

The Daily Postcard: Zeev Engelmayer's Routine Acknowledgement of Our Hopes, Dreams and Losses



Mary Poppins in Gaza, Freeing the Hostages. Zeev Engelmayer. December 25th, 2023.

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After over one hundred days of war in Israel, I have fully settled into my emergency routine (*shigrat hirom* in Hebrew). Some parts of my emergency routine will be familiar to readers outside of Israel: the trill of the air raid application on my phone, the run to the bomb shelter, covering my ears in an attempt to muffle the *boom* of the Iron Dome as it collides with Hamas rockets, counting down

the ten required minutes before I can exit the shelter safely without fear of shrapnel falling on my head, and listening to Daniel Hagari speak in his slow, measured Hebrew about the events of the day. Other parts of my emergency routine may be less familiar: flinching at the rev of a motorbike, waking up at 6 AM and reading the names of soldiers killed in Gaza, and, equally meaningful but perhaps less immediately comprehensible to those reading this article, making sure I see Zeev Engelmayer's newest illustration in *The Daily Postcard* project.

Israeli illustrator Zeev Engelmayer began uploading near daily illustrations, titled *The Daily Postcard*, after the events of October 7th. He does so on his Instagram page, under his character name 'Shoshke': [@shoshke_engelmayer](https://www.instagram.com/shoshke_engelmayer). The illustrations, referred to as postcards, are actually quite a bit larger than the small missives and are closer in size to a piece of printer paper. They are completed with markers and rendered in a very simple, straightforward style. For the first two weeks of the project, Engelmayer worked only in black and white, until he suddenly exploded with colour on October 26th, with an image of Kibbutz Be'eri. His works have remained in full colour ever since. The images reflect a diversity of subject matter, featuring individuals and scenes from both imagination and reality, tied together by their connection to the war.

For me, *The Daily Postcard* project is not only a poignant illustration project, but also an essential daily acknowledgement of the reality we are facing in Israel. I hope that by drawing attention to Engelmayer's works, I can encourage readers to seek out his full portfolio of postcards, so that they too can appreciate and benefit from Engelmayer's visual nods to our hopes, dreams, and losses.



The Daily Postcard. Yoga Class with Carmel Gat in Captivity. January 4th, 2024.

While working on this project, Engelmayer has received requests to create works featuring specific subjects and people. An example of one such piece is *The Daily Postcard. Yoga Class with*

Carmel Gat in Captivity from January 4th. Engelmayer's accompanying caption explains that a friend of Carmel Gat heard from freed hostages that Carmel had taught them yoga and meditation whilst they were in captivity together. Carmel, a 39-year-old occupational therapist and yoga teacher, was abducted to Gaza from Kibbutz Be'eri. The friend requested that Engelmayer illustrate a postcard for Carmel. In the piece, Carmel is drawn in the centre, teaching her fellow hostages yoga, seemingly in a dark tunnel underground. A Hamas terrorist looks on disapprovingly. The speech bubble above Carmel's head reads, in Hebrew, "We will move to Lotus position".

Every day we learn more and more about the horrific realities facing the 136 people still held captive in Gaza. I have no doubt that, especially as a woman in captivity, Carmel is facing unthinkable horrors. I can understand her friend's request to see Carmel illustrated into a kinder moment, a lighter scene, born perhaps from a combination of hope and desperation to not have to be limited to one, unbearable reality. This image was eventually presented to Carmel's father by Engelmayer, who gave it to him on his birthday; a gift of hope for a better reality for his daughter, while acknowledging the intolerable circumstances she is currently enduring.



The Daily Postcard. If They Would Have Rescued the Three Hostages. December 18, 2023.

Often Engelmayer deals with some of the most painful trauma of the war by offering a visual alternative, or a rewriting, of the event. The postcard from December 18th, *The Daily Postcard. If They Would Have Rescued the Three Hostages*, is an example of this rewriting as coping method. The postcard features numerous smiling soldiers surrounding Alon Shamriz, Yotam Haim, and Samar Talalka, three hostages accidentally killed by the IDF after the hostages escaped Hamas captivity. In Engelmayer's version of the story, the hostages survive and are successfully rescued by the soldiers.

