Rivka Basman Ben-Hayim’s Eulogy for her husband, Mula Ben-Haim

What follows is the eulogy given at an exhibition in memory of Mula Ben-Hayim held at the Artists Union

of Israel 10 years after his death:

“Mula, an artist, eulogizes himself. Strangely, his self-eulogy is not all that sad, for how can colorfulness sadden? Perhaps only in the process of creation, while he is still alive, does the artist feel an abysmal sadness, an overwhelming powerlessness facing the passage of time. And then, when every fiber of his soul is transformed into color, sadness vanishes and on the canvas what remains is the eternal longing for life.”

And shards of memory:

“Something happens in time. Pain becomes an entity, a foundation, something alive and primal, something absolute along which the seasons travel and change: autumns, winters, springs and summers. Each season lends expression to this same basic thing. In autumn pain, leaves die multi-colored; in winter, rain, too, cries; in spring cyclamens stroke the pain, and in summer pain seeks refuge from the heat. It is the uncompromising decree of life. Alone with the grace of pain it is now ten years since Mula’s death. More accurately, ten years since they buried him in kibbutz Ha-Ma’apil. And I, in the evening after the funeral, with the help of a very kind person named Yisrael, who worked in what was then the Museum of Print in Safed, I returned to our place, to Mula’s studio, to the coolness of Safed by myself. The trip took about three hours, from twilight into darkness, through wondrous vistas, on the same road Mula and I had traveled over twenty years, till we got there. How to return so alone through the silence to a house far away and high above the hills, to a house that breathed a life of creation so completely- all of it Mula’s breathing- a life of painting, and now all death.

I don’t understand how I survived that first night. Perhaps that’s how the first night in the grave passes. And then cryptic time, all-powerful and powerless, envelops you against your will, brings you morning, brings you autumn and spring with its stroke of cyclamens, and it is ten years that Mula is no longer here, yet he is here more and more. “

Rivka Basman Ben-Hayim, 2003