

DANI KARAVAN: THE PHENOMENON OF PLACE

ANA MARÍA TORRES*

*"I was born on the dunes of the Mediterranean shores.
With my bare feet I first felt the forms impressed by nature
into the earth, onto the sands."¹*



D. Karavan trabajando en la maqueta del proyecto de Murou de Japón / Karavan working on the model for the Murou Project in Japan.

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¹ This was written on the wall for the Biennale of Venice in 1976.

² Lucy R. Lippard, *Overlay: Contemporary Art and the Art of Prehistory*. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), 9.

With these words Dani Karavan begins a passionate dialogue explaining the nature of his work in his studio in Paris. Listening to him speak, questioning and confirming his ideas in front of a model for his most recent project in Murou, Japan, I entered into the world of memory, of things observed and not taught, of the closeness to earth which defines his site-specific sculpture. His environments belong on the one hand to the tradition of contemporary art that confirms the human need to touch, to hold and to make relationships to natural forces. On the other hand, they are rooted in the origins of architecture identified by Marcus V. Pollio Vitruvius as being related to the origins of language, and, also, in the numerical proportions of a geometrical universe which references the perceived celestial order. This ancient ritual of ordering became the historical precedent of Western art and architecture.

With the geometric simplicity and large-scale directness of his designs Dani Karavan continues the tradition initiated by artists such as Constantine Brancusi, or Isamu Noguchi. The Israeli artist's projects are physically and culturally bound to the earth, sharing concepts pursued in the late 1960s by artists like Robert Smithson, Michael Heizer, Walter de Maria and Robert Morris. His site-specific sculptures contain the magnetism of historical and ancient sites such as the Temple of Heaven in Beijing; the Neolithic stone work in Brittany, the Egyptian pyramids and the Observatory of the Maharajah Sawai Jai Singh II in Jaipur. All are talismans, aids to memory, and stimulants for imaginations that cannot be regulated, owned, or manipulated.²



Isamu Noguchi
Bill Rose Garden, Jerusalén / Jerusalem, 1960-65



Dani Karavan
Huellas en la arena, s.f. / Prints in the Sand, n.d.

One of the most important twentieth-century antecedents to environmental projects like Karavan's and a significant step in the development of contemporary art in the landscape is Constantine Brancusi's memorial in the town of Tîrgu-ju, created in 1935, consisting of three major works, *Gate of the Kiss*, *Table of Silence* and the *Endless Column*. It is organized along an east-west axis running about three quarters of a mile through the town. The importance of this work, like with Isamu Noguchi's UNESCO gardens, Paris, 1956-1958, or *Billy Rose Sculptural Garden*, Jerusalem, 1960-1965, as well, lies in the artist's sensitivity to a cultural memory never far from his roots. Dani Karavan, like Brancusi and Noguchi, brings to his art the memory of childhood. As Noguchi remarked of Brancusi "He brought with him something more than learning: the memory of childhood... This is the inheritance that he was able to call upon when the notion came to him that his art, sculpture, could not go forward to be born without first going back to the beginnings."³ Karavan's public works share with Brancusi's a particular expression of tolerance and modesty, which invites the user to be silent rather than to be intimidated. One can walk through and sit on the works.

Dani Karavan was born in 1930 in Tel Aviv, located on the sands at the edge of old Jaffa. "I was born on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea, stepped on the dunes, near olive trees, mountains and valleys; who had survived all those terrible wars. Memory has become part of my very being, and if memory is forgotten, direction is lost and so is the way."⁴ Karavan's childhood experiences with nature were tied to his father Abraham's understanding of the earth as a gardener and landscape architect for the city's parks. His participation as a child in the creation of nature made him part of it. As he still does when he gets a commission; he first adapts himself to the site, "I am listening, asking the site what the site will accept and what it will refuse."⁵ Even as he intervenes, he becomes part of the site, of its history, of the wind, the sun, the water, the trees.

His involvement in politics began as a member of the organization Shomer Hatzair. He and a group of friends from the Shomer Hatzair founded Kibbutz Harel, and he stayed in Kibbutz Harel, from 1950 to 1955. Convinced that art should be at the service of politics, Karavan created posters favoring peace with the Palestinian and against lack of tolerance. As the Italian architecture historian Giulio Carlo Argan

³ Isamu Noguchi, "Noguchi on Brancusi" *Craft Horizons* 35, no. 4.2 (Aug. 1976): 26-29.

⁴ Dani Karavan. *Dialogue with the Environment. Resonance with the Earth*. (Tokyo: Kerichi Kawahashi, 1997).

⁵ Dani Karavan's correspondence with the author.

wrote in 1978, on the occasion of the exhibition *Two Environments for Peace* at the Forte di Belvedere, Florence and Castello del Imperatore, Prato, “you are a political sculptor because you read the destiny of man in nature, and would like a universal harmony to permeate the whole reality, and obliterate the will to war and to power from the hearts of men.”⁶ The symbiosis of art and politics is expressed in all his work, like for example in the *Square of Tolerance* in the UNESCO gardens in Paris, “I call this the *Square of Tolerance*. It was built without knowing that Yizak Rabin would be assassinated and that it would be dedicated to his memory. If I were to write something about him I would write this phrase I had chosen even prior to the dedication.

