





wander, woman

Deborah Wasserman

July 2018

The Zaritsky Artists' House

Tel Aviv

The Women are Present: Seen/Not Seen

Deborah Wasserman's latest exhibition continues her ongoing investigation of women's roles and identities, filtered through her own complex sense of "unbelonging" growing up with several identities. It must certainly be one source for her particular empathy with the wanderer, the refugee, with whom she identifies, mirroring a Jewish heritage that historically is one of displacement and wandering.

Her personal reactions are set against a particularly disruptive — some say perilous — time in world history. Catastrophic political events cascade daily across the globe, setting off waves of forced migration, precipitating widespread humanitarian crises. Unprecedented millions of people have fled their native habitats in search of more viable locations; these are desperately traumatic voyages with no guarantee of finding shelter or a better life. Women and children are subjects close to her heart, touched by their vulnerability; they have all too frequently been headlined as tragic examples of how the political impinges on the personal, the personal involuntarily shocked into the political. We have no idea how many do not survive such ferocious sowing and transplanting.

Wasserman has divided her show into three sections, each focusing on different aspects of displacement and migration as they affect women. One is a striking portrait series, "Plurabelle," (the title taken from James Joyce's character Anna Livia Plurabelle in *Finnegan's Wake*) that presents women as fragmentized collages, their faces stylized masks of many ethnicities that camouflage, even corrupt identity. These are constructed out of multiple

points of view into multiracial, interconnected visages — all the daughters of Eve — superficially visible but, ultimately, not truly seen. Composed of cut-outs from glossy publications, they have lipsticked mouths, cosmeticized eyes, polished nails, jeweled rings and other contrived, generic emblems of female beautification and disguise, the natural woman made over into creatures of artifice and male desire. Transformed into an object of consumption, the jagged tears of the paper imply violence and abuse, prevalent in societies that undervalue and objectify women. These composite dissimulations are based on an "existential anxiety," Wasserman says, and "provide a way for women, like chameleons," to navigate their way through oppressive cultures. Her women, however, do not appear subdued but instead regard the world with a steady gaze, one that seems full of unvoiced judgment and defiance, despite their apprehension.

Wasserman, who still delights in colors and materials with the spontaneity, immediacy and wonder of childhood that adds lightness to the gravity of her projects, drips paint deftly down the surfaces of these portraits, conjuring barbed and fibrous roots, staining areas and brushing on images of indigenous flora to create a more specific landscape and sense of place, contrasting natural elements with that cultivated by humans. She often includes the prickly pear in her iconography, also known as a sabra, a name given to native-born Israelis, self-characterized as spiny on the outside, but succulent and sweet on the inside, like the fruit.

The second section is called “Bindle,” the Yiddish word for bundle. Consisting of a quilt, it is an item usually made by women and considered a handicraft, not a work of art although that is shifting. Wasserman pieced it together out of scraps of recovered women and children’s clothing, stained, distressed, their personal histories unknown. Wasserman’s quilt emphasizes the very topical plight of women and children as they search for sanctuary and a new home with very few belongings, except, perhaps, for this merest of coverings, if even that. Wasserman uses the quilt in numerous ways, as an “artifact,” an object to be hung, and as a “document and a prop” to be included in her performances. Not only an essential possession, it can be bundled, used as a carrier of possessions, as nomadic peoples have done since time immemorial. It is also a micro-shelter, an intimate primal tent to be wrapped in, like swaddling cloths. Wasserman compares her quilt to the “security” blanket of a child and as such, a psychological “transitional object” that represents the mother, signaling comfort, safety, and love. Her quilt, however, is figuratively reversible; we know that it is a flimsy safeguard against the harshness of certain realities that can easily shred it to pieces, against which it is ultimately, poignantly impotent.

A number of works on paper, including watercolors and collages, comprise the last section of the presentation. They, too, feature the female figure in many of them as Wasserman continues her exploration of the loss of home and shelter. Completely executed by hand and sensitively rendered, these landscapes of devastation

are all the more eloquent for the tremulous or slashing strokes and markings that make them appear the most grief-stricken and subjective of the three groupings. Blank facades of houses, some on fire, can be seen in the background, the foreground at times occupied by the dead bodies of women floating in murky waters, like refuse, collateral damage of senseless wars and environmental disasters caused by criminally heedless mismanagement of the earth. One particularly moving image is of a woman with pale skin, dark tangled hair and wine-colored lips who seems both contemporary and biblical. Her eyes are closed as if she is asleep, surrounded by wreckage, a beautiful azure blue body of water tauntingly stretched out behind her in heartbreaking indifference to her death.

Wasserman has a nomadic sensibility that informs many of her projects. They are often site-specific, made of throwaway materials that are easy to transport or acquired on location. These installations are also easily assembled and packed up or left behind, corresponding to and underscoring the themes of migration and displacement that engross her. Compelling visualizations of some of the countless thoughts on her mind that keep her — and us — awake at night, they pointedly, evocatively address issues that are in urgent need of resolutions.

