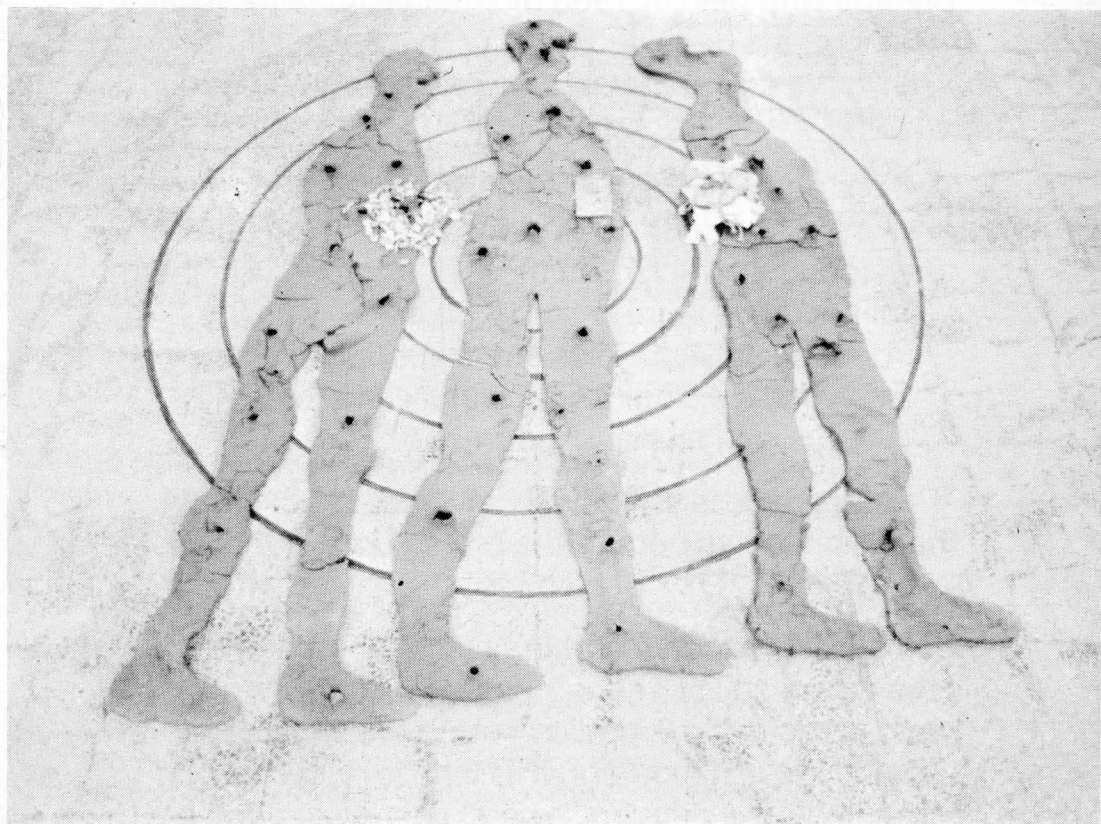


"EVERYONE'S SITTING"

SIONA SHIMSHI



condition 1983

A MEMORIAL

"A human shadow is not human". Every day has its shadow: fired clay and other materials of the fluid world. Seven sculptures leaning and hanging against floor and walls.

"Everyone's sitting": An environment of nine human figures (ht. 220 cm) sitting (150x60x18) on 25 seats (30 x 30 x 60): fired clay and aluminium.

HERZLIYA MUSEUM — 19.11.83—4.1.84

In 1983, I went to demonstrations against war —
and against death inflicted on people by people.

Death created by the betrayal of the spirit by the
body seems to me understandable, acceptable,
and I do not protest against it.

Friends who died in 1983 did not die in battle. That
their hearts deceived them or that their cellular
networks disintegrated, can be understood and
accepted.

A country in which not only the aged have a
monopoly on death drives one mad. At the age of
forty-four, I am more and more concerned with the
failure of the spirit towards the body, with the
deception our bodies are preparing for us.

“Everyone’s sitting” and patiently and tolerantly
awaiting judgment.

The carapace is still comely and well but inwardly
the collapse has begun—the drying up and the loss
of memory.

This exhibition was created at the moment when
the outer shell still encompasses all the wonders
and secrets of our bodies — and the sense of its
being the last moment of its kind is not actually
justified but stems from merely observing one’s
surroundings.

The feet of a dead and unknown stranger which
followed me as we escorted Dan to his grave,
pursue me. All along the long history of sculpture,
feet have been after me. Every culture and its
footprints. In these works, the feet no longer carry
the weight of their burden. The human shadow is
not human, and our memories — too heavy to
to bear.

