

The God of Small Details

Tami Katz-Freiman

There are exhibitions that have no need for wordy explanations, viewing them is experiential and un-mediated. *OverCraft* is such an exhibition. The colorful excess, the toil, the density, and sensual abundance that characterize the works in it magnetize the spectator's eye with effects of spectacular and multihued beauty. The women artists taking part in the exhibition bring to center stage that which has been pushed to the lowly margins of kitsch and decoration and has belonged exclusively to the world of women. Through empowerment, pleasure, and defiance they elevate what was in the past thought of as an "aesthetic crime" and give it new meaning and content.

In an ironic paraphrase of the American artist Barbara Kruger's slogan, "We Decorate Your Life," these artists engage with decoration and ornamentation, obsessive work and handicraft as their principle practice and proudly present seductive, labor intensive beauty without shame or apology, often imbuing it with latent, biting criticism.

In recent years, after a long absence, the concept of "beauty" has returned to the center of the theoretical discourse of contemporary art. In 1999 two central exhibitions on this topic were exhibited in the United States: one at the Hirshhorn Museum in Washington D.C., *Regarding Beauty: A View of the Late Twentieth Century*, and the second, at the Tampa University Museum in South Florida, under the title *Ultralounge: The Return of Social Space with Cocktails*.¹ The second exhibition was curated by Dave Hickey, one of the prominent theoreticians in the world of American art, whose articles and books paved the way for "beauty" to return to center stage.²

OverCraft similarly activates pleasurable sensual experience and renews concepts connected to beauty that had been excluded from the modernist discourse in general and the local Israeli art discourse in particular.³ The term "decorative" (along with "kitsch" and "illustrative") was for many years one of

the common condemnations in the unwritten rule book of Israeli modernism. Until recently the adjective “beautiful” was a derogatory term in the local ethical code that supported reduction, efficiency, leanness, asceticism, thrift, and austerity. *OverCraft* renews the discourse on the beautiful, the decorative, and the ornamental, celebrating the joy of liberation from these adjectives’ derogatory labels.

OverCraft’s historical sources are anchored in the feminist wave of the early 1970s, in the radical art of women that dealt with the rehabilitation of traditional women’s craft, motivated by a desire to crystallize its core images and to formulate what would be termed female “essentialism.” Artists such as Harmony Hammond, Faith Wilding, Judy Chicago, and Miriam Schapiro started to express skills that until then had been thought of as lowly, as being “too feminine” in the eyes of the male art world. Judy Chicago’s well known piece *The Dinner Party* (1973) – homage to 39 creative women from history – is a key example of the expression of female essentialism. The grandiose dining table that Chicago created brought together images of nutrition, fertility, and sexuality through the use of handicrafts such as ceramics, tapestry, lace, and embroidery, with an emphasis on soft colors and open, round, and flowing forms. The question of whether there are essentially feminine images, techniques, or materials – is still debated in the field of Feminist Studies. What is clear is that the use of these materials and crafts in the 1970s was a meaningful political act in itself.⁴

With the penetration of feminist theories and their influence on mainstream cultural trends in the 1980s and 1990s, male artists such as Mike Kelly, Lucas Samaras, Oliver Hering, and others also began to knit, sew, and embroider. Women artists such as Ann Hamilton and Annette Messenger refined feminine expression and took another step toward labor intensive and detail-filled work, through the use of materials linked exclusively to female territories. The most important artist in the context of *OverCraft*, however, is the young American Liza Lou, who set a new standard for such work when she created *The Kitchen* (1991-95), where she covered a standard, life-size American kitchen from top to toe with tiny beads. With the start of the 21st century these trends

have been assimilated into the center of the artistic establishment, and at the last Venice Biennial (2003) it was possible to see a record level of decoration and obsession in the works of the British artist Chris Ofili, the Brazilian Beatriz Milhazes, and the Danish Olafur Eliasson.