*“ Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds
of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed”*

He was a man of war and then he began to focus on peace.”⁷ Karavan here quotes lines by Archibald MacLeish (1892 – 1982) inscribed on the vertical wall of the *Square of Tolerance*. MacLeish was an American poet who during the 1920s lived mostly in France and whose writing dealt in a direct way with the political and social situation of his time.

After the kibbutz dissolved Karavan realized that his art should be part of daily life in our society as an element promoting peace and harmony. He understood that art could not belong to a particular political party; as the art critic Pierre Restany wrote, “Karavan no longer believes in them.”⁸ His interest in painting, particularly in Renaissance fresco art, brought him to Italy in 1956, where he enrolled at the Academy of Fine Arts in Florence. He was always fascinated by Piero della Francesca’s treatment of space and the harmony and equilibrium in the proportions of his compositions and perspectives. The Italian artist was a master of “regular bodies”, as well as of arithmetic and geometry. Karavan captured from Piero’s works perceptions of natural objects brought back to the essential and measurable regularity of geometrical forms. Impressed by the void and the tension created by the relationship between the form and the figures, Karavan, like the Italian artist, conceives the “regular bodies” in relation to the harmonious construction of the human body. He used this tension later in all his environmental sculptures. In

⁶ Giulio Carlo Argan. *Dani Karavan. Two Environments for Peace. Forte di Belvedere, Firenze. Castello dell’ Imperatore, Prato.*(exhibition catalogue, Florence: Il Bisonte Editore, 1978), 17.

⁷ Conversation with the artist at the UNESCO gardens, June 2002.

⁸ Pierre Restany. *Dani Karavan. A life in Osmosis with the Surrounding Space.* (Munich: Prestel-Verlag, 1992), 19.

Dani Karavan
Escenografía para la obra de Martha Graham
Legend of Judith / Stage scenery for Martha Graham's
Legend of Judith
Nueva York / New York, 1962



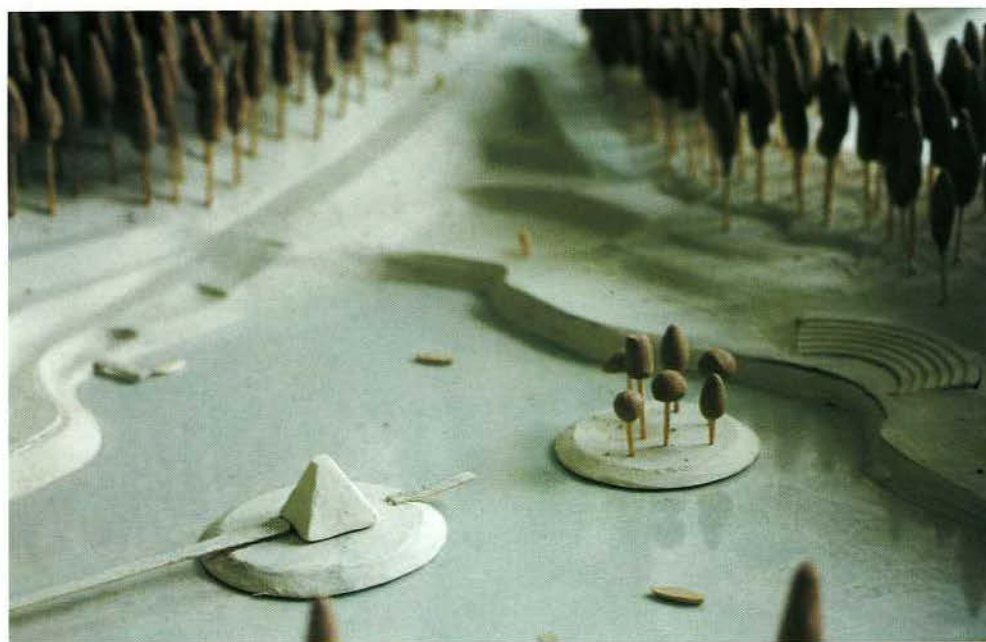
addition to learning from Piero della Francesca's work the essence of perspective and proportions, he also studied anatomy and ancient fresco technique by copying Luca Signorelli and Andrea da Firenze. Like Noguchi he was a student of the past,⁹ most of it related to ancient mosaic techniques and bas-reliefs. He applied his experiences and memories from Italy to his first commissions on his return to Israel.

From 1959 to 1973 Karavan, who first worked for actors' groups, designed stage sets for the Inbal and the Martha Graham Dance Companies, and in particular from the 1960s to 1970s created sets for the Batsheva Dance Company. Like Noguchi in the 1930s, whom he met while working with Martha Graham, he has used set design as a laboratory for experimenting with the human scale and space. He created spaces of transition in which the expression of feelings and the manifestation of experiences of movement, musical harmonies and the rhythms of speech through the body were experienced as a tight weaving of time and space. As Pierre Restany states, "the theater experience ... was crucial for Karavan. It enabled him to acquire a mastery of space, the pragmatic sense of 'a solution for every situation' and so, through that stage experience, to approach the structural problem of 'total ambience.'"¹⁰

⁹ Isamu Noguchi, *A Sculptor's World*. (New York: Harper and Row, 1968), 16.

