



Ray Must (of blessed memory)

Fine Arts

“First, I’d like to say I am a Jew who is an artist not a ‘Jewish Artist.’ My work is directed to wider audiences and the Jewish themes I find just naturally emerge or are not always on a conscious level.

I’ve always felt strongly I was Jewish. Self-identity is not a problem. My family and relatives were Jewish, my neighborhood, my friends, and from my childhood point of view I thought even Detroit was Jewish, from the old East side where my grandfather and aunts and uncles lived and had small businesses to the west side of 12th Street, Linwood and Dexter, where I was at home among the delicatessens. I had a terrible Hebrew education although I’m told I spoke Yiddish before I spoke English. I was Bar Mitzvahed and a pitiful sound it must have been. I can’t remember - it’s been repressed. Still, it was done. There was herring and whiskey in the basement of the *schul* for the old snuff taking regulars - come to think of it that image is what I really remember.

Later I rebelled, refused to go to the ‘Jewish High School,’ because I was in love with making things and wanted to use my hands as well as my head. Cass Tech High was a great place for me. I met all kinds of people with different ethnic backgrounds and made good friends. My viewpoint opened outward. I was growing up and out of a *shtetl* mentality. Later I attended another ‘non-Kosher’ school, Michigan State in Lansing, not University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and there I really blossomed and chose my career after false starts in horticulture and pomology (three days), journalism (three months), then the psychology of vision, and finally art.”

From a lecture titled “Why I am Sometimes a Jewish Artist,” March 14, 1997, Temple Israel Lecture, Focus on Friday Program. Copyright by the author: Ray Must.