The women artists participating in *OverCraft* therefore reflect post-feminist trends dominant in the contemporary international art world: they succeed in refuting disturbing conventions regarding work and gender. They do this in a refreshing manner combining political radicalism, sensual pleasure, and emotional expression. For each and every one of them the laborious, Sisyphean process stands at the center of the artwork, and the final product testifies to the thousands of hours invested in it. The creative process common to all the artists is characterized by monotonous, repetitive, and obstinate acts of cutting, joining, folding, piercing, gluing, covering, and filling in areas in an obsessive manner known in Art History as *horror vacui*: Yael Yudkovik pierces clay with her fingers; Tal Matzliah fills areas with cross-hatches of color and with mantra-like sentences; Dina Shenhav, Merav Sudaey, and Shula Kobo sew and glue sequins and beads; Aya Ben Ron, Meital Katz-Minerbo, and Hilla Ben-Ari cut and glue paper and wallpaper; Tal Amitai, Naomi Siman Tov, and Dina Schupak create the illusion of handwork in painting (embroidery and puzzles); Alice Klingman and Michal Shamir cover surfaces with various materials (plastic toys and jelly candies); and Miri Chais and Vera Korman perform thousands of virtual acts of "cut & paste" on the computer.

OverCraft reflects the natural way in which craft work has been assimilated within the canonic artistic language after being transformed from folkloric material and functional art, from techniques belonging to "outsider art" or to bourgeois leisure activities, into viable means of expression valued as contemporary artistic practice. The exhibition demonstrates the long way that feminist art has come since the political activism of its early days, which motivated women artists to choose obsessive-decorative techniques as a way to liberate themselves from the hegemony of male, intellectual, and spiritual art up to the renewed engagement with the same practices thirty years later.

This time around, however, they are performed with relaxation and humor, with no barricades and banners of war.

In Israel the use of crafts carries additional meanings connected to the Zionist education of the 1950s and 1960s, and to the gender-related division of labor that relegated women to home keeping and excluded them from public life. Elementary school “girl’s crafts” lessons were meant to prepare us for life, armed with the female knowledge necessary in order to be good wives skilled at holding needle and thread and darning socks. Acquiring craft skills was also developed as a kind of hobby that would allow women to keep themselves busy during leisure time as they quietly continued decorating the men’s world. Beyond feminist concerns, however, it must be said that questions of aesthetics and beauty were never at the center of Israeli society. Remains of socialist values are still noticeable in the cultural-ethical code that prefers simplicity, modesty, and visual poverty to any hint of bourgeois luxury. Two artists who lived on kibbutz, Hilla Ben-Ari and Shula Kobo, mentioned the aesthetic deprivation that was part of the ascetic kibbutz society, and confessed their strong desire to compensate themselves through an obsessive preoccupation with beauty and ornamentation. Yet despite the post-modernist blurring of differences between high and low culture, and despite the “high” needing the “low” for over two decades, it is still clear who rules the roost. Contrary to high art dealing with cardinal issues, handicraft still belongs to the “authentic,” “popular,” and “exotic” voice – the world of the domestic, the practical, and the day to day.⁵

Decorative craft is closely linked to the concept of “obsession.” Because of their demanding focus on details and on compulsive repetition, it is commonly said that works of the type shown in this exhibition are “obsessive.”

“Obsession” is defined in the dictionary as to “haunt” or “beset” and in clinical psychological terms as a form of neuroses whose main characteristic is the attachment to a troublesome thought, impulse, or image that forces itself on the patient’s mind. It is a closed circle: compulsive obsessive actions are meant to reduce the anxiety caused by the obsession and they express a desperate effort to seemingly control an uncontrollable world.⁶