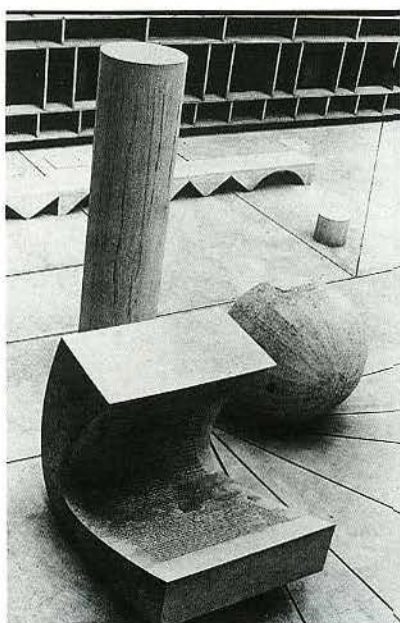
¹⁰ Pierre Restany, *Makom 1. Dani Karavan, Semiotic and Behavior*. (exhibition catalogue, The Netherlands: De Beyer, Breda, 1984), 30.

Maqueta del proyecto de Murou, Japón / Model of the Murou Project, Japan



From his stages to his latest commission, the garden in Murou, Karavan combines human interaction with the environment creating stages as spaces for contemplation and as spaces for participation. In Murou the garden will become a counterpoint to a nearby 11th century temple. On the upper part of a valley three platforms will be located on a lake: the first will be a stage for performances and dance with an amphitheater on the shore on each side of the island; from the stage using a bridge you will arrive at a pyramid from where the actors will start their performance. The connecting paths will bring into nature the traditions of the Noh and Kabuki stage. And the third one, accessible by boat, will be a natural preserve for birds with an amphitheater for bird watching. In the lower part of the valley will be a line of gates and an observation tower and celestial observatory aligned with the 32nd parallel emphasizing Buddhist and Shinto traditions and emphasizing temples and shrines like the temple of Murou Village built in the 7th Century.

A dance platform in Knossos was one of the most important commissions in the myth of Daedalus who personified the first Western architect. The Greek theater holds the ritual origins of Western art and architecture. The mythical presence of



Dani Karavan
*Environmental Sculpture in White Concrete and
 Plants, 1963–64*
 Tribunal de Justicia de Tel Aviv / Court of
 Justice, Tel Aviv

path and space became a privileged symbol of cities in the western tradition. Path and space are implicit in the dance platform at Murou. Here Karavan, following the history of theater design, builds in accordance with the tradition of viewing the sky and in harmony with the stars. The theater becomes a place for seeing where the observer participates in this ritual. But as the artist explains there are functional and pragmatic issues to be resolved: “We need to have parking. The visitors need it. These are the things you have to deal with — traffic, pedestrian movement, infrastructure and so on,” and he continues, “It is not as if you do art and that is it and you don’t touch things like that. This is part of the sculpture, which is very close to architecture. My work is touching architecture but it is not architecture, it is completely different.” As he has stated on many occasions “My art works exist in relation to the environment, of course, but they are not landscaped or architectural creations, nor are they purely sculptural creations.”¹¹ They recall the function of art by looking back to times and places where art was inseparable from life.

The concept of the stage appears as a part of his sculptural concept in almost all his early projects. In *Kikar Levana* (White Square), Tel Aviv, 1977–1988 or at *Way of Light*, in the Olympic Sculpture Park Seoul, South Korea, 1987–1988 or in the *Tree Nursery for Peace*, Pistoia, Italy, 1999 a white concrete platform defines the space in which the language of drama becomes the language of metaphor. The space for dance is a place for the poetic mobility of the observer built to human scale. As the artist expressed about his relationship to public art, “another way to say public is ‘human scale’. Everything, especially architecture, is built to human scale. My works are fully realized only when people are inside them.”¹²

After the creation of several murals and bas-reliefs, Karavan began his first environmental work with the courtyard of the Tel Aviv Court of Justice in 1962–1967. Commissioned by the architect Yaacov Rechter, the artist created outdoor and indoor pieces. At the main entrance above the grand staircase stands *The City Gate*, a wrought iron sculpture, in which sinusoidal forms abstract the traditional symbols of law — the wheel, the scales of justice, the ram horn and others. Thirty-five cast concrete reliefs are located throughout the building, and on them quotations from the book of Isaiah and different chapters in the Bible mostly dealing with justice and tolerance are alternated with hieroglyphs. In the interior courtyard is a white concrete square where

¹¹ Restany. *Dani Karavan*, 125.

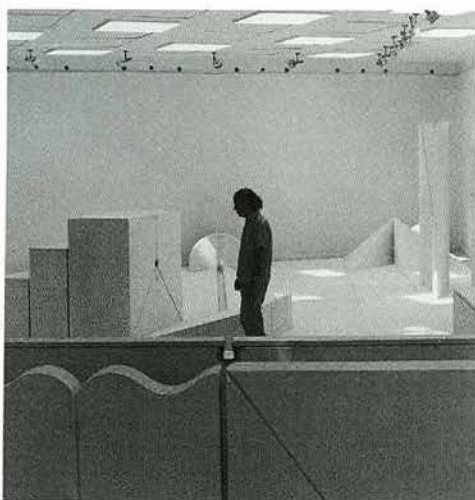
¹² Dani Karavan. *Dani Karavan: Sky, Water, There*. (exhibition catalogue, Tokyo: Sagacho Exhibit Space, 1997), 7.

geometrical forms are located around a central composition of a large column, a globe and a scroll on which the first verses of chapter 21 of *Exodus* are inscribed. All the elements, including the pavement and two areas for vegetation chosen with the consultation of his father Abraham Karavan, the landscape architect in charge of the Park Department of Tel Aviv, are part of the sculpture as an environment. The structure becomes the modern interpretation of megalithic monuments. Karavan's works, including a multitude of varied forms and scales, are inseparable from their sites and from their suggested histories. He intertwines ideas left on the earth by many different cultures, making one a metaphor for the other and vice versa.

