

Brandeis Reporter

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Artists united in their grief

Bowls exhibition fosters reconciliation

Brandeis will be the first stop on a nationwide peace tour featuring Israeli and Palestinian artwork. The exhibition, titled "Offering Reconciliation," will showcase 135 ceramic bowls used by the artists to express their interpretation of the intrinsic values of reconciliation: coexistence, pain, loss, fracture and fusion.

"Offering Reconciliation" was commissioned by the Parents Circle-Families Forum, a grassroots organization of bereaved Israelis and Palestinians that promotes reconciliation as an alternative to hatred and revenge. Along with the Parents Circle, the U.S. exhibitions will be co-presented by the Association of Israel's Decorative Arts (AIDA), a nonprofit dedicated to exposing contemporary decorative artists from Israel to an international audience.

The Israeli and Palestinian painters, sculptors and photographers created one-of-a-kind pieces from identical ceramic bowls — a com-

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mon denominator for artistic depiction of the pain-filled, yet hopeful stories of the conflict. The fragility of the large bowl symbolizes the fragility of the relationship between Israelis and Palestinians.

The artists represented include Israeli sculptor Menashe Kadishman, Israeli abstract sculptor and environmental artist Dani Karavan, Israeli-born photographer/videographer Michal Rovner, Palestinian artist Jalal Kamel and Aliza Olmert, wife of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert.

Palestinian artist Osama Zatar sculpted a barbed wire olive tree that grows out of a painted rural landscape. The legs of his bowl are adorned with symbols of Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Zatar told the Jerusalem Post that he chose an olive tree "because it is something shared by us all, something that represents life whose roots are deeper than human roots, and which lives peacefully with the earth and gives its fruit to all."

"If we continue to water our trees with blood, what legacy will our children inherit?" he asked.

Former President Bill Clinton has lauded the Parents Circle: "The Parents Circle's work is praiseworthy. They unite hundreds of Israeli and Palestinian families who have lost loved ones as a result of the Arab Israeli conflict." [July 22, 2005]

The artists' bowls will eventually be auctioned to benefit the ongoing educational activities of the Parents Circle-Families Forum, which has an Israeli office in Ramat E'el and a Palestinian office in A-Ram. In 2006 alone, the group organized more than 1,000 dialogue meetings with Israeli and Palestinian high school children and youth movement members, as well as students and groups from abroad. The Forum also hosts reconciliation meetings for Israeli and Palestinian adults and study days with people who shape public opinion, including high-ranking army officers and influential people in the financial world.

The exhibit will be on display for the Brandeis community and the general public in the Rapaport Treasure Hall of Goldfarb Library from March 22 through April 1. Hundreds of children from area schools are scheduled to view the exhibit. The Parents Circle is also coordinating talks with

Parents Circle members Ali Abu Awwad, whose brother was shot and killed by an Israeli soldier at a checkpoint at the entrance to their village, and Robi Damelin, whose son David was killed by a Palestinian sniper while he was guarding a checkpoint near a settlement during his army reserve service. Both will speak at Brandeis about their experiences with loss and reconciliation and facilitate discussion groups.

Awwad and Damelin are featured prominently in "Encounter Point," a feature-length documentary by a Palestinian, Israeli, and North and South American team from Just Visions. The film will be shown on Monday, March 21 and Tuesday, March 22 at the Arlington Regent Theatre at 7 Medford St. in Arlington (781-646-4849). Damelin and Awwad will attend the March 21 screening and offer a question and answer session at the conclusion of the film.

On March 29, the award-winning documentary will be shown at Brandeis in the Wasserman Cinematheque (Sachar International Center). This screening is open to members of the Brandeis community only.

"Instead of looking for revenge, we choose to use our mutual loss to empathize with each other, and that's the message we spread," Damelin said after a screening of the film in Jerusalem last year. "We believe it's necessary for both sides to see each other as human to stop the cycle of violence."

"Offering Reconciliation" was first exhibited at the Museum of Israeli Art in Ramat Gan in May 2006 and drew an unprecedented 2,500 guests including ambassadors from around the world, politicians, prominent members of the international and Middle East community and media representatives.

From Brandeis, the exhibition will travel to the World Bank in Washington, D.C.; the Bellevue Art Museum near Seattle; the Pomegranate Gallery and the United Nations in New York City; and SOFA-Chicago. A full-color, trilingual catalogue with an introduction by curators Orna Tamir-Schestowitz and Daphna Zmora accompanies the exhibit.

A faculty committee, an interfaith chaplaincy and student groups at Brandeis are coordinating and hosting programs around the exhibition. For more information, visit the Web site for the Brandeis exhibition or contact the Office of the Provost at 781-736-2101.

