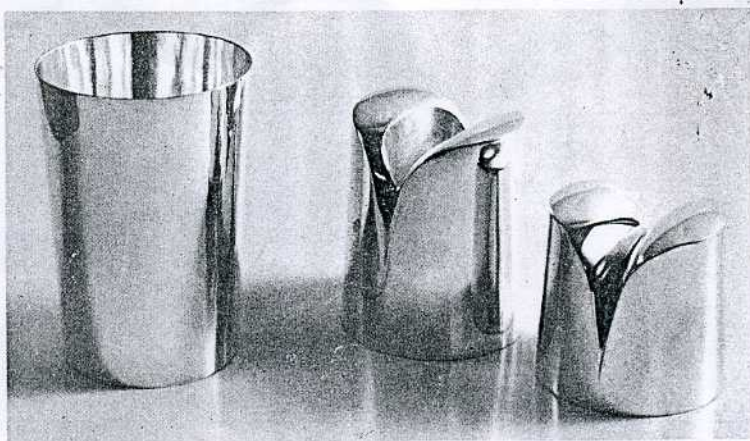


ARIE OFIR
Concepts Gallery, Carmel Valley, CA)

Irene Lagorio
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Arie Ofir, the contemporary Isra-
silversmith, flew in from Jerusalem
be on hand for the installation
of opening of his exhibition of
of silver Jewish ceremonial ob-
jects at Carmel's Concepts Gallery.

Ofir also managed to find an hour
in his crowded schedule to discuss
the forms and function of his hand-
crafted Judaica objects.

He first explained how a clearly
defined sculptural vision underlies
the design of all the Judaica objects
which creates for the observance of
additional or religious rituals in the
home or synagogue on special Jew-
ish holidays.

Consequently, Ofir expects the
viewer objects constituting his exhibit
to be appreciated as much for their
sculptural qualities as for their cere-
monial purpose.

RODS AND SPHERES—The
most communicant of this idea is the
1 (40 cm) Hanukkah lamp which
is fashioned with some slim silver
rods and small spheres. This lamp,
a candelabrum, is indeed an elegant
example of sculptured silver. More,
it maintains its sculptural identity
when viewed front, back or side.

"The Hanukkah lamp," the soft-spoken
Israeli silversmith and Bezalel Aca-
demy instructor explained, "is used
as part of the eight-day Hanukkah
holiday. The lamp always consists
of nine branches for nine candles.
Eight of the branches symbolize the
holiday's eight days. The ninth
branch stands for the 'shamash' or
servant.

"In the two Hanukkah lamps I
created for my Carmel exhibition,
the 'shamash' branch is taller than
the other eight branches. I did this
because the servant candle is lighted
first in the Hanukkah home cere-
mony. Then, its flame serves as a
light source for the other candles."
Ofir added that all observant Jewish
homes have such a lamp and that the
candle lighting ceremony dates to
ancient times.

Ofir's two Hanukkah lamps and
spectacular seder plate differ from
the other items of his exhibit in so
far as they lack the identification of sur-
face which appears, like a signature,
on his kiddush cups, Ethrog box, spice
container and candle holders.
In the case of the oval Ethrog

box, this signature suggests a natural
sort of thumb and forefinger imprint
on the box's sides. Ofir demonstrated
the validity of this design feature by
showing how the indentations provide
a logical hand-hold if the box were
being opened.

The Israeli silversmith (trained at
"Georg-Jensen" in Copenhagen from
1966 to 1968) explained further:
"The Ethrog box is used to hold a
large citron type of fruit for cere-
monies observed on the Sukkoth, a
holiday named for a place occupied
for a time during the Exodus of the
Israelites from Egypt."

BRILLIANT FINISH—Another
distinguishing feature of Ofir's "Juda-
ica" objects is the brilliant, mirror-
like finish which eliminates the need
for any attached decoration. "The
absence of decorative surface elements
in my work is very calculated. I hate
the word decorate and feel there must
be no more repeating (in contempo-
rary 'Judaica' design) of old styles
such as the 'baroque' and 'rococo'
which have so many non-Jewish
motifs."