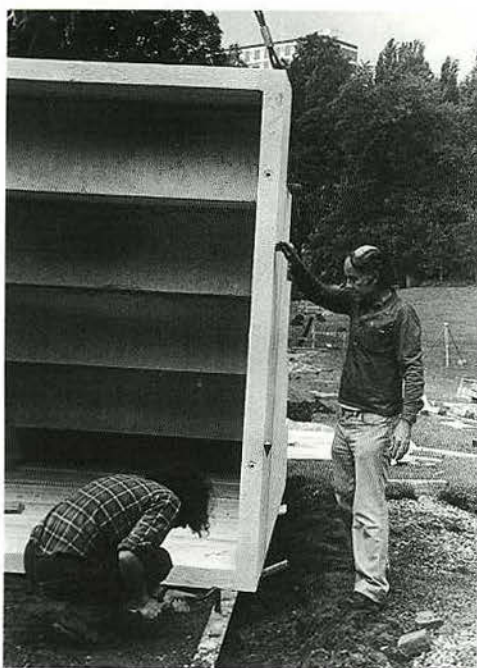
Precise and frequent use of language is a particular characteristic of Karavan's work. "In the beginning of the 60s I used letters, words, and paragraphs as part of my sculptures and bas reliefs. My use of text was integrated to the form, to the sculpture and has mostly a political meaning."¹³ Each title and piece incorporates carefully considered words brought down through history. This brings us back to how Vitruvius associates the origins of architecture with the origins of language. The Roman writer explains the beginning of human culture by describing storms and winds rubbing branches together and causing fire. People first ran away and then, eventually, approached the fire and realized that it would keep them warm. They learned how to keep it going by adding more wood to the fire. As a result of this they stayed together and the origins of language developed in the space created around the fire where social interaction and then communication occurred. Each environment has its own connection with memory and the site through language.

Before the court project was finished, Karavan devoted himself to the creation of the *Negev Monument*, Beersheba, 1963-1968. An environmental sculpture that commemorates the heroic action of the Palmach Brigade, who halted the Egyptian offensive in the Negev in 1947. On this occasion, and for the first time, Karavan had the opportunity to choose the site of his project. He selected the highest point near Beersheba, a limestone hill located two miles northeast of the city. In an area of 10,000 square meters a variety of concrete sculptural elements emphasizes the importance of "phenomenon of place." The geometry of the monument's forms was created through an intuitive process that drew on his experiences of the place's primary components, earth and sky, through all the hours of the day of each season.

¹³ Dani Karavan in correspondence with the author.



Dani Karavan
Pabellón de Israel, Biennale di Venecia / Israeli Pavilion,
Venice Biennale, 1976



Dani Karavan en la Documenta de Kassel/ Dani Karavan
at Kassel Documenta, 1977

¹⁴ Martin Heidegger. *Poetry, Language, Thought* in Albert Hofstadter, ed., (New York, 1971), 149.

¹⁵ Restany. *Dani Karavan*. p. 135.

We can turn to Martin Heidegger and his distinction between “earth” and “sky”: “Earth is the serving bearer, blossoming and fruiting, spreading out in rock and water...” “The sky is the vaulting path of the sun, the course of the changing moon, the glitter of the stars, the year’s seasons, the light and dusk of day, the gloom and glow of night, the clemency and inclemency of the weather, the drifting clouds and blue depth of the ether...”¹⁴ The importance comes out when we add the area “between” the earth and sky which is what the philosopher calls “the world” and, also, when we relate it to his definition of “dwelling”. Heidegger uses several connotations of the word “dwell” to show that dwelling means to be at peace in a protected place. Karavan gathers in the *Negev Monument* the properties of the place and brings them close to the human being and makes the visitor belong. Through the leaning pyramidal form that suggests a sand dune, the long oblique planes, the concrete tunnels, the columnar cylinder the artist demonstrates the “vocation” of the place. Most remarkably he understands the prevailing evening wind and turns it into a distinctive audible sound as it passes through slots in the columnar cylinder. In this way he engages the earth, and the visitor becomes part of a comprehensive totality.

The work was recognized not only by art critics but also by the architectural world for its uniqueness in the tectonic treatment of the concrete, its identification with the site and the scale among the pieces. Other projects were commissioned after the construction of this successful monument. At the Israeli Pavilion at the Venice Biennale of 1976 Karavan created a geometric universe of white concrete forms, water, olive trees and wind organs. A line between two olive trees at the entrance led to the following inscription “Olive trees should be our borders.”¹⁵ Here the artist’s basic political convictions again come to the fore through language. This piece like his environment at Documenta 6 the following year, *Environment Made of Natural Materials and Memories*, brought the visitor to the exhilarating experience of feeling the pleasure of space, order, and concepts. In these projects, like in others, visitors are seduced by the human scale of the space, which gives them the feeling of belonging. Through the use of specific proportions and light the artist creates the sensual experience of the “art of living”.

