in Germany, included painting, photography, pottery and Japanese papermaking.

Manor’s inclination toward mixing and matching runs through the exhibition, as do references to her father’s daytime job as a dental technician. There are tooth molds in several works, in addition to all kinds of dental paraphernalia he employed. There are also surprising, seemingly extraneous elements in there, such as a slice of bread in the interdisciplinary piece *Existence and Death*.

Manor is not sure if her father, were he still around, would have appreciated the new display.

“I don’t know if he would have been

proud of my current output. He didn’t really understand my approach. He liked figurative art, you know, paintings with a stream and a nice landscape in the background – that sort of thing,” she says.

Her dad also expressed trademark Jewish concern.

“He was bothered by the quantity of works I didn’t sell,” she says with a smile. “He thought I should be a bit more practical, or maybe an arts teacher. It was also a bit tough for him when I moved to Germany. I am an only child.”

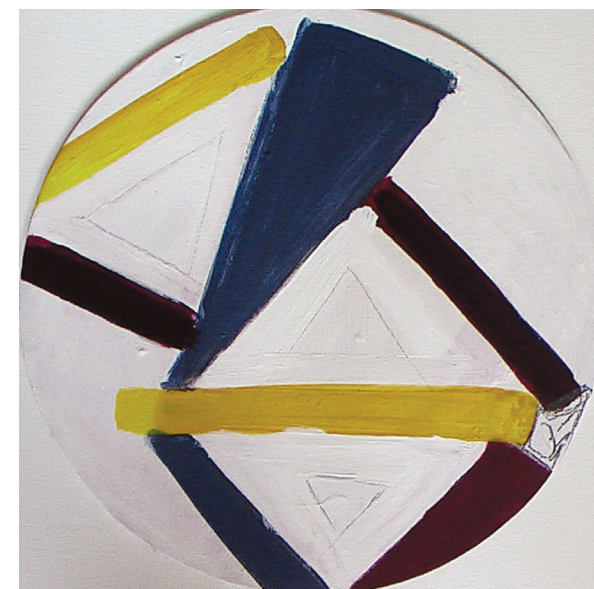
Mind you, it’s not as if Saica Menashko (Manor Hebraicized her name) was particularly enamored of Israeli culture and society. Despite making aliya on his own in 1948 at the age of 17, he remained entrenched in the culture of his native country throughout his life, his daughter says.

“Dad was very connected with Romanian culture. He never really became absorbed here. When they started broadcasting TV channels in Romanian, he’d watch that all the time. He said there were no real cultural roots here.”

In fact, she says, she learned the meaning of roots after she relocated to Berlin, where she has been based since 2007. She had a previous stint in Germany, between 1998 and 2001, when she lived in the northwestern town of Rendsburg as an artist in residence at the local Jewish Museum.

“My father said I don’t know the meaning of roots. I do know what that means, I live in Germany,” she says. “Strangely, I connected with my Jewish and Romanian roots in Germany.”

The Tel Aviv slot is the second showing of “Abba, Tata, Papa,” with the orig-



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inal unveiling having taken place at the Romanian Embassy in Berlin – yet another nod to the triangular structure underlying the collection. She wants the exhibition to run to a third installment, with the final showing taking place in Romania. That, for her, would represent some kind of closure, and presumably, it would have made her father proud.

“It is important for me, in terms of my dad. And I want to complete the third part of the triangle,” she says.

German historian Dr. Frauke Dettmer, who was a curator at the Jewish Museum in Rendsburg during Manor’s tenure there, describes the artist as feeding off “three different topographies, cultures and mentalities [which] shape and inspire her and challenge her.”

When you walk into the Romanian Institute on Shaul Hamelech Boulevard, the initial sense is one of surprise at the diminutive dimensions of the works. There are frames measuring 40 cm. by 40 cm., one that stretches to 73 cm. in length but only 17 cm. across, and some around 25 cm. by 25 cm. You don’t get the feeling that Manor is trying to grab you by the lapels and shout, “Look at me!”

But as some would say, it is the quiet ones you have to watch. The small works do draw the eye, and the emotional content comes through immediately.

Manor says that when she exhibited at the embassy in Berlin, she was a little concerned that her modestly proportioned offerings might get swallowed up in the vastness of the embassy display area. In the event, though, she says it worked well. The same can be said for the Tel Aviv layout, in which the works are dotted along a couple of



Anat Manor.

corridors and around a spacious room at the institute.

There is no escaping the emotional baggage of the exhibition. The acrylic painting called *The Empty Chair* hangs next to, and echoes, a photograph of the same name.

“That was where my father used to sit,” says Manor simply. “His memory is still very fresh.”

Perhaps it is no surprise, then, that for the most part, the creative process ran seamlessly.

“Sometimes I have to work very hard to find a theme, or some kind of continuum, between works I have in an exhibition, but this one flowed so easily,” she remarks. “I don’t know if it was an intuitive thing, or a conscious approach, but things constantly connected.”

The artist exudes an air of quiet confidence – possibly filtered through European manners – but one senses a steely determination about her, too.

“I have a lot of drive,” she admits. “A few years back, I proposed an exhibition to the people at the Centrum Judaicum [the Jewish history museum in the gold-domed Stiftung Neue Synagoge Berlin]. I set a precedent there. I saw the place, and I decided I would have a show there.”

Her initial application was rejected. “They said, ‘We are a history museum, what would we do with contemporary art?’ Then they saw the catalogue and they agreed to have my exhibition there.”

Naturally there was a Jewish element to the exhibition. “My connection with Judaism really started in Rendsburg, in Germany in general. Sudden-

ly, I felt Jewish and saw the beauty of the religion and tradition. Shabbat is a wonderful thing.”

The closure she hopes to achieve by bringing “Abba, Tata, Papa” to Romania is connected to her cultural identity as well.

“I used to be ashamed of my Romanian roots, and when my father spoke to me in Romanian in public,” she says. “But now I know that is part of who I am, as a person and as an artist.”

That mental U-turn was prompted by a musical evening during her time in Rendsburg, when, on a whim, she went to a concert of Balkan music.

“I bought two audio cassettes,” she recalls, “one for my father and one for myself. From that day on, I took pleasure in being Israeli and Romanian.”

For more information: (03) 696-1746 or www.icr.ro/tel-aviv

