

# Israeli Jewelers at the Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition



Sarit Assaf, knitted bracelet, silver.

## BY MOSHE MIKANOVSKY

Now in its 49th year, the Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition (TOAE) is one of the largest, if not the largest, juried art festival featuring contemporary fine arts and crafts in Canada. The TOAE takes place at Nathan Phillips Square every July. This year, more than 500 selected artists will gather on July 9, 10 and 11 to showcase their contemporary artwork, in all media and styles.

Among them will be two Israeli artists who focus their artistic creativity and careers on the art of jewelry making. For Sarit Assaf, it will be her first time showing in Canada. In the case of Nirit Dekel, her TOAE success in 2008 made it an easy decision to join again.

I interviewed both Assaf and Dekel just before their trips to Toronto. Both were excited for this opportunity, and they shared their background, inspiration and hopes.

Sarit Assaf confessed that when growing up, she didn't have any hand in making art. It was only during her studies to become a special education teacher that she realized that field wasn't for her, and began looking for something different. After some trial and error, she enrolled in design courses at Omanit College in Jaffa. With encouragement from her teachers and some apprentice work with another jeweler, Sarit started working at the Eretz Israel Museum shop in Tel Aviv in management, where she works till today.

The store manager, Aviva Ben-Sira, pushed Sarit to become more professionally savvy with her work. But the breakthrough came about seven years ago, when AIDA, the Association of Israel's Decorative Arts, was created.

Charles Bronfman and his wife, the late Andrea Bronfman, along



Sarit Assaf, knitted rings, silver, gold-filled, coloured copper

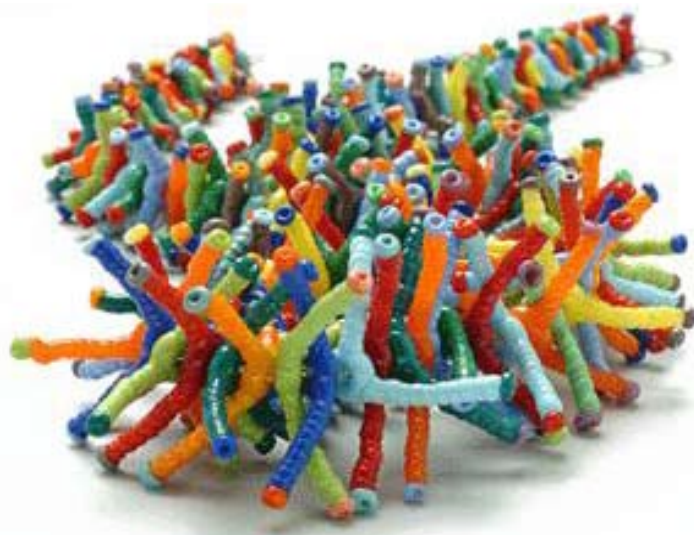
with their friends Doug and Dale Anderson, were so impressed with the level of artistry in Israel that they decided to start the association to support Israeli artists. The association helps artists find new venues, educational programs and scholarships in leading art schools abroad, and securing museum and gallery exhibitions.

Sarit was one of the first artists to

join, and since then has exhibited at the Philadelphia Craft Show, which led to representation at stores and galleries in the U.S. Beyond, the experience she gained through AIDA pushed her to become even more professional in terms of her designs, product quality and business endeavours. She is so grateful to AIDA for sponsoring her in this trip to the TOAE.

Sarit's creations are painstakingly created by metal thread knitting. Some of the metals are precious, like gold and silver, and some are not, but all retain their colours and contain no additional colours or stones. Sarit does play with the juxtaposition of the crocheted metal – with its complex perforated look – and the smooth metal that lies next to, or peeks from within, the knitted areas. Her works are not small, and they make an immediate impression. She describes her work as very fitting to her personally – a clean, organized, focused, subdued colour palette.

In contrast, Nirit Dekel's glass jewelry bursts with colour. Nirit is also a member of AIDA, and she



Nirit Dekel, Ballerinas necklace, glass

loves returning to Toronto and the TOAE. She had an amazing experience two years ago and can't wait to come again.

Nirit started her career with two degrees in social studies, then switched to working in the hi-tech industry. When she saw Dale Chihuly's 2000 art installation at the Tower of David in Jerusalem, she felt her wakeup call. She immediately started taking glass beading workshops and after quitting her hi-tech job, completely immersed herself in the work of glass beads making.

In the beginning her beads were "perfect" and "by the book" – round, colourful, dotted, a complete deviation from her personal style of black and grey outfits. In the years that followed, Nirit developed beads of different shapes, such as the Ballerinas, beads with their countless "legs" that sound like tiny bells, the Containers and Pomegranates, which are beads that are open at some sides. She also developed flat, two dimensional beads. Her latest work includes bead-less beads

ment. The work towards this type of show frees the functional thinking and allows creative freedom."

I also asked Nirit what influences her work as an Israeli. "I don't know if my pieces can be define as 'Israeli,' but I am sure that the place I am coming from, living in Tel Aviv's centre close to the Mediterranean, the weather and the Israeli sun, all influence in one way or another who I am, and thus influence my creations," she says. "I think that the colourfulness, boldness, humour and lack of ancient tradition in glass allow me to break many boundaries."

Appreciating Dekel's and Assaf's unique jewelry through pictures is one thing – seeing it in person is a whole different story. I hope everyone from our community will show their support and visit Sarit and Nirit this weekend. They will love to see some friendly faces! Below is the information on the show, opening times and where to find Sarit and Nirit.

Toronto Outdoor Art Exhibition (TOAE), July 9, 10 and 11, 2010,



Nirit Dekel, necklace with disk, container and pomegranate beads, glass

whose shape is created by heating the glass, yet do not have a pinhole for the thread to go through like beads usually do.

For Nirit too, AIDA's was invaluable in launching her international career. She participated in SOFA Chicago, the International Exposition of Sculpture Objects and Functional Art, the Philadelphia Craft Show, the Boston Craft Show, and currently sells at the Eretz Israel Museum in Tel Aviv. "The most important thing for me was the feeling that I joined a family, and like any family they take care of you and want you to succeed," she says. "Their support and encouragement throughout the way, my desire to improve in order to fit the North American standards, and the constructive criticism only pushed me forward. Each show that I have been in, with all the preparations involved, contributed to my development and professional advance-

Nathan Phillips Square. Friday and Saturday 10:30 a.m.-7:30 p.m. Sunday 10:30 a.m.-6:30 p.m. Rain or shine. Free admission. [www.torontooutdoorart.org](http://www.torontooutdoorart.org)

Sarit Assaf will be at booth 615 in the Yellow section. You can also contact her at [saritassaf@netvision.net.il](mailto:saritassaf@netvision.net.il)

Nirit Dekel will be at booth 531 in the Turquoise section. You can also contact her at [nirit\\_dekel@hotmail.com](mailto:nirit_dekel@hotmail.com) or through her website at [www.niritdekel.com](http://www.niritdekel.com).

AIDA, the Association of Israel's Decorative Arts, can be reached through their website at [www.aidaarts.org](http://www.aidaarts.org) CIC, the Canada-Israel Committee, is also sponsoring Dekel's and Assaf's visit. [www.cicweb.ca](http://www.cicweb.ca)

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