

International ART Experiences

Our AIDA Art Adventure

We landed in Tel Aviv on December 18th. Our arrival was just five days after the giant snowstorm that dropped tons of snow on parts of Israel. As our van ascended into Jerusalem, we began to see evidence of the storm. The streets were still covered in slush and people young and old, with and without boots, were trying to navigate over and around giant mountains of now black, snow. Thus began our Israel adventure. Thanks to AIDA the Association of Israel's Decorative Arts and Doug Anderson, the co-founder of AIDA, who put us in touch with Aviva Ben-Sira, Director of AIDA, our trip this time had a definite artsy accent. Our day with Aviva found us at two outstanding museums with wide ranging collections, The Tel Aviv Museum of Art and the Ha Eretz Museum, and included exciting visits to the studio and home of AIDA artist, Ayatal Serfaty and a trip to the Binyamin School for Ceramics.

We met up with Aviva at the Eretz Israel Museum and viewed some exciting and dramatic exhibits, including a wonderful presentation of art crafted from paper. Ben-Sira introduced us to Henrietta Eliezer Brunner, curator of the Glass Pavilion, as well as Jean Luc Olivier, curator at the Musee des Arts Decoratifs in Paris who was in town for a visit. We had previously met Olivier, since his museum, part of the Louvre, has been a long time subscriber to Glass Focus.

We hoped to visit the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, where many AIDA artists are schooled, but because of the winter holiday it was not possible.

AIDA, a unique art organization, was conceived to support and encourage Israeli artists. The organization began 13 years ago, initiated by Doug and Dale Anderson of Palm Beach and New York, and Charles and Andrea Bronfman of the Andrea & Charles Bronfman Philanthropies in New York. AIDA's mission is to foster the development of contemporary decorative artists from Israel by connecting them to an international audience of galleries, institutions, and collectors. AIDA funds and facilitates attendance at celebrated American facilities such as Pilchuck, Penland, Haystack, Watershed and Corning. Internationally renowned artists from the US are sent to Israel to conduct workshops and classes.

The Bronfmans and Andersons, studio glass collectors, visited Israel together in December 2001.

The quality and variety of craftsmanship they encountered delighted and astonished them.

In their first blaze of enthusiasm, they planned to bring a group of other collectors to Israel to introduce them to this yet uncharted artistic world.

But as the violence of the intifada, or uprising, intensified, that plan was abandoned. Andy Bronfman then sought the advice of Aviva Ben-Sira, who ran one of the best craft shops in Israel, on how to bring this work to the attention of American collectors, galleries and museum curators.

Anderson, a former member of the board of the American Craft Museum, met with Mark Lyman, president of SOFA, who agreed to arrange a booth for the Israeli artists at the Chicago show. "Since its inception, SOFA has been interested in providing wide public exposure for artistic statements from diverse cultures," Lyman says. "It was exciting how strongly the AIDA special exhibit at SOFA Chicago expressed the voice of artists from this very troubled region of the world."

To prepare, Ben-Sira gathered the portfolios of 100 Israeli artists, 50 went to a jury in the U.S. From the 50, 10 were chosen, among them, Lily Poran.

Poran, 57, lives in Galilee, a hilly region in the north of Israel. She says, through Ben-Sira's translation, that the sources of her inspiration stem from the region's archaeology, its ancient sites, the Bible and Galilee's landscape.

Her work is proof that the austerity of Israeli artists' lives cannot repress their creativity. A shoe with its sole lined with thorns seems especially symbolic. One has to ask, as the world watches in horror at the violence in that part of the world, how can anyone create in an environment rife with terrorism? For Poran, "her art is like a life raft for her," her husband translates.

AIDA's mission is to foster the development of contemporary decorative artists from Israel by connecting them to an international audience of galleries, institutions and collectors.

Since the organization's founding in 2003, AIDA has helped careers of a generation of artists from Israel. Underlying all of AIDA's activities is the goal of promoting a positive face of contemporary Israel not often seen. AIDA's programs include: connecting artists with galleries; exhibiting works at international art

fairs and significant craft fairs; providing scholarships, residencies and summer teaching + positions at prominent craft schools; supporting participation in conferences like NCECA and the GAS conference and finding venues for museum shows. These programs allow artists from Israel the opportunity to exchange ideas, techniques, and approaches to their work with a broad and diverse audience.

NOTE: For the very informative AIDA Art Guide www.aidaarts.org/artist-guide.php Your search can be limited by region, such as Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, etc

Aviva Ben-Sira (AIDA's Director) is a graduate of the ceramic department at Bezalel School of Art (Jerusalem), she worked as an interior designer, was director of the Eretz Israel Museum Shop for 16 years (retired 2 years ago). For the past 10 years, Ben-Sira has served as the Israeli director of AIDA. She introduced the Andersons and the Brofmans to Israeli artists working in clay, fiber, glass and, jewelry. Anderson adds, "Over the years, Aviva has spent time with many AIDA supporters who were in Israel and wanted to add an art & design component to their trip...something we've humorously dubbed "Tell Aviva Travel."

