

When time stands still

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Surrounded by stopped clocks, philanthropist Charles Bronfman presented the second-ever Andrea M. Bronfman Prize for the Arts (otherwise known as the "Andy Prize") to Israeli timepiece designer Itay Noy in a ceremony Tuesday evening at the Eretz Israel Museum in Tel Aviv. The prize, established by Bronfman as a gift to his wife just prior to her untimely death, is meant to encourage innovation in the Israeli decorative arts, such as ceramics, textiles, glass and jewelry.

"Our goal is to elevate the status of Israeli decorative artists to an even higher degree," Bronfman told The Jerusalem Post prior to the ceremony. "We want to give them the inspiration to make their excellence even more excellent."

Noy's winning exhibit, "A Second Second" is made up of several installations, each of which deals with the dynamic nature of time and memory. In his installation "Second Time," Noy collected dozens of old stopped watches and grandfather clocks and photographed their faces, creating a record of their "time of death." Then he dismantled and repaired them, replacing their faces with the photographs. The effect created is that of looking back through time. In the installation, a video simultaneously shows two subtly different "days in the life" of a young student, one linear, another which bounces suddenly back and forward through time, serving as a sort of alternate reality to the first.

During her lifetime, Andrea Bronfman was a longtime supporter of Israeli crafts and decorative arts. Along with her husband and another couple, Dale and Doug Anderson, she founded the Association for Israel's Decorative Arts (AIDA), a group dedicated to bringing Israeli decorative art on an international audience. At first, Bronfman says, AIDA was intended to bring American artists to Israel using Israeli decorative arts as a hook. Then the second intifada happened.

"One night we were having dinner together in New York," Bronfman recalls, "and Andy turned to Dale Anderson, and said, "You know, they're not going to come. So why don't we bring Israeli artists here?"

So the Bronfmans arranged for AIDA to have a booth at the prestigious Sculptural Objects and Functional Art show in Chicago so that Americans could be exposed to Israeli art.

The move did several things. It allowed other artists to see how good Israeli artists were and gave them the opportunity to meet and mingle with them. "But mainly," Bronfman says, "Israelis got to see that they were as good as the best in the world. And because of the quality of their work, a lot of the [foreign] dealers picked up these people and brought them into their camps."

Through the Andy Prize, the Bronfmans hoped to do the same thing from within Israel. Thus the prize is less about money (NIS 50,000) than about putting promising Israeli artists on the world map. Aside from the cash award, Noy will also have the opportunity to display his work at the Eretz Israel Museum for four months. A catalogue of his creations will be sent to the hundred most prestigious art museums in the world. Bronfman will also buy one of Noy's timepieces to donate to the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

Noy is a fitting winner for a prize dedicated to Israeli innovation, says Tal Lancman, trend forecaster and curator of Noy's exhibit. His work defies easy definition, and this "open nature" marks it as quintessentially Israeli.

"His work has a quality of suggestion that invites people to project themselves and to be activated," Lancman says. "Maybe if you live elsewhere you can skip questions of meaning, and only think about it if you want to. But when you live in Israel there is no escape. You have to deal with it, to develop your own stance. It's reflected in every art and every craft that comes out of here."

For his part, Noy sees the prize as an important milestone in his career, and is happy that it will increase his exposure.

"The prize opens places for me that I didn't expect to see yet," Noy says. "I mean that first of all I am an artist-I do my work not just for myself but for the public. If hundreds or thousands of people will see the exhibition, I will be happy. My work is a way for me to express my feelings-it makes me happy that more people will see it."

"A Second Second" is currently on display at the Eretz Israel Museum in Tel Aviv and will continue to be exhibited through October 27.