

## CITY HAPPENINGS

# Kisufim 2015

Gathering Jewish writers from around the globe, this year's biennial conference will explore 'Identity and Otherness' in various languages

• By PEGGY CIDOR

Like so many interesting and important events, Kisufim, the biennial conference for local and international Jewish writers, was born incidentally.

Hava Pinhas-Cohen, a Jerusalem poet and translator who is the founder and artistic director of Kisufim, recalls that for years, in several encounters with Jewish writers abroad, she heard their frustration over remaining unknown to Israeli readers – and not only as a result of the language barrier. Having founded *Dimuy*, the first literary review to open its pages to promising young and religious Israeli writers, mostly poets, in the 1980s, she realized that a gap existed between Israeli writers and their Jewish counterparts in the Diaspora and that it somehow had to be filled.

"It took several years more years," Pinhas-Cohen recounts, "but I finally came out with a clear idea of what had to, and could, be done, and it was clear that the meeting point had to be Jerusalem. That is how the first Kisufim Conference was born in 2007."

With the fourth conference starting on November 23, the Holy City-based Kisufim is the only conference that brings together Jewish authors, poets and intellectuals from Israel and around the world on a four-day journey into Jewish time and spirit. During the event, the prestigious Matanel Award is presented to two promising writers or poets: one of them Israeli, writing in Hebrew, and the other writing in another language.

As a lead-up to the conference, an anthology of short stories, essays and poems written by participants will be published. Initially, it will include the pieces in their original language; later, they will be translated and republished as a Hebrew collection.

This year's Kisufim is on "Identity and Otherness" and will be "an encounter about characters and characteristics that emphasize the significance of Jewish culture in the life of the Jewish people," Pinhas-Cohen says.

"Throughout the four days of the conference, we hold public readings of poetry and prose, and workshops with poets and writers in various languages, such as English, Russian, Spanish, Hungarian, French, Serbian, Romanian, Greek, Italian, Bulgarian, Macedonian, Arabic, Ladino and Yiddish," she says. "The conference also offers more intimate meetings among visiting authors and readers, who share their language, as well as [meetings] between authors and translators and among magazine editors from all over the Jewish world and their readership."

For Pinhas-Cohen, Kisufim provides a vehicle for the belief that contemporary Jewish literature is a treasure trove containing the memory of Jewish life and culture after World War II, and the destruction of Jewish communities in the Levant.

"We find it a matter of both interest and responsibility to examine the transformations undergone by Jewish culture since then, and leave a chronicle of testimony and knowledge for the coming generations," she emphasizes.

Pinhas-Cohen, born to a Jewish family that fled Bulgaria, is very much aware of the necessity to discover, translate and pres-



Jerusalem poet Hava Pinhas-Cohen, founder and artistic director of Kisufim. (Courtesy)



Kisufim 2013. (Courtesy)

ent Balkan Jewish writers and introduce them to the public both in Israel and abroad. It is, she says, another way to protect and bring to life the wealth of Jewish literary work that escaped attention for years following the Second World War.

Among this year's conference participants are poets Yvonne Green of the UK and Sarah Wetzel of the US. Other participants include Jennifer Barber (US), Erez Bitton (an Israel Prize laureate) and Michel Eckhard (France).

There will be a one-on-one encounter between Israeli writer David Grossman and Norwegian writer Gabi Gleichmann, and Israeli writer Samy Michael will converse with Kari Klemela from Finland. A special program on "Yiddish Now – Boundaries of Language" will host Yiddish-language writers from the US (Dov-Ber Kerler), France (Gilles Rozier), Mexico (Myriam Moscona) and Turkey (Tarik Gunersel).

Special attention will be devoted to Israeli writers who write in their original, pre-aliya languages, and another session will host young writers who came to Israel from Russia and write in both Hebrew and Russian. "Poetry From a Place of Otherness," a session moderated by Prof. Michael Kramer, will host American and British poets.

There will also be a presentation of New Poetry in English from the graduate program in creative writing of Bar-Ilan University's Shaindy Rudoff.

Kisufim 2015 will take place on November 23-27 at Mishkenot Sha'ananim and Beit Avi Chai.

Details: [www.mishkenot.org.il/kisufim/en/](http://www.mishkenot.org.il/kisufim/en/)