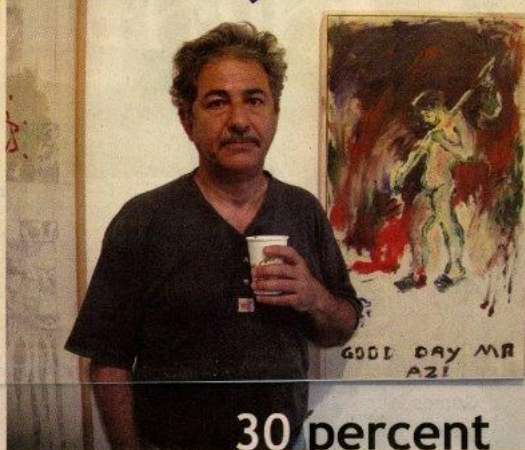


70 percent Western,

Druse artist Asad Azi shows his anger and love for his father, who was killed in 1961 by a Syrian sniper while on patrol in the Golan Heights, in a new exhibit titled 'My Father Is a soldier,' now on *dimla'cian*



30 percent Eastern

• By Carl Hoffman

'There is nothing more alive than a dead father'

—Meir Aharonson, Exhibition Catalogue, 'My Father Is a Soldier'

Israel is home to an estimated 104,000 Druse, an Arabic-speaking ethnic group with an essentially Arab culture, but a distinct religion that blends Islam with elements of Greek philosophy. Avoiding the pull of Arab nationalism since 1948, the Druse have proven themselves to be exemplary citizens, famously serving with distinction in the IDF from the Border Police to more recently the cockpit of an IAF fighter jet. Several members of the Druse community have attained high-level positions in the military and in politics.

One, Asad Azi, has become a famous artist and art teacher, living and working at his studio in Jaffa, acquiring a devoted following, and counting more than 40 solo exhibitors to his credit. Even so, Azi, 54, says, "It is very difficult to be a full-time artist here in Israel. I

teach two days a week, and then spend the rest of the time concentrating on my art." Azi teaches painting and drawing one day a week at Beit Berl College in Kfar Saba, and then flies to Kiryat Shmona once a week for his classes at Tel Hai College, where he has been teaching for 22 years.

Metro recently caught up with Azi at his third exhibition at the Museum of Israeli Art in Ramat Gan, and had to wait patiently while the busy artist was showing a group of appreciative art students around the gallery. The exhibition, entitled "My Father Is a Soldier," reflects Azi's years of trying to come to terms with the major traumatic event of his life, the death of his soldier father when he was six years old. Sayah Azi, who had previously enlisted in the Border Guard in 1956, was killed while on active duty in 1961. This incident, occurring almost 50 years ago, remains perhaps the defining event of the artist's life.

In 1955, a year before his father's enlistment, Azi was born in Shikama, a mixed village of Christians, Muslims and Druse in the Western Galilee. Azi insists that no "mystical voice" called him to a life in art. Although he

acknowledges that he drew "all the time" as a child, his childhood ambition, he says, was to become an IDF officer. By the time he got out of the army, however, his sole desire was to study at university and perhaps become a lawyer. He entered the University of Haifa and took courses in art, philosophy, Hebrew literature and ethnic studies, and graduated with a Bachelor's degree. Although initially chosen as an elective minor subject, art began to assume progressively greater importance throughout his time in Haifa. By graduation, he had completely succumbed. In 1981, Azi found his way to the Italian village of Caserta, where he concentrated on learning the art of marble sculpture. Returning to Israel, he continued his studies at Tel Aviv University, toward an MA in Art History. There, he found himself torn

"I'M STILL someone who doesn't have the opportunity to go with his father to the zoo, to the sea, to hug him and feel protected. These are all the things I was raised with and cannot get free of," says Asad Azi. (Carl Hoffman)