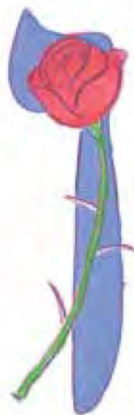


Foreword: Celebrating Dreams



If you like to dream, then enter the dreams of Mark Podwal. He will lead you through the centuries as through a gallery where you are awaited by a world both strange and familiar. A world forever united with a pen that, with a rare finesse, recounts the stories of yesterday and today, and of all days. For not only is the artist a keen-sighted and incisive commentator who adds an elevated dimension to details, but a storyteller who explains and charms as much as instructs. His stories, sometimes joyful and sometimes melancholic, are recounted in a style and language quite his own; they will make you smile. Through them you will discover or rediscover recollections, which—without your being aware—are part of your collective memory.

I confess: my judgment is not objective. It is not the view of a professional. Not of a critic or an art historian. I am very close to Mark Podwal and his oeuvre. We have worked together on several books (*The Golem*, *The Haggadah*), which mean a great deal to me. Since then a fruitful friendship has bound us together. That said, his art played a role in the genesis of this friendship—as did his love for mystical texts.

It is above all in his drawings, but also in his watercolors, that Podwal seems to be attracted, if not fascinated, by the mystery, which dwells in certain faces, certain stones, certain ancient signs. Rather than attempt to decipher that mystery, he penetrates its world, yet leaves all intact.

Take a good look at his letters that fly, dispersed by some divine or malevolent wind: they form the names of angels endowed with immense power. But beware: neither pronounce them nor try to connect them; you risk bringing them back to life. It is with these letters that God created the universe.

Take a good look at the shadows that have gathered in the Prague ghetto: they are not there by chance. Nor is the golem a product of chance. Do you fear him? The Maharal created him to dissipate your fear. In fact, seen through Podwal's eyes, the golem will make you laugh.

As to the spice box that you would so like to hold in your hand, it is no simple object: it contains a message that helps separate the sacred from the profane, darkness from light, man from his anguish.

Above all I love the miniature drawings by my friend Mark. For me, they reflect his mystic quest. It is as if he were trying to render a visual and artistic form to the concept of *tsimtsum* of which the kabbalah speaks so eloquently. This small town, submerged in a white space and withdrawn into itself, seems to have shrunk as if under the pressure of history, as a way of defying death. It is empty; Jews are no longer there. Yet part of their prayers forever floats there.

Such is the power of this artist: he captures what death has forgotten to take.

—Elie Wiesel