

## “ENVIRONMENTAL SCULPTURE IN THE WAKE OF THE TERMITES” IN HERZLIYA MUSEUM – MAY 1989

A few years ago, during a visit to Africa, my curiosity was aroused by natural sculptures standing out on the vast plains. Some structures were cylindrical, others had a tree jutting from their centre with its heart eaten out. These were termite hills – those insects who destroy everything in their path, but have the ability to build from earth and saliva well planned structures. The hills are divided into rooms and tunnels, cooled and dehumidified.

By photographing those hills I took the first step in researching termites and their accommodations. My digging into the subject brought me to a close understanding of these destructive / creative insects and awakened in me a desire to create a sculptural project based on termite structures. Originally I created individual sculptures and then models of various sizes until the Environmental Project took shape.

While attempting to create a natural, stable mixture for the sculptures, I consulted with the Negev Research Institute in Sede Boker. I decided to work with red clay from the Sharon, while using various adhesive materials. This concept was first utilized in a large stone and earth sculpture from natural materials of Mitzpe Ramon.

Now the environmental project stands in an open area of 200 square meters south of the Herzliya Museum. The earthen structures grow out of the earth, they entwine themselves around tree trunks and hang in clusters on their branches. Visitors at the project move among the sculptures, penetrate within them and “stumble” on the mounds. The children skip over or crawl in the connecting tunnel.

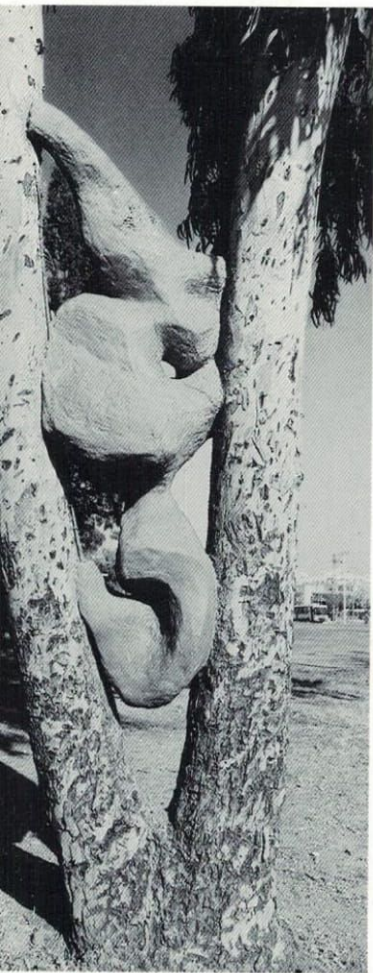
The rigid iron sculptures and the net hanging heavily above, exist as another part of this project.

In Africa myths have grown around the termite hills. One of them concerns the god Amma who rushes to unite with the female earth and through her gives birth to the human race. A termite hill stands in his way. Enraged he pulls out his sword, beheads the hill and fertilizes the earth. In some regions of Malay the circumcising of girls is related to this legend.

Since the first stages of the project I was fascinated by the duality of the termite role – as destroyers and builders in one. This challenged me to express not only my admiration of their creativity but also my rejection of their destructiveness. We cannot allow forces of this kind to invade our world. The iron sculptures represent this rejection. There is an additional element to this complex situation: the sprays we use to kill the insects, also poison the air we breathe. This smog hangs over our heads as the net cover hangs beneath the crowns of the trees and over the entire sculptural complex.

Israella Hargil





Israela Hargil's sculptures in the gardens of Herzliya Museum allows the museum, for the first time, to observe the construction of a project of environmental sculpture.

