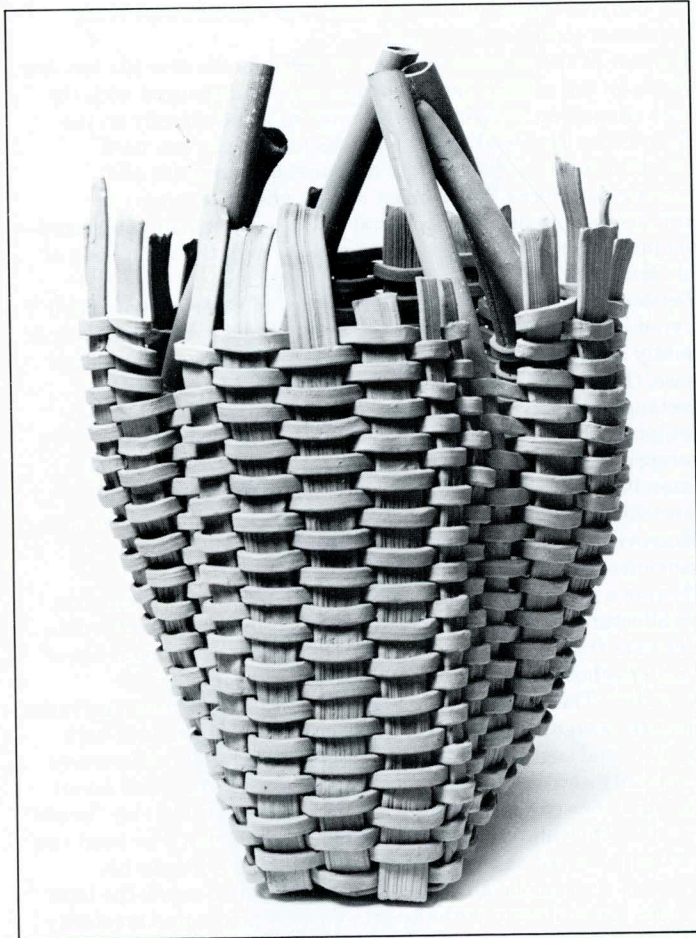




Rina Peleg

Anthony Bannon



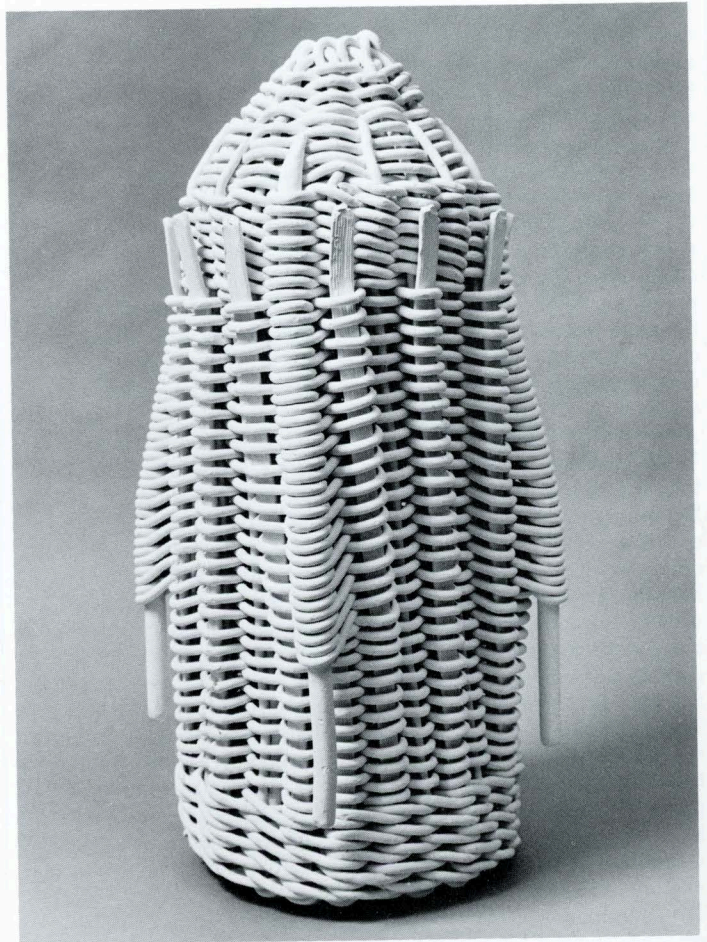
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Rina Peleg's clay sculpture weaves a loose tapestry of references from the rich cultures of the ancient Middle East to a fascination with contemporary urban architecture. Yet finally, and for all of the New York artist's declarations of influences and origins, her basket-shaped clay-woven works provide rich occasions for light and a compelling oscillation between the appearance of great mass and the illusion of fragile grass.