As part of our experience, Aviva had arranged a special tour for us to the studio and home of **AIDA artist, Ayala Serfaty**. As we entered her studio we were greeted by two assistants who were tediously bending and folding glass rods into magical and ethereal-looking objects with the help of a small flame. The work, known as Soma, is composed of lampworked layers of pastel-tinted transparent glass veins that create both depth and surface. The resulting organic-looking shapes with fragile cloud-like skeletons, is then sprayed with a liquid polymer which dries to a thin and silky web-like covering, softening and enhancing the appearance of the glass rods. The entire process was invented by Serafaty a decade ago.

To explore Serfaty's creations visit www.designboom.com/contemporary/insideviewisrael/aquacreations.html on u-tube www.youtube.com/watch?v=3gekRbptuPE and www.youtube.com/watch?v=jf1IP1m72Sk to see Serfaty creating her innovative designs.

A book entitled *Soma: The Beauty of the Moon through Clouds*, has been published. Ayalaserfaty.com

Ayala Serfaty, born in Tel Aviv 1962, studied fine art at the Bezalel Academy of Art in Jerusalem, then, in 1985, continued her studies at the Middlesex Polytechnic in England. When we entered her airy and large apartment, it was thrilling to see many of the Soma, suspended from ceilings and mounted on walls. They emitted a warm and cheerful glow. Some of her large-scaled, yet comfy-looking furniture pieces were almost nest-like in the shapes and soft welcoming textures of the fabric. Her early work was influenced by underwater plants and creatures. Today, she transforms nature into her handmade furniture and lighting fixtures. In 1993 Ayala founded Aqua Creations with husband Albi Serfaty, and remains the sole designer of the company.

The couple are now mainly concentrating on lighting. Their work has included interiors, site specific lighting and a variety of lamps. The sculpted lamps are made of treated silk, which is hand dyed in India, and then laid on a metal structure.

Breaking news: The Corning Museum of Glass has commissioned Serfaty for a large SOMA light sculpture.

Our next stop was the **Benyamini Contemporary Ceramics Center** located in south Tel Aviv, an area of workshops and light industry, that in recent years is attracting artists' studios and art galleries. When AIDA brings ceramists, such as Tony Marsh, Akio Takamori, Tip Toland to Israel they do demonstrations/workshops at Binyamini. The entire ceramics community of Israel is touched by AIDA with these workshops and also by the AIDA program that brings three ceramists from the United States to Israel to participate in a one week ceramics retreat with the community. The center promotes ceramic art and design in a vibrant atmosphere of creativity for professional artists as well as the general public. "Through the on-going activities the center wishes to create a dialogue between the various aspects of ceramics and extend its scope in the broad spectrum of material culture," says Marcel, director of the center.

The facility includes: School for Ceramic Art: workshops in throwing, design and sculpture for adults, youth and children; Galleries: changing exhibitions, gallery talks and guided visits; Reference Library, special events and more courses. www.benyaminiceramics.org/en/

Issachar and Yehudit Benyamini lived a modest and unassuming life. They were involved in the very be-

gining of the establishment of the State of Israel. Issachar (1917 – 1990) worked in building and Yehudit (1928 – 1999) was a nurse. After a work injury, Issachar decided to dedicate his life to working with clay. The ceramics studio was a large part of the Benyamini home in Afeka, Tel Aviv. After work at the Zamenhoff clinic, Yehudit would join Issachar in the studio where they would work side by side.

The Benyamini's collaborated and shared their aesthetic spirit and talents, also teaching ceramics in the studio. They believed that the way one performs the least important task is a reflection of oneself. This is a legacy we will preserve and promote at the Benyamini Center.

The atmosphere of culture, creativity and labour in their home, their determination and commitment to their work and their students, created not only a place to study art and ceramics, but a place to learn about life. The Benyamini home and studio was always open to the community.

In 1990 Issachar and Yehudit traveled to Egypt, to visit the ancient monuments. Their bus was attacked by terrorists, killing 9 of the passengers, Issachar was one of them. Nine years later Yehudit passed away.

It was Yehudit's will that their home and studio be used to establish an art center. Their generous contribution facilitated the purchase of this property and its establishment as a ceramic center. www.benyaminiceramics.org/en/ to see a video. Even though the video is narrated in Hebrew, the wonderful visuals give the viewer insight into the Benyamini school.

Tel Aviv Museum of Art

The Tel Aviv Museum of Art was established in 1932 in a building that was the home of Tel Aviv's first mayor, Meir Dizengoff. The Helena Rubinstein Pavilion for Contemporary Art opened in 1959. The museum moved to its current location on King Saul Avenue in 1971. Another wing was added in 1999 and the Lola Beer Ebner Sculpture Garden was established.

The museum houses a comprehensive collection of classical and contemporary art, especially Israeli art, a sculpture garden and a youth wing.

