

JEANNE BUCHER JAEGER



Dani Karavan, his wife Hava and his daughter Noa in the exhibition ADAMA at the gallery in 2019

Dear Friends,

Dani Karavan has left us on Saturday, May 29, at the age of 90, while he was in Tel Aviv, with his family, his wife Hava and his 3 daughters, Noa, Tamar and Yael. I was telling him on the phone five days ago, while I heard the sirens ringing behind him and felt him worried and feverish about the situation in Israël, the message of peace conveyed by his bas-reliefs in raw earth just exhibited in Lisbon which are now at the entrance of the new Lisbon Palacete acquired by the gallery, in Chiado.

Dani Karavan's entire life has been devoted to his archi-sculptures spread across the Globe, from Israël to Japan, passing through Italy, France, Germany, Spain and Korea, environmental sculptures that he was amongst the first to create.

Few artists have been able to show in their work such a deep respect for the memory of places or events, to the point of having it contained in the sculptures and anchoring it on the Earth: in the same way, few have demonstrated such a deep love towards Nature to the point of deviating integrally the plans of his archi-sculptures when necessary, not to damage or cut a tree which happened to be in their way, or to underline the lines or sublimate the reliefs and the atmosphere of a landscape in order to make us seize all its beauty.

Originally inspired by the bas-reliefs of the Mesopotamian, Babylonian or Sumerian era and fascinated by the Egyptian pyramids and their play with sun rays, Dani Karavan was one of the first artists to see, in the 60s, Alberto Giacometti in the fullness of his space, looking for days and hours in Basel at his *Objets mobiles et muets*, his *Palais de quatre heures* or the different versions of his *Femme couchée*, projecting them on a much larger scale and imagining the public wandering inside them. During this period, he created the *Negev Monument* in Beersheba, an environmental sculpture that seemed to emerge from Earth, founding the principles of all his sculptures to come, since the artist chooses his site, sculpts its memory and inscribes his vocabulary of forms with the fundamentals of his sculpture: the sun and its lines of light, the sound of water and wind, the Earth in its various forms of sand, cement, stones or trees, its natural environmental landscape and the duration of its accomplishment. We are both in the past and the future in his work. It is during the realisation of this first archi-sculpture that Dani will argue with the Government having approved its project model and decided of the localization, in order to obtain from the Government precisely the place where the sculpture must be implanted and readapt his model to the landscape of surrounding hills which he thought was simply breathtaking. No, his work is not a mausoleum to collect flowers but rather a place celebrating the Universal and welcoming life on Earth, Nature, Man, Family and we now know since its creation, how many children have been conceived on this site! The fact of showing both authority towards the Government to obtain the precise site where his work is to be placed as well as a profound humility in front of Nature which is his absolute master, so that the forms as well as the sounds of his sculpture are in perfect symbiosis with the surrounding landscape, are the absolute principles of his work, whatever the duration of completion of his sculpture is to be.

It was during this period that he created the bas-relief *Pray for the Peace of Jerusalem*, installed since 1965 in the Knesset in Jerusalem. His *Way of Peace* developing 108 columns spaced over 3 kms on which is engraved the word Peace, translated into all world languages including dead languages, from the Israeli desert of Nitzana to the Egyptian border, is marked at the end by a wire barrier, testimony to the stupidity of men. It was at the Venice Biennale and then at the Documenta in Kassel at the end of the 70s, that Dani Karavan showed his vocabulary of forms and sculpture in its new function of revealing natural or urban landscapes.

His *Axe Majeur*, a monumental work begun in 1980 at the request of urban architects Michel Jaouin and Bertrand Warnier, tracing a central 3 km axis from the Place St-Christophe of the new town of Cergy-Pontoise through the crossroads of Ham, is still at work today since the 12th station of the work, the Astronomical Island, has yet to be built. For Dani Karavan, the *Axe Majeur* must be the backbone of Cergy-Pontoise and visually link it - through one of the most beautiful landscapes of the Ile de France - to the central axis of Paris, the Défense, the Arc de Triomphe and the Louvre Pyramid. Composed of 12 stations - a very symbolic number - 11 of them are now completed.

We had exhibited the 6m long model of this masterpiece in 2019 at the gallery, in an attempt to raise awareness, during the exhibition entitled *ADAMA*; we all hoped that Dani could see his *Axe Majeur* finalised in his lifetime, more than 40 years after having initiated it, and our appointments with the Ministry of Culture and files sent to potential sponsors have remained in vain, to date.

Projects in Japan have followed one another since the beginning of the 90's, and we had recently taken some 25 friends there to contemplate the *Environmental Sculpture of Murou*, near Nara. Here again, all those who went can testify how well the artist's sculpture fits into the surrounding Pine Forest landscape, with an amphitheater to listen to birds and frogs, circular basins to drain the water from the mountains, a Non theatre, an astronomical tower 8m high to contemplate the breathtaking landscape, a spiral of bamboo, and an axis placed on the 32nd parallel visually joining the Shinto temples of Nara placed not far from there. Dani Karavan will receive the Nobel Prize for the Arts, the Japanese *Praemium Imperiale* in 1998 as well as the *Magshim Prize* in Israël, awarded to people who have shown outstanding activity in ecological projects. Works of Memory as well as works of Peace, his sculptures serve in turn the tragic fate of the Philosopher Walter Benjamin with *Passages* in Portbou, or the universality of Human Rights with the *Path of Human Rights* in Nuremberg or the recent *Memorial of Sinti and Roma* in Berlin, forgotten victims of Nazism.

