



Love and crease

There's more to origami than paper planes and boats. Meher McArthur meets the artist who is using the craft to bring Israelis and Palestinians together

Origami has evolved over the last few decades from a Japanese paper craft practised by children into a sophisticated form of artistic expression. Physicist Robert J. Lang folds complex models of birds, beasts and insects that look lively enough to breathe; French paper-folding master Vincent Floderer crumples paper into exquisite organic forms, while Swiss origami supremo Sipho Mabona pushes the limits of paper-folding beyond aesthetics into the realm of philosophy and politics with his large-scale installations spotlighting global warming, capitalism and animal exploitation. Now Israeli artist Miri Golan is using origami as a tool for political activism to help resolve conflict in one of the most volatile regions of the world.

As a young girl growing up in Israel in the 1970s, Golan saw a Japanese woman making an origami crane on television. She didn't know this was origami and says she thought of it simply as "playing

with paper". But it sparked her interest in the art, and she began learning how to fold other forms out of paper. She was even given special permission to fold paper during her classes at school as she demonstrated that it could help with her concentration.

In her twenties she travelled to Japan, where she learned more about the craft. In 1993, after returning to Israel, she established the Israeli Origami Centre in Jerusalem and began teaching the skill in schools. Since then, Golan has trained and placed origami teachers in many of Israel's Jewish, Muslim and Christian schools.

The Centre currently has 15 teachers in 25 elementary schools teaching the Origametria programme: a system that uses origami in geometry lessons to

help children visualize difficult abstract concepts. This year an additional 40 elementary school maths teachers are being trained to teach the craft, whilst over 100 kindergarten teachers have been trained to implement a similar programme for younger children.

But Golan believes that origami can be used for more than illustrating mathematical concepts. In the early 2000s she founded Folding Together, an organization that uses origami to bring Israelis and Palestinians together in the Jerusalem area. Children are invited from local Israeli and Palestinian schools and

sitting alternately, with each nationality next to each other, and with each child's name written in Hebrew, Arabic, English and Japanese, they are taught how to create origami models.

"Origami is neither Israeli nor Palestinian – it is culturally neutral"