

The Enigma of Narrative in Ella Amitay Sadovsky's Oeuvre

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Ella Amitay Sadovsky's oeuvre is distinguished by a combination of narrative, form, and repetitive patterns – an anchoring structure that may be likened to a recurrent musical motif. This strategy of repetition familiarizes the viewer with the background patterns, while freeing the gaze to explore the new and unfamiliar figures, objects, and situations that are unique to each of the works. Amitay Sadovsky's compositions are characterized by an internal logic predicated upon the merging of subject and background, which serves to simultaneously conceal and reveal experiences and emotions.

These works thus cast the viewer in the role of a voyeur peering in on scenes that may at times appear intimate, while blocking his gaze and preventing him from entering the composition. Moreover, only a small number of the depicted figures make eye contact with the observer. The observation of the painting seems to require the raising of a screen or the breaking of a wall, only to reveal a theatrical semblance of reality – a scene unfolding in a non-place that does not confirm to our criteria for representing the world.

In her book *Visual Texti(a)les*, Efrat Biberman writes that "Despite the absence of a linguistic narrative, the viewer's observation of the painting gives rise to a narrative structure; the linguistic story is thus a sort of 'absent presence' based on the visual allusions provided by the painting [...] the painting is endowed with narrative abilities that do not rely on a literary text, but rather arise from within the composition itself. Most of the figures remain anonymous, unidentified, and immersed in their own world, which is penetrated by the observer."¹

In an article devoted to Biberman's book, Dror Pimentel presents several philosophical approaches to the question of narrative in painting. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, according to Pimentel, argued that "Literature extends in time, while painting extends in space. This distinction obviously denies the presence of narrative in painting, for narrative is inherently related to temporality, and may thus mainly be represented in literature. Lessing introduces narrative into painting through the back door, by employing the concept of the 'fertile moment.' He privileges painted scenes that trigger the viewer's curiosity about what preceded and followed them, and thus inspire him to imagine an entire narrative."²

1 Efrat Biberman, *Visual Texti(a)les, Narrative and View in Painting* (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2009), p. 74, in Hebrew.

2 Dror Pimentel, "On Efrat Biberman's Book *Visual Texti(a)les*," *On the Sensual in Art*, Bezalel Department of History & Theory, no. 22, 2011.

This type of "fertile moment," which Lessing also calls a "pregnant moment," may be found in many of Ella Amitay Sadvosky's works. Such 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 [see p. x]. According to Amitay Sadovsky, "My paintings and installations create visual enigmas centered on space and time. I attempt to examine intimacy, which is constantly in flux, as well as the self's perception vis-à-vis the other, the real and its reflections, and the painting's ability to grasp onto the story up to a certain point, and then to let go of it."³

One of the dominant characteristics of Ella Amitay Sadovsky's work is the combination and merging of different elements in order to create new and original meanings: the fusion of reality and the imagination, of interior and exterior, and of surprising materials such as embroidery and printed fabrics. The use of readymade materials introduces an additional, unexpected dimension into the works. At first glance, her compositions appear to be entirely painted; the discovery of additional compositional elements constitutes a surprising realization that lures the viewer into the work, causing him to alternately draw closer and pull away from it.

The illusion that the compositions are entirely painted is especially dominant in two works [see p. x], in which the embroidery in the background reveals its true material nature only when one draws close. The black-and-white processing of the seated figure in the foreground of these compositions underscores this illusion. The readymade embroidery or printed fabrics that are integrated into the works enhance the ambivalent dimension of revelation and concealment, underscoring the simultaneous simulation of reality and detachment from it that characterizes Amitay Sadovsky's works.

The narrative in these works is concealed by means of numerous visual inventions and surprises. As is the case in every artwork, "truth" is always in the eyes of the beholder. Amitay Sadvosky's compositions constitute enigmas that cannot be deciphered by means of a single narrative. Every work is the beginning of a 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.

3 Ella Amitay Sadovsky, artist's statement.