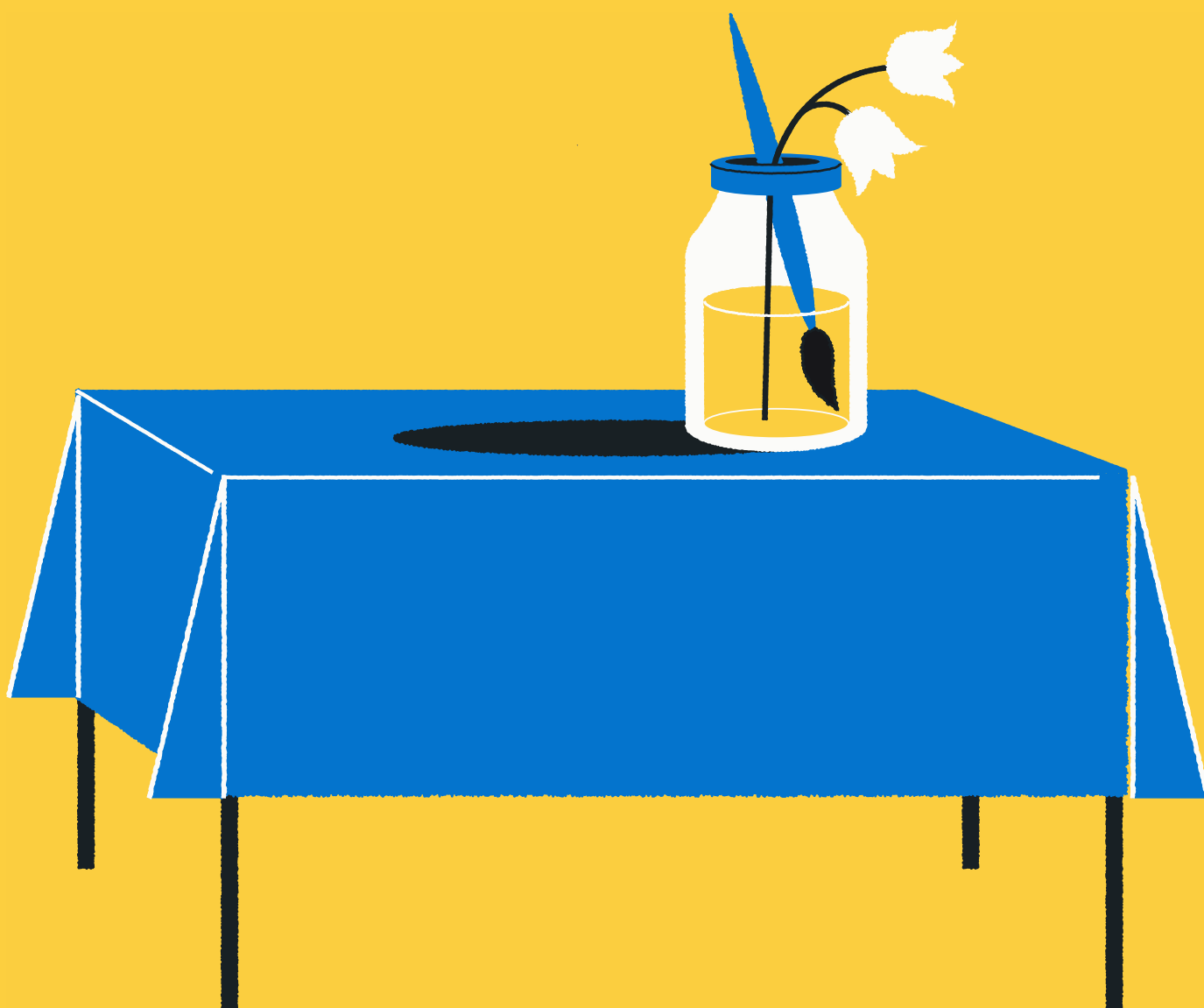


PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST IN RESPITE



INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Israel has faced profound challenges- war, loss, uncertainty, and the tensions between private life and collective responsibility. As Israel's national days approach, daily life continues, shaped by the broader national experience that is still unfolding. In moments like these, words alone can fall short; art, however, offers an alternative way of engaging with this reality-creating space to pause, observe, and hold complexity without needing to resolve it.

