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Ambassador Hosted "Journey With Me" Artist Ben-Haim



Walk: Ambassador Ischinger with the artist. German Embassy photo by Victor Holt

An outdoor sculpture exhibit, "Journey With Me," by prominent Israeli-American artist Zigi Ben-Haim, has graced the garden of the German Ambassador's Residence at 1800 Foxhall Road in Northwest Washington, DC, since November 2004. Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger and Mrs. Jutta Falke-Ischinger are pleased that the residence grounds have been the setting for the 13 pieces, which unfold their dramatic beauty and charm within the spacious, gently, rolling landscape. The human-scale abstract pieces captivate passers by and add splashes of color in the winter months to the Foxhall neighborhood.

The Ischingers hosted a private reception for artist Ben-Haim and his wife. "I am particularly proud that Zigi, one of the most prominent Israeli-American artists, agreed to have his works displayed here in 2005, when we are celebrating the 40th anniversary of diplomatic relations between Germany and Israel," Ambassador Ischinger said.

In Conversation:
German Embassy
photo by Victor Holt



A solo exhibition of the artist's work, entitled "Zigi Ben-Haim – 90 Days of Berlin," will be opening soon at the Stux Gallery, 530 W. 25th Street in New York.



Art: Zigi Ben-Haim and the Israeli Ambassador, Daniel Ayalon. German Embassy photo by Victor Holt

Over that past 25 years, Ben-Haim has used original and unorthodox materials in his New York studio to create pieces that explore the relationship between manmade and organic forms. His work uses durable construction materials and odd assortments of objects, such as acrylic urethane, wire mesh, copper and concrete. His sculptures encompass graceful arcs, protruding cylinders and abrupt branches that embody an intriguing sense of imbalance.

Reception:

Ambassador Ischinger (right), with the winner of Germany Info's Holiday Calendar contest, Alberto Menendez Hassel (left) and the artist Zigi Ben-Haim (center). German Embassy photo by Victor Holt



Born in Baghdad, Iraq, in 1945, Ben-Haim immigrated to Israel in 1951. After obtaining degrees from the Avni Institute in Tel Aviv and the California College of Arts and Crafts in San Francisco, Ben-Haim received an MA from JFK University in Ordina, California, in 1973 and an MFA from San Francisco State University in 1974. He came into prominence in the 1970s with his sculptural works of cast paper. He became known as an artist who experiments with unconventional materials and his works are in collections throughout the United States – including the permanent collection of The Guggenheim – Europe and Israel.

The special installation at the German Ambassador's Residence is organized by International Arts & Artists, Inc., of Washington, DC.

The garden is not open to the public, but the sculptures may be viewed from the public sidewalk along the property.



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The Week in Germany: Culture

March 4, 2005

Interview with Israeli artist Zigi Ben-Haim

The German Ambassador's residence in Washington, D.C. is currently hosting the outdoor installation of sculptures titled "Journey with Me" by Israeli artist Zigi Ben-Haim, known for his experimentation with unconventional construction materials and his exploration of different cultures.



Born in Baghdad, Iraq, in 1945, Ben-Haim immigrated to Israel in 1951. After obtaining degrees from the Avni Institute in Tel Aviv and the California College of Arts and Crafts in San Francisco, Ben-Haim received an MA from JFK University in Ordina, California, in 1973 and an MFA from San Francisco State University in 1974. He came into prominence in the 1970s with his sculptural works of cast paper. His works have been acquired by collections throughout the United States, Europe and Israel.

The garden of the German Ambassador's residence at 1800

Foxhall Road in Northwest Washington, D.C., is not open to the public, but the sculptures may be viewed from the public sidewalk along the property.

TWIG: You have lived around the world. How does your international background give further meaning to the exhibition's title: "Journey with Me?"

Ben-Haim: My work is basically about moving, I live in one place, and then I have to move again. And I take with me stepping stones from different places – language and culture. I take them with me and then apply them to a new culture. In other words, in order to survive, I have had to adapt to new cultures and new habits. The work that I have in this show is, in a way, about that too. Each of these works is from a different section of my life. I have always looked for some indication of icons in my life. They are really important for me. The leaf, for example, represents the language given to us by nature. They change color in the season, they blow and drift around, they almost migrate from one place to another. I apply those ideas to everything I create.

TWIG: Mr. Ben-Haim, what were you trying to reflect through the playful sense of imbalance in these works?

Ben-Haim: It's part of surviving, we are always at in-between stages and we never really achieve full balance. It's kind of like with ants. The ants carry leaves on top of their heads in no proportion to the weight of their bodies. It's kind of like the imbalance in our lives, even if our imbalances are ones that we cannot see. So it's this kind of imbalance, these elements in our lives that I want to touch on through my art.

TWIG: How important is the setting when experiencing your sculptural works? This particular exhibition is taking place in the garden of the German Ambassador's residence.

Ben-Haim: It's very exciting. It's exactly the way those works are to be experienced. Those works haven't been exhibited for seven years. And every environment is different. It's really nice to see them set amidst nature. And the Ambassador's residence is a place of German culture, and that's important too. There are a lot of metaphors you could see in that.

TWIG: You are a multi-media artist with facility in painting, drawing, sculpture and assemblage. What is it about the possibilities of sculpture that attracts you?



Ben-Haim: The big picture is that I don't plan to be a sculptor, or a painter. Oftentimes, I'm working and the work

German Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger with a sculpture by Zigi Ben-Haim.
German Embassy photo by Viktor Holt.

leads to another dimension. I really listen to the work, it tells me what to do.

TWIG: You were recently a DAAD artist-in-residence in Berlin. Are you familiar with the recent Newsweek poll that voted Germany the best place to live for artists? Was that your experience there?

Ben-Haim: It was exactly that. I was in Berlin for three months, October through December 2004. I worked there, I recharged my batteries, I made friendships with many of the artists there. Today, I think it's the center of Europe, at least from the artist's point-of-view. It's like a magnet for artists right now. I think it's on the way up, very fast. Artists from all over Europe are deciding to move to Berlin. It's a really vibrant city. The fact that it has so many layers of culture and beauty, the coming together of the East and West that is still there, it's the kind of environment that nurtures artists. And when I says artists, I mean not just fine artists, but everything from musicians, fashion designers, architects, dancers – everything. I already miss it!

Zigi-Ben Haim's next major public exhibition, "90 Days," will open at the Stefan Stux Gallery in New work April 28-May 28.