Siona Shimshi

Life as a Predella*

Franz Molnar winds up his story "The Secret of the Aruvim" with the character of the honest government official, Layush, standing helpless in the heart of the dense forest, clearly aware that the only way to get out of the forest will be to cut a way through it. How does a little man cross a huge jungle? A dwarf sent from heaven-knows-where tells Layush the secret. 'Don't ever tell yourself that you have to cross this forest but that you merely have to get past this thorny bush, climb over this fallen branch, overcome another pitfall...'

In this way, the terrible ordeal is broken down into small parts and the jungle becomes a pavement of hedges over which even Layush is capable of passing — and if he is able to do this, Sionka certainly can. With unwavering energy, she strikes out in every direction, and from myriad elements in a seemingly disorderly pattern, a clear path begins to emerge.

It is said that it is a question of the sectors of the brain, the left and the right sectors. It is said that it is connected to genetic traits — the feminine and the masculine. There are those who are inclined to envision complete entities in which the details are obscured and the general principle remains — like the formation of metal shavings on a magnetic field.

And there are those who prefer to begin from a detail, which they cosset, tend lovingly and joyfully, and build towers and palaces like mathematical systems, brick by brick.

This applies not only to human beings but to styles of art as well as to historical eras. What is so contrary to the bold strokes, the wide scope and massive figures of Michelangelo, then 'The Arnolfini Group', in which the Flemish painter Van Eyck weaves each separate hair, every fold in their garments, every shadowy tone of their nostrils. The heavy, earthy, unadorned characters, painted with few details, of Giotto and Masaccio on the one hand, and the wealth of detail, delicate lace and microscopic observation of Gothic art on the other. Or the geometric compositions built like fine metal constructions in a lucid and intelligent fashion, by Piero della Francesca as compared with "Adoration of the Lamb", schematic and floating spaces with its endless elements. Or the Medici Palace, a model of organisation based on a single guiding principle, when seen beside the mad and capricious rising towers of the Gothic cathedrals.

In fact, this dualism can be found, to some degree or another, throughout the various periods of art. One can place the defined cubes of Mies van der Rohe beside the organic building structures of Frank Lloyd Wright, the steel panels of Sera alongside the intentional clutter of Beuys.

The concept of the use of details can move in two directions. 'The Collector' accumulates details — possessions, particles, and places them side by side — will crowd his works with details; his house, his room or his painting, every cranny will be occupied. He will breathe and live

with this ever-growing obsession with the hoarding of items and will cling despairingly to every last remnant of life, to every wisp of memory, to every burnt-out-light-bulb. His world is an overcrowded cemetery, filled with skeletons, bones, gravestones, epithets and testimonies — all assembled to protect him against the fear of being naked, uncovered, free to go out into the open, where he may perchance encounter a 'room' where he knows no one and can identify nothing or come across a monster which does not appear in any of the catalogues on one of his metal shelves.

On the other hand, somewhere out there is the threatening forest, and little Red-Riding Hood, defenceless and innocently makes her way through it, discovering that behind every tree and shrub and even under her grandmother's coverlet, there lurks a wolf.

Layush stands by with ax in hand, and he goes out to the forest of details, the labyrinth of scraps and junk, to cut a pathway through to the other side. He will arrive there only if he does not see a 'forest' but merely one tree, and then another and then another. His world is also comprised of endless, frightening and stifling details, but his way of dealing with them is to cast each one aside, to arrange them along the edge of his path, to decide which is the most practical and sensible course to take. Not to be buried in the mounds of collected items or to hide in his well-protected store-rooms but to burst out of them and leave them behind. He carries it all within him, dominating and bending the parts to his will, his needs and desires. Layush is not a collector — he is a dispenser.

Sionka is Layush. Her work is a volume of puzzles. Energy and effort are invested in the invention of details, in the changing and improving and arrangement of the whole. She is not of that school which sees the world in generalities and the details, secondary, faded and unidentifiable. She is sustained by details. She breathes details, plays with them and celebrates them; she neither keeps them nor collects them but throws them about, spreads them around, arranges patterns with them, and goes on her way.

Perhaps this is the source of her vitality, charm, her humour and the basic optimism that flows from her work, even if they consist of wingless angels, women recumbent on the floor, or classmates who have aged, become bald and fat and their bitterness emerges with their entrails.

