



Fertile Moments Captured on Canvas with Paint and Polymers

Artist Ella Amitay Sadovsky invests all her energy in investigating questions that intrigue her, just as she did throughout her career as a scientist. > by Heidi J. Gleit

It seems unimaginable to not wonder about the stories behind the works in artist Ella Amitay Sadovsky's solo exhibition "Spare Parts," which is on display at the Open Museum in the Tefen Industrial Park. Each painting appears to be telling a fascinating story that pulls the viewer in, even though the plot and conclusion are ambiguous.

Open Museum Director and Chief Curator Ruthi Ofek, who curated the exhibition along with Amon Yariv of the Gordon Gallery, writes in the exhibition catalogue of "fertile ... moments, which are captured by the artist's paintbrush in the course of an unfolding event, awaken the viewer's curiosity concerning the preceding and following moments, as well as concerning embedded narrative...."

"Amitay Sadovsky's compositions constitute enigmas that cannot be deciphered by means of a single narrative. Every work is the beginning of a



Photographs courtesy of the Open Museum in the Tefen Industrial Park

Above: *Flower Arrangement 2*, oil, polymer, pigment, and fabric collage on fabric, 216 x 145 cm, 2013. (Avraham Hay and Yona Schley)

Facing page: *Without Flower Arrangement*, oil, acrylic, pigments, and fabric collage on canvas, 207 x 157 cm, 2014. (Avraham Hay and Yona Schley)

Previous pages: *Bargain Reality 2*, oil, acrylic, and fabric on canvas, 171 x 216 cm, 2014. (Avraham Hay and Yona Schley)

story, or perhaps its end or a single moment in the continuum, a fertile moment that asks of the viewer to weave the story himself.”

When asked about this, Amitay Sadovsky has difficulty formulating an answer and finally points to one of the half-dozen works in progress leaning on the walls of her studio in south Tel Aviv. Its focal point is a horse and she explains that her grandfather used to drive a horse-drawn wagon in Jaffa. However, she does not have fond childhood memories of family rides with him through quaint alleys. The War of Independence in 1948 shattered her family – the Egyptian forces firing on Jaffa killed her grandmother. Her mother, who was only five years old at the time, and all her siblings were separated from each other and from their father and sent to orphanages.

While Amitay Sadovsky tells her own history in her art, she does not reproduce it exactly. Instead, she reorganizes and retells it, creating her own story and her own truth.

“Each story is related to reality, but is not something real,” she says, explaining that since her mother grew up alone, away from her family, “I wanted to produce family pictures for my mother ... to let her see everyone at once again.”

This desire led Amitay Sadovsky to create *Orphan (Work is a Supreme Value)*, which shows her grandmother standing next to her mother at her mother’s wedding with a horse in the background, and *Root Treatment*, a large triptych that is composed of depictions of all of her mother’s siblings and children.

“These works do not provide a logical, straightforward narrative of my family’s history, but instead change it to create a new, alternative history,” Amitay Sadovsky explains.

These changes are far from arbitrary – much thought and effort go into every detail of her work. For example, Amitay Sadovsky wanted her depiction of her grandmother to resemble the woman who she had never met and who her mother only has dim childhood memories of, but her grandmother had died young. So she sought out her grandmother’s sister, who was in her nineties and lived in France, and went to meet her.

“She bore a great resemblance to my mother,” Amitay Sadovsky recalls, adding that in the end, they found a distant relative who had a tiny but clear photograph taken of her grandmother a few years before her death.





Above: *Root Treatment*, oil, acrylic, and fabric collage on canvas, triptych, 231 x 195 cm each, 2014. (Elad Sarig)

Returning to the original question, she notes that her works focus on “family relations,” particularly couples, children, identity, and personal history.

“I try to understand by reconstructing,” she explains, emphasizing that this is not simply her own personal pursuit. “When I make a genuine statement about my family’s experience, it also speaks to other people. Human experiences are universal. This is why I study people.