A work of art makes human existence meaningful and the uniqueness of Karavan’s works is their capacity to concretize the Roman concept of *genius loci*. According to the Roman tradition, every being has its genius, its spirit. This spirit gives life to

Dani Karavan
Environment por la paz / Environment for Peace, 1978
 Rayo de láser Homenaje a Galileo Galilei, Florencia
 / Laser beam. Homage to Galileo Galilei, Florence



people and places determining their character and essence, denoting what a being is. With this understanding he approaches the installation for the *Two Environments for Peace* at the Forte di Belvedere in Florence and at the Castello dell'Imperatore in Prato, in 1978. The artist worked in tune with the measure of the existing structures, the views of the “ideal city” and “with memories of, and associations with, history, science and art=civilization”.¹⁶ As the artist describes, “In the Belvedere I invite the visitor to enter the environments I have built to measure in the place: I invite the visitor to experience these measures directly. I measure my forms within the measures of the place, and the forms have grown from the need of harmony or counterpoint with what already existed, integrating it and becoming a part of it.”¹⁷

To arrive in complete harmony with the existing military landmark of the Forte Belvedere¹⁸, the artist analyzed the intricate structure of the building elements and its proportions to fully marry his art work with the landmark; as he explained: “the point is not to use the fort as a background for my artworks: it is a work of art in itself, as I see it, it houses temporarily, for just a few months, another work of art which is a little bit more contemporary.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Dani Karavan. *Dani Karavan. Two Environments for Peace. Forte di Belvedere, Firenze. Castello dell' Imperatore, Prato.*(exhibition catalogue, Florence: Il Bisonte Editore, 1978), 77.

¹⁷ Dani Karavan. *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁸ Designed by the architect Bernardo Buontalenti between 1590 and 1595.

¹⁹ Restany. *Dani Karavan*, 63.



Jantar Mantar, 1726-34, obra del arquitecto Maharajá Sawai Jai Singh II / work of the architect Maharajah Sawai Jai Singh II, Jaipur, India. Foto: Howard Davis

Karavan laid down in the outdoor spaces of the Belvedere along the north/city-south/country axis his lines of sight and the interstitial linear spaces framed by a quartered pyramid, vertical elements and hemispheres. He created three lines of water parallel to the Arno river, one from the pyramid to the obelisk on the lower part of the fortress, a second on the terrace and a third guided the visitor through the succession of rooms of the indoor installation containing a vocabulary of wooden forms. Line in mathematics is considered the path of a moving point; in a number of ancient cultures a significant journey is seen as a straight line. From the Bible to the Nazca lines in Peru, human beings traced straight lines in the landscape to reclaim the “spirit of the place”, relating spiritual dimensions to those of time and place. Karavan shares the interests of the artists Robert Smithson and Richard Long in his returning to the earth to “place memories”. The Israeli artist in Florence brought the walk, a journey as defined by the earthwork artists, to another level with the blue laser beam that ran through the night between the fort and Brunelleschi’s dome.

Dani Karavan
Kikar Levana / White Square, 1977-88
Tel Aviv



In the Castello dell'Imperatore in Prato²⁰ the lines became part of a white concrete square stage in which several geometric elements were located. The complex reminds one of the astronomical instruments of Jantar Mantar from the famous personal observatory built by Sawai Jai Singh in Jaipur in 1733. Each of the astronomical instruments was designed and oriented to observe the movement of the sun or the moon, or a particular star or constellation. Angled and partial circular planes with calibrated scales etched onto stone strips created novel architectural shapes that influenced the work of artists and architects like Noguchi or Louis I. Kahn. One year before the creation of the two installations in Florence, the artist began the design of *Kikar Levana*, (White Square) 1977–1988, for a park designed by Zvi Deckel, landscape architect in Tel Aviv, a white concrete stage with the qualities of the Prato installation.

Following Florence, Karavan began to work on commissions for major site-specific sculptures in Cologne, Cergy-Pointoise, Seoul and Portbou. All of his projects take a considerable number of years. Part of the reason is the frequent delays in the world of public art due to budget cuts and political changes. As the artist expressed, “All my projects are always in doubt. Only when they are inaugurated do I know that they exist. They depend on democratic decisions concerning budgets and on the socio-political structure of society. If a project is not realized for me it's normal; if a project is realized for me it's a miracle.”²¹

In 1979, Professor Karl Rurhberg, the director of the Museum Ludwig in Cologne, invited the sculptor to create a plaza in front of a new museum that was in the design phase. He created a line for *Ma'alot* 1979–1986 incorporating the entire space from the Cologne Cathedral down to the Rhine. The line became a tower and then a large square in front of the museum. The ancient word *Ma'alot* found in the Book of Psalms means “steps”, “ladder” or “terrace”, and the connotation of upward movement extends the meaning to include “beauty”, “virtue”, or “admirable character” in a human being. As is constant in all Karavan's projects, measurements are related to the model used by the architects Burmann & Haberer. The number 9 is the numerical basis of this work. The geometry of the tower's 6 elements is the result of the first cube being 2.70 x 2.70 and 1.80 in height (90x2 – 90x3), and then each cube being reduced to 45cm (half of 90) so the last element is 0.45 x 1.80. The

²⁰ Built by Federico II, king of Sicily.

²¹ Hava Karavan. *An Interview with Dani*, Paris, 1997. *Dani Karavan Winter 97 Ramat Gan Israel*, (exhibition catalogue, Ramat Gan: Museum of Israeli Art, 1997), 75.



Detalle del Eje Mayor de Cergy-Pontoise / Detail of the *Axe Majeur* at Cergy-Pontoise

origin of the reduction of the cubes' size was because of the need to eliminate weight due to the existence of the concert hall below.

