

## **The Carpenter and the Seamstress** **Ellen Ginton**

"Some of us are so obsessed with the past that we die of it. it is the attitude of the poet who never finds the lost heaven and it is really the situation of artists who work for a reason that nobody can quite grasp. They might want to reconstruct something of the past to exorcise it. it is that the past for certain people has such a hold and such a beauty...

Everything I do was inspired by my early life.

Louise Bourgeois<sup>1</sup>

Yehudit Sasportas's installation at Tel Aviv Museum of art merges floor-bound sculpture, comprised of multi-colored wooden panels, with patterned drawing.

The panels serve to outline the plan of the artist's childhood home in Ashdod, while the drawing alludes to the striped wallpaper pattern in that very same apartment.

Encoded within the geometrical grid and within the abstracted, anonymous, flat and schematic language of drawing-which brings to mind the product of computer graphics-are energetic states of charged familial relationships. Even hints of the outdoors, appearing chiefly on the circumference, alluding to remote and inaccessible vegetation and vistas, fail to alleviate the sense of pressure and tension inside the home. In their sublime nature they reflect and reinforce it all and more. At the same time, Sasportas's installation is a glorification of the apartment-home, designed as it is as a model of an entire urban array, gloriously colorful, surrounded by surrealistic panoramas akin to delineated maps and fantastic landscape.

Recent years have witnessed a profusion of artistic works relating to the theme of the home, at least some of them inspired by feminist art. Several of the essays in Christopher Reed's book **Not at Home: the Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture** relate to the: "inherently contradictory position of men (male artist) eager to exploit elements of feminine culture while anxious to preserve their masculine status."<sup>2</sup>

Currently on display at the Tel Aviv Museum of the Art is another installation by artist Shuka Glotmsn revolving around a reconstruction of a typical 1960's Israeli apartment, and naturally, a comparison is called for. The "living room" or "home" in Glotman's exhibition was reconstructed from period elements assembled and arranged by a team of professionals in the form of a cinematic set evoking nostalgia and criticism. In her essay in the exhibition catalogue, Tali Tamir discusses the indivisible hybridization between the private family living room and the public space :

"Its content is a mixture of iconic objects bearing familial , public , and national meaning ...The link between the mundane ,simple , and low on one hand , and the conceptual , political , and principled on the other , charges Glotman's installation with complexity..."<sup>3</sup>

As opposed to the public politics in Glotman's "male" work, Sasportas's piece in modeled on the 1970's feminist motto: "Personal is political " .

Her work is somewhat odd and deconstructive ; assiduous ,obsessive drawings ,attempting to hold on to the walls, collapsing back into a kind of Post-Minimalist ,primitivistic and mystical floor sculpture .In terms of content ,the work evolves relationship ,and it is essentially an attempt to enact this symbiosis .

The act of "repetition" and "reconstruction" performed by Sasportas with regard to her childhood home belong in the realm of the "traumatic events." Relying on a study conducted by Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub on the concept of "testimony" , Griselda Pollock maintains what we , , in fact , do not experience the traumatic events of her childhood .They lodge themselves within "an unprepared and undefended psyche , possessing us without relief and almost without knowledge ." <sup>4</sup> The trauma resist "the march of time and is impenetrable to any erosion by its passage." it can be eliminated only through an act of witnessing ,namely ,by creating a memory of the traumatic event registered , "but only as its own absence of intelligibility and meaning ." Once transformed into memories ,these childhood materials are "no less painful" , "but "simply less unmastered and predetermining ." in this context one may perceive Yehudit Sasportas's work not only as allusion to "demons" ,but also as an attempt to exorcise them .

Pollock writes the above in reference to the oeuvre of Louise Bourgeois. A senior artist who continually confronts childhood memories and trauma , Bourgeois's art contradict the linear narrative usually characterizing art history , as well as the assumption that "as we mature and progress through life, the formative moments of childhood lose their intensity ,and , with the distance of lived time , their charge wanes" .

Pollock further notes that in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century women artists have related to cultural artistic model that has been culturally signified and acclaimed, concurrently taking a stand of disobeying and exiling themselves from that very same model; that is to say, they operate along a double axis that is both affinity and distance.<sup>5</sup> A similar principle is discernible with regard to a women artist's active at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In 1994, The Museum of Modern Art in New York featured the exhibition **Sense and Sensibility**, titled after Jane Austin's novel and subtitled **Women Artists and Minimalism in the Nineties**.<sup>6</sup> The title of the show was also an allusion to the title of Rosalind Krauss's 1973 essay exploring post-minimalist sculpture in the 1960 s.<sup>7</sup> The exhibition suggested a continuum between the works of women artists in the 1990s and post-minimalist qualities: a link between minimalist forms associated with rationality (such as grid, modularity, repetition, and geometrical structure) and context of personal sensibility and individual contents. The participating artists held a discourse with a formal vocabulary of make minimalism (whose rhetoric nowadays appears authoritative and even brutal), in the spirit of Post-Minimalism, challenging its rules and infusing it with personal and expressive contents.

Sasportas's mode of installation –painterly floor-bound sculpture-may also be perceived as the "scene of the crime" ,as the title of an exhibition held in Los Angeles

in 1997.<sup>8</sup> Within the framework of that show Post-Minimalist floor pieces by Bruce Nauman and Barry Le Va were interpreted as testimonies of some unknown event which viewer were called on to investigate and decipher.

In her work Yehudit Sasportas draws upon the principles of "painterly floor sculpture" and onwards , accumulating and transposing them to the site of the personal and domestic history , to he scene of the "original sin" , the arena of domestic trauma ,where all originated and everything was determined .Her parents' occupations – carpentry and sewing –crafts tracing back to the home and the body , to furniture and clothing , undergo sublimation .The compulsive preoccupation with and critical analysis of the familial memory and history are transformed into art .

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<sup>1</sup> Louise Bourgeois, "Child Abuse", **Artforum** 21, 4 (December 1982), pp. 40-47.

<sup>2</sup> Christopher Reed (ed.), **not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture**, London 1996, p.16.

<sup>3</sup> Tali Tamir , "The Reversed Parade," **Shuka Glutman-Here Live Happily Mr. Poetic and Mr. Pathetic** (exh. Cat, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv 2002 .

<sup>4</sup> Griselda Pollock, "Old Bones and Cocktail Dresses: Louise Bourgeois and The Question of Age," **Oxford Art Journal** 22, 2 (1999), p.90.

<sup>5</sup> Pollock 1999, pp.82-83 .

<sup>6</sup> Lynn Zelevansky, **Sense And Sensibility: Women Artists And Minimalism In The Nineties** (exh. Cat), the Museum Of Modern Art., New York 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Rosalind Krauss, **Sense and Sensibility: Reflection on Post 60s Sculpture**," **Artforum** (November 1973), pp.43-53 .

<sup>8</sup> Ralph Rugoff, **Scene of the Crime**, Cambridge, Mass. & London 1997, pp. 60-61.