The painting featured in this educational guide is part of the current exhibition at Beit Avi Chai, which brings together five prominent contemporary Jerusalem-based artists who reflect on life during this ongoing period. Its title, *My Life at the Moment*, comes from a line by the Jerusalem poet Israel Eliraz, who urged individuals to look closely at a single moment in time and embrace the emotions and contradictions it contains.

[>> *Portrait of the Artist in Respite - Jpeg format*](#)

[>> *The Painting on gallery website*](#)

ARTIST & ART HISTORY CONTEXT


Elkana Levi (b. 1993) is a Jerusalem-based painter and graduate of the Pardes School of Art and the HaMidrasha School of Art. He developed his art style during years of service in the army reserves, where he observed and processed his experiences through the act of creating.

This painting connects to a long tradition of self-portraiture, especially from the Renaissance and Baroque periods, where artists painted themselves in their studios, often in the act of painting. These works explored identity, examining the artist's outer appearance and how they understand themselves and their place in the world. Levi continues that tradition in a modern context, where different aspects of identity converge. Building on Israeli art history's shifting representations of the self, depictions of soldiers have undergone significant transformation over time—from early state-driven images of heroism and collective idealism, to later works that questioned and critiqued the military ethos, and eventually to more fragmented, postmodern interpretations. Here, Levi presents a more unstable identity that blurs the line between hero and anti-hero.

Note to Facilitator: This guide provides a gentle way to engage with complex aspects of Israeli contemporary reality through art. The goal is to create space for observation, reflection, and personal connection, without necessarily arriving at a satisfying answer or resolution.

LOOKING ACTIVITY > 30 — 60 SECONDS






Look closely at the painting

- Spend about 30 seconds letting your eyes move from top to bottom, from side to side, and through the center.
 - Notice the colors, objects, figure, expression, and space, staying with observation only.
 - Pause before discussion.
-  What do you see first? Where do your eyes go next? How do they move around the canvas? How do the objects in the scene interact? Begin to move beyond pure observation. Does the placement or combination of objects suggest anything?









PROCESSING QUESTIONS > 5 MINUTES

Discuss in pairs/small groups

-  What did the artist choose to show us on his canvas, and what did he hide? What might he be trying to draw our attention to?
-  Do you notice anything about the objects in the room? How do they relate to each other?
-  What different roles or identities might be present here?
-  Is there any contrast or tension in the painting?
-  In traditional self-portraits, artists often show their tools (like brushes). What did Levi choose to include here? What do you think that teaches us about his identity?

REVERSE THE CANVAS

-  Take 5-10 minutes and write a few sentences or sketch what you imagine might be on the front of the canvas, the part we cannot see.
 -  Invite the participant to share briefly :
-  How was this for you?
 -  Why did you choose the imagery you chose?
 -  What might the artist have chosen to show - or not to show? Think about the contrast between his personal and public life and what he chooses to represent here.
 -  Is there duality in your own life? If so, what might you choose to represent?




MY LIFE AT THE MOMENT › CREATIVE EXERCISE

- Take a minute to think of what that title means to you at this moment in time.
- Create a short response - writing, list, sketch, or even generate an AI image that goes along with it.

Note to Facilitator: If they have a hard time, you can suggest the following questions as inspiration:

- ? What represents your life right now? What would you show? What would you keep hidden?
- ? Choose two items from your own life that might juxtapose each other: Do they represent private reflection versus public duty?

WRAP UP

-  Take one more moment to look at the painting.
- ? What do you notice now that you didn't see at first?
- ? Where do your eyes rest? Does anything stay with you?

Consider the dualities in the painting: the rifle beside the palette, the unseen front of the canvas, and a gaze that holds both private reflection and public duty.

REFLECTION PROMPT

- ? How does this painting resonate with your own life, and what does it suggest about living between personal experiences and the larger realities of your community or country?
- ? If this moment were part of a larger story, imagine what might come before or after it. What possibilities or hopes could unfold? How might the tensions, choices, or details in this scene lead to change, growth, connection, or new beginnings?

Note to Facilitator: [Click here](#) to explore the rest of the exhibition's virtual gallery. You can view the other three paintings by Levi in the exhibition, ask similar questions, and reflect on the themes of identity, duality, and the artist's choices.