The clinical definition of “obsession” connects obsessive expressions to the work of “outsider” artists – psychotic artists in a mental state that activates their creative imagination in an unusual manner. In the “Hotel Utopia-Dystopia” – a special edition of *Studio Art Magazine* (1998:89) edited by Meir Agassi – the “outsiders” world is defined as “a world experienced and seen as if through autistic glass, a complex universe, dense, intricate and so intensive, that it immediately creates a feeling of discomfort and temporary loss of balance in the viewer who comes in contact with it. Narrative and formal labyrinths direct the eye toward a complex trap of images that flood the paper in a conflicted merging of dream and reality.”⁷

Density, abundance, urgency, compulsion, and discomfort also characterize the works in *OverCraft*, although, of course, none of the artists here are really “outsiders.” The similarity is only on the visual level and it exists only in the affection for small details. In *Reading in Detail*, the feminist theoretician Naomi Schor writes about society’s negative relationship to small details seen as a form of surplus, as a decadent and annoying expression, in other words as “women’s matters.”⁸ Indeed, an essential part of women’s protest turned against the therapeutic language that labeled them as illogical, hysterical, obsessive, and preoccupied with the insignificant. The (male) view was expressed in art as well, where the tendency toward small details was considered the opposite from the ideal, the sublime or classical, threatening to undermine the internal hierarchy of artistic creation and to blur the relations between center and periphery, between the meaningless and the significant, between foreground and background.⁹ In *OverCraft*, therefore, this phenomenon receives a defiant meaning. The artists question which details should be dealt with, and aspire to invert the hierarchy of what is really important. The same details that society bothered to organize, categorize, clean up, and hide as being meaningless, impure, and unworthy acquire here full attention and are treated with critique, love, and humor.

“The uniqueness of obsession is that its compulsive quality could obscure its contents and could become through infinite return the content of itself.”¹⁰ At

first glance, the compulsive repetition that characterizes most of the works in this exhibition obscures the contents of the works. Moreover, there is something apparently autistic, disconnected from the world, in this kind of intensive labor. Yet it is precisely here that the strength of the works lies: the rich colorfulness, the harmonious combinations of small details and the actual preoccupation with fragments and shards of imagery and materials are the hook on which the bait is hung – they dizzy the spectator with feelings of pleasure and astonishment and only then surprise with their content. None of the works exhibited here remain on the level of ornamentation: the reaction to reality, discomfort, subversion and sarcasm bubbles under the surface of beauty and is revealed only with a second gaze. Relations of woman-nature, food, sexuality, politics, ecology, psychology, gender roles, body, pornography, and even our political conflict are camouflaged by the rich surfaces. The works' beauty and their ornamentation veil the spectator's awareness with a screen of pleasure, neutralizing resistance and then – at the most unexpected moment – they bite.

Notes

1 Viso, O.M., Benezra, N., (eds.), *Regarding Beauty: A View of the Late Twentieth Century*, Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Smithsonian Institution (Washington DC: Hatje Cantz Publishers, 1999); Hickey, D. *Ultrabounce: The Return of Social Space with Cocktails* (Tampa: The University of South Florida, 1999). In this exhibition Hickey exhibited the works on black walls in a darkened space. The ceiling and floor were completely neutralized, and only the works glowed from the walls. The installation of works in *OverCraft* has been inspired by Hickey's exhibition.

2 The most important collection of his articles on this subject has been collected under the title: Hickey, D., *The Invisible Dragon: Four Essays on Beauty* (Los Angeles: Art Issues Press, 1993).

3 In this context *OverCraft* is a direct continuation to previous exhibitions I have curated such as *Antipathos* at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, (1993) and *Metasex* at the Ein Harod Museum (1994), which dealt with the non-canonical margins of Israeli art.

4 The current October edition of *Artforum* (2003) is dedicated to the question of whether today, thirty years after the radicalism of the 1970s, there is still meaning to the term “feminist art.” For an in-depth discussion on the issue of essentiality and the use of crafts see also: Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, “Crafty Women and the Hierarchy of the Arts,” in *Old Mistress: Women, Art and Ideology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981).

