

EXHIBITION

Golden age flower power

The 11,005 ceramic flowers that now adorn the lawns of the Eretz Israel Museum hail from 71 sheltered housing facilities and senior citizens' homes around the country

• By BARRY DAVIS

An octogenarian – sprightly condition notwithstanding – recently remarked to me that once people pass a certain age, they increasingly tend to go unnoticed. Someone else told me about the time she took her senior citizen mother to a doctor, who kept asking the daughter about her mother's state of health instead of addressing the fully compos mentis older woman.

Shlomit Hepher says she has been keenly aware of this tendency for quite a while and felt it was time to show the younger generations that their parents and grandparents still had plenty to

contribute. The result of Hepher's initiative is an exhibition of thousands – 11,005 to be precise – of ceramic flowers that now adorn the lawns of the Eretz Israel Museum in Ramat Aviv. The scintillatingly aesthetic "Blossoming with Age" show was officially opened on September 19, attended by Senior Citizens Minister Uri Orbach.

Hepher, who is a seasoned multidisciplinary artist in her 50s, clearly had all the necessary professional skills – and drive – to get the initiative off the ground and see it through to multicolored, multi-shaped, abundant fruition.

The exhibits were created by some 1,600 senior citizens, most of whom had some background in art and attend regu-

lar arts activities in their respective locations. The flowers hail from 71 sheltered housing facilities and senior citizens homes all over the country, from the Golan Heights in the far north down to the Eilat region of the Arava, near Eilat.

The flowers are arranged in three main groups corresponding to the sun, water or fields. While the general hue of the first two groups is yellow or blue respectively, the third group allowed the artists plenty of room for colorful maneuver.

Hepher did a good job positioning the flowers, and since they were put in place, blades of grass have stretched up between them, adding a lovely Mother Nature continuum to the man-made addition to the lawn. There are other natural "intrusions" as well. The museum lawn is watered regularly, and the water that collects in some of the bowl-shaped ceramic flowers is appreciatively lapped up by cats and birds.

"That is lovely to see," says Hepher. "It adds life to the whole thing."

As with natural processes, the curator was not looking to dictate to the contributors how they should go about their business.

"The general guideline was simply that they should work from the heart," she says. "They could base their work on any flower they wanted. The only proviso was that the color had to reflect the sun, water or fields. The field-based flowers are all sorts of colors. For instance, we have a group of people who decided to go for anemone fields, which grow in their area in the spring, so there are shades of red in their flowers. And there are things made by people from the Ad 120 Hod Hasharon sheltered housing center who decided to go for a uniform style," she points out.

It is only fitting that the artists should have as much free access as possible to the fruits of their labor.

"I arranged the exhibition so that the people who made the flowers can get quite close to their own creations," says Hepher. "You should have seen them at the opening ceremony! They were so excited to see their work finally on show, and so was I."

When Hepher thought up the senior citizen plan, she had no idea what she was letting herself in for. The arts groups from all over the country packed up their creations in crates and shipped them off to Hepher's studio in Pardess Hanna. The logistics were mind-boggling.

"My loyal husband took each flower



The fields section includes many different colors.

and attached a short piece of tubing to the center of the underside so that we could later attach a metal rod to them, like a stem," she explains.

The statistics of the preparatory stage make impressive reading.

"Six hundred vegetable boxes full of ceramic flowers landed at my studio," says Hepher. "We also used a ton and a half of metal for the rods. It was crazy!"

Had Hepher thought the wild and wonderful plan through before she got down to brass tacks?

"I knew it would be tough, but I was also confident we would manage," she declares. "We took each stage at a time. For instance, we painted all the metal rods green to resemble a stem. That also took quite a while. And we had to get the rods out of the bundles in which they arrived, and we cut ourselves on the sharp edges the whole time."

Once all the preparations were complete, the flowers had to be rewrapped and crated and transported from Pardess Hanna to Tel Aviv. Hepher received very little in the way of financial support for her floral enterprise.

"It's interesting to see the various cog-



Senior Citizens Minister Uri Orbach (left) with Shlomit Hepher. (Photos: Leonid Padrut)

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nitive levels of the artists," says Hopher as she tiptoes through the ceramic vegetation. "You can see that this lot has a higher level and greater attention to detail, but that doesn't matter. All the artists did so well."

The most senior of the senior citizen exhibitors is 93 years old. Hopher says she hopes the show will help to raise awareness about the fact that just because someone has retired from his or her job and is not quite as physically agile as he/she once was, it doesn't mean those people don't have anything to offer society.

"These people have lived long lives, worked, brought up families and have done their bit for the country, too," says Hopher. "I hope lots of people of all ages will come to the museum to see the exhibition to see what 'old folks' are capable of. This really is a joy to behold."

The "Blossoming with Age" exhibition will run until December 27. For more information: (03) 641-5244 and www.erezmuseum.org.il



Blue is the general color of the water section.