AICF
Stories from Israeli Artists

Cover image by Fatma Shannan. From the series: Carpet in the Field, 150X100cm
OSHRAT INGEDASHET, 21  
from ASHDOD, ISRAEL  
THEATRE: ACTRESS/SINGER

What brought you to acting?
I grew up in a religious home. My parents were born in Ethiopia and moved in 1980. I studied at an Ulpana (a girls-only Jewish school) until ninth grade. They didn’t have a theatre program at school, so I asked to change schools. My mother was very supportive, although she’d always wished I would choose a lifestyle that is closer to religion. I couldn’t deny this strong urge to act and sing, and the growing passion I had for theatre and music.

How will the Scholarship help you?
My mother raised us alone. She’s been juggling four jobs since my childhood. She does everything she can, but it’s limited. However, when I think of giving up on this dream, it literally hurts, so I just don’t stop, no matter what.

What would you like to do most today, as an actor?
My childhood dream is to work for the Cameri Theatre, and work abroad. My sister took part in productions at the Cameri Theatre. She was also the first Ethiopian soldier to be part of the Army Band in Israel.

ELI SCHOENFELD, 25  
from GIV’AT ZE’EV, JERUSALEM  
THEATRE: ACTOR

What would you like to do most today?
Create a versatile group of actors. The ensemble will be ideally composed of people who can combine singing, acting and physical theatre, even acrobatics.

What do you like most about being an actor?
I think actors hold a pertinent role in our society. When someone has the interest, the talent, and this feeling of not wanting to do anything else, then I believe it’s their path and responsibility to go for it.

How does the Scholarship support you?
It’s an immense financial help. I know many students who have to maintain two jobs and work the entire weekend. I’m observant, so I couldn’t even do that. The scholarship is powerful in that it’s a recognition of your work and talent.
INBAR PAZ MICHAELI, 20
from TEL AVIV, ISRAEL
MUSIC: JAZZ/CLASSICAL UPRIGHT BASSIST

Are your parents and siblings in the arts as well?
My mother is a classical pianist and piano teacher. I wasn’t attracted to the piano, though. We play together. She accompanied me at the audition. My younger sister, Shira Paz, is an AICF recipient as well. She has been playing the harp for a few years now.

What do you do these days?
I’m in the army. About to be released. I serve in the Military Band as an Outstanding Musician.

Why is it important to give young Israeli artists scholarships?
It allows us to study at a very high level and in better conditions. The funds make it possible to play on a high-quality instrument and study with the best teachers.

ELISHA KRAWETZ, 18
from NACHLA’OT, JERUSALEM
MUSIC: CLASSICAL PIANIST

When and why did you start to play the piano?
I began to play at age five. I had a nanny who used to take me to concerts, and one day I simply told my parents I wanted to start.

What kind of music do you like to play?
I have a trio with violinist Tamar Greenstein and cellist Uriah Tutter. We met at the conservatory, and then continued our studies together at the Music Academy in Jerusalem. We are all AICF recipients and serve in the army as Outstanding Musicians.

How did the Scholarships help you?
When I made the decision to become a professional, I applied for the Scholarship. This certainly prompted me to make the effort to be the best I could be. Receiving it opened a lot of doors. Schools trust that AICF recipients are of a certain level of skill and talent. In Israel, the music world is tightly linked, and it directly affects one’s career.

Why is it important to give scholarships to young musicians in Israel?
First, many musicians simply do not have the money to support themselves and their training. That might cause extremely talented people to quit, which is awful.

Secondly, it elevates the music in Israel. It encourages people to become more professional, to strive to do better. It sets standards musicians might have not aimed for otherwise.
RENAN HARARI, 25
from KARKUR, ISRAEL (lives in LEIPZIG, GERMANY)
VISUAL ART: INSTALLATION ARTIST

What draws you to installations specifically?
My mother is a teacher and my father is a farmer. He wanted me to fix plows and weld iron, and I wanted to build birds! In time it became unstoppable. I never wanted to do anything else.

Did you feel that your studies at Bezalel helped develop your skills and artistry?
It surely made me a better artist. It pushed me to go deeper, listen more carefully. Being an artist is very personal. All you can do as a teacher is share your world.

How did you use the Keren Sharett Scholarship funds?
I used it for materials that I needed for my art. That’s the major expense for an art student, especially when you deal with extremely large installations. When I graduated, AICF gave me another grant to buy equipment, which saved me. I still work with it today!

FATMA SHANNAN, 26
from JULIS, DRUZE VILLAGE IN THE GALILEE
VISUAL ART: PAINTER

How did you start painting?
I’ve been doing it for as long as I can remember. I used to love to draw and was naturally attracted to arts. I officially started when I was about 12.

How did you receive the Keren Sharett Scholarship?
I was recommended by the head of the Department at Oranim College to be considered by the Foundation. I prepared a small exhibition, and got the Scholarship.

It helped me a lot. I received it right after graduating, which is a difficult time for artists, because they find themselves all alone in the studio for the first time.

Do you identify a particular direction Israeli art is taking today?
Certainly. There is much more openness to painting. It makes me very happy, seeing that it has regained its value in the Israeli culture.

In Israel, AICF is often referred to in Hebrew as Keren Sharett.
Q+A

“I am proud to be an Israeli artist, trying to show that Israel can produce highly skilled, thoughtful and creative art that emerges from a rich culture.”