Lilly Wei

Plurabelle

*The one the many
the Bella
The Belle
Patchwork of
one and many
The She*

*Fractured pixilated
inside paper*

*She Locked
paper marks
her*

*Eyes patched looking
amassed from this and that time
She Knows*

*mouths tongues
She Speaks*

*skins
bleached stained peeled scratched
invisible unfound collapsed
in any possible tongue
is the*

(She)

*and yet
she
isn't*







Bindle

Wrapped swaddled suspended

between

heaven

and

earth

wander

Crude pathetic unforgiving

an empty shell

A nothing object

stained shamed ripped and shredded

an empty sum

A tent a shroud a veil

a warmth a hide

a cover

Cursed

like skin

it

hangs

from

a

nail







Works on Paper

The sky was hers

*translucent
delicious mountain flowers trees
sway abundant
sweet
natured*

*The locked house
amidst prickly fields
Fire!*

*The water murky trash floats
Spills and drills and corpses
Floating gently waves of blue*

home less and buried

*at the
very place
she gardened*

*where it was all
hers
to
become*











Deborah Wasserman

Lives and works in New York City

Education

1997 Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture, Skowhegan, Maine
1998 Artists in The Marketplace (AIM), The Bronx Museum of Art
1993 POST-MFA Whitney Independent Study Program, NYC
1992 BFA & MFA, California Institute of The Arts, Valencia, CA
1988 Diploma, The Tel Aviv School of Art, Tel Aviv
1986 Diploma, Shenkar College of Design, Ramat Gan, Israel

Selected Solo Exhibitions & Performances

2018 WANDER, WOMAN, Artist's House, Tel Aviv
2018 HOS-PI-TAL-I-TY in DWELLING, Queens Museum of Art
2017 THE MORPHING WOMAN, Socrates Sculpture Park, Queens
2017 HOS-PI-TAL-I-TY, public intervention, commissioned by QAI, NY
2017 MIXED GREENS, NYFA Collective, Boogie On The BLVD, Bronx
2017 MOTHER EARTH/QUEEN OF TRASH, public intervention, commissioned by QAI, NYC
2015 NO LONGER YOUR CHICA, public intervention, commissioned by QAI, NYC
2015 HEAVY LOAD, Socrates Sculpture Park, Queens
2014 THE LONGEST JOURNEY, public intervention, commissioned by QAI, NYC
2011 FAR AWAY, SO CLOSE, The Roger Smith Hotel, NYC
2010 HOMEWARD FOUND, Bineth Gallery, Tel Aviv
2006 WANDERLUST, A.I.R. Gallery, NYC
2000 DISTANTE, TAO PROXIMO, LA Hebraica, Sao Paulo
2000 QUICK SANDS, Abraham Lubelski Gallery, NYC

Selected group exhibitions and Performances

2018 PIEROGI 2000, Flat Files, ongoing, Brooklyn (since 2005)
2018 CURRENTS, A.I.R. Gallery, Brooklyn
2017 BOTANICAL, Local Projects, Queens
2017 ARTISTS CO-OP 2017, Jamaica Center for Arts & Learning, Queens
2015 MAKING HISTORY, Storefront Ten Eyck Gallery, Brooklyn
2014 THE SELFIE SHOW, MONA, The Museum of New Art, Detroit
2013 IMAGINE A WORLD WITHOUT HATE, Benrimon Contemporary, NYC

2012 NURTURE ART, Charles Bank Gallery, NYC
2012 RED, Cheryl Hazan Gallery, NYC
2011 SMALL WORKS, Boltax Gallery, Shelter Island, NY
2011 MYSELF, Sheppard Fine Arts Gallery (catalog), University of Nevada, Reno
2010 FRESH PAINT, Bineth Gallery, Tel Aviv
2010 PAPER IN THE WIND, Thomas Jackel Gallery, NYC
2008 CONTINUITY, NurtureArt Gallery, Brooklyn
2008 RED DOT ART FAIR (Paradigm Art), Park South Hotel, NYC
2008 POINTS OF DEPARTURE, University of Pennsylvania, Fox Art Gallery, Philadelphia

Selected Awards/Residencies

2018 SU-CASA GRANT, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs
2017 PUFFIN FOUNDATION GRANT, The Puffin Foundation
2017 SU-CASA GRANT, NYC Department of Cultural Affairs
2017 SOCIAL PRACTICE FELLOWSHIP, NYFA, New York Foundation For The Arts
2005 MAKOR ARTIST'S NETWORK, The 92nd Street Y, NYC
2003 ALJIRA EMERGE, Aljira Center for Contemporary Art, Newark
1997 ARTISTS IN THE MARKETPLACE (AIM), The Bronx Museum, Bronx
1997 SKOWHEGAN SCHOOL OF PAINTING AND SCULPTURE, Residency, Skowhegan, Maine
1995 EXPERIMENTAL TELEVISION CENTER, Finishing Funds Grant, Newark Valley, NY



Checklist

Plurabelle (series), 2018

watercolor, ink, collage on paper, 15 x 11" (38 x 28 cm)

Plurabelle 2 – cover (detail), page 5

Plurabelle 1 – page 6 (left), (detail) inside front cover

Plurabelle 3 – page 6 (right)

Plurabelle 6 – page 7 (left)

Plurabelle 7 – page 7 (right)

Works on Paper (untitled series), 2018

watercolor, ink, collage on paper, 24 x 18" (61 x 47 cm)

Untitled 13 – page 13, (detail) inside back cover

Untitled 6 – page 14

Untitled 7 – page 15

Untitled 12 – page 16

Untitled 8 – page 17

Bindle, ongoing, 2018 – pages 9-11

Stained, bleached & sewn women's and children's clothing,

8 x 8" (244 x 244 cm). Photographed in artist's studio and local sites in Queens, NYC.

I would like to thank my family, mentors and friends for being my source of inspiration, guidance, love and support. Special thanks to Oded Halahmy Foundation for their generous assistance in the production of this catalog.

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Artist Exhibition Catalog, June 2018

The Zaritsky Artists' House

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Essay "The Women are Present: Seen/Not Seen" by Lilly Wei

Photo of Bindle wrapped woman (page 11, upper right) by David Ashford

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העמותה לחקר אמנות נשים ומגדר בישראל

Association for Women's Art and Gender Research in Israel

الجمعية للبحث في الفن النسوي والمגדר في إسرائيل



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