“This also means,” she continues, “it is not neces-

sary for every work to relate my own story for viewers to understand it.”

This is particularly true of her paintings *Bargain Reality 1* and *Bargain Reality 2*, in which a mother who is with her baby in a black-and-white room gazes out a window at a colorful fantasy world. The details of the mother, the baby, and the fantasy are slightly different in the two paintings, just as the details that each viewer focuses on and reads into the painting differ.

“My personal story is not actually of interest to the viewer,” she says. “All of us have our own story and our own baggage, but not all of us can express it. However, some viewers can discover something in my story that they can relate to.”

That said, Amitay Sadvsky’s story is an interesting one. She grew up at Kibbutz Gesher, which her father’s parents helped build. They made aliyah from Germany before World War II, in 1934, with the Habonim Dror youth movement, while their

parents remained in Europe.

The family of Amitay Sadvsky’s mother made aliyah from Turkey and Bulgaria long before World War II. Her mother was one of eight siblings, one of whom died very young. After her grandmother’s death in the War of Independence, her mother and her siblings were sent to live in a variety of orphanages and other frameworks. Finally, at the age of 12, her mother was sent to Kibbutz Gesher and has been there ever since.



Above: *Orphan (Work is a Supreme Value)*, oil on canvas, 175 x 200 cm, 2013. (Avraham Hay and Yona Schley)
Facing page: *Fractal*, oil, acrylic, and fabric collage on canvas, 180 x 165 cm, 2014. (Elad Sarig)

Her father was the first child born and raised at Gesher and Amitay Sadovsky was the first grandchild born and raised there, a highly meaningful status for the founding generation at many kibbutzim. However, like much of their own generation, she and her siblings all ended up leaving the kibbutz to make their lives elsewhere. Amitay Sadovsky left years ago in order to pursue her studies.

Academia was a major part of her life until recently. After studying chemical engineering at the Technion, she earned a Ph.D. at the Weizmann

Institute of Science. Then she traveled to the US to conduct post-doctoral research at the University of California at Berkeley. While she was there, she began undergraduate studies in art at what was then the California College of the Arts in San Francisco and decided that it made more sense for her to focus on art than on science. However, before she could finish her undergraduate degree in art, family commitments led her to return to Israel.

Back in Israel, Amitay Sadovsky initially continued her art studies at Hamidrasha, the School of Art

at Beit Berl College in Kfar Saba, but then the Hebrew University of Jerusalem offered her a position researching physical chemistry. Even though she had spent the past two years focusing almost solely on art and not on science, she accepted the position and decided to continue her art studies in Jerusalem as well – at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design. When she finished her undergraduate degree at Bezalel, she decided that the time had come to leave academia and science. Her colleagues at the university tried to convince her to change her mind, she recalls, but she felt that the world of art was the best place for her to continue her search to understand life.

Amitay Sadovsky explains that when she does something, she does it fully, whether it is deciding what to wear or eat or how to spend her time. So she immersed herself completely in art, earning a masters degree at Bezalel in 2009 and then working full-time as an artist represented by the Gordon Gallery and exhibiting her work at galleries and museums throughout Israel.

Even though she changed her focus, Amitay Sadovsky still builds on what she did previously. She also is teaching an interdisciplinary course at the Technion and at the Shenkar College of Engineering and Design titled “Pattern” that is on the border of math, science, and art. Her students and colleagues at Shenkar quickly found that this course filled a need and made it a required course for textile students. Her course also is popular among architecture students. She also continues to cooperate with people from many different fields since the same issues that captured her interest as a scientist continue to intrigue her as an artist.

As Yivsam Azgad, curator of the Weizmann Institute, writes in the exhibition catalogue, “Deep down, the worlds of science and art share common values: the unceasing eagerness to examine new possibilities, perform experiments, risk failure and embark on repeated journeys into the unknown from which they attempt to wrest new insights, so that we can incorporate them into our lives.”