Profoundly free and outside any artistic categories or classifications, Dani Karavan is at the same time a sculptor, painter, draftsman, architect, scenographer, urban planner and landscaper. He invites visitors not to contemplate his works from afar but to experience them, to walk on them, to climb them and even to create in them. Thinking of the many photographers, video artists and directors who have created their works there. All of Dani's work is centered around man and the human scale is systematically represented in his countless models. Dani Karavan has certainly shown us the Path, a way of respect for the surrounding Nature and for human Nature. His last exhibition at the gallery entitled *ADAMA* presented his latest creations of bas-relief and sculptures in raw earth, the choice of a material that embodies the essence of a life, and whose simple forms summon respect. At 90 years old and despite his countless achievements around the world, Dani Karavan remained deeply humble and lucid about his time, saying that he was happy not to be a successful artist in the context of what is now called the art world.

We will miss you Dani and you opened a Way towards Humanity and for Humanity that we will not stop pursuing in your memory.

Dani Karavan's body lies today in one of his recent works in Tel Aviv, the *Kikar Habima* Cultural Square, thus continuing the legacy of his father Abraham, the great landscape architect of the White City and incarnating the absolute symbol of Culture, a value he has defended throughout all his life.

Véronique Jaeger



Dani Karavan as the 109th column in his Way of Peace, Nitzana desert



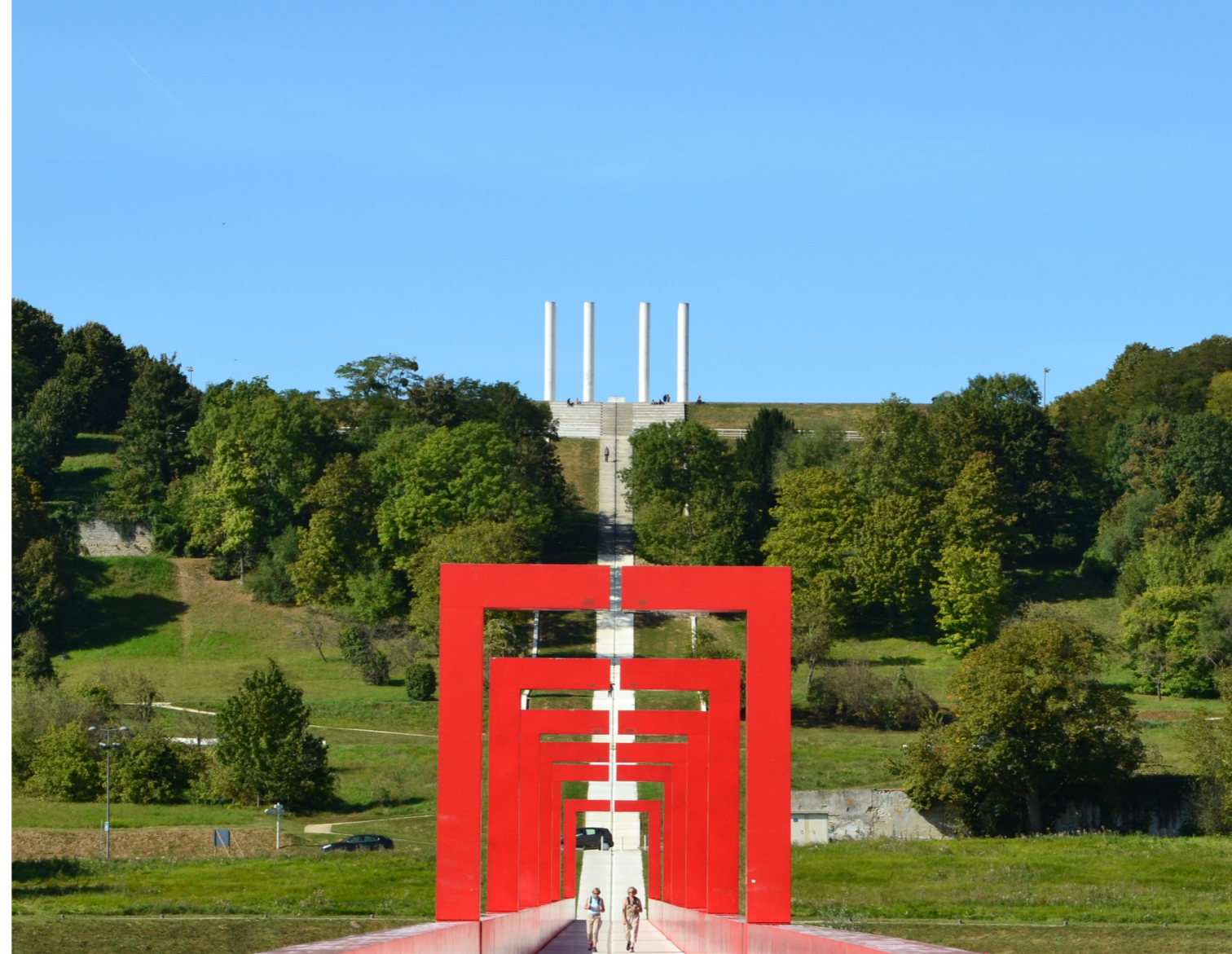
Negev Monument, 1963-1968, Israel, © Studio Karavan, Photograph David Rubinger



Dani Karavan contemplating the environmental sculpture of Murou in Japan



View of the Axe Majeur in Cergy-Pontoise, France



Installation view of the exhibition ADAMA at the gallery in 2019

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