



Painting WITH Passion

The art of Sara Solomnick

Sara's young classmates were earnestly considering what they'd like to do when they grew up, but Sara didn't have to stop to think. She'd be an artist. Of course. And indeed she is an artist today, sketching, painting and sculpting with passion and exquisite talent.



As the second of six children growing up in St. Petersburg, a bustling and picturesque Russian city, Sara attended Bais Chana, a Chabad-run school from kindergarten through eleventh grade. She also enrolled in the St. Petersburg City School for the Arts at the young age of 8.

She was initially joined by a friend, who gave up very soon when faced with long hours of art lessons after school in addition to their regular homework. There were five core subjects: painting, drawing, sculpting, composition and art history. But as Sara said then and still says now, "Art is my passion, and when you love something you find time for it."

Young Sara soon proved to be a prodigy, eagerly adding new techniques to her repertoire and creating beautiful artwork.

The classes in Bais Chana were small, and different grades often combined for learning or activities. Sara had only one classmate her age. During her summers at Camp Eitz Chaim (directed by Mrs. Chana Leah Rappaport of Canada), Sara met and befriended other Jewish girls, a valued opportunity since she had so few classmates. Each year that she attended she created an original camp banner, which was sold to benefit the camp.

During her school years at Bais Chana, Sara





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continued taking art lessons after school, throwing herself into it with enthusiasm. As an advanced student she took an accelerated seven-year track instead of the usual nine and graduated the art school at 15, with an honors diploma in the arts.

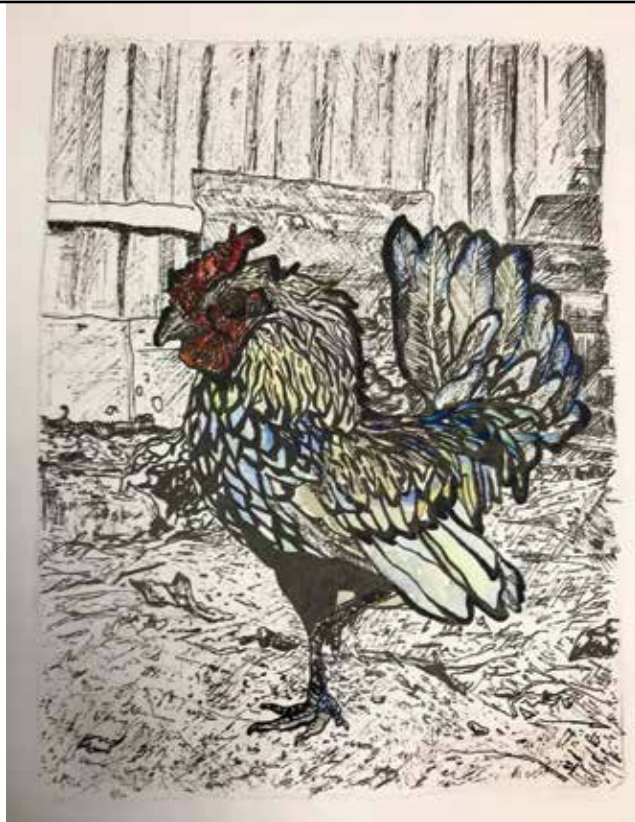
Throughout this time, her paintings, drawings and sculptures were often featured in art galleries and exhibitions. “Last year,” says Sara, “my art teacher, with whom I’d kept in touch, chose my painting to display alongside hers in an ‘Art Teacher and Most Talented Student’ exhibit. Now my little sister is studying with the same teacher, having earned a scholarship to the same art school.

Because high school in Russia

finishes with eleventh grade, last year found Sara making decisions for her future. Pursuing art was not a question, it was how and where that needed to be worked out. Where would she find an arts program at her level that would be suitable for a *frum* girl? Consulting with various Jewish artists, she was advised to go to the U.S.

In September 2018, 17-year-old Sara enrolled in Bnos Batya, run by Mrs. Sara Pinter, a four-year program for Russian girls, who attend seminary under the auspices of Touro College.

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classes as Touro offers each semester. Her goal is to graduate at 21 with a degree in graphic design, but her true interest is hands-on art. Despite her hectic schedule, she finds plenty of time for painting and drawing.

Artistic eyes are often not satisfied with the humdrum appearance of a dorm room. "My dorm is in a basement, and I missed having a window, so I painted one!" The wall is now graced with an elegant wood-framed glass window overlooking a magnificent scene of a sunny garden on her wall. It looks so vivid that you look twice on entering the room before realizing it's just a painting.

A wall in the seminary building is graced with her large and detailed hand-painted mural of the Kosel. And her dorm room is full of art in all forms, as well as supplies brought from Russia or acquired here.

Sara describes the art supply store with awe in her voice. "There are so many supplies, I wish I could buy one of everything!" Her fortunate classmates receive beautiful portraits of themselves as birthday gifts.

She also livened up her dorm

room by drawing charcoal sketches of all her siblings back home in St. Petersburg, so she can "see" them whenever she wants to.

Sara is fluent in many art forms but enjoys painting most of all, whether it's acrylics, watercolors or something else entirely. She paints idyllic nature scenes or vivid arrangements of flowers, some three-dimensional; Judaica featuring Yamim Tovim, scenes from *Tanach* and various *mitzvos*.

Her most labor-intensive project was a still life she did as her graduation project in art school, a true-to-life depiction in pencil and watercolor, which she perfected for the better part of a year.

Sara's determined personality and deep passion for art made her jump right in, loving every minute. She often imagines a picture in her mind then recreates it. At other times, a masterpiece takes shape as she goes along.

She painstakingly researches and references photographs so that her artwork is as realistic as possible. Her paintings, sketches, portraits and sculptures are each truly a labor of love, and every bit of art she creates is a fulfillment of her childhood dream. ■

