

Opposite:

Anat Gelbard

Handbag and clutch purse from the "Metal Scale" collection, 2017
Dyed cowhide, silver-plated brass
Handbag: 11½ x 11 x 4 in.;
Clutch purse: 11 x 7½ x 1¼ in.
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Dima Valerstein

Liat Ginzburg

Triumph, 2015
Silver, brass, Swarovski
crystal, found objects, resin
5½ x 5½ x 4¾ in.
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Guy Miller



HOW WE BUILT THIS

AIDA in Action

Working across countries and across cultures, AIDA fosters exchange for Israeli artists

BY DAVIRA S. TARAGIN

To some extent, the chain of events leading up to Israel's presence as the Guest Country in this year's Philadelphia Museum of Art Craft Show was typical of that of most of the Association of Israel's Decorative Arts (AIDA) projects.¹ First, Doug Anderson, AIDA's co-founder, was approached to determine feasibility. Director Aviva Ben Sira, headquartered in Israel, then approached artists whose work she has followed for years—including jewelers/metalsmiths Dana Hakim Bercovich, Nirit Dekel, Anat Gelbard, Liat Ginzburg, and Sara Shahak—to determine their availability. The artists then sent images of their works for consideration by a small jury of American curators and collectors. Then invitations to selected artists were extended, and AIDA raised the funds needed to provide booth space and hotel accommodations.

At this point, however, the similarities between this, AIDA's major effort for 2019, and its previous ventures ended.

Throughout the remainder of the planning and implementation phases, the twenty-four participating artists, half of them jewelers or metalsmiths, worked directly with show organizers to handle all arrangements, including shipping, installation, and sales. This shift in responsibility demonstrates the level of sophistication and professionalism now characteristic of Israeli artists, in part a testament to AIDA's success under Ben Sira's leadership.

AIDA was founded in 2003 by Charles and the late Andrea Bronfman and Dale and Doug Anderson after they observed firsthand Israel's declining crafts market and the isolation in which its artists worked because of Middle East politics. Initially AIDA provided both retail opportunities in US and UK galleries and craft shows, and funding for museum exhibitions of Israeli work. Its focus has grown. In addition to giving mature Israeli artists travel grants to advance their careers at American arts

institutions, AIDA organizes trips within Israel and the United States for Israeli and American arts professionals, respectively, in the hope of furthering international cooperation and collaboration.

Early on, AIDA arranged participation in such ongoing retail events as CraftBoston, in which some Israeli artists still participate. For this author, of all of AIDA's programs that address a combination of sales and education, its involvement with the contemporary jewelry exhibition/fundraiser *Bijoux*, held from 2012 to 2018 at West Palm Beach's Norton Museum of Art and scheduled in 2020 for that city's Armory Art Center, has had the most far-reaching effect on the artists themselves and on their contemporaries. Each year Ben Sira recommends six or seven jewelry artists, to whom AIDA then gives travel stipends. Artists develop close bonds with one another and with international colleagues. Strong friendships develop as their fellow

Sara Shahak

Sometimes Purple, 2019
Stainless steel, found objects, enamel,
glass paint, velvet flocking powder
5½ x 2 x 1½ in.
Courtesy of the artist and
Gioielli in Fermento, Italy
Photo: Shlomi Bernthal

Nirit Dekel

Dropping, 2018
Flameworked glass, 22k gold leaf, silver
Length 23% in.
Collection of Idee German
Photo: Shlomi Bernthal



Dana Hakim Bercovich

The Hanging Gardens—Winter, 2018
Stainless steel, powder-coated paint,
acrylic paint. Variable dimensions.
Courtesy of the artist
Photo: Tamuz Rachman
© Dana Hakim Bercovich

artists gain an understanding, beyond what they hear in the press, of life in Israel. In addition to sales, the Israelis receive valuable feedback from customers and curators. They learn about new techniques, materials, and exhibition opportunities, and return home with inspiration to mine and to share.

Considering the fact that Israel has no arts council, Anderson feels that AIDA is filling a significant void: “We never thought of what we do as being an arts council,” he noted. “But we definitely do look like one.”² Artists, writers, museum curators, art educators—all of whom have benefited from AIDA’s munificence—definitely concur. Renowned former gallery dealer, curatorial consultant, and educator Helen W. Drutt English recently wrote to Anderson: “I keep meeting people who are enriched by your support.”³ More countries would benefit from an organization like AIDA.

Formerly curator at the Detroit Institute of Arts and the Toledo Museum of Art, and director of exhibitions and programs at the Racine Art Museum, Davira S. Taragin is an independent curator serving as an advisor to AIDA since its inception.

AUTHOR’S NOTE: This essay is based on conversations with Doug Anderson on May 29 and June 2, 2019, and with Aviva Ben Sira on May 31, 2019.

¹ Israel first participated in this prestigious craft show in 2008. / ² Doug Anderson, conversation with the author, June 2, 2019. / ³ Helen W. Drutt English, e-mail to Doug Anderson, June 6, 2019.

