

About Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design

“See, I have singled out by name Bezalel son of Uri son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. I have endowed him with a divine spirit of skill, ability, and knowledge in every kind of craft”

-Exodus 31:2-3

From the dawn of the Jewish tradition, artistry is sacred and the artistic spirit is a reflection of the divine. For more than 100 years, the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design has been building on this ancient understanding of Israel’s artistic heritage and bringing it into the future. Through innovative research and the integration of cutting-edge technology, the students and faculty in Bezalel’s varied degree programs preserve traditional crafts and develop groundbreaking ways to expand Israel’s culture of art and design.

Biblical Inspiration for a National Future

In the book of Exodus, Bezalel is tasked with crafting the Tabernacle, singled out by God for his ability to create. The Talmud (Berakhot 55a) tells a story of Moses recognizing the wisdom of the gifted artist, saying that Bezalel understood his craft so well because “Perhaps you were *BeTzel El* (in God’s shadow)”.

Bezalel is the earliest artist recognized in the ancient texts, introduced at a moment of the Israelites’ transition to nationhood. He is the natural namesake for the institution established to revitalize the artistic heritage of the Jewish people and the State of Israel.

A School of Art for a Budding Society

Bezalel was the name chosen by Boris Schatz, who founded Bezalel Academy in 1906. A sculpture and painter, Schatz grew up in western Lithuania, immersed in a world of Jewish text and religious ritual. This background inspired much of his later artistic work but he found that for many artists, a Jewish background could find no comfortable expression in the European art world. In 1895, Schatz was invited to help found Bulgaria’s National Academy of Arts. In the following years, he would become active in the Zionist cause. With experience founding one national art school already, Schatz approached Theodore Herzl in 1905 and offered to establish the first Zionist art school in Jerusalem.

Schatz envisioned an institution that would bring together the artistic heritage of the Jews of Europe and the Jews of the Middle East. Classical styles would blend with Jewish imagery and modern art would meet traditional crafting techniques. The school would create new economic opportunities, educate incoming immigrants from around the world, and offer artistic culture to a new society built by the Zionist movement.

Growing Alongside the Modern State of Israel

Since 1906, the Bezalel School of Art and Design has grown and adapted to meet the ever-evolving character of the State of Israel. In its first years, the school had less than 100 students spanning all ages,

learning both trades and artistic skills. Today, the school has more than 400 faculty members and over 2,000 students studying toward bachelor's and master's degrees.

The student body represents every population in Israeli society: immigrants and native-born Israelis, secular and religious students (including a thriving Ultra-Orthodox satellite campus), Jews, Christians, and Muslims from East Jerusalem and all over Israel. This is in addition to exchange students from the most prestigious art and design schools around the world. Bezalel graduates can be found at the world's most renowned art exhibits, the largest technology companies, and the most popular entertainment studios.

An Art and Design Education for Today's World

Today, Bezalel offers a wide range of degree programs that combine fine art, traditional craft, and in-demand creative professions:

- Architecture
- Fashion and Jewelry Design
- Fine Art (BFA and MFA)
- Glass and Ceramic Design
- Visual and Material Culture
- Industrial Design (BA and MA)
- Photography
- Screen-Based Arts
- Urban Design (MA)
- Visual Communications (BA and MA)
- Policy and Theory of the Arts (MA)

Every degree program offered at Bezalel pushes beyond the techniques and methodologies of the department's particular medium. Whether a student is studying fine art or architecture, the Bezalel curriculum focuses on developing a creative mindset. In classroom courses and studio work, students learn about the place of art in the greater world and how to apply an artistic perspective wherever life takes them.

In accordance with Boris Schatz's original vision, a Bezalel education brings together old and new. As the guardian of Israel's artistic heritage, Bezalel has a responsibility to protect time-honored crafts and techniques, simultaneously broadening and strengthening them through integration with modern technologies and ideas.

At the Heart of Israel's Artistic Legacy

Bezalel's unique location in Jerusalem embodies the vision of a place where contrasting cultures, styles, and values can come together to create something new. Today, Bezalel is located on Mount Scopus in Jerusalem while a new campus is under construction in the heart of downtown Jerusalem. The state-of-the-art facility will be located just blocks from the historic Old City and Bezalel's original location.

This spot, encompassed by history, conflict, spirituality, and natural and man-made beauty, offers aspiring artists an unending source of inspiration. By letting these surroundings into their work, the next generation of artists and designers can truly perpetuate and advance Israel's cultural heritage.

Developing the Values of Israeli Art

An art education includes techniques, skills, and creative methodology, but is incomplete if it does not also transmit the values that must accompany artists as part of an evolving society.

Bezalel is a public institution and has an obligation to give back to the society that supports it. As artists, Bezalel's students and faculty have the ability to provide a unique contribution to the world around them. In both the commercial and non-profit sectors, artists and designers can and must be agents of cultural innovation and examples of creative citizenship.

This value is incorporated in every aspect of a Bezalel education, from volunteer programming to faculty leadership to the curriculum itself. By helping students realize their potential as contributors to their society, Bezalel continues its role as the custodian of Israel's artistic heritage.

Building on the Past, Preparing for the Future

Technological Innovation

Design thinking is at the forefront of today's technological revolution. Recognizing this new reality is particularly critical in Israel, which relies on its innovative high-tech sector. Bezalel has a responsibility to prepare its graduates for this growing trend. A contemporary art education must include the most cutting-edge artistic techniques while also teaching students to think about the new possibilities that technology offers. This allows the next generation of artists and designers to take an active role in Israel's economy as they safeguard the future of traditional crafts.

Research

As Israel's most prestigious artistic academic institution, Bezalel is leading the development of the art and design research field. Unlike the sciences, social sciences, or humanities, the art world does not have established research methodologies and practices. In recent years, every department in Bezalel has been pushing the boundaries of this new field, working to find creative, academic ways to explore art and design and to apply those new methodologies in a variety of areas.

Internationalization

As Bezalel continues to lead the Israeli art scene, it is also taking its place as a prestigious player on the international stage. Bezalel currently runs student exchange programs with nearly 200 schools around the world, with approximately 160 students participating per year. This is in addition to a growing number of partnerships and collaborative projects with the top art schools and academic institutions worldwide. Exchanging ideas and inspiration with the global art and design community improves the work of Bezalel's students and creates an ever-expanding audience for Israel's unique artistic heritage.