Peleg's work deserves out-of-doors installation, for it casts shadows, gives shade, creates changing lattices of light, blocks vision, and demands viewing from all sides. At Artpark, the 200-acre, New York State-supported park for the arts located several miles down river from Niagara Falls, Peleg created a six-by-three-by-one-and-one-half-foot, 1,200-pound sculpture on a hill overlooking the gorge of the Niagara River. She was selected for a three-week summer residency in the park.

Terms of artists' residencies at Artpark are that the artists challenge their medium, take a risk, try something out that hasn't been tried before. Peleg had never built a piece this big; building it outside and firing in a kiln built around it didn't make things any easier.

Woven with plaited coils of clay pulled from an extruder, this Artpark work is conceptually similar to her previous pieces, though heroically scaled. The theme she explores is the shape of a



flattened basket, woven as if with loose bands of straw that one is tempted to snap off or pull tight. Vertical support struts project beyond the weave, bending in various directions, as if to suggest an interrupted process. Those of her sculptures that do bend in the firing, whether in part or wholly along the face of a piece, infer the element of chance that finally rests at the root of what have now become the broad, expressive possibilities of clay.

Peleg's work suggests historical references, from vessel to adobe structure, while at the same time enriching that visual enterprise with the formality of abstracted concerns. Still, her work cannot avoid associations with primal, fecund imagery more connotatively endowed than even a basket or a dwelling. For sometimes a piece suggests the shape of an egg, at other times the gastrula, that open-ended, two-layered sac that appears in the early embryonic development of a complex organism.