The project in Cologne took seven years to finish. The *Axe Majeur* of Cergy-Pontoise has been an ongoing process since 1980, when Karavan was given the commission to design it. This new town situated 30 kilometers northwest of Paris was created in an area of 8,000 hectares to alleviate overcrowding in Paris. The idea of the axis belongs to a very old French tradition, a heritage from the Roman and Italian periods. Karavan worked with this idea, already in place, and developed it further as he explains: "In the beginning when they started to make this town someone made a line of an axis. They didn't know who made it but they wanted to keep it. When I came to see the site there was designated a kind of half circle that was to be apartment buildings. I explained to them that I couldn't make a place without knowing the surrounding architecture. They responded by saying OK, you design the facades and the architect will do the architecture. But I don't believe in facades; I believe in architecture as a whole. So I started to work without knowing what would be around."

In developing the three kilometer long axis and the twelve different stations it unifies, he defined it in relation to the existing great axis of Les Tuileries-l'Etoile-la Défense, inserting the work into the history of Paris. The work begins at the Belvedere tower at the center of the Place de la Tour and runs through the Garden of the Impressionists dedicated to Camille Pissarro, to the Paris Esplanade with 12 columns, down to the Garden of Human Rights dedicated to Pierre Mendes France (under construction), to the Gerald Philip amphitheater, over a footbridge to the astronomical island from which you cross by boat to the pyramid that serves as a stop for migratory birds, and finally to the other side in Saint Germain en Laye, Conflans Sainte Honorine, where you find an inclining gate which will receive the project's laser beam.

The axis, the line, sculpts the earth following its topography. Walking along the path towards the water, you find yourself in a preexisting apple orchard that the artist decided to leave. "Here they wanted to have a place for children to play ball. I said it is impossible; the ball will go over your head. Then they were going to make a place where children could play with little mountains of grass – I said no we are not going



Dani Karavan
Dibujo en la arena / Drawing in the Sand 1981
 Environment para la exposición *Mitos y ritual / Environment*
 for the *Myths and Ritual* exhibition
 Kunsthaus Zurich

to cut these trees. With the little apples and, in the spring, the flowers it is exactly like an impressionist painting. We call it the apple garden, dedicated to Camille Pissarro because he was living in Pointoise. This was the center of Impressionism. Van Gogh was buried not far from here. So in this place the memory of Impressionism is very strong.” Arriving at the grand horizontal platform raised 6 meters on the Oise side, the vista of the whole valley of the Oise is framed by the view of 12 columns with the dimensions of the Arc de Triomphe du Carrousel – the commission for the *Axe Majeur* was an astronomical project and the 12 columns represented the 12 hours, the 12 months, and therefore they are 12 meters in height and have a diameter of 1,20.

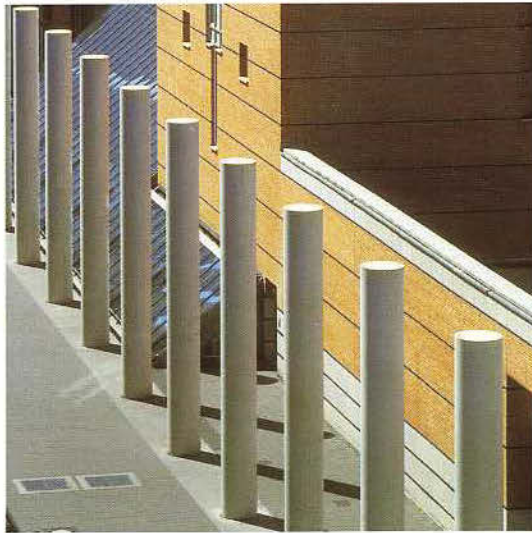
In the *Axe Majeur* in Cergy-Pontoise, like in all the projects, the artist bases his universe on numerical relations. In this case it is number 36, he explains “The tower is 36 meters high, which is a multiple of 12, and is 360 cm by 360 cm, like the width of the axis. So I am using the 360 degrees that you have here with the defining circle. You have 360 pavers around the tower and each one is 36 cm, so all is based on this number. Later I find out, thinking more about this number, that it is also in the Jewish tradition, 36 is the number of the just people in the world.”²² All the aspects of the Axis are numerically related like the ancient Chinese structure the Altar of Heaven. The Altar of Heaven is arranged in three terraces of white marble, representing heaven, earth and man. The upper terrace, representing Heaven, is 90 feet in diameter, the middle, the Earth, 150 feet, and the lower, Man, 210 feet. These correspond to the odd numbers in the relationships 3×3 , 3×5 , and 3×7 . Odd numbers are categorical numbers for heaven according to Chinese metaphysical doctrine. The circular balustrades of white marble surrounding the three terraces have 72 pillars on the upper level, 108 pillars in the middle and 180 on the lower terrace. If you add them up, the sum of the three figures comes to 360 degrees, similar to Karavan’s numerical relationships of the axis.

Mathematical numeration is the ordering that allows man to dwell on this earth. Plato’s *Timaeus* first systematizes the universe. Plato’s geometrical universe became the source of inspiration for Western culture. Being, symbolized by mathematical proportion, was intentionally embodied in man-made artifacts such as buildings, gardens and solar clocks. It is not surprising that the presence of numerical proportions in Karavan’s works underlines the architectural tradition established by

²² Conversation with the artist at the top of the tower in Cergy-Pontoise, June 2002.



