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HANNAN ABU-HUSSEIN explores the theme of women's voices and body acceptance.  
(photo credit: ODED ANTMAN)



## Jerusalem's historical Kishle site hosts captivating 'Umbilicus' art exhibition

By REBECCA SZLECHTER, RIKKI ZAGELBAUM JULY 20, 2024 16:12



**inJerusalem** 

Enter the Kishle space, unearthed in archaeological excavations within the building, uncovering

Jerusalem's history from the days of the First Temple onward.

Originally serving as a British Mandate prison and part of the [Tower of David](#) complex, it houses artifacts spanning various historical periods, including remnants from King Herod's palace. It is currently undergoing a restoration and renovation project to conserve its riches.

The Kishle moat at the Citadel in Jerusalem is now hosting the "Umbilicus" exhibition, curated by Dr. Adina Kamien and Malu Zayon, where art explores how creativity, the human body, and the universe connect. The Citadel itself encapsulates 2,800 years of [history throughout Jerusalem](#). It holds remains of Ottoman walls, foundations from Herod's palace, and other archaeological treasures. "Umbilicus" delves into ancient ideas of Jerusalem being the center of the world.

For the inaugural occasion at the Kishle, a contemporary Israeli art exhibition displaying prominent Israeli artists was held. Located south of the Tower of David Citadel, the Kishle building hosted the exhibition's opening on July 9.

"Umbilicus" is a captivating exhibition that combines multiple senses and different types of artistic expression, both physical and metaphorical, to intertwine personal and universal symbols. This exhibition, which includes artworks spanning video, painting presentations, and sound, explores themes of umbilicus and global connectivity.



THE NAVEL of Jerusalem: Excavations at the Kishle. (credit: ODED ANTMAN)

## The Kishle comes alive

EILAT LIEBER, director and chief curator, said, "It is exciting to see the Kishle come alive and to recognize its potential to tell different stories of Jerusalem. The connection between old and new and its presentation is the uniqueness of the Tower of David. Here we see the connection between archaeology and art, between the ancient stone and the modern work, which creates a fascinating dialogue between material, form, and color and gives a new meaning to the eternal city."

When visitors enter the Citadel, they are met with a grand, vaulted cave-like structure, which deepens as they walk through the gallery. The building, dubbed "the navel of Jerusalem" (hence, "Umbilicus") embodies the feeling of being deep, almost embraced, within the citadel, and, by extension, by Jerusalem itself.

As visitors descend the staircase, audio presentations from speakers strategically placed in seven locations within the Kishle chamber gradually rise in volume, providing a sense of grounding within a deep recess of the Earth. These sounds, crafted by Matan Daskal, emanate from 12 separate outputs, creating an almost out-of-body experience for visitors that encourages them to fully engage with the building and the works within it.



Naturally, upon entering, visitors first look up at the expansive ceilings – high stone arches that feature graffiti art from Etzel prisoners of the British Mandate period, as well as contemporary art from the artists featured in the gallery. But look down, and you will see that the floor has been transformed as well.

Created by Sahar Azimi, the ancient stone now glows with a video piece titled *With the Water*. The footage, which flickers and ripples like water, is meant to move like a dance, showcasing dancers at the [Dead Sea](#). “The Sea of Death seeps into the excavations from the First Temple without physical existence, presenting an alternate reality,” the museum explains in a press release. “The work connects to the Foundation Stone that covers, according to tradition, the source of all the springs and fountains from which the world drinks its water.”

NEARLY BLENDING in with their ancient surroundings on the left of the Citadel is a set of nine handmade ceramic jars by Israeli sculptor Yehudit Sasportas, which come together to form a 3D sentence assembled under the title *Hashavat Aveda* (return of something lost). The jugs are painted with swampy forests and swirls drawn in ink, which the museum says “are flooded with unresolved conflicts or situations of fracture and tension.” Emanating from the jugs are sounds of trees swaying in the forest, evoking a sense of the hidden, spiritual structures within our collective subconscious.

To the right hangs a set of fictitious maps, titled *Imago Mundi*, created by Israeli artist Lihi Turjeman. The drawings, wide in scope and covering a significant portion of the wall, correspond to the architecture of the building. They are “reminiscent of prehistoric wall paintings, like a modern archaeological perspective, but with a time lapse,” the museum says, showcasing territories with unknown coordinates. When looking at the drawings, it is possible to identify the image of a womb, celestial bodies, or imaginary buildings. It is described as “the attempt of man to limit the border between our world and the chaos around us.”

Also adorning the walls are works by Israeli artist Merav Shinn Ben-Alon, who deals with topics of gender and trauma, and the gap between what is seen and what is said. In her series of drawings of the navel, she “touches on the experience of the death of a mother and the image of the navel as a representative of the scar of separating from her.”

Other interesting pieces include works by Palestinian Israeli artist Hannan Abu-Hussein. Hanging from the center of Kishle and in the depths of the Citadel at the end of the exhibition, they depict a

theme of women's voices, acceptance of sexuality and one's body, and gender equality.

But perhaps the most intriguing piece is done by Israeli video artist Sharon Balaban, whose work is housed in one of Kishle's niches. The video installation Navel Balloon projects the knot of a balloon onto a silk balloon, evoking an amniotic cavity or incubator. The image's movement creates a pulsating sensation, symbolizing the connection between mother and fetus, moving and breathing.

The beating heart of the Kishle spreads its riches.■

*For more information: [www.tod.org.il/en/event/umbilicus/](http://www.tod.org.il/en/event/umbilicus/)*

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