5 The flagship exhibition that marked and summerized the dialogue between “high” and “low” as expressed in modern art was exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York in 1990 (curators: Kirk Varnadoe and Adam Gopnik). See: Varnedoe, K., & Gopnik, A., *High & Low: Modern Art and Popular Culture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1990) In Israel the Tel Aviv Museum of Art put on the exhibition “**The Height of the Popular**” in 2001 (curator: Ellen Ginton). However, the exhibition closest in spirit to *OverCraft* was *A Labor of Love* at the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York in 1996 (curator: Marcia Tucker). This exhibition focused on contemporary art’s adoption of labor intensive techniques and folkloric crafts. See: Marcia Tucker, *A Labor of Love* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996).

6 The first article in which Freud relates to obsessive disorders was written in 1907. See: “Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices” in Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. & ed. James Strachey (London: The Hogarth Press, 1955) vol. 14., **pp. ??**. The definition given here is based on the Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought (Tel Aviv: Am Oved), p. 4 [Hebrew]. For a clinical definition from the field of psychiatry see also: Harold I. Kaplan & Benjamin J. Sadock, *Synopsis of Psychiatry: Behavioral Sciences, Clinical Psychiatry* (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1998), Chapter

18.5: Anxiety Disorders, pp.326-327.

7 Meir Agassi, "Hotel Utopia-Dystopia," *Studio Art Magazine* 89, January 1989, p. 6 [Hebrew].

8 Naomi Schor, *Reading in Detail: Aesthetics and the Feminine* (New York & London: Routledge, 1989), pp. 4, 15.

9 Marcia Tucker, *A Labor of Love* (New York: The New Museum of Contemporary Art, 1996) p. 37.

10 Amir Orr, editorial article on obsession, *Helikon, Anthological Series of Contemporary and Classical Poetry* 22 – Arousings [Hebrew]. See the electronic version at the web site:
<http://www.snunit.k12.il/sachlav/db/helicon/upload/.num22/content.html>

Body—Object—Secretions—Ornament

From a distance, **Hilla Ben-Ari's** decorations on the red wall (*Mechanized Flow*) seem to be pretty Sukkah decorations. From close up, they are revealed to be a fence or lattice pattern, something that is both a defense and a barrier: hundreds of duplicated identity-less female figures cut out from wallpaper are organized in crowded uniform lines. The figures are connected to each other by their blond braids, by the milk spraying from their nipples, and by the blood flowing from their vaginas. The sexual organs and secretions are made from three dimensional plastic paint used in clothing. Sharp red hooks protruding from the smooth surface trap the threads stretched from their vaginas. Row upon row of anonymous girls dance as if crucified or bound on the wall and splatter their body fluids in all directions. The body's borders are breached, as internal and external, pure and impure are merged, and the seemingly innocent decorative pattern turns into a sharp metaphor for the tangled relations linking nutrition, reproduction, fertility, barrenness, identity, and sexuality.

In **Miri Chais's** romantic dollhouse-like space the image of an anonymous woman is also duplicated – a faceless woman who is swallowed up by the overabundance of ornamentation that surrounds her. The source of the image is a digitally manipulated portrait of a model that is repeated again and again on the wallpaper, the bed, and the matching linen chest. The digital manipulation – the flattening of the images, their duplication and infinite cloning into flower-like and star-like patterns – turn the woman into a wallflower, wallpaper, furniture, empty ornamentation. It is a representation of passive femininity lacking sexuality, sweet and eye pleasing, trapped in a magic circle. “Beauty” is indeed the lead star in Chais’ work, glamorous, seductive, and magnificent, but it is revealed to be hollow, embalmed, and serial. Chais intensifies kitsch’s seductive power to spread a smoke screen and to distance the viewer from reality. Her preoccupation with flattening feminine beauty, duplicating and decorating it, raises questions about the way in which women have been presented by men for hundreds of years as wall decorations, as trophies, as delightful collector's items for aesthetic pleasure.