Dani Karavan
Diálogo / Dialogue 1989
 Wilhelm Lehmbruck Museum, Duisburg, Alemania / Germany



Dani Karavan
Camino de los Derechos Humanos / Way of Human Rights,
 1989-93
 Germanisches Nationalmuseum, Nürnberg, Alemania /
 Nuremberg, Germany

Piero della Francesca, Alberti, Vitruvius and Galileo. The project shares the universal harmony of the ancient sites, their memory, emphasizing the basic importance of the relationship between natural and man-made places.

Since the project began twenty two years ago Karavan has realized a large number of temporary installations, and site-specific pieces. All of them enriched his vocabulary of forms by their relation with memory and numerical proportions, bringing us back to the Renaissance understanding of the five senses in relation to the cosmic body. The perception of his work like the perception of architecture is a multi-sensory experience; qualities of matter, space, and scale are measured equally by the eye, ear, nose, and skin. He walks the landscape with naked feet, in contact with the stones and the earth, learning the topography to create topography. His work never loses its sensuality; more, it invites the viewer to be sensuously curious. He refers to the experience of his work, "You have to find your way inside my sculptures. But seeing is not enough. I will add listening, smelling, touching, walking through, all the senses need to be involved." Sunrise and sunset, the wind's melody, water and reflections invigorate the essential interaction of all the senses in perceiving the space.

The work titled *Linea 1,2,3 + 1 + 1 + 1*, in Villa Celle, Italy, 1980-1982, is a line, a path of white cement that starts in the middle of the garden, goes through a cedar grove, from Lebanon, and ends at the edge of a pond. It brings to the visitor one of the essential experiences created by any art work, tranquility. The sculpture makes us aware of our fundamental solitude evoked by the extremely simple gesture of locating a line on the ground. The line becomes the negative space defined by 24 + 4 halved tree trunks with the exposed faces painted white in the piece for the Olympic Sculpture Park in Seoul titled *Way of Light*, 1987 – 1988, a homage to King Sei Jong. In *Dialogue*, a sculpture for the Wilhelm-Lehmbruck-Museum, in Duisburg, Germany, 1989, the path directs you to six seating cubes on a square platform near the park's pond. All these works detach us from the present and allow us to experience the slow, firm flow of time and tradition. The experience of a work of art is a private dialogue between the work and the viewer.

A white rectangular gate, twenty-seven white concrete columns, two columns embedded in the ground with only their rounded tops visible and an oak tree are the sculptural elements of *The Way of Human Rights*. Each element holds one of the 30



Dani Karavan
Plaza de la tolerancia, homenaje a Yitzhak Rabin / Square of Tolerance, Homage to Yitzhak Rabin, 1993-96
 UNESCO, París

paragraphs of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the UN in 1948. Commissioned in 1989 and finished in 1993, it is located between the new and old buildings of the German National Museum in Dusseldorf. With the use of language and memory the sculptor offers a political layer suggesting universal harmony is capable of chasing away desire for war and domination. As the artist states, “dialogue is always possible at the individual level, between two people of good will.”²³ Over the last two centuries artists and architects have become narrators of events, “story telling” is the response to the demands of our time, disclosing “fictional” modes of dwelling by questioning technology through words.

In 1990, Karavan chose the cliff near the public cemetery in Portbou, Spain, to build the monument, entitled *Passages*, in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the death of German Jewish philosopher Walter Benjamin (1882-1940); as he explains, “I look down the cliffs to the sea. The churning waters rage noisily, suddenly spewing up with white foam, and then retreat until they are still. The sea is motionless. Then once again: swirling waters, foam, noise, silence. Nature is telling the tragedy of this man.”²⁴

The sculpture consist of three parts: a 33-meter-long tunnel going down to the sea, a wall with an olive tree leaning against it, and finally a platform with a cube, all in Corten steel. In this case the line, the tunnel, is buried in the earth and connects earth, sky and sea. It also links the visitor with the universality of the earthen and stone graves and draws attention to the fact that flesh is destined to merge with earth. The tunnel is not an end in itself; it frames, articulates, gives significance, relates, separates and unites, facilitates and prohibits. It gives the opportunity to the observer to touch, listen and measure the world with his or her entire bodily existence. It becomes the refuge of our memory and identity. Karavan’s homage is a line to nature which at the same time becomes nature. It brings to mind Benjamin’s ideas about a dream city expressed in *The Arcades Project*, “One can characterize the problem of the form of the new art straight on: When and how will the worlds of form which, without our assistance, have arisen [...] and which have subjugated us, make it clear for us what manner of nature they contain? When will we reach a state of society in which these forms, or those arising from them, reveal themselves to us as natural forms? [There is] another impulse as well: to bring about objectives strange to nature,

²³ Restany, *Dani Karavan*, 129.

²⁴ Dani Karavan. *Dani Karavan: Sky, Water, There*, 7.



Dani Karavan
Sendero por el jardín secreto / Path through the Secret Garden, 1999
 Sapporo, Japón / Japan

along with means that are alien and inimical to nature — measures that emancipated themselves from nature and master it.”²⁵ Karavan reconciles the conflict by turning man-made materials into materials from nature, “to convey experiences, to transmit cultural energies.”²⁶

Soon after this memorial, the artist was commissioned to design the *Square of Tolerance, Homage to Yitzhak Rabin*, in the UNESCO gardens, in Paris (1993–1996). The *Square of Tolerance*, with its simple geometry and a precise path system, establishes a dialogue between the visitor and the buildings, between countries. The two main constraints on the site, a large ventilation chimney and an English court, became part of the main features of the garden. The English court next to the gate, which can be seen into from above, contains archeological artifacts from Israel. The chimney becomes a wall on which are inscribed Archibald MacLeish’s lines translated into several languages. At the center, one single olive tree is planted in a circular mound.

