

Curtain call

By BARRY DAVIS

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The Israel Museum comes full circle with Ron Arad's monumental installation, '720 Degrees.'



720 Degrees, the stunning and much-talked about work of designer, [artist](#) and architect Ron Arad, will be installed for three weeks in the [Israel Museum's Billy Rose Art Garden](#).

It is pretty safe to say that the Israel Museum will be transformed during the forthcoming Jerusalem Season of Culture, and the change in the surroundings will be evident from the outset.

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"As soon as you get to the entrance to the museum, you will see *720 Degrees* dwarfing everything around it," says Jerusalem Season of Culture artistic director and performance curator Itay Mautner.

"When you get to the museum, from afar it will seem like some sort of a huge UFO that draws you into it."

The work in questions was created by London-based Israeli artist, designer and architect Ron Arad following a [surprise](#) visit by a neighbor. "Ron lives across the road from the Roundhouse [the famous arts venue in London's Camden district], and the Roundhouse CEO [Marcus Davey] went over and knocked on Ron's door and suggested he [do something](#) there," Mautner explains. "Ron told me that he came up with the idea for *720 Degrees* on the spot and said that if Davey said he didn't like the idea, he wouldn't do anything there at all."

Davey duly enthused over the proposed work, and the results of that happy confluence will be evident in Jerusalem, Saturdays to Thursdays, from August 16 to September 5.

720 Degrees is not the sort of work that even the most casual of passersby can miss. It comprises 55,600 silicon rods suspended from a height of eight meters, to form a 20-meter-wide circle. The cords provide a backdrop – a canvas – onto which works by Israeli and non-Israeli works will be projected for outdoor viewing in the evenings. The creations that will be housed within Arad's monumental installation include contributions from a wide range of artistic disciplines, by the likes of American- Swiss artist and composer Christian Marclay, British visual artist David Shrigley, British photography and video artist Mat Collishaw and British-based Israeli [fine art](#) photographer Ori Gersht.

"Ron wanted to explore the idea of the [moving image](#) and the area of moving through the image," continues Mautner, adding that the power of the installation is not just a byproduct of its gargantuan proportions.

"Things that stick out, physically, are always impressive, but there is something very sophisticated and complex about this work. The BBC called the installation 'a new way of looking at art.' I think that's pretty accurate."

Mautner adds that there is some proactive effort involved in making the most of *720 Degrees*. "A lot of the responsibility is placed on the spectator's shoulders, too.

That is something in which we, at the Jerusalem Season of Culture, greatly believe. It is not like coming to look at something hanging on a wall, and

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that's that from the visitor's point of view. Here, your presence inside the installation defines the way you experience the work.

As the observer, you have complete freedom to do what you want with it."

Artists often talk about how their works, including static paintings, are not complete until the members of the public see them and respond to them. With *720 Degrees*, the public's input is integral to the installation's ongoing artistic evolution.

That also means that the creator can never know how his or her product will pan out.

"The beauty of this type of work is that it only comes alive when the visitors react to it. A Picasso painting, however amazing it is, lives independently of the way the public respond to it. With Ron's work, I can really move it. There is a lovely video clip of a [little girl](#) at the Roundhouse, who goes through and right around the work by Shrigley, of a giant figure walking around the rod curtain.

The little girl touches the rods and slightly distorts the work and the image.

Shrigley could not have foreseen that; but when it happens, it imbues a new meaning to the work. You can watch the video art standing up, sitting or lying down. It is up to you how you want to take the installation," says Mautner.

After a lengthy berth in London, Mautner says the creator is delighted that his work is "coming home."

"Ron studied at Bezalel and has a strong bond with Jerusalem. He will be coming over with his family. I am sure it will be a wonderful experience for him, too."

720 Degrees will be on view at the Israel Museum's Art Garden, Saturday – Thursday evenings, 8 p.m.-11 p.m., from August 16 -September 5. Video art will be screened in a loop that repeats itself every hour. A bar and light refreshments will be available. Every evening, one-time-only surprise performances will be staged as a part of *720 Degrees*, spanning a wide range of artistic disciplines including music, dance, poetry, theater and more. The esteemed artists participating and the time of the performances will not be announced in advance, creating unexpected and memorable experiences for museum visitors who happen upon them.

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