

SHELTER

Rina Peleg's career as a ceramicist is founded on personal values and life experiences that have informed each phase of her artistic development. Born and raised on a kibbutz in Israel, Peleg has an innate appreciation of history and the sanctity of the earth. Her early exposure to ancient Middle Eastern cultures, Bedouin communities, and her memories of pottery shards that littered her daily walks in the desert continue to inspire her and to provide her with a firm foundation for accepting and challenging the limitations of clay.

As a young woman, Peleg taught basketry during her high school years, and she received additional training at Bezalel Academy of Arts in Jerusalem. The connections she made between woven containers and clay vessels were seminal discoveries when she began to envision her life as an artist. "Working with clay became a way for me to make contact with the world outside the kibbutz, and ultimately, outside Israel", Peleg said. Having moved to New York City in 1971, she subsequently enrolled as a graduate student at Alfred University. There she began to extend the possibilities of the medium and made important contributions to the field of ceramics.

The 1970s was an epic period in the history of ceramic sculpture, dominated by masters such as Peter Voulkos, Stephen de Staebler, Jun Kaneko, and Betty Woodman who were exploring issues of function, scale, asymmetry and deconstruction. Peleg's international perspective allowed her to combine her knowledge of classical shapes, her reverence for antiquity and her interest in architectural structures with innovative techniques and an element of chance to create ambitious, large scale works. In her daring hands baskets became vessels, vessels became totems, and sculpture became environment.

At Alfred, Peleg experimented with a variety of Process Art techniques. Of singular importance was her use of the extruder, a tool that produces coils of clay that Peleg then wove into plaited basketry patterns. By weaving the strands of moist clay, Peleg extended surfaces and volumes to monumental size, sometimes building an outdoor kiln on site to accommodate works that were as much as eight feet high. These massive forms are at once imposing and fragile, alluding to function but in their impressive dimensions and strong architectural values they become abstracted, and achieve a beauty that is both formal and sensual.

In recent years, Peleg has continued to use the extruder, and to emphasize the role of the spectator. She has devised a modular woven clay tile that she assembles to create textured surfaces. When placed together on a flat support the tiles suggest the Japanese Tatami mats found in Zen Temples. While continuing to manipulate the glazed and unglazed woven tiles, Peleg has been exploring her ongoing interest in architecture, thus expanding the boundaries of discrete sculptural objects into the arena of environment. Using large sheets of metal cut in geometric shapes and positioned in various tenuous relationships, Peleg lays the woven clay tiles on the outer surfaces of the metal, creating a rich texture and intriguing allusion to tents, teepees, masabas and dogans.

For Peleg, the *Shelter* project has many meanings. It is a refuge, the locus for contemplation, a place of isolation or the site of community. *Shelter* functions like a personal retrospective, as it calls upon all the references of her earlier work and recombines them as a landscape for thought. The viewer is free to wander at will through this woven, walled microcosm, to move away from the industrial aesthetic and to retrieve something of our ageless communal memory. As Peleg states, "My works invite the viewer to discover the earth's nurturing abilities and to understand the land as the source of human power and spiritual energy".

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