





“When I first came here

I greatly resisted the word *yisraeliut* ('Israelness')," wrote the man who many consider to be Israel's finest painter. Yossef Zaritsky, born in Borispol, Ukraine, went to study art in the nearby city of Kiev in 1910 at a time of revolution in Russian painting and sculpture that gave rise to Rayonism and Suprematism. After fighting in World War I, he worked in Kiev until 1923 when, at the height of the massive emigration of Russian artists to the West, he moved to Jerusalem.

His Jerusalem period as a watercolorist is characterised by an intoxication with colour. Opposing the exploitation of emotions by the advocates of Hebrew nationalism and the orientalist exoticism of the Bezalel School, he led the self-proclaimed cosmopolitan camp. "Looking out at the world, I thought it a sin to bind the monumentality of nature even in an ideal organisation," Zaritsky explained in discussing a landscape that he painted from his window in 1927.

In 1929, he moved to Tel Aviv. His senses were engaged by perceptions of light, expressed in his paintings in brightness and contrasts which he called "darkness" or "clarity." His view was formed by the fact that "The light in Israel is cold." From 1974 he painted, now in oils, for half of each year in Kibbutz Tsova.

His work has been seen as akin to that of Matisse — an art of "value" (*valeur*) in which a balance is struck between form and colour, a painting whose "contemporary language" fed on the heritage of the past. As he put it: "Painting is language — no *isms*, just language." Like a sentence, a painting "has a beginning and an end." For him, his "language" is universal and contemporary, but "the climate is ours." The dynamism and the light are specifically Israeli: "We are not cut off from the world, but we must make our own contribution," a "concrete" expression of that dynamism and light.