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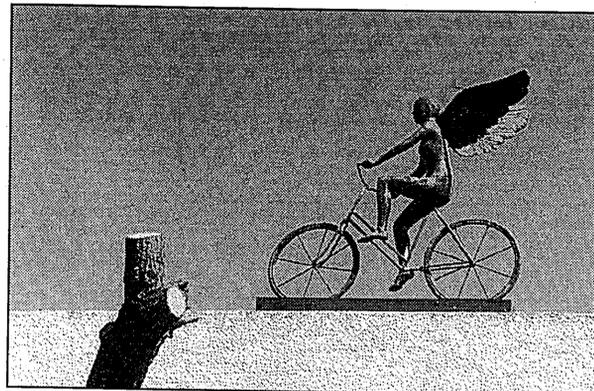
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Israel feature



Motti Mizrahi's bronze "Peace Rider," a winged, nude female on a bicycle, exhibited through Beit Hagefen. WZPS photos courtesy of Beit Hagefen.

Haifa's holiday of holidays festival - Chanukah-Christmas-Ramadan - marks end of millennium

Since it was first established 37 years ago, the Beit Hagefen Arab-Jewish Center in Haifa has worked tirelessly towards coexistence and development of social and cultural ties with the Arab world, and has the distinction of being considered a pioneer in building "Peace Bridges" between nations...

By SHARON KANON

For the sixth year running, the Beit Hagefen Arab-Jewish Center in Haifa last year produced "The Holiday of Holidays" Festival to celebrate Chanukah, Christmas, and Ramadan - holidays of the three major religions - all of which occur during the same season. The festival is one of Beit Hagefen's major projects to promote understanding and tolerance through culture, art and sports.

For 40 years, Beit Hagefen has organized meetings and classes for Jewish and Arab kindergarten children, students and adults, where the emphasis is on mutual respect. In addition, it offers more than 40 courses every year, hosts Womens' Clubs, Friends' Clubs, a Young Leadership Group, and a Youth Communications group that produces films for local TV. The center also supports an Arab theater group that performs adult and childrens' plays in Israel and abroad, and has hosted Jordanian performers and artists.

Highlights on the calendar last December and January included liturgical music concerts, a holiday lights competition for the residents of Haifa, symposiums, and a gigantic street party to welcome the millennium.

Most events took place in Wadi Nisnas, a charming neighborhood whose craftsmen, shop keepers and

residents go all out to make visitors feel welcome. "We want to bring people here so they can see how Jews and Arabs live together," said Rivka Bialik, festival director and producer. "Wadi Nisnas is an authentic neighborhood where co-existence is a reality."

On a typical Saturday last December, more than 40,000 visitors from all over Israel jammed the alleys and marketplace of the picturesque Wadi Nisnas neighborhood to enjoy the festive atmosphere created by the street performances, jazz, theater and parades. Visitors wandered around the craft's fair where dozens of artisans sold original crafts - jewelry, ceramics, textiles and wood - from stalls scattered along Hawadi Street. A local antiques fair and auction, held in Beit Hagefen itself, brought more than 40 dealers who sold everything from spice boxes, Persian rugs, clocks, brass and silver utensils and ornaments, to a wooden horse from a carousel, circa 1900. Symbols of the three religions - a moon crescent for Islam, a Magen David for Judaism, and a Cross for Christianity - were prominently displayed on the roof of Beit Hagefen on HaZionut (Zionism!) Avenue.

(Cont. on page B15. See "Haifa centre works toward co-existence".)

Israel feature

Haifa centre works toward co-existence

(Cont. from page B14.)

Visitors also got a chance to taste the local cuisine. Many of the neighborhood's 5,000 residents prepared homemade specialties - baklava, kanafa (another sweet cake) and sachlav, a sweet porridge served hot or cold. Since Muslims fast during the day in the month of Ramadan, the neighborhood's two busy falafel stands suggested that most of the local residents are Christian Arabs.

