



Shula Kobo

hopes her "Garinim" project will bring Jews and Arabs together.

Sowing the seeds of coexistence, one shell at a time

By *Camea Smith*

No one has sunflower seeds down to an art like the Jews and Arabs of the Middle East, and artist Noam Edry is out to prove it.

Edry plans to produce an art installation from the shells of some 10 tons of sunflower seeds, with the raw material to be produced by dozens of "expert" Arab and Jewish seed-eating shell-spitters from across the land.

The artist, who recently returned to her native Kibbutz Ramat Yohanan after living in London for several years, said that several London galleries have already expressed interest in the project.

"Garinim" (seeds), as Edry plans to call the work, is a response to the sunflower seed installation exhibited two years ago by Chinese artist Ai Weiwei in the Turbine Hall of London's Tate Modern museum.

Weiwei's installation was composed of 100 million sunflower-seed replicas made of porcelain, which were each hand-fired and hand-painted by 1,600 artisans in the village of Jingdezhen, China's "porcelain capital." The seeds were spread across the entire floor of the hall, with visitors encouraged to wade through and touch them. Visitors were thus exposed to fine Chinese handiwork that differs from the image most people have of mass-produced Chinese products manufactured under sweatshop conditions.

Edry's gut response to Weiwei's work was far more personal. "I visited Ai's installation in 2010," recalls Edry, "and immediately I thought, 'he stole this from us, this is ours.'"

She later came up with the idea for the project, "in which every person chosen to join the top team of seed-shellers will also encounter people that he would never meet under normal circumstances."

On August 23 the work begins, as members of her kibbutz, together with residents of the adjacent Arab villages of Ras Ali and Khawalid, hold the first group shell-cracking session.

The effort, which will take several months, then takes to the road, with Edry hoping to bring Arabs and Jews from adjacent cities and towns through this simple, everyday activity – sowing seeds of coexistence, as it were. Thus Edry hopes to enlist residents of Haifa and Nablus, Afula and Jenin, Aqaba and Eilat, and so on.

One problem with this ambitious plan is that in some cases, entrance permits will be required.

"On September 10 Israelis are going to travel to the Jordanian city of Aqaba for the purpose of shelling seeds," Edry said. "After that meeting, 10 Jordanians are meant to come to Eilat, but I would imagine it won't be easy to get crossing permits in that direction."