Ornament—Fertility—Reproduction—Flesh

An innocent and sweet illusion also characterizes **Aya Ben Ron's** series *The Four Seasons*, but here the context is even more chilling and nightmarish. Beyond the covering of ornamental clusters and the radiant symmetrical formations in splendid color one discovers disturbing images connected to abject aspects of the human body. The images are based on a series of 17th century medical book illustrations (*The Four Seasons of Humanity*, 1680) that demonstrated clinical treatments of the body – pregnancy and birth, diseases, viruses, mutations, and invasive surgical procedures. In a technique that combines handicraft with digital manipulation, Ben Ron duplicates images of the body, cloning and grafting limbs and organs in a process during which the images lose their initial contexts and are transformed into a kind of kaleidoscopic weave abundant with forms and colors. The images of sexuality, pregnancy, and birth in this series blur the gender differences and raise questions of technological reproduction that sanitize the fertility process of female flesh and blood. Thus, the decorative compositions seen here are

an efficient camouflage tactic for the obsessive and inquisitive treatment of the clinical-medical aspect of the human body in the post genome age.

Flesh—Meat—Body—Childhood—Food

The preoccupation with the body also exists in the work of **Michal Shamir**, for whom the body is represented as a hunk of life-size animal meat (ox) hung from a butcher's hook, similar to the famous ox painting by Rembrandt.

Multicolor jelly candies – snakes, snails, spiders, worms, teeth, and fried eggs – make up the skin covering the meat. Through meticulous work, which resembles the inlaying of precious stones, Shamir disguises the monstrous image of the living bleeding flesh. She has used candy to deal with the affinity between meat, body, decoration, and temptation in other works as well: she wrote on the wall with necklace candy, sculpted body-like objects from cotton-candy, ironed clusters of crushed sweets that looked like open wounds and created a candy curtain in the style of Hansel and Gretel. The preoccupation with meat and animals is discussed in feminist literature as a way of relating to the body and as a protest against the disturbing equation women=nature / man=culture. The sweet meat sculpture exhibited here is a 21st century version of *vanitas*, but in contrast to the still-life paintings of the 17th century, where the futility of carnal life was symbolized by ripe fruit, here decay is not hinted at but crawls freely over the hanging meat delicacy.

Food—Nutrition—Sexuality—Phallus

Tal Matzliah's work, *Not Tasty*, present two obsessions of modern life: sex and food. Images of food (this time, steak on a plate) are combined with sexual images and defiant mantra-like sentences. The central image is of a monumental phallus spraying jets of fluid into an open mouth. In her unique handwriting, characterized by tight, rhythmic, brushstrokes, the artist compresses her disturbing images onto the canvas and reveals an accumulative associative continuum of anxiety, anger, repugnance, and fantasy. The Hebrew texts (slice of cock/not tasty/Tal eats) are written with a fine brush and create an autonomous tangle that becomes intertwined amongst the images and defines some of the shapes. The painting's texture, its striated grooves and layered surfaces, is laboriously constructed, as if the

artist disciplines all her energy and the thoughts that flow during the act of painting into ornamental channels of expression whose logic is etched on the depths of the soul.

Phalluses—Landscapes—Childhood

Male sexual organs also star in **Yael Yudkovik's** floor installation, *Polynomos*. A crowded collection of phallic structures thrusting upward like towers, of different textures and heights, are duplicated by a round mirror that serves as their base. The general impression is of a fantastic glacial landscape, a kind of continent, island, or puddle with imaginary bodies thrusting out of it. The objects are made of baked clay dipped in whitewash, and painted a sickly green shade. With laborious and patient handwork Yudkovik pierces the flesh-like clay with her fingers. The gouging, the hole making, and the piercing is done in a monotonous cyclical rhythm until a dense and intensive surface is created. The strategy she has chosen – to produce a phallus pierced, sieve-like, and thus to negate its centrality and completeness (and even make it female), gives new interpretations to Freud and Lacan, formulating a different, androgynous sexuality, beyond the normative division of gender differences. It seems as if even the most aggressive image – the ultimate signifier – has a hole (many holes).