A great many visitors participated in the "Coexistence Walk" through the narrow alleyways of Wadi Nisnas, which served as an outdoor gallery for an exceptional selection of works of art - sculptures, plastic art and frescos - by some of Israel's most talented artists. Rooftops, walls, awnings, balconies, steps and intersections are the non-conventional "exhibition hall" for almost 100 imaginative, colorful and daring artworks, which is open to visitors all year round. Additional installations are also exhibited in the

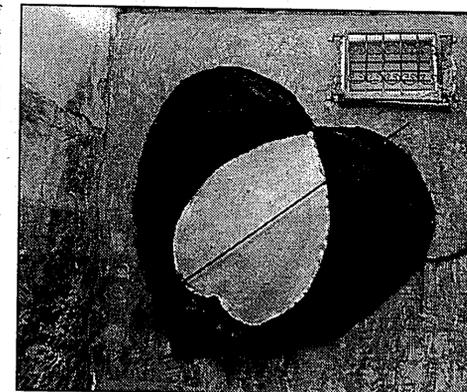
arched roof gallery of the Center on Beit Hagefen Street and in small local galleries.

The indoor galleries focus on the themes ending, loss, diminution, uncertainty, many of which make strong, harsh statements, like Eli Gur-Arie's contorted dove, and Nir Hod's portrait of "Youth" with a hypodermic needle.

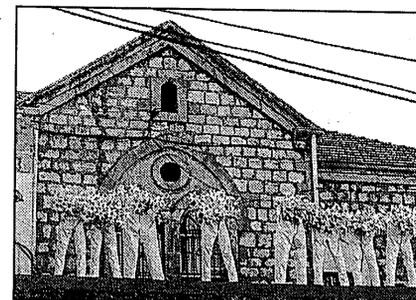
Reuven Cohen's bionic man, called "Leon," is scary only by implication. Three works I personally liked were Josyane Vanounou's whimsical vanishing snowman, Ofra Zimbalista's "Woman at the Edge," and Tamar Schori's "On and On," a computer print on aluminum.

"The event enables art to break out of its elitistic isolation and redefines its context," said Rivka Bialik.

"Top 2000," with



Saleh Alesat's "Heart to Heart" in which Cupid's arrow tries to join two different hearts together, exhibited through Beit Hagefen. WZPS photos courtesy of Beit Hagefen.



A row of white, polyester cast pants sprouting white lilies, by Ora Segalis, exhibited in Wadi Nisnas, courtesy of Beit Hagefen. WZPS photos courtesy of Beit Hagefen.

motifs related to the beginning and the end of the millennium, was the subject that challenged the artists this year. Themes of innocence, love, peace, birth, death and the apocalypse are clearly represented by the works.

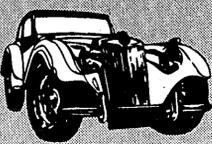
A giant white pacifier by Dror Kartar; The Kiss, of two iron doves by Menashe Kadishman; Ora Segalis's row of white, polyester cast pants sprouting white lilies; Ahmad Kanaan's optimistic colorful painted tin butterflies; Motti Mizrahi's bronze "Peace Rider," a winged nude female on a bicycle; "Wadi of Copper and Light by Abed Abdi; and Batia Eisenwasser Jancourt's tall wood birdhouse, entitled "And they will turn their towers into bird-houses," all send positive messages.

At least four works use the heart-shape prominently. Especially effective are David Gerstein's seven colorful dress silhouettes in iron, with cut-out hearts filled with images such as flowers, a sunburst

and a baby. Saleh Alesat's "Heart to Heart" with Cupid's arrow, evidently tries to bring two different hearts together. Self-taught Argentinian-born Daniel, now living and working in Tel Aviv, paints a black eye-masked youth in his large wall painting. The message: "Don't Worry Be Happy."

Now that's an upbeat message to start the new millennium.

- WZPS.



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