Amitay Sadovsky also discreetly employs her knowledge of chemistry in her paintings.

“People don’t usually paint on material,” she notes. “I developed polymers in my studio lab to preserve material and serve as a base coat, allowing me to paint on a variety of materials, not just canvas, and incorporate them into my works. The polymers are transparent and not something viewers

notice. This is not something that should draw people’s attention – it is just a tool and not essential.”

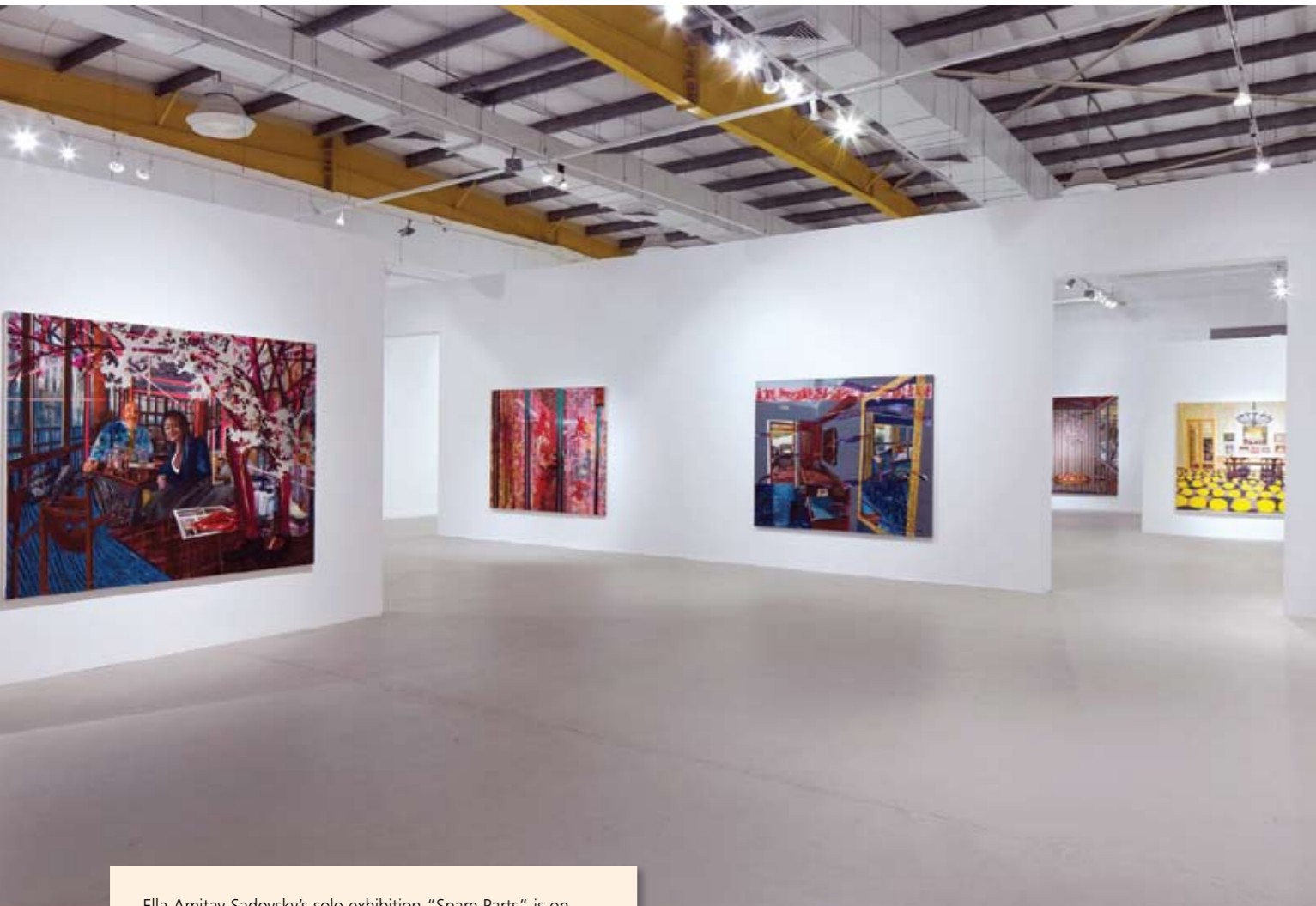
She uses a variety of fabrics, wallpaper, needlepoints, and textiles, some bought, some found, and some that she made herself. She often uses scraps from clothing produced in the industrial neighborhood in south Tel Aviv where her studio is located. She incorporated needlepoint works into her paintings *Bargain Reality 1* and *Bargain Reality 2*.

