

Jay Milder, *Easton Irregular Art Profile*, Dec 2011

Jay Milder and I shared lunch at Pearly Baker's, our conversation darting from Kabbalah, Plato, Thomas Aquinas, Pico della Mirandola, Theosophy, Spinoza, Nachman of Breslov, and Bal Sham Tov, all before we got our water. Well versed in philosophy, religion, science (especially Quantum Physics), Jay thinks in a non-linear fashion. He recalls being unhappy in school, preferring to make "projects" in his parents' basement. Our soup came and we circled the globe: Born in Omaha, Nebraska. Studied in Paris with André Lhote, Ossip Zadkine and influenced by Soutine. Moroccan music, light and color. Attends the Art Institute of Chicago. Exhibits in Mexico. Provincetown and New York in the early 1960's. Founding member of the City Gallery in Chelsea; participated in "Happenings." Founding member of Rhino Horn at the New School for Social Research in 1970. Taught at City College of New York City University, Vermont Studio School, Brooklyn College, Brandeis Institute in California, Pratt Institute and the New York Institute of Technology. He speaks of energy manifest in multiple forms and as change being a given. "The Tao of Physics" was required reading for his students. In 1998, he received an NEA Grant. In 1999, he was a Cultural Exchange Representative between America and Brazil at Museo Nacional Bellas Artes, Rio de Janeiro. In 2013, a retrospective at Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo in Brazil will travel to Shanghai, China and then throughout the U.S. He is working with the Liberation Theologists to aid the poor of Brazil. Our salad and coffee arrived, and the conversation continued with the evolution of philosophy from Moses de León to Spinoza to the Deists (Thomas Paine, Ben Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and George Washington) and onto current U.S. politics. Jay alternates between the public concerns of elections, a good education for our youth, the environment, and the very private concern of being an artist today.

We left the restaurant and visited his studio. All the names and theories that he mentioned settled into order when I looked at his paintings. I understood how Kierkegaard, Gurdjieff, Madame Blavatsky, John Locke, Aristotle and yours truly can be numbers or letters on a surface, individual entities, parts of an equation, crowded edge-to-edge and layered deep in the canvas. I relaxed, feeling less pressured to connect all the dots of history. The path is there, the long view of human endeavor in many layers. Yet, anxiety returns when I give myself over to sculptural paint effects; I'm experiencing all creation happening at once. It's colorful, messy and immediate. There is an up and a down, a way the painting should be displayed, but for the most

part I am peering into chaos. Jay has studied systems of meaning such as numerology and astrology yet the conveyed information is less important than the joy of playing with symbols. Thickly-painted numbers and letters partially mask or morph into animals and faces. Jay mentioned “tzimtzum” from Kabbalah, the idea that divine energy contracted itself, forming an empty space where creation could begin, and I think he said “Zamzam,” the miraculous well in Mecca, located near the Kaaba, the holiest place in Islam. I see symbols emanating from the center of the canvas, like water rising up from a well. Jay liked the mistake, the close sound and meaning of the two words. He picks up a compass and says, “This is ‘tzimtzum’ too.” Everyone has used a compass. One leg is held stationary and the other draws around it in a circle. We understand each other, but we don’t pause, there are so many other discoveries to be made.

— Elizabeth Johnson