Another kind of decorative landscape is presented here by **Tal Amitai**: a realistic painting of the panoramic Haifa Bay as reflected in the gallery window. But the window has been blocked off for the exhibition and the landscape painting is actually a large jigsaw puzzle of 6,588 pieces that can never be played with. As with her previous works, Amitai has created the illusion of a real thing (a puzzle) exposed as a perfect mimesis, meticulous but functionless. As with the Surrealist painter Magritte's tautological window/picture, there is a deconstruction of the correct relationship between representation and the object represented, between image and reality, between culture and nature. The painting becomes a window overlooking what is hidden behind it while simultaneously posing as a children's game. Utilizing a technique of concealing and revealing (using masking tape) the artist worked in her studio for many months using a labor intensive, meditative

creative process to deconstruct the enormous view into tiny pieces. The painting's three-dimensional effect gives rise to thoughts about the ways of seeing and of painting as a screen and illusion. Moreover, the work of deconstructing and reconstructing the apparently pastoral landscape raises thoughts regarding the area that is known for being one of the most polluted in the country.

Shula Kobo exhibits works based on patterns from children's pajamas and sheets, reminiscent of her childhood on the kibbutz in the 1950s. Polka dots, cats, flowers, and figures from fairy tales are processed through gluing colored and variously shaped beads onto a canvas. This meticulous procedure covers the entire surface (the background is covered in clear beads as well). The kibbutz pajamas have been upgraded to shimmer and shine with what look like precious stones and diamonds. The artist chose the decorative aspect of the beads as compensation for the puritanical aesthetics and asceticism of the kibbutz. The adhesion, the covering, and the inlay are in many ways a therapy that allows her to deal with the wounds of her childhood, with inhibitions linked to beauty, with appearance and femininity without revealing too much. The layer of beads creates a wall of illusory beauty, pretty to look at, but sharp and hard to the touch. In addition to being bizarre and so different from what we are used to seeing in Israeli art, these works also radiate loneliness and deep longing.

Childhood—Violence—Compassion—Romance

Meital Katz-Minerbo's *The Hairy Scary Woman* is a giant doll made of colorful crepe paper strips wallowing in the abundance of her sweets. The doll, whose upper body hangs object-like from the ceiling, and whose lower half lies on the floor, is made according to the piñata tradition, a ritual-children's game common in Latin America, especially on birthdays. In the ritual, children take turns to try to hit the piñata doll hanging from above their heads with a long stick. This continues until the belly opens and candy rains on their heads. Born in Venezuela, Katz-Minerbo assimilated the local traditions and folklore ("a grotesque combination of gefilte fish and Simon

Bolivar,” she says) that add a popular-carnival dimension to her works. The piñata experience is branded in her memories as a violent and cruel event, as a game of survival for the children (and parents), and as a never-ending nightmare for herself. Her choice of the “hairy woman” (and not a star, flower, or cute butterfly) intensifies the aggressive dimension (the thought that children would beat a woman until her insides spill out is chilling) and places the figure as a grotesque metaphor for woman as the ultimate victim.

In **Dina Shenhav’s** *Sunset* installation there is also a figure on the floor (or on an elevated platform), but here the figure is curled up and covered by a sort of satin covering decorated with a romantic image of a sunset made from colorful glitter and sequins. The contrast between the romantic image, between the spectacular fabric covered with glittering cheap materials and its function as a cover for the curled body, raises thoughts of the twilight zone, the hallucinatory state between life and death. The associations of a cloth covering a body are varied. It could be a prayer shawl, a towel, or a blanket in daily use as well as a cloth used to cover a body after a terrorist attack in the street. The many months of intense work invested in gluing and covering the cloth confer upon it ritual and magical qualities, charging it with meanings of compassion, saving, and healing, as if redemption exists in the small details. The artist has sunk her desperation and discomfort with the local political situation into this Sisyphean and therapeutic act, as if she is spreading symbolic “healing” throughout the Middle East. The work’s title, *Sunset*, implies fading and death, yet the image itself could also be seen as emerging sun rays and thus indicate sunrise and rebirth.

