Israeli Silversmith's Work on View In Current Carmel Gallery Exhibition

By Irene Lagorio
Herald Art Critic

Arie Ofir, the contemporary Israeli silversmith, flew in from Jerusalem last week to be on hand for the installation and opening of his exhibition of sterling silver Jewish ceremonial objects at Carmel's Concepts Gallery.

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

He first explained how a clearly defined sculptural vision underlies the design of all the Judaica objects he creates for the observance of traditional or religious rituals in the home or synagogue on special Jewish holidays.

Consequently, Ofir expects the silver objects constituting his exhibit to be appreciated as much for their sculptural qualities as for their ceremonial purpose.

Rods and Spheres

The best communicant of this idea is the tall (40 cm) Hanukkah lamp which Ofir fashioned with some slim silver rods and small spheres.

This lamp, or candelabrum, is indeed an elegant example of sculptured silver. More, it maintains its sculptural identity when viewed front, back or side.

"A Hanukkah lamp," the soft-spoken Israeli silversmith and Bezalel Academy 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

Ofir's two Hanukkah lamps and spectacular seder plate differ from the other items of his exhibit in so far as they lack the indentation of surface which appears, like a signature, in 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 ceremonies observed on the Sukkoth, a holiday named after a place occupied for a time during the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt."

Brilliant Finish

Another distinguishing feature of Ofir's "Judaica" 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 contemporary 'Judaica' design) of old styles such as the 'baroque' and 'rococo' which have so many non-Jewish motifs."

Ofir next discussed another distinctive feature of his Judaica objects, one he terms "assymetrical-symmetrical." He

exhibit, is the seder plate which h created for cermonial use during th Pesach (Passover) holiday which com memorates the escape of the Jews fron Egypt.

In explaining the function of the sede plate (which is not so much a plate as sculptured entity rising on a tier toppe with an Elijah cup), Ofir first dis assembled his creation.

As he did so, he stated, "This dis assembling is a new approach in sede plate design, one which can be cor sidered my innovation."

Then, while he reassembled the sede plate, Ofir told how the tier of littl wood trays functions as a support for th wafers of unleavened matzo brea which are eaten during Passover.

Functional Elements

Next, on this tiered wood and silve structure, Ofir placed a tray of six silve food cups for Passover's six symbol foods. At this stage, Ofir pointed to sequence of little silver balls, whic appear to be decorative elements on h Seder plate, but actually function to loc the tray of food cups on to the wood trays.

Finally Ofir settled the Elijah cu like a crown, on the top and center of th total structure. This final moveme brought the previously disassembl seder plate into focus as a refined pie of functional silversmithing built with sculptured outlook. And that sums up th nature of Arie Ofir's sterling silv Judaica objects.

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