



AIDAshed: Expanding Community

Above: Givat Haviva Art Center. Exterior view showing sculpture and kiln yard.

Below: Meals included delicious fresh vegetables and fruits grown in Israel. Salads, fresh breads, meats and vegetarian options were abundant.

THEY ALL HAD LINKS TO BEER SHEVA. IT BECAME the joke within our new community of artists. And we too, new visitors to Israel, a country no larger than New Jersey, would travel through the centre of Israel on our return from Masada. Many of the Israeli artists had shown in exhibitions together but few had worked in a studio side by side. Israel is a magnificent country with a diverse population. If you are Israeli, it is likely you know someone from a town who is a friend of a friend or family relation. Many have children, sons and daughters serving in the army. It is a special place for all religions; a centre of culture, a source of political question. Linda Sormin, Molly Hatch and I were visitors who became a part of a community of Israeli artists during July 2012 at what is known as AIDAshed.

Nan Smith relates her experience in an Israeli residency

Inspired by the Watershed residency model, AIDAshed, is an international ceramics residency in Israel, introduced in 2010, by the Association of Israel's Decorative Arts. AIDA, founded in 2003 has made its mission "to foster the development of contemporary decorative artists from Israel by connecting them to an international audience of galleries, institutions and collectors". The esteemed Board of Directors is excited about AIDAshed which has just completed its second year of programming.

AIDAshed is hosted by the Givat Haviva Institute's Art Center, a primary and well equipped facility for ceramics located an hour north of Tel Aviv. Givat Haviva was awarded the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education in 2001 for its long-standing work in promoting Jewish-Arab dialogue and reconciliation. When invited to be one of three international artists I was excited by the philosophy of the centre. For me, the idea of cultural education inspired the concept for my residency sculpture.

The ceramics artists who were selected by the boards of AIDA and



Watershed, co-sponsors, for the two week AIDAshed experience were both international and multi-generational. The 15 Israeli artists reflected those who were born in Israel and those who emigrated from European and South American countries. Of this group, five were recent BFA graduates from the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design and Tel Hai College. These budding artists were both residents and staff workers, thereby receiving partial funding according to the Watershed model. The North American artists invited; Hatch and I hail from The US and Sormin is living and teaching in Canada. I was aware that I was going to the cultural nucleus for all religions and antiquity and I knew Israel and the Middle East as a political hotbed. I wondered how art might reflect a life where the hostility of war was ever present.

My first glimpse of Israeli contemporary ceramics was at NCECA in the mid-1990s through an exhibition titled *Ceramics Israel*. Through my AIDAshed experience, I became fully aware that the ceramics artists from Israel have continued to share their vessels and sculptures internationally through NCECA and other exhibitions, travel and residencies. AIDAshed is a recent partnership held by Watershed and AIDA to bring North American artists to Israel. AIDA also regularly co-sponsors Israeli artists to Watershed as residents. There are annual ceramics symposia hosted by Tel Hai College that bring American and English artists to present ceramics workshops in Israel. Currently, Aviva Bensira, AIDA Director, who has done much to create a 'bridge' across continents, is working on future interchanges with schools in the US. The Benyamini Center for Ceramic Arts, run by Marcelle Klein opened this year in Tel Aviv. The Benyamini, is a centre devoted to ceramics education where classes are taught, lectures and exhibitions hosted. The Association of Israel's Decorative Arts and The Ceramics Artists Association of Israel are active groups supporting Israeli ceramics. It seems a time of critical mass for Israeli ceramics and its expanding international outreach.

Working in the studio alongside my new Israeli friends allowed me to directly experience their dedication, work ethic and a diversity of art expression through clay. Our interchanges revealed that sustaining a career in ceramics in Israel is not easy. Most ceramics artists support their studio practice by teaching private classes within their own studios. In addition, the Israeli artists have formed cooperative galleries so that they can sell their work. The art scene in Israel is still a bit fractured in that museums still do not exhibit ceramic art alongside of other media art. There are few grants, no graduate art programs in ceramics and ceramic art residencies and symposia are relatively new.

The spirit in the Givat Haviva studio was one of great sharing. Working throughout the days and late into the nights we had joyful conversations in studio and around meals. Arranged outings fostered a special informal environment where wonderful interchanges occurred. Art ideas were shared during evening lectures. I felt a new community was formed through frank discussions that began with art and went far beyond it, into life, politics and social values.

All experimentation during the session was openly shared. I brought some small rubber moulds which sparked interest and a mould-making demo using Smooth-On silicone rubber. Sormin made porcelain paperclay



Top: Etty Spindel (left) and Dori Zanger discuss the evolution of Dori's figure sculpture.

Centre: Ester Beck working. Her vessels are thrown and carved to maximise the gesture and expressive marks of her hands.

Above: Rani Gilat throws and alters a form that will be painted with soluble salts and fired to Cone 9.



Top: Linda Sormin with the three sculptures she coil built in open lattice form using a porcelain paper clay recipe. *Lehatsit – Ignite*; composed of a dove, a boat, a cave were glazed and electric fired to cone 6.
Centre: Michal Klasovsky works to develop a method of silkscreen printing underglaze colours onto leather hard clay.
Above: Hilda Merom. *Untitled*. Slab built stoneware, pit fired. 6 x 30 x 12 in. Photo by Rani Gilat.

using Rani Gilat's method. Ettie Spindel did naked raku, Michal Klasovsky worked on a new silkscreen print technique, Dori Zanger combined Chinese underglaze decals with her own underglaze painted patterns. Pit firing, porcelain high fire, reduction and low fire were accomplished in the studio kilns. The Israeli-mixed clays were unique, beautiful, varied in colour and their rocky texture. All supplies were abundant in the studio. Porcelains were brought in from Europe. Hatch and I fell in love with French Limoges.