“Many people hang the ideal on the wall in the form of a needlepoint image and I address the concept of the perfect and the not-so perfect in many works,” she says. “We try to manage the not ideal... I often bring the contrast into my work, creating a scene in which it looks like everything is perfect, but it’s not.”

In *Flower Arrangement 2*, she notes, a groom seems to be carrying his happy bride over a threshold strewn with flowers. However, upon closer examination, the bride’s hand can be seen reaching out to grasp the threshold, perhaps an indication that she does not really want to cross it.

“The border between the good and less good is





Ella Amitay Sadovsky's solo exhibition "Spare Parts" is on display at the Open Museum in the Tefen Industrial Park until January 2015. For details, phone (04) 910-9611/609.

The Weizmann Institute of Science will be hosting a solo exhibition of Amitay Sadovsky's work in its David Lopatie Conference Center for one year starting in November. For details, phone (08) 934-4499.

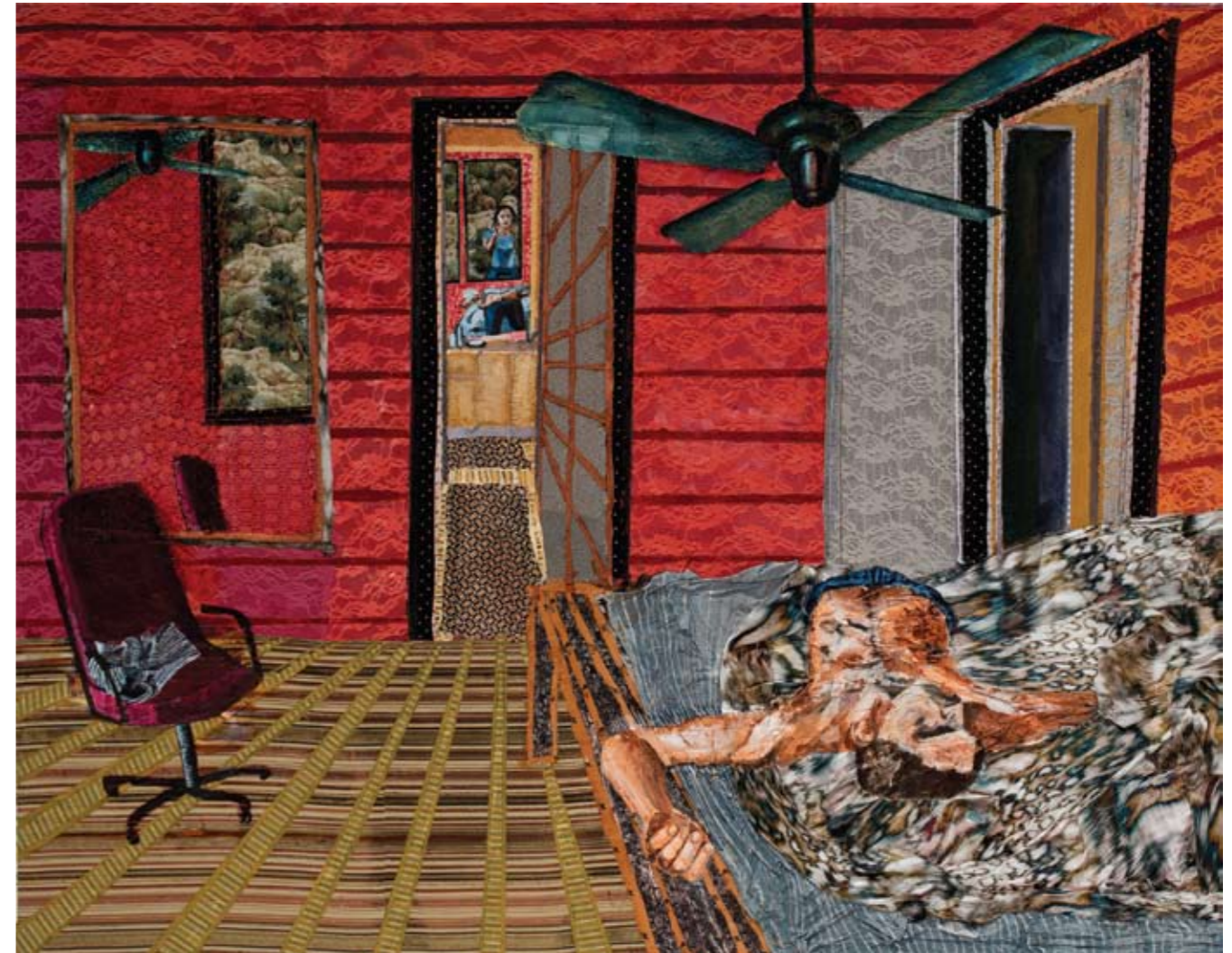
very thin – sometimes it is only in our heads and we cannot verbalize it," she muses.

