



The Power of Art

By Erika Vogel



The Association of Israel's Decorative Arts (AIDA)

Since its founding five years ago, AIDA has worked to celebrate Israel's vibrant creativity and to provide Israel's best artists with a global platform in the world of decorative arts. Each year AIDA seeks out new artists who represent the diversity of modern-day Israel. This year, in addition to the emerging talent seen in the work of the seven artists exhibiting at our SOFA CHICAGO 2007 booth, AIDA has partnered with the Parents Circle - Families Forum to present the work of 135 talented Israeli and Palestinian artists in *Offering Reconciliation*.

Picture this: May 2006, 40 art collectors (including SOFA founders Mark Lyman and Anne Meszko) on a ten-day bus journey across Israel, experiencing the country's art, culture, and politics topped off with plenty of shopping and a few desert vistas.

The trip was the dream of AIDA's late co-founder Andy Bronfman, who had envisioned leading a group of art collectors to Israel to give them a sense of the country's artistic talent. Sadly, Andy died tragically a few months before the trip. Despite her absence, Andy's spirit was felt every step of the journey. The trip was perfectly scripted, every minute of every day was thought out and planned, just as Andy would have done. But, as is so often the case, it was a combination of spontaneity and serendipity that brought us to where we are today.

One particular morning, Rivka Saker, Director of Sotheby's in Israel and an AIDA board member, suggested we do the unthinkable: cancel our morning destination and change the day's itinerary to visit an exhibit in Ramat Gan. The day's schedule was changed and we went uncertain of what to expect.

In spite of, or perhaps because of our lack of expectation we were amazed by the display. From the moment we entered the exhibit cameras flashed. The exhibit's 135 bowls were on view in a small room with white-washed walls; a single spotlight highlighted each bowl. We were told that each of the participating artists were given the same simple clay bowl, designed by Orna Tamir-Schestowits, and were asked to depict their interpretation of reconciliation.

Two members of the Parents Circle – Families Forum, Robi Damelin and Ali Abu Awwad, joined our group. Damelin is an Israeli whose son was killed by a Palestinian sniper, and Awwad is a Palestinian who served time in prison for political activities and who—while recovering from a gun shot wound inflicted by an Israeli—learned that his brother had been killed by an Israeli soldier.

Damelin and Awwad walked our group through the exhibit, recounting their personal tales of loss and their journeys toward reconciliation, and sharing stories of some of the bowls. One story in particular stood out: Palestinian Osama Zatar and his Israeli wife were unable to settle in Palestine or Israel and were forced to move to Europe to live together. The inscription on his piece—an olive tree created out of barbed wire—reads in Arabic and Hebrew, "Better to water the tree with water than blood."

This exhibition is dedicated to the memory of AIDA co-founder Andy Bronfman, whose dream it was to take this journey and who believed in the power of art.

After initial moments of reflection, the energy in our group ignited. Exhibition catalogues flew off the shelves, Mark Lyman began discussing how to bring the exhibit to SOFA, and without prompting, members of our group made donations to the Parents Circle – Families Forum. For our group, the power of *Offering Reconciliation* stemmed from its unique ability to provide an alternative vantage point to discuss reconciliation and to create social change. We were so struck by the exhibit's message that before leaving the museum, it was decided AIDA would work with the Parents Circle – Families Forum to transport this exhibit overseas.

For the past year the show has been on tour in the U.S. and has successfully brought together Jewish and Muslim groups across the country. It premiered at Brandeis University, Waltham, MA; and continued to the World Bank, Washington, DC; the Bellevue Art Museum, Bellevue, WA; the United Nations, New York; the Pomegranate Gallery, New York; with its finale at SOFA CHICAGO. At SOFA, the individual bowls are to be auctioned off to raise funds to support the Parents Circle – Families Forum's educational programs.

AIDA is proud to partner with the Parents Circle – Families Forum to present this message of reconciliation in the U.S. and especially at SOFA. With your help we can continue to remind the world that there is more to Israelis and Palestinians than what we see on the nightly news: There are creative people producing wonderful objects; there are individuals and groups seeking to reach out to one another.

With our tale in mind, I hope you will take a moment to absorb the powerful message of *Offering Reconciliation*.

Erika Vogel is the director of the Association of Israel's Decorative Arts.

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A live auction of vessels in the *Offering Reconciliation* exhibit will be held at SOFA CHICAGO on Friday evening November 2nd, with pre-bidding on-line beginning in September; all proceeds will support PCFF programs in Israeli and Palestinian communities. For details, visit www.sofaexpo.com, www.theparentscircle.org or www.AIDAarts.org.

For further information on AIDA please visit www.AIDAarts.org; for further information on the Parents Circle – Families Forum please visit www.theparentscircle.org.



Artist list left to right:

Suleiman Mansour

Nelly Agassi

Jim Hollander/Sharon Shakedander

Dani Karavan

Assi Meshullam

Micha Kirshner

Mohammad Kalash

Osama Zatar

Phillippe Boulakia

Menashe Kadishman

Aliza Olmert

Salam M. Diab

Ofra and Narin Zimbalista

