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## **Four-Story Public Artwork, Experimental Sound Instrument Installed at Oshman Family JCC**

*California, New York artists collaborate on new landmark funded by Taube Philanthropies*

**Palo Alto, Calif. (June 10, 2021)**—Despite the pandemic and a Bay Area wildfire that burned down their studio, a team of artists representing both U.S. coasts has created a four-story sculpture and experimental instrument. Entitled “Chai,” the Hebrew word for life, the interactive, permanent public artwork was funded by a grant from [Taube Philanthropies](#) and is the centerpiece of the Taube Koret Campus for Jewish Life in Palo Alto, Calif. The sculpture is intended to reflect and support the inter-generational nature of the campus, which is open to the public and includes the Moldaw Senior Residences and [Oshman Family Jewish Community Center](#) (OFJCC) fitness center, cultural arts hall, preschool and afterschool care facilities. The OFJCC typically hosts 1.3 million visits per year.

“We are thrilled to support Chai, a stunning public art installation with potential to bring people together to share musical compositions and experiment with sound,” said Tad Taube, chairman of Taube Philanthropies. “It is our hope that the soaring height and unique sounds of Chai will inspire creative spirit in the Bay Area for many years to come.”

Acclaimed Bay Area sculptor Richard Deutsch and his daughters, artists Silvie and Rebecca Deutsch, started their creative process by conducting a series of workshops with members of the diverse OFJCC community. Preschoolers, a youth theater troupe, board members and elders told stories of hope, history, values, resilience and community, all underscored by their belief that today’s Jews are the architects of the Jewish future. The artists were inspired to create an artwork that echoes these thoughts, unites the community and is engaging to 4-year-olds through 94-year-olds. It was clear early on in the sculpture’s development that it should have a sound component. Composer Ron Shalom of New York joined the team to share his expertise in forging new sound through electronics.

“Chai is a sculpture about life. It is interactive and reflects the light, hope and history of the community,” says artist Richard Deutsch whose studio was severely damaged by the CZU Complex Lightning fires while he was working on Chai. “We started by exploring the sounds of wind through steel pipes and ultimately designed a symbolic instrument that can be played like a ‘shofar’ or megaphone by the people of the JCC and visitors from near and far.”

Located at the visual center of the campus, Chai’s 35-foot tower is covered with more than 5,000 tiles in seven colors of red to symbolize the fruit of the pomegranate, one of the seven species mentioned in the Hebrew Bible. Eighteen polished stainless-steel pipes, the numerical prayer number of Chai, simultaneously reach towards the sky and the ground, inviting viewers to wonder and interact.

Chai is intended to evoke the two-ness of Judaism, as in the primal divisions of Genesis, separating light from dark and the sea from the sky, alluding to the transformations sparked by the two tablets of the covenant and the parting of the Red Sea. The polished stainless steel is designed to reflect its surroundings, the people and dynamic life of the JCC. The

sound component was inspired by the artists' desire to involve the OFJCC community and visitors in exploring the sculpture as a creative tool.

“Chai is a multi-dimensional, one-of-a-kind instrument invented specifically for this location,” says Shalom. “By scanning a QR code while viewing the sculpture on campus, people will be able to use the software interface I designed to playfully explore the unique sounds of steel. The interface also allows other artists to compose for Chai and I look forward to hearing their creations.”

Ron Shalom and Richard Deutsch identified 10 highly resonant locations on the pipes and installed transducers in those spots to amplify sound by vibration. Shalom's interface has buttons people can touch on their smartphones to play a variety of short arrangements of musical tones and harmonies through the steel sculpture. His arrangements are randomized so that the experience of “playing” the sculpture is different every time. Chai can be silenced at night and as needed during classes and events.

OFJCC Chief Operating Officer Sally Kaufmann Flinchbaugh noted, “the installation of Chai lays the groundwork for the instrument to become a centerpiece of our community's oral history. We anticipate developing a program that encourages the public to experiment and professional artists to compose for this one-of-a-kind instrument.”

### **About Richard Deutsch**

While shaping a 30-year career, artist Richard Deutsch has fostered the imaginative inquiry required to design sculpture and public art environments of stone, water, bronze and stainless steel. The recipient of numerous awards, including fellowships from the American Academy in Rome and the National Endowment for the Arts, Deutsch creates work that is marked by an understanding of space and environment. Conceived for a particular architectural or social context, complex programs and rich histories are distilled into art projects with simple sculptural forms and strong visual impact. The artist is committed to creating work that is thought provoking, accessible and—through art's intangible power—builds community and sustains interest over time. Concept, layers of meaning, the organization of form and space and the human experience are all central to his exploration. Among Richard Deutsch's commissions for sculpture and art-integrated environments are significant projects for Stanford University, the Oakland Museum of California and major urban plazas including San Francisco, Oakland, Los Angeles, Arlington and Washington, D.C. His sculpture is in the permanent collections of San Francisco's de Young Museum, the Smithsonian Institution and the Kreeger Museum in Washington DC.

### **About Ron Shalom**

Ron Shalom is a musician and theater maker. He is often engaged as a producer, composer and sound engineer, as well as for art direction. Minivan is his electropop drag show featuring custom lights, original music, costume and instructional dance. Fers Yn Ri is the ensemble of percussion, strings and voices that performs his songs. He also is a member of the Daxophone Consort, a composers collective. Recent residencies include the Watermill Center, SPACE Gallery, 10 Forward, and Rhizome DC. He lives in Brooklyn, New York.

### **About Rebecca Deutsch**

Rebecca Deutsch is an artist and educator in Oakland, Calif. where she guides children through artmaking and storytelling across a wide range of media. In 2018, she completed a Fulbright scholarship in Athens, Greece which culminated in a large public sculpture and

community performance in Heraklion, Crete. Rebecca earned a master's in arts in education from Harvard Graduate School of Education, and a bachelor's degree from Oberlin College. In her work as an artist, she continues to explore new ways that performance, public art, and storytelling can be used to create meaningful, responsive, and transformative experiences for youth and communities.

### **About Silvie Deutsch**

Silvie Deutsch teaches Studio Art at de Toledo High School, serves as the director of their studio art program, and is an interdisciplinary and collaborative artist. She teaches sculpture, ceramics, drawing and painting, and facilitates large permanent projects on campus. Her teaching and art practice revolve around building communities and creating the conditions for collectivity, joy, awe and play through art. Silvie earned her master's degree in fine art from University of California Irvine and a bachelor's degree from Wesleyan University.

### **About Taube Philanthropies**

For more than 30 years, Taube Philanthropies has been a leader in supporting diverse educational, research, cultural, community and youth organizations in the San Francisco Bay Area, Poland and Israel. Founded by businessman and philanthropist Tad Taube in 1981, and now led by Tad and his wife Dianne Taube, the organization works to ensure that citizens have the freedom and opportunity for advancement of their goals and dreams. [taubephilanthropies.org](http://taubephilanthropies.org)

### **About Oshman Family Jewish Community Center**

The Oshman Family Jewish Community Center (OFJCC) on the Taube Koret Campus for Jewish Life serves the South Peninsula through educational, social, cultural, fitness, sports and other programs. The OFJCC is a multi-generational Jewish neighborhood where all are welcome, and which seeks to enrich lives, build community and inspire Jewish journeys. The OFJCC provides a common ground for individuals, Jewish institutions and other local groups and organizations to work, learn, play and celebrate together for the betterment of the whole community. For more information, visit [www.paloaltojcc.org](http://www.paloaltojcc.org) or call (650) 223-8700.

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