Romance—Sex—Pornography

A seemingly romantic image also appears in **Vera Korman’s** work *Paranoia Vera*. A decorative web of flowers on a bed of shining metal sheets is revealed to be a complex weave of pornographic images in a whole range of sexual delights. It is as if Georgia O’Keefe’s flower paintings had been distorted and taken to the extreme: the images represent an ironic stereotypical affinity of woman-nature that emphasizes the formal similarity between the vegetative and vaginal world. This digitally imaged

photomontage work is based on two borrowed images: flower images taken from instruction manuals for furniture decoration and pornographic images taken from porno magazines. The intensive process of assembling the two types of images is based on the repeated hybridizations and cloned patterns that “rest” on the faux-lace bed. The two contradictory aesthetic tactics – the innocent and gentle as opposed to the vulgar and sarcastic – are interwoven into a texture of camouflage and charade. Even the name, *Paranoia Vera*, originating in the psychoanalytical discourse (a specific type of mental illness), leads to similar meanings and points at (albeit humorously) **a regime that suppresses passions**. The title could also be interpreted as fear of the truth and thus charges the work with ironic autobiographical meanings. Korman creates a new sexual image that is dynamic and pleasurable, and that can also be seen as a metaphor for artistic creation.

Pornography—Politics—Terror

Merav Sudaey's work is based on a press photograph documenting one of the bloody events of the Al-Aqsa Intifada – the site of the suicide bombing of bus 32A in Jerusalem (June 2002). The scene, which has been enlarged to gigantic proportions, has been embroidered and sequined in many colors. The over-familiar news image, the smoking skeleton of the bus and rows of bodies covered in black plastic sheeting, is turned into a glittering, shimmering, and seductive screen. The chilling contrast between the content and the form, between the charged subject matter and the decorative aesthetics of the work, is almost unbearable. The sewing, whose Sisyphean and obsessive execution demands a peaceful temperament, is here deflected into a kind of exorcism that enables the artist to deal with the terror. Sudaey seems to have joined "art's emergency service." Like those who clean the “scene” and obsessively collect the remains of flesh in order to return them to the earth, so she joins detail to detail and translates the horror into kitsch, the bleeding routine into decoration. Through this contrast Sudaey criticizes the deadening of the senses and the absurdity of becoming used to the terrifying routine.

The political aspect is also raised in **Alice Klingman**'s work, who exhibits here two panels from the series *Four Mothers (Matriarch)*. Hundreds of

children's toys and doll parts are tangled together to create a colorful abundance that overflows and seduces the eye. On one panel there are toys connected to the house and family (wedding, birth, show home) and on the second panel, different types of Barbie dolls of both sexes. The work's title relates to the Biblical matriarchs and is homage to The Four Mothers, a women's political movement whose protest helped cause the withdrawal of Israeli troops from Lebanon. Yet, with more than a touch of irony, it also relates to mothers as producers of soldiers of war. The meticulous treatment of the toys – heating them to high temperatures and melting down the synthetic material into a shapeless mass – blurs their original features and changes their innocent function. The damage, the violence, and the destruction are well camouflaged, but beyond the screen of beautiful color combinations and forms the toys are revealed as a collection of junk and the dolls as a pile of bodies.