Flower Arrangement 2 is one of a series of works set in the same entryway. They include *Without Flower Arrangement*, a 2014 painting in which a tiger crouches on the manmade steps and no humans can be seen. Amitay Sadovsky often mulls over the ideas that interest her for a long time before express-

ing them in a painting or what ends up being a series of paintings. There is a five-year difference between *1. The Waterfall 2. The Illuminating Lamp 3. The Shirt*, which she created in 2009, and *1. The Waterfall 2. The Fan 3. The Shirt*, which she created in 2014, but they are in the same place and address the same topic. Each work also changes dramatically as she creates it. She paints over entire sections, adds materials, and repaints again and again, changing colors, images, and angles. She can work on something for a year or more until she feels it is complete.

"I think about issues and address them in many ways," she says. "My work is always developing ... it is a very sensitive process."

In "Spare Parts," the exhibition at the Tefen Open



Museum, the works are displayed in an order that is somewhat chronological, offering visitors a glimpse of that process.

The Tefen exhibition also includes the film *Quiet Island* of the project that Amitay Sadovsky conducted over several months in Musrara, a neighborhood in Jerusalem with a tumultuous history and diverse population that could be considered a microcosm of Israeli society, in cooperation with the Muslala Group, which "operates on the premise that the power of art and creativity can alter ways of thinking and the conduct of society and individuals." The project's English title, *Quiet Island*, is an imperfect translation of its Hebrew name, *Ei Shaket*, which has a dual meaning: lack of quiet and island of quiet.

Above: 1. *The Waterfall 2. The Fan 3. The Shirt*, oil, acrylic, and fabric collage on canvas, 166 x 210 cm, 2014. (Avraham Hay and Yona Schley)

Facing page: "Spare Parts" at the Tefen Open Museum. (Elad Sarig)

Amitay Sadovsky began the project in February 2012 by painting a life-sized image of a man sitting on a bench on a bulletin board on a main thoroughfare in Musrara. In the following months, until July, she changed the painting regularly based on her reaction to comments from passersby on the street about "what they saw in the painting and what they wanted it to be," adding and erasing characters and scenery and changing colors, she recalls. The film documents this process, providing another piece of the fascinating insight on human interaction that typifies Amitay Sadovsky's works. ■