Our work week ran Sunday through Thursday: we did not work on the Sabbath; Friday and Saturday. The Israeli artists returned to family. On the first Friday Hatch, Sormin and I presented artists' lectures in Tel Aviv at the Benyamini Art Center. Afterward we went out to explore the spirit of this historical place with our hosts. Artist or historian, the Israeli population seems to know much about the historic cultures that populated their homeland. Whether in the Arab section of Jerusalem, on the Palestinian border, atop the Mount of Olives or high above sea level at Masada we were offered background information plus an experiential step into the culture.

The evening artist lectures clearly revealed some common life priorities. Hilda Merom created works that speak of the essence of the earth, Gila Miller uses language and bible verse on form to convey cultural commentary, Michal Klasovsky creates performances to reflect the old and new of Israeli culture and Ester Beck's vessel oriented forms dance as she moves clay to mark a moment of time. Master potter/teacher Avner Singer, our gracious host, creates monumental vessels that carry decal images with cultural symbols and photos of contemporary Israel.

The in-studio projects included design based work where Hatch projected a French European painting she re-interpreted to create a shower curtain design. Sormin created her beautiful open lattice sculptures which, when fired, looked like lustre glass. I sculpted a large ceramic book on a plinth, as a symbol for education. Atop its blowing pages a stack of porcelain ballet shoes are carefully balanced. Gilat made a series of beautiful vessels that he brushed and fired with soluble salts. Martha Rieger's powerful thrown black vessels; included urns, teapots, and tea bowls accented and lined with gold. Rachel Menashe Dor, Ceramics MFA, Rhode Island School of Design, created a house-like structure and glass fossils. Dori Zanger had a colourful grouping of fantasy figure and animal sculptures that told stories about current life in Israel.

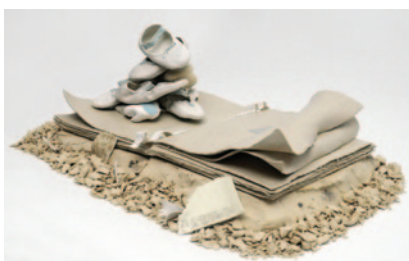
The residency session culminated with a show of the works at an open house. Sormin, Hatch and I had the pleasure to greet Hilary Olsin-Windecker, the American Cultural Attachee to Israel who was invited by Etti Amran, Director of the Givat Haviva Art Center. Aviva Bensira, brought arts writer and curator Suzanne Ramljak, American Federation of Arts and Susan Lewin, an independent curator and collector.

We all left a 'creative bubble' with an interactive community of new friends. The Israeli's were continuing to reach out; Rieger was to attend a Watershed session in August, Beck would be at the International Association of Ceramics (IAC) Conference in September, Shay Sirkin, a new BFA from Tel Hai College had just accepted a residency fellowship in



Switzerland and Noa Platt a recent BFA from Bezalel had an upcoming exhibition of the art work she created at AIDAshed.

Israeli ceramics artists are dedicated practitioners whose world view finds its home in community and family. They are people who highly value other people. Their art reflects a diverse and complex world. The work is sustained by curiosity, intellectual rigor and a search for skill and craft. I gained the understanding that a life in clay in Israel speaks about this special land. The ceramic art speaks about Israeli society; a homeland and a people with the will to survive and the desire to contribute as a culture.



Top left: Led by Hilda Merom the group plan the pit firing. Left to right are: Gila Miller Lapidot, Rani Gilat, Noa Platt, Michal Klasovsky, Hilda Merom.

Top centre: Molly Hatch's designs for custom teas and design work to create a specialized font. Hatch threw and decorated a series of small porcelain bowls using Limoges porcelain.

Top right: The ware after a cone 9 reduction firing. One of three outdoor kilns.

Above left: Martha Rieger pictured after she sets her work up for the AIDAshed Open House. The vessels shown were thrown from a black clay mixed in Israel and then will be accented with gold lustre.

Above right: Osnat Raichman (left) and Rache Menashe Dorr work to slab build Rachel's architectural design.

Left: Nan Smith. *Dance of Peace*. Glazed and unglazed porcelain, stoneware, electric fired. 12 x 30 x 18 in.

Photo by Avner Singer with Allen Chevront.

Below: The participating group.

Nan Smith's figure sculpture and installations have been recognised through national and international exhibitions, artist fellowships and articles in numerous ceramics journals. An overview on her sculpture and studio methods can be found in book chapters in *The Figure in Clay* and *World Famous Ceramic Artists Studios*. Smith is a Professor of Art, who teaches Ceramics for the School of Art + Art History at the University of Florida (www.nansmith.com). "About the Art Center at Givat Haviva" by Avner Singer. Givat Haviva was established in 1949 as a national education centre for the Kibbutz Federation. Over the years various relevant centres were opened according to the needs of the movement. Givat Haviva facilitates six key areas of activity: 1) language, 2) art & culture, 3) capacity building & empowerment, 4) education, 5) media & outreach and 6) research. The Art Center at Givat Haviva, opened in 1982 offering courses in the visual arts to the local population; specifically area Kibbutz members. Today, the Art Center collaborates with the current ideology of Givat Haviva by running the Gallery for Peace and organising projects that bring differing social communities together using art as a powerful medium to bridge common goals and foster understanding. The ceramics department was developed in this atmosphere and boasts a large, well stocked studio conducive to learning, creating and programming (<http://www.aidaarts.org/>) (<http://www.givathaviva.org.il/english/>). All photos by Avner Singer unless noted.

