

Alexandre Mitchell, speech @ EU Parliament, Members' Salon, September 30, 2025

Honorable Members of Parliament, Mr Kristoffer Storms, Mr Commissioner Varhelyi, Mr Rosenzweig from the Israel Mission to the EU, Ladies and Gentlemen and representatives of the EJA and EJCC,

It is a privilege to speak in this house of European democracy. I come before you as a painter, to share fragments of a long journey — the journey of the Jewish people through memory, loss, and renewal. —**My project** Cities of Lost Memory was born during the silence of the COVID lockdown, when conspiracy theories were rife, spreading across the digital world. I chose to respond not with polemics, but with images — stark black-and-white drawings, where memory emerges like an archaeological layer, fragile but undeniable. —**Today**, I wish to present 8 works, 6 directly linked to the Jewish people, and 2 others that broaden the scope to our shared human history.

The 1st, *Dreaming of Babel*, recalls both the Tower of Babel and the city of Venice — places where languages collided, ambition reached the skies, and where unity and confusion were intertwined.

The 2nd, *Emerging from the Temple's ashes*, evokes Jerusalem's destruction in the year 70. While most peoples in antiquity vanished after such devastation, the Jews endured, preserving their identity through faith, study, and memory rather than a physical sanctuary.

The 3rd, *West of Eden*, recalls the Jews of Iraq — a vast community extinguished in a few short months of forced exile in 1950. After a relentless antisemitic campaign, the Jews left their homes of Baghdad and towns all over Iraq. Having lived there 2500 years, long before Islam and Christianity, they left with nothing but a suitcase.

The 4th, *The Vanished*, turns to Greece. Before **WW2**, half the city of Thessaloniki was Jewish. Then came the Nazis. In 6 months, a community alive for nearly 2000 years was erased from existence. Even the cemetery was destroyed, its stones reused. It truly became a city of ghosts — and yet today, slowly, its Jewish presence is being remembered again.

The 5th, *Bring Him Home*, painted soon after October 7th, depicts not rage but absence: a teddy bear placing a prayer between the stones of the Wailing Wall, asking for the return of a stolen child.

The 6th, *Brothers*, portrays the reunion of the famous biblical brothers, Jacob and Esau — not in easy reconciliation, but in a fragile embrace, luminous despite deep scars. It speaks of rivalry, but also of the hope of peace.

—**And then two works** beyond Jewish history.

Brotherly Love portrays Venice and Constantinople — two poles of Christianity — whose supposed fraternity was shattered in the Fourth Crusade. It is a meditation on betrayal between cultures meant to be brethren.

The Fractured Mask, drawn in 2022, contrasts Stalin's well established brutality, with the war in Ukraine under Putin — two faces of the same violence, built on deception and destruction. These two paintings remind us that history's wounds are not only Jewish, but human wounds — and that memory, if neglected, repeats itself, again and again.

Together, these eight drawings are not monuments: they're invitations. They ask us to see Jewish life in Europe — in Thessaloniki, Venice or in Baghdad and Jerusalem — not only as a history of tragedy, but as centuries of contribution, creativity, and **resilience**.

As both an archaeologist and an artist, I believe memory must never be frozen in stone. It must remain alive, unsettling, and sometimes uncomfortable. But it is in that discomfort that truth emerges, and with it, the strength to resist hatred.

My drawings may be dark, but they're not sinister or despairing. They reveal what was covered, forgotten, or erased. And in doing so, they affirm a message essential to Europe itself: that even in loss, Jewish life has always endured, re-invented itself and with the help of others brought new light to the world.

Thank you.