Engelmayer, ironically, offers us an escape from reality in the aftermath of the failed escape of the hostages. Such an image allows viewers a brief respite, a chance to exhale, which, after over one hundred days of war and tragedy, is not a moment unappreciated. It is possible to sit with this version of the story for a few minutes, to honour a wish for a different turn of events.



The Daily Postcard. The First Birthday of Kfir. January 18th, 2024.

One recurring topic in *The Daily Postcard* is the ongoing nightmare that is the fate of the Bibas family. Shiri and Yarden Bibas were taken captive together with their four-year-old son, Ariel, and their now one year old baby, Kfir. All four remain in unknown condition in the Gaza Strip. January 18th marked Kfir's first birthday, as depicted in *The Daily Postcard. The First Birthday of Kfir*. Engelmayer illustrates baby Kfir, complete with the Bibas family's signature ginger hair, sitting at a table full of birthday cake and treats. Three Hamas terrorists join him at the table. Part of Engelmayer's caption reads, "Is there no sadder birthday than this in the world?"

Engelmayer has created several illustrations of the Bibas family, including one depicting their 80th day in captivity, and another portraying them as a cluster of oranges. Within Israel and internationally, the Bibas family and their children have become iconic symbols of the hostage crisis. Engelmayer's image created on January 18th to mark Kfir Bibas' first birthday captures feelings of both hope and loss. We are compelled to celebrate Kfir's birthday, and want to give him cake and sweets, all the while grappling with a suffocating sense of loss as the days carry on without any news about him or his family. Despite the bright colours and smile on baby Kfir's face, however, the postcard is nevertheless stamped with a deep sense of sadness and profound grief.



The Daily Postcard. Another Day Which Begins with 'Cleared for Publication'. January 9th, 2024.

Many of Engelmayer's daily postcards are connected to the dreaded 'cleared for publication' announcements, which, ever since the start of the ground operation, have become more and more frequent. These messages appear when the IDF announces the deaths of soldiers and refer to the fact that the families have been notified – thus, the news of their deaths has been cleared for public publication. In Hebrew, the term for a fallen soldier, *chalel*, also means space or void. This is visibly represented in quite a few of Engelmayer's pieces, including *The Daily Postcard. Another Day Which Begins with 'Cleared for Publication'*. The artist depicts himself against a muted blue and grey city background, staring at four black circles in front of him. Each circle represents a soldier killed; a void created.

This is what loss feels like in Israel. It is in front of you, inescapable, and although sometimes abstract – in the sense that you may not have a direct personal connection to it – it is unrelenting in its seeping into every small moment of day-to-day life. From time to time, it really does feel like there are big spaces in front of me, all-consuming and unforgiving. Israel is too small, too tight-knit; it is impossible to escape acknowledging the constant loss.

For many viewers, *The Daily Postcard* has become a kind of alternative source of news in Israel, and, simultaneously, an alternative way to *cope* with the news in Israel. Commentators often express relief at the publishing of the daily new image or write that they have been waiting anxiously for it. I relate to these sentiments. As I write this, just yesterday, January 23rd, I had my own moment of needing to see Engelmayer's work. I had arrived to ulpan, and, whilst sitting waiting for the lesson to start, I read the news that twenty-one soldiers had been killed in a tragic incident in Gaza the day

before, making it the deadliest day of the war so far. Feeling overwhelmed, one of the thoughts that came to my mind was, "I want to see the postcard". The loss of so many felt too big, too much to deal with on my own. When the postcard was published, it struck just the right chord: a simple print design of twenty-one women kneeling before graves. One commentator wrote in Hebrew, "I'm trying to say something, but I have no voice, no words. So, I will look at the daily postcard through tears. Thank you Shoshke". I could not agree with her more.



The Daily Postcard. Cleared for Publication. January 23rd, 2024.

Viewers can view *The Daily Postcard* project here:
https://www.instagram.com/shoshke_engelmayer/