

AIDA's Gems – Israel's Artists

By Erika Vogel



A.

A.
Nirit Dekel
Necklace, 2009
borosilicate glass,
22k gold leaf, gold-filled wire

B.
Anat Gelbard
Earrings, 2008
22k gold, pink sapphires,
diamonds

C.
Anat Gelbard
Earrings, 2009
22k gold, precious and
semi precious stones

D.
Deganit Stern Schocken
Moving Ring, 2007
18k gold, amethyst



B.



C.



D.

AIDA's story is about discovering gems. It's the story of providing an international platform to incredible talent and creativity from a small country. It's the story of allowing artists to realize their dreams.

Over the years, AIDA has repeatedly told this story at SOFA CHICAGO by exhibiting Israel's contemporary treasures made of ceramic, glass, metal and fiber. Of the work exhibited, AIDA has found that visitors repeatedly come back seeking out its jewelry. Collectors are drawn to the craftsmanship, attention to detail and diversity of styles and materials of this wearable art form. For this reason, in 2009, AIDA's special exhibit at SOFA focuses on objects of beauty and body adornment, jewels of all shapes, sizes and materials.

Few art media represent the Israel of today better than jewelry. From the exquisitely hand-crafted style of Shay Lahover to the contemporary industrial work by Yael Herman, to the glass jewelry of Nirit Dekel, to the leather work of Avital Korsh, the diversity of style and material reflect the complicated mosaic that makes up today's Israel.

The history of contemporary Israeli jewelry predates the birth of Israel, going back to 1906 with the founding of the Bezalel School of Arts and Crafts in Jerusalem by Boris Schatz. Today, the school is known as the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design and continues to be one of Israel's leading art academies. The metalwork department was one of the first divisions established and the earliest students were comprised mainly of Yemenite artisans. In the early years, the Bezalel style could be characterized as a combination of Western methods with Oriental motifs and techniques. With the large wave of German-Jewish refugees in the 1930s, the style shifted towards Modernism. Combined with today's technologies and amorphous borders, the current style has become international, marked by a strong European influence.

In 1998, the Shenkar College of Engineering and Design in Ramat Gan opened their own Department of Jewelry Design. The department's embrace of cutting edge technology and an interdisciplinary approach to learning has had a significant impact on Israel's jewelry community, with many of Shenkar's graduates receiving international recognition for their achievements. In 1998, the first Israeli jewelry biennial was held at the Eretz Israel Museum; the next one of this ongoing program will be held in 2010. With many Israeli-trained jewelers traditionally choosing to market to the commercial jewelry or Judaica markets, the establishment of the biennial has encouraged more artists to produce one-of-a-kind art objects. As a result, Israel has seen a rise in jewelry exhibitions throughout the country, both in museums and top design galleries. As teachers at both Shenkar and Bezalel, many AIDA artists have played an active role in encouraging the next generation of Israeli jewelers to pursue artistic careers. AIDA is proud to encourage this dialogue and support this community.

Through a multi-faceted approach, AIDA has enabled Israel's decorative artists to present their work on the world stage. Within the Israeli jewelry community, the successes have shined brilliantly. Once known only to the local Israeli market, jewelers such as Anat Gelbard and Shay Lahover are now represented by galleries and expositions throughout the U.S. and Europe. As Shay remarked, "The entire experience has been amazing. Thanks to AIDA, I'm now working in some of the world's top jewelry galleries." Nirit Dekel, a sociologist by training and a former high tech expert, changed careers several years ago after seeing the exhibition, *Chilhuly In the Light of Jerusalem 2000*, in order to pursue her passion—glass jewelry. Since being discovered by AIDA, Nirit has exhibited in galleries and museum shops across the U.S. She recently returned from an AIDA-sponsored workshop at the Studio at the Corning Museum of Glass where she studied with Paul Stankard. As Nirit stated, "My relationship with AIDA has changed my life. I can't say thank you enough." Shay and Nirit are not alone; AIDA jewelers are currently represented by top galleries in the U.S., Israel, Europe and Asia and can be found at booths across SOFA CHICAGO.

In 2006 AIDA was a supporter of *Women's Tales*, an in-depth study of the work of four of Israel's leading contemporary jewelers: Bianca Eshel-Gershuni, Vered Kaminski, Esther Knobel, and Deganit Stern-Schocken. The exhibit opened at the Racine Art Museum and traveled to the Bellevue Arts Museum, Houston Center for Contemporary Craft and the Newark Museum, and will conclude its tour at The Israel Museum, Jerusalem in 2010. These four jewelers, well known throughout Israel and Europe, were newcomers to the U.S. art scene. As a result of this exhibit, these masters are now known designers in the U.S. and their work can be found in permanent museum collections and galleries across the country.

AIDA's Network

Every organization is only as good as its friends. AIDA and its artists have been fortunate to build a network of invaluable supporters who believe in the organization's mission. These supporters have come in many forms: architects, designers, event producers, gallery owners, curators, museum directors, individual and corporate donors and the list goes on and on. Without these cheerleaders, AIDA's artists would never have succeeded in the ways they have.

This year, AIDA is fortunate enough to not only recognize, but also partner with one of our supporters, Nancy Yaw, former owner of the Yaw Gallery of Birmingham, Michigan. Over the years

Nancy has recognized the talent of a number of AIDA's jewelry designers and has not only represented them, but has mentored them, seeking out galleries and other representatives for them. The Yaw Gallery embodied AIDA's vision of fostering Israel's artists, not only selling their work but also teaching the artists how to master their craft, as well as navigate the professional retail environment. Thanks to Nancy's mentoring, of the six AIDA artists represented by Yaw, all are now represented in galleries and museum shops throughout the U.S. including: Sabbia, de Novo, Aaron Faber Gallery, Morgan Contemporary Glass Gallery, the Museum of Art and Design, and the Corning Museum of Glass, among others.

AIDA was lucky enough to bring Nancy back to SOFA CHICAGO 2009 to co-present an exhibition of Israeli jewelers. Some of the jewelers represented are AIDA alumni while others are newcomers; all work in a range of materials and methods that reflect the diversity of contemporary Israel.

AIDA invites you to visit our booth and experience all our gems have to offer.



E.

E.
Shay Lahover
Rings, 2008
24k and 22k gold, precious
and semi precious stones

F.
Shay Lahover
Grape Earrings, 2008
22k gold, uniquely cut rhodolite,
diam

G.
Avital Coorsh
Origami Bracelet, 2009
leather

H.
Yael Herman
Ribbon Ring, 2008
18k gray gold, diamonds

Erika Vogel is the Director of the Association of Israel's Decorative Arts.

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F.



H.



G.