Politics—Fantasy—Decoration

Naomi Siman Tov bases her work *The Map and the Mirror* from the series *Paradise or Beds and Mattresses* on oriental carpets, as a homage to the craft and skills of folkloric art created throughout history by women who, in her words, “were expelled from the Paradise of modernism.” Siman Tov was among the first in Israel to turn to traditional crafts and to translate them, through empowerment and pleasure, into painting. At the beginning of the 1990s she offered an alternative to heroic male painting based on the expressive or lyrical gesture. She presented meticulous and labor intensive painting that imitates different woven textures, reexamining concepts connected to decoration and beauty. Her “carpets” are painted with fine brushes and with short, monotonous, and repetitive brushstrokes similar to the act of weaving, knitting, or embroidery. In the painting exhibited here the carpet patterns are symmetrically repeated, with the upper section reflecting the lower like a mirror. In “Paradise” Siman Tov relates metaphorically to fantasy, harmony, and heavenly beauty; in “Beds and Mattresses” she relates to a concrete place, down here, on earth. The erasure of color from the bottom section of the carpet, the planting of the black olive tin (Yombo) in the right corner (like a cushion) and the addition of text (about Prince Bompo who

wanted to become white in *Dr. Dolittle*) emphasize the gap between fantasy and reality.

Dina Schupak exhibits here four illusory paintings from the series *The Trousseau*. Her oil paintings, like those of Siman Tov, are made with fine brushes that skillfully mimic women's crafts that demand patience and diligence. Lace-like knitted pillows in various ornamental patterns are translated into meticulous, detail-filled paintings, lovingly presented as a bride's dowry to her groom. The anachronistic and disturbing concept of "dowry" – the price paid by the bride's family as proof of her ability to become a good wife – symbolizes the repressive state of women as objects and property. Schupak presents the dowry with no apologies and from a non-threatened position of female self-assurance. As one raised in the lap of revolutionary Malevich style modernism, she uses minimalist syntax as her point of origin, but charges it with female content and transforms the inferiority of handicrafts into a source of empowerment, strength, and generosity.

Arundhati Roy Author, The God of Small Things Ms. Roy was born in Shillong, Meghalaya, India, to the Keralite Syrian Christian and political activist Mary Roy. She studied architecture at the School of Planning and Architecture in New Delhi and worked as a screenwriter and actress. Her first novel, The God of Small Things, won the Booker Prize in 1997. She has since dedicated her writing to social and political activism, winning the Sydney Peace Prize in 2004. Faith Salie Cultural Critic Actress, journalist, commentator for CBS's Sunday Morning, and a regular on the NPR game show, Wait Wait; Arundhati Roy's debut novel The God of Small Things rapidly became a world-renowned literary sensation after it was published in New Delhi in 1997. Immediately recognized as a passionate, sophisticated, and lushly descriptive work, it won Britain's prestigious Booker Prize and launched its author to international fame. Roy stresses throughout the novel that great and small themes are interconnected, and that historical events and seemingly unrelated details have far-reaching consequences throughout a community and country. The novel is therefore able to comment simultaneously on universal, abstract themes, and a wide variety of ideas relating to the personal and family history of the members of the Kochamma family as well as the wider concerns of the Kerala region of India. And small fish appear in the puddles that fill the PWD potholes on the highways. It was raining when Rahel came back to Ayemenem. Slanting silver ropes slammed into loose earth, plowing it up like gunfire. The old house on the hill wore its steep, gabled roof pulled over its ears like a low hat. 4.0 out of 5 stars Review of The God of Small Things, by Arundhati Roy. Reviewed in India on October 27, 2017. Verified Purchase. Be prepared for coma inducing detailed descriptions throughout really, from the drooping leaves in the rain (wow how original) to the log in the river dancing (amazing) to the character of the spider in the crack being moody. So very unnecessary, long winded and ridiculous. Go away and cleanse your palate with A Suitable Boy. Okay, first things first. The God Of Small Things is a very very clever book, but what makes it exceptional is that it is both beautiful and crafty, a rare combination. This book has structure. Lots of it. There are so many excellent reviews out there that discuss this novel in detail and all of its themes that it is impossible for me to add anything new. I will only say that the novel made me feel a lot and I count on the fingers of one hand the books that affected me so much recently. ...more. flag 279 likes · Like · see review.