In 1956–1958 for UNESCO Isamu Noguchi, pioneer of the concept of “sculpture of space”, designed the *Patio des Délégués* and the *Jardin Japonais*. “This concept was his most significant contribution to modern sculpture. He conceived large spaces as gardens, not as sites with objects but as relationships to a whole.”²⁷ Karavan’s square, by coincidence, is located next to the *Jardin Japonais* and masters the tradition initiated by the Japanese-American sculptor. It is an assertive geometric garden, full of complex relations and experiences.

The same year the project in Paris was completed, Karavan became involved in another ambitious endeavor, a three-kilometer sculpture cutting across the border between Israel and Egypt, titled *A Way of Peace*. A line of 100 columns of artificial sandstone, 3.6 meters high and 60 cm in diameter and placed at 30-meter intervals inscribed with the word “peace” in 100 different languages, are offering a prayer in the desert for a better way of life. At each end of the line a group of four columns mark the four cardinal points. The number of columns is 108 as “the artist discovered later it is the number of times the bell must ring in a Buddhist temple for a feast.”²⁸

Way to the Hidden Garden (1990–1999) is the name of the fourth sculptural environment that Karavan built in Japan. He feels at home in Japan as he explains his first encounter with the country in 1988, “It seemed then as if I looked in the

²⁵ Walter Benjamin. *The Arcades Project*, ‘Dream City and Dream House, Dreams of the Future,...’ Jung, [K3a,2]. Translated by Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. (Massachusetts, & London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 396.

²⁶ Dani Karavan, 1997, 28.

²⁷ Ana Maria Torres. *Isamu Noguchi. A Study of Space*, (New York: The Monacelli Press, 2000), 309.

²⁸ Dani Karavan. *Thanks*, (exhibition catalogue *Artists, Thinkers and Doers on Visions of Art, Art of Vision*. Edited by Albert Bressand & Catherine Distler), 105.

mirror and saw into myself. Perhaps because my journey began long ago, because Asia is my continent, because the roots always touch the earth and pass its energy through the body upwards. In Japan I tried to touch holiness, to touch your “Ma”, which also became mine.”²⁹ The sculpture is composed of eight elements — *Gate 1, 2 Hills, Place of Time, 7 fountains, Cone of Ice, Snake of water, Gate in the Water, The Hidden Garden* — extends 300 meters in length through 2.5 acres of moist land in a Sapporo sculpture garden, in the city of Sapporo.

Since the 38th Venice Biennale and Documenta 9, the artist has designed temporary installations throughout the world, all of them rooted in the basic principles of his site-specific work: memory, mathematical relations and the spirit of the place. Lines, circles, sundial towers, pyramids, stairs, rails, light, wind, water and trees continue the formal vocabulary of the artist and are used to create nature, an indoor-outdoor dialogue with the gallery, the city and history.

The artist continues this dialogue with the present installation at the IVAM named *Pardes* which means “orange grove”. The gallery spaces become an ideal journey through the history of the city and the personal memories of the artist. Orange trees, Renaissance frescos, water, cactus, rails and two olive trees, one planted and the other upside down, open to an infinite possibility of interpretations.

“My footsteps in the sands were the first reliefs, the first pieces of sculpture that I made; the sunlight discovered them.” With these words Dani Karavan recognizes that man’s relationship with environmental proprieties is developed during childhood. The child grows up under a cloudy or serene sky, walks or plays on sand, earth, or concrete, hears the wind moving leaves, experiences heat and cold. How the child gets acquainted with the environment determines all future experiences. Identification is the basis for our sense of belonging. Memory enables us to dwell, which means belonging to a concrete place. With that point of departure Karavan develops his formal vocabulary as he explains, “There I touch the land, the roots of the trees, the water and I come back now, twenty-one years later, to remember and to remind others of the most wonderful experiences of my life.”³⁰

²⁹ Dani Karavan. *Dialogue with Japan*, 200.

³⁰ Dani Karavan wrote this when he was talking about his links with Tuscany in the catalogue of his exhibition in Pistoia, Celle, Prato, Florence.

The character of the piece, its “genius loci” is determined by the infinite curiosity of the sculptor who asks himself: What is the ground on which we walk? What is

the sky above us? And most important of all, what does this place want to be? Karavan, like the earthwork artists, “looks the ground in the eye” as the artist Richard Long said. This impulse initiated in the 20th Century by artists like Brancusi and Noguchi is rooted in the rich and diverse traditions of Babylon’s hanging gardens, Indian earthen mounds and Viking fortresses. Like in the environmental art of Richard Long with works such as *Walking a Line in Peru*, 1972, or Walter De Maria with *Las Vegas Piece*, 1969, the Israeli artist gathers the properties of the place and recognizes the fact that the human being is an integral part of the environment. Through his work he reminds us that to belong to a place means to “have a grip” in a concrete everyday sense. He gives the visitor a sense of security by symbolizing an eternal environmental order. He resolves the most basic problem of the human being, which is to regain lost place.

Maqueta de la instalación del IVAM / Model of the IVAM installation