Ofir next discussed another dis-
tinctive feature of his Judaica ob-
jects, one he terms "asymmetrical-
symmetrical." He meant the inden-
tations on his kiddush cups, which
are structured so their walls appear to
curve in two opposing directions.
Ofir also told how the word "kid-
dush" translates into "holy," hence
the kiddush cup is the one used on
the eve before the Sabbath (Sabbath)
to hold the wine blessed by the
father of a Jewish family before the
evening meal commences.

The stellar example of Ofir's
silversmithing, in his Concepts Gal-
ery exhibit, is the seder plate which
he created for ceremonial use during
the Pesach (Passover) holiday which
commemorates the escape of the
Jews from Egypt. In explaining the
function of the seder plate (which is
not so much a plate as a sculptured
entity rising on a tier topped with
an Elijah cup), Ofir first disassembled
his creation.

As he did so, he stated, "This dis-
assembling is a new approach in seder
plate design, one which can be con-
sidered my innovation." Then, while
he reassembled the seder plate, Ofir
told how the tier of little wood trays

functions as a support for the wafers
of unleavened matzo bread which are
eaten during Passover.

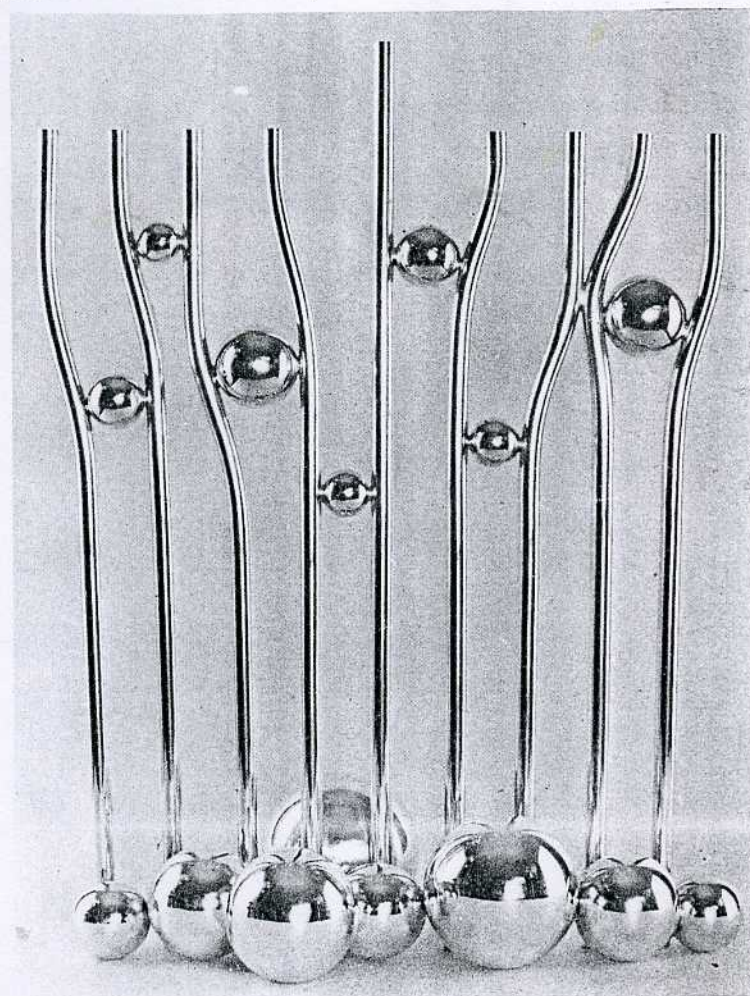
FUNCTIONAL ELEMENTS—Next,
on this tiered wood and silver struc-
ture, Ofir placed a tray of six silver
food cups for Passover's six symbolic
foods. At this stage, Ofir pointed to
a sequence of little silver balls, which
appear to be decorative elements on
his Seder plate, but actually function
to lock the tray of food cups on to
the tier of wood trays.

Finally Ofir settled the Elijah cup,
like a crown, on the top and center
of the total structure. This final move-
ment brought the previously disas-
sembled seder plate into focus as a refined
piece of functional silversmithing

built with a sculptured outlook. And
that sums up the nature of Arie Ofir's
sterling silver Judaica objects.

Arie Ofir, Haudalah Set, sterling
(above)

Arie Ofir, Hanukkah Lamp, sterling,
40 cm h.
—Photos by R. Milton



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