

## The bowl is full

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Robi Damelin lost her son David to a Palestinian sniper's bullet as he stood guard at a checkpoint near a West Bank settlement. Ali Abu Awwad's brother was killed by an Israeli soldier at another checkpoint at the entrance to his village. Yet the two are traveling together around the United States to share their stories.



A Jewish and Arab man embrace in a photograph by Jim Hollander printed onto one of 135 "bowls of reconciliation," now on display at the Bellevue Arts Museum.

(Photo: photo: Ilan Amihai )

At a series of events at the Bellevue Arts Museum, Damelin and Abu Awwad are talking about their experiences and the chances they see for their peoples to find a way to live together. The pair are touring with "Offering Reconciliation," an exhibit of 135 bowls created by Israeli and Palestinian artists illustrating their personal visions of what reconciliation looks like.

Instead of harboring the resentment and anger that consumes so many people on both sides of the Green Line, Damelin and Abu Awwad have joined a group of Israelis and Palestinians who have chosen reconciliation over vengeance called Parents Circle - Bereaved Families Forum for Peace, Reconciliation and Tolerance.

Parents Circle is made up of people who have lost children to the violence that afflicts their lands. These parents have come together so they can help one another bear their grief and find a way to transform their anger, rather than to fuel the kind of daily violence that has been consuming the region for more than half a century. Parents Circle is one of the few organizations that has continued bringing together people living on both sides of the Green Line since the renewed violence of the last several years.

The art works are the product of a project begun by Families Forum, which provided identical blank ceramic dishes to the artists, sculptors and photographers who were asked to transform them into personal reflections on the healing process.

The result was “Offering Reconciliation,” an international art exhibit promoting Israeli-Palestinian peace, which is on a one-year tour of the United States. The exhibit was first shown in the Museum of Israeli Arts in the town of Ramat Gan, where it caught the attention of former World Bank President James Wolfensohn.

The original plan was to auction off the bowls at the end of that exhibition, but Wolfensohn contributed a substantial sum to send the bowls on an international tour. Bellevue is the only West Coast stop for the tour, which began at Brandeis University in Waltham, Mass. and will include stops at the World Bank headquarters, United Nations and the Pomegranate Gallery in New York, ending at the SOMA Exhibition in Chicago this November.

Sotheby's auction house will then hold the long-postponed auction, with the proceeds going to support educational projects of Family Circle in Israeli and Palestinian schools.

Support for the exhibit tour also came from the Association for Israeli Decorative Arts. Erika Vogel, AIDA's executive director, says Bellevue was selected as an exhibition site due to the efforts of two couples: Randall and Betty Rubinstein, and Norman and Elisabeth Sandler, all AIDA and BAM supporters. The two couples worked hard to convince museum director Michael Monroe and BAM to bring the exhibit to the Seattle area. Monroe says the museum decided to host the bowls, even though most museum shows are scheduled up to two years in advance.

Vogel says one of her favorite pieces was done jointly by Palestinian artist Hannan Abu Hussein and Israeli Ariane Litman Cohen. “Convergence” is made up of two bowls, connected and covered in cement. At the top is an opening and the vessel is filled with olive pits.

“It is not the most beautiful of pieces, but this lack of beauty and perfection brings with it a great deal of honesty,” she says. “The piece looks like you could either close it and keep all of the pits inside or open it much wider and the pits would spill all over the place.”

Several public events are planned for the first week of the show at the art museum (which will display the bowls through mid-August). Along with the exhibit, the museum will have a computer game called Peacemakers available to try out for free with the regular museum admission. Produced by Impact Games, Peacemakers allows people to take on the roles of either the Israeli prime minister or Palestinian president, with the goal of resolving the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Damelin and Abu Awwad will be on hand from Fri., June 8 through Tue., June 12 for a series of presentations and discussions. From 7-8:30 p.m. Friday evening they will give a talk in the museum auditorium, detailing their personal experiences and leading a tour of the exhibit.

- On June 9, Investing in People for Israeli-Palestinian Peace, a local organization of Jews, Christians and Muslims, will offer a guided tour of the exhibit from 1–2 p.m. hosted by the pair, followed by a conversation with representatives from the Parents Circle from 3–5 p.m.

IPIPP is sponsored by the Seattle Chapter of the American Jewish Committee and the Pacific Northwest Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. They have been meeting monthly for the last half-year with the goal of contributing to the struggle for a just peace by garnering financial support for organizations and programs in which Jews, Muslims and Christians work together for peace. A special admission price of \$5 is available to people who mention IPIPP at the door.

Then, at 5:30, the museum will screen an 85-minute feature documentary film, *Encounter Point*, that follows a former Israeli settler, a Palestinianex-prisoner, a bereaved Israeli mother, and a wounded Palestinian bereaved brother (Damelin and Abu Awwad) who risk their lives and public standing to promote a nonviolent end to the conflict.

Sunday, June 10, from 2:30- 4 p.m., the museum will present an interview with Damelin and Awwad hosted by Monroe of the Bellevue Arts Museum staff with a question-and-answer period.

- Tues., June 12 at 7 p.m.. the Bellevue Arts Museum with the Arab American Community Coalition, Brit Tzedek v'Shalom, Find Common Ground, JTNews, the Middle East Peace Camp for Children and Voices of Palestine are co-sponsoring "Building Hope Through Art and Dialogue," which will also feature Damelin and Awwad. The cost for that event is \$10 adults/\$5 students.
- Then, on Fri., June 22, from 7–8 p.m. Sarah Zale, a local poet, teacher, and public speaker on poetry and peace education, will give a PowerPoint presentation in the museum auditorium, combining her poetry with visuals. In November 2006 Zale traveled to Israel and Palestine with the Compassionate Listening Project. Her experience there resulted in a collection of poems, *Art of Folding*.

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