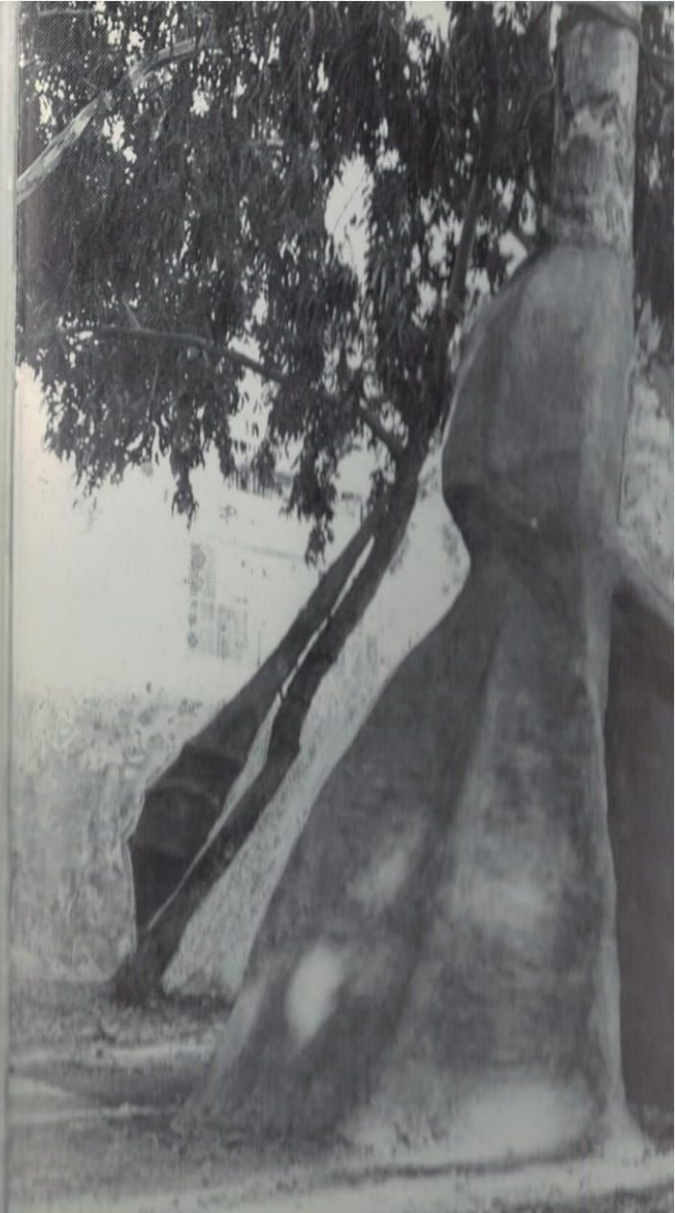
The inspiration for her sculptures had their genesis in an encounter with natural forms but the development and artistic finish of the sculptured objects has transmogrified them into elements of a total artifact in which I. Hargil has brought together colour, material and form that both interact within themselves and their natural environment at large.

The unique character and unifying element of the project is to be found in the contrast between natural and industrial materials, between flowing, flexible forms, biomorphic in essence, and the sharply-cut lines of industrial elements, between the bridges and barriers which characterize those parts of the sculpture built from earth and the sense of rejection which is suggested by the metal bodies.

There can be no doubt that, although this is a finished work of sculpture, the spectator must play an active role in the construction and dismantling of the "pictures". These changing views turn the "sculpture", together with the play of colour, light effects which change with the hour of day and the movement of the spectator, into a work of many facets and of great significance.

We wish to convey our thanks to the artist and to all those who gave of their time and energy in the construction of the project.

Yoav Dagon  
Museum Director





בוצע הפרויקט התאפשר הודות לתרומתם הנדיבה של "הפניקס", חברה לביטוח

## **Al Hamishmar**

31.7.1989

Dorit Keidar

**The Herzeliya Museum is currently showing two exhibitions apart from those recently mentioned in our weekend column. The first – the statues of Datia Landber, to be exhibited through July-August, and the second – a permanent sculpture by Israela Hargil, "An Environmental Sculpture of Termite Structures."**

With regard to Hargil's exhibition, we should quote the sculptress' own comments after a trip to Africa where she encountered termite structures: "Soil structures 'growing' out of the ground, intertwining around tree trunks and hanging in clusters from their branches. They are made from red loam from the Sharon area with the addition of binding materials...in Africa they gave rise to myths. One of them deals with the God 'Ama' who wants to unite with the female earth and, together, give birth to the human race. But a termite hill stands in his way. Enraged, the God takes out his sword and cuts off the top of the hill that fertilizes the soil. In a certain area of Mali, the custom of circumcising girls (as customary among the Bedouin) is attributed to this myth."

In relation to her artwork, Hargil comments: "right from the beginning stages of my work, the duality of the termites' roles roused my interest – they simultaneously destroy and build. This duality faced me with a challenge – to express not only my wonder at their 'artistry' but also my resistance to the destruction they wreak. We do not permit them to penetrate our world, if they dare – we destroy their nests and bombard them in every way possible. My cold iron

sculptures express our war against insects. However, there is another factor involved in this intervention.

The spraying materials we use on them also poison the air we breathe. The smog above our heads is like the layer hanging beneath the treetops and above the completeness of the sculpture.”

The artist’s words indicate the intention manifested – ambiguous feelings about the invasion, control, and use of soil to build huge, sealed, dark and deterring fortifications. Forces of darkness that take control of the foliage and natural environment. One could perhaps compare this to the termite army - like a human army – that constantly attacks and builds fortifications, wonderful soaring towers that also give a sense of conquest and violence. But there is also deterrence, as Hargil notes – as well as a certain enjoyment of this erupting power, enjoyment of a warring creativity.

The immovable shining towers of iron – this cold mineral material – located like a power from another arrow, but, in fact, the two towering forms indicate a grip on the same principle of conquest. The termite structures are a metaphor for the magic circle of a war against war, on one hand a construction for the purpose of support, and, on the other hand, for the purpose of destruction. A metaphor for human termites who build themselves Towers of Babel. Hargil constructs an inspired sculptural environment that is definitely worth coming to see.