

Getting a Head ST-ART

A new mentoring program helps beginning artists transition into the business world

Bernard Dichek

ISRAEL HAS BECOME A HUB FOR business innovation, especially in the high-tech and biotech fields. But the country's most original business incubator could very well be in the visual arts sector. Known as ST-ART, the venture was founded in 2008 by Serge Tiroche, a banking expert with a passion for Israeli art.

"I came up with the idea for ST-ART when I noticed the gap between young independent artists and those represented by galleries," explains Tiroche. "It usually takes young artists a number of years until they are able to find a gallery that will represent them and by then many have given up on a career as an artist."

In an interview with *The Report*, Tiroche notes that Israeli art schools don't teach the business side of the profession. "The graduates may be talented and well-trained as painters or sculptors but often they aren't equipped with sufficient business know-how to become commercially successful."

To boost their chances of success, Tiroche has devised a business model that offers young artists a type of support that is similar to what venture capitalists and incubator managers offer young scientists and entrepreneurs.

Every year, Tiroche and ST-ART's CEO and curator, Dana Hasson, invite about four to six artists, usually fresh out of college, to become members of the ST-ART incubator.

During the two-year incubator period, Tiroche and Hasson mentor the artists, help them find work space, arrange exhibits for their works and introduce them to gallery owners, curators and collectors in Israel and overseas.

And even before doing any of that, Tiroche



MICHAL SHANIR: *Untitled*, Oil on canvas

purchases a portfolio of works created by the artist – sometimes as many as a dozen.

The mentoring that Tiroche and Hasson offer can be quite straightforward. "Some photographers aren't aware of the need to limit the number of prints in each edition they produce, as well as how to price them," observes Tiroche.

That kind of advice has paid off. With Tiroche's help, Peleg Dishon, one of ST-ART's artists, was able to commercialize his works.

"Peleg had created a series of pieces by Xeroxing sculpture-like objects made out of paper that he created with a cardboard cutter," recalls Tiroche. "The result was a series of breathtaking images that looked like they had come from a different world. But he was presenting them by projecting them onto hanging canvases using a slide projector."

At Tiroche's suggestion, Dishon began to

convert his works into a more saleable format – a light box that can be mounted on a wall as a permanent installation. And once Dishon made this change, his pieces began to sell.

ST-ART BEGINS TO GIVE ITS resident artists public exposure with exhibitions that are held regularly in the stately, 150-year-old building that serves as the incubator's headquarters. The two-storey, arched building, located on the edge of Jaffa's Ajami neighborhood, overlooks the old Jaffa port and served as the governor's mansion during the Ottoman Empire.

It is also the house that Serge Tiroche grew up in.

"This was a lively place when I was a kid," says Tiroche, 44, walking through the first-floor gallery during this year's residents' group show. Tall, casually dressed and wearing sneakers, Tiroche has a relaxed but serious manner, some-

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