- OHAD RAPS, 16

OHAD RAPS, 16
from KFAR SABA, ISRAEL
DANCE: BALLET/MODERN DANCER

What do you like most about dancing?
Wow, where do I start! There are so many sensations that are difficult to articulate... I'd say it's like a kingdom that is separate from my life. It's always there for me as a safe place that saves me. It's outside of life but helps me grow within my life.

How was your recent audition for Keren Sharett?
I thought I didn't do well. I was glad to learn that they found something worthwhile in what I'd brought, and that they were willing to invest in me.

Why do you think it is important to give scholarships to young artists in Israel?
Because budgets seem to be largely dedicated to security, and very little is invested in art. When art isn't supported, there is no one to communicate Israel's culture to the world. There are so many talents in this country who are unable to create because they simply can't afford it financially.

How do you communicate Israel's culture in your art?
I reveal who I am. I am proud to be an Israeli artist, trying to show that Israel can produce highly skilled, thoughtful, and creative art that emerges from a rich culture.

MICHAEL CHRISTIAN HAJ, 12
from HAIFA, ISRAEL (FAMILY FROM ROMANIA)
MUSIC: CLASSICAL PIANIST

When did you start playing the piano?
I started to play the piano at the age of six. My mother believed that music is important. I started to study at the Rubin Conservatory of Music. My younger brother is eight years old and he plays the violin at the same music school.

How many auditions have you done?
The first time was two years ago, when I was ten years old, and this is the second time I was awarded this Scholarship.

How did the Scholarship help you?
This Scholarship is very important to me, first of all because of the prestige and secondly because it is a very significant financial aid. It is tremendously encouraging to know that it is possible to be supported while building a musical career.
ORI LEVANON, 26  
from KIBBUTZ KFAR BLOOM,  
NORTHERN ISRAEL  
THEATRE: ACTOR

Why do you think it’s important to give those funds to artists, and particularly young artists in Israel?
Being an artist, especially in Israel, is very challenging. Many find themselves focusing on and fighting for getting attention, any attention, and lose their original interest to create something truthful through the way they express themselves in this world. It can get cynical, understandably. Receiving a Scholarship as an artist in Israel gives a feeling that someone still cares about the hard work that we do and about the importance of nurturing art in Israel.

SONYA TYRIN, 17  
from HOLON, ISRAEL  
MUSIC: CLASSICAL PIANIST  

How does the community around you feel about your playing?
People like that I play. My neighbors, too, are very interested and supportive. There is a bench on the street right under my window, and I sometimes see people sitting there to listen to me when I practice at home.

What do you feel that you need as an artist today?
I feel that I owe it to myself to be open to any opportunity that comes along. I try to be humble in the sense that I keep an open mind and let new things in. I don’t let myself be intimidated by things that are unfamiliar or new.
EYAL ASSULIN, 31
from OFAKIM, ISRAEL
VISUAL ART: SCULPTOR/PAINTER, PROFESSOR AND CURATOR AT THE EDUCATIONAL GALLERY AT SAPIR COLLEGE

What would be your advice to the young artists who are now beginning their studies?
I have a rule: even though Ofakim is far away, I make sure to go to Tel Aviv every two weeks, to simply sit and have an interesting dialogue with someone, create opportunities, be out there, reach out to people. Eventually your art has to speak for itself, of course, but you have to give yourself a chance to be known, so that people can find out about your art. It’s all about small victories. Don’t try to do it all at the same time. Work slowly and thoughtfully, and your success will be more steady and endurable.

Why is it important to invest in art in Israel?
When art is good, it creates something that raises an interesting discussion. It doesn’t necessarily take stands or provide an opinion. The mere dialogue which fine art creates, has the power to shape a society.

LORIN MUSSERI, 23
from HOLON, ISRAEL
THEATRE: ACTRESS/SINGER/COMEDIAN

How and when did you start acting?
When I was sixteen, I accompanied a friend to an audition for a workshop at the Nissan Nativ Acting Studio. While I was waiting outside, a teacher approached me and asked a few questions. After a brief conversation, he said: “Why don’t you come and audition for our preparatory program?” I decided to give it a try and got in!

How did you continue after high school?
When I went to the army, I really wanted to be in either the Military Band or the IDF Theatre. I was out of luck, though, because the theatre didn’t audition that year, so I auditioned for the Band only. During the audition they thought that I was very funny, and they told me that they were looking for a comedian - a new “position” - and they asked if I’d like to audition for that. I did and I got it and became the first official comedian of the IDF. I spent my two years of service doing stand up shows for soldiers all over the country. I loved it.
About the America-Israel Cultural Foundation

The America-Israel Cultural Foundation (AICF) has been the touchstone of excellence in Israeli culture since 1939, supporting promising young artists with over 15,000 scholarships and furthering the growth of more than 600 of Israel's leading arts institutions. Most of Israel's finest artists in every discipline have received assistance from AICF. Among those supported are: Itzhak Perlman, Menashe Kadishman, Pinchas Zukerman, Gil Shaham, Yefim Bronfman, Eytan Fox, Ohad Naharin, The Cameri Theater, Sam Spiegel Film School, the Israel Philharmonic Orchestra, the Israel Museum and the Batsheva Dance Company.

Join us in supporting hundreds of new artists each year!

For more information, call (212)557-1600 or visit us at www.aicf.org

Based on interviews conducted by Galia Barkol, AICF