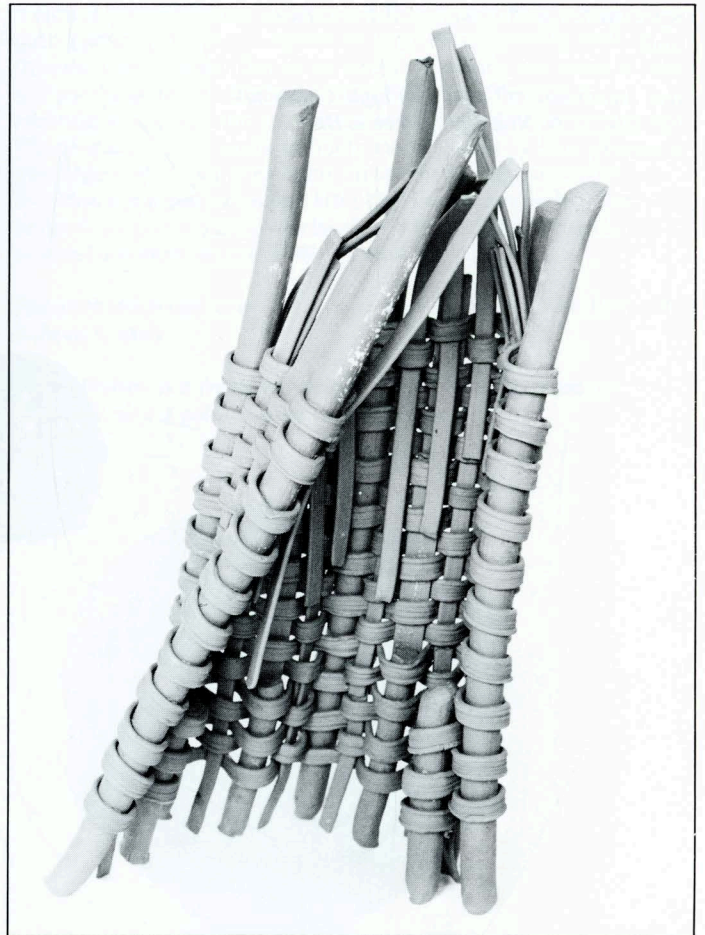
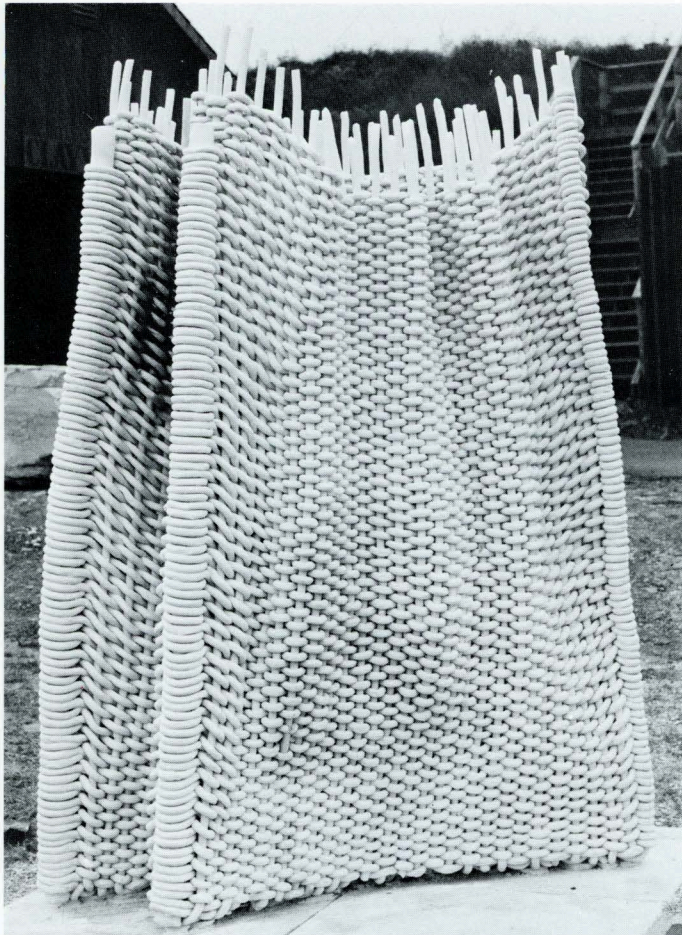
"I grew up in Israel on a kibbutz," the artist explains. "Almost everywhere one walked one practically stumbled over pottery pieces that are sometimes the only evidence of rich cultures that existed in the Middle East in the past. My first acquaintance with clay was made through these fragments." Although Peleg was graduated from the Bazalel Academy of Arts and Crafts in Jerusalem in 1960, her career did not blossom to its present concerns until her year of study at Alfred University in upstate

Untitled (1981), 32" (81.3 cm) high.

Untitled (1981), 30" (76.2 cm) high.

Untitled (1982), 72" (183 cm) high.

Untitled (1981), 26" (66 cm) high.



New York in 1980. "At Alfred I worked on handmade coiled-clay structures and a play of unconnected coils within these structures. This experience taught me that a coil may be used as rope or string is in weaving and plaiting. I decided to try to 'weave' using clay coils. Since these coils are the same coils used for traditional pinching, the transition to 'clay weaving' was simple—being one of concept and but a slight change in technique."

Peleg enjoys "the idea that fired clay is very stiff and strong, and it cannot move, but it *can* move before firing . . . it can bend like hair." And she fashions a piece into various thicknesses of coils, often up to three or four deep in places, and creates works of varying heights. Installed in a tasteful space, the work yields strong architectural values.

The Artpark residency presented the challenge of working outside, with the possibilities of rain, strong winds, heat, and humidity changing normal working patterns. "But I feel the clay is something you always can work out," explains Peleg. "It comes from outside, after all. . . . And coming back to nature is nice." Size, of course, was the other problem. "I wanted to do something here that I had never done before, and when you do . . . you always risk something," she says. "Will it fall? What will happen? I was curious to see if it would stand. Sometimes I couldn't fall asleep, thinking about how it must support itself." It supported

itself, and stood, and presented a new problem. Works produced at Artpark remain the property of the artist, who must either remove it or destroy it. Because of its size, lengthy travel would be difficult; Peleg now seeks a site for the work in western New York State.

Rina Peleg's ceramic sculpture was most recently on view at Nina Freudenheim Gallery, Buffalo, New York; Branch Gallery, Washington, D.C.; and Theo Portnoy Gallery, New York.

Anthony Bannon is the art critic for The Buffalo Evening News. His most recent book is The Taking of Niagara: A History of the Falls in Photography.