In 1989, the American pop artist Roy Lichtenstein created a giant two-panel mural especially for the Tel Aviv Museum of Art. It hangs in the entrance foyer.

The Peggy Guggenheim Collection, donated in 1950, includes 36 works by Abstract and Surrealist artists. Time prevented us from seeing everything in the vast collection, but what we did see was eye-popping.

Highlights included, Joana Vasconcelos, (b. 1971) one of Portugal's leading artists.

She uses a variety of materials, industrial and handmade, (textiles, plastic, ceramics) and found objects to create grandiose site-specific works, like the one on display, a vibrantly colored, giant serpent-like creature that winds its way through the museum's vast atrium.

The artist conceived Lusitana within a dialogue of the almost 90 foot-high twisted atrium in the museum's Herta and Paul Amir Building, which refracts natural light into the building's various levels.

Also, Jeff Wall, (b.1946) His work, *Visibility*, utilizes ultra-oversized photography in both near documentary and cinematographic style, leaving the viewer to ponder and invent his or her own scenario.

The **Eretz Israel Museum** is a historical and archeological museum in the Ramat Aviv neighborhood of Tel Aviv. Each pavilion on the grounds is dedicated to a different subject: glassware, ceramics, coins, copper and more. The museum also has a planetarium. It was first founded as the Haaretz Museum in 1958 in the northern part of Tel Aviv, alongside Tell Qasile, where archeological excavation began ten years earlier. Israel Rokach, Tel Aviv's mayor between 1936 and 1953, opened his talk "On the opening of Haaretz Museum" with the words, "In a few days the first pavilion of Haaretz Museum will be inaugurated in the northern part of Tel Aviv. This pavilion, the first of many, will house the glass collection of Dr. Walter Moses (who died in 1955), who bequeathed his archeological collection evaluated at over a million dollars and his extensive art and archeological library to the Tel Aviv Municipality on condition that it builds a museum which will exhibit his collection."

Dr. Walter Moses, who immigrated to Palestine from Germany in 1926, was an industrialist who was totally devoted to his glass and antiquities collection, which was housed in his apartment on Bograshov Street in Tel Aviv. Moses expanded his collection by buying items in Israel and abroad, regarding it as the docu-

mentation of the history of Eretz Israel culture, which, in addition to the Jews, included the daily lives and artistic work of other peoples - the Phoenicians, Canaanites, Romans, Nabataeans, Christians and Arabs. Moses regarded the country's multiculturalism as the core of its unique history and as the basis for building its culture and future. Israel Rokach describes the collection: " In his spacious apartment on Bograshov Street he virtually began to create his museum... when you enter the apartment you will find near the door several sarcophaguses, statues, and heads of Roman notables... in the last room, around the wall... he set up his glass collection, and it was most beautiful and magnificent."

The many-faceted Glass Pavilion is divided into three sections, representing three eras in the history of glass production: pre-blown glass (Late Bronze Age to Hellenistic period—15th-1st centuries BCE), blown glass of the Roman and Byzantine periods (1st-7th centuries CE); and blown glass of the Islamic period (7th-15th centuries CE).

We were primarily excited to see this area of the museum, where ancient glass is in the spotlight. In addition to the wonderful and varied examples of glass from various civilizations, there was a small representation of contemporary work, including the Autumn Crown piece created in 2007 by Zoya Lozinsky, made from cut glass and wire.

The many facets of Jewish life find expression in the rich array of items used in religious rituals. The finest examples of Judaica that developed in the country, beginning in late 19th century until the 1960s, is now on display in a new permanent exhibition.

As you explore the museum site, its unique character becomes apparent. The numerous pavilions spread over the Museum's vast grounds form a Museum Park. At the center of the park is an ancient archaeological site, where excavations are still ongoing. www.erezmuseum.org.il/e/

NOTE: If you are traveling to Israel and have an interest in engaging with the arts community, email doug@d2anderson.com. I'd be glad to introduce you to Aviva.

Aviva has put together a wonderful group of artist/guides who are available to spend as much time as you would like exploring their communities.

To make a tax-deductible gift, please send your check to:

The Association of Israel's Decorative Arts, c/o Dale & Doug Anderson
100 Worth Avenue, Apartment 713, Palm Beach, Florida 33480

Article by Beverly M. Copeland

Sources: World Wide Web; Doug Anderson; Aviva Ben-Sira.

AIDA The Association of Israel's Decorative Arts

AIDA's mission is to foster the development of contemporary decorative artists from Israel by connecting them to an international audience of galleries, institutions, and collectors.

Since 2005, AIDA has been giving scholarships to artists and helping to place teachers from Israel at the great Summer Studio Craft Programs in the United States.

In 2011, AIDA formalized their relationships with the Studio at the Corning Museum of Glass, Haystack Mountain School, Penland School, Pilchuck Glass School and Watershed Center for Ceramics,

In 2012 AIDA provided 20 scholarships to artists to attend programs at these prestigious schools.

AIDA was founded on the premise of "giving the *unexpected the chance to happen*"

www.aidaarts.org