"Life is a predella", says Sionka. Not the centrepiece, not heaven and hell, not the great, inspiring dramatic moments, the grandeur and the tragedy. Not fateful days filled with action, but a predella, those events which occur on the outskirts, are less momentous and on the fringe. Only those who are not constantly curious and observant and whose ears are not shut to the mute song of the peripheral details, can love them truly, live with them, dominate and not be sacrificed by them.

Prof. Ran Shechori

**Predella:* The word is applied. . . loosely, to any subsidiary picture forming an appendage to a larger one, especially a small painting or series of paintings beneath an altarpiece.

SIONA SHIMSHI, whose subject matter is man, is without doubt a unique artist, combining sensitivity, a keen and discriminating eye, with a rare intelligence.

In her exhibition "Ten Years Later" (Binet Gallery, Tel Aviv, 1971), the portrait busts deal with the quintessence of the personality: critical and questioning their existence. In 1981 (Julie M. Gallery, Tel Aviv), with "The Last People", the artist breaks through the barriers of time and matter and enters the world of mythology and archaeology, with figures which may be rediscovered in the future but whose end is as yet untold.

This exhibition in the Herzliya Museum is born of those same "Last People" and closes the circle. In his article on death, Jean Guiart, of the Musée de l'Homme, writes: "Les habitants des Nouvelles-Hébrides situent cette perte de mémoire au moment où la mémoire collective s'efface et où le nom du mort n'est plus remémoré."

"Everyone's sitting" is, to a certain extent, a form of memorial, in which, apart from the direct impact of her individual pain, the dualistic approach is conceived in a series of contrasts, which sharpens and illuminates the question of existence.

Siona places the first people wrought of fired clay opposite the spirit — that very spirit-soul which betrays the clay shell left standing in anticipation while being emptied of its vital energy and is once again returned to its original state of void. Against the static positions of the tired, seated figures whose bodies seem to merge with their seats, there are the inner phenomena of liquid-melting turning into cold and firm metal, representing death. "Everyone's sitting" in awe and expectation with eyeless stares — and the empty seats are there for us, the spectators.

Yoav Dagon

Director, Herzliya Museum

“For the blood *is* the life”

(Deuteronomy XII, 23)

A recent archaeological discovery has been instrumental in substantiating one of the philosophic elements of Christianity which derive from Rabbinic Pharisaic thought. The discovery itself, deals with the death of Jesus of Nazareth — an event which has attracted greater attention than either his life or his teachings. The Jews were accused of responsibility for his death and have paid for it heavily in a flow of blood and hatred that has pursued them throughout the ages, although Jesus was crucified by the Romans in a manner customary to them at the time and far from Jewish practice — and according to one version, Jesus was also stabbed by a Roman soldier while still on the cross (John XIX, 34). While it is accepted that the Chief Sadducee Priests handed Jesus over to Pilate, the Pharisees were angered by his execution. The version telling of the stabbing which underlines the Roman's responsibility for his crucifixion is also confirmed by the archaeological find.

A mosaic floor bearing three inscriptions was discovered in the ruins of a small Byzantine church on the northern slope of Tel Qasile in Tel Aviv. In one of the inscriptions which contains four lines, there is an appeal to recognize the pierced one. The phrase “recognize the stabbed” appears in the writings of the Fathers of the Church when asking the Jews to recognize Jesus of Nazareth. Roman soldiers approached Jesus while still on the cross, saw that “he was dead already, they brake not his legs”, (as was the custom in the case of those found on the crucifix still alive). Then one of the soldiers pierced his side with his spear “and forthwith came there out blood and water”. Blood and water would not normally flow from a dead body although Jesus may have been suffering from pneumonia at the time of his arrest and water had accumulated in his lungs (as some doctors conjecture). Emphasis is placed on the verity of the account in the lines that follow: “And he that saw *it* bare record, and his record is true” (John XIX, 35), and its continuation when Jesus disappears from his sepulchre, rises from the dead and appears to his disciples, are connected with the emission of the blood and water, namely that his spirit was alive within his dead body. “*Nefesh* means blood” (life) (Gen. R. s. 14, ref. to Gen. II, 7). The phenomenon appeared to his contemporaries as living proof of Jesus' immortality and godliness. In the visual arts, too, the pierced side and the bleeding wound in the chest are always evident in paintings and sculpture of the crucified Jesus. The significance of the stabbing can be interpreted as one of the basic elements of Christianity, among the various factions of which there are some arguments as to whether Jesus was man or God. Weighty philosophical ideas that figure in Jewish thought were taken over in a somewhat oversimplified manner by Christianity. Concepts such as “The end of days”, “Immortality of the soul”, “Resurrection”, and “Life after death”, generally associated with both faiths, are, according to Jewish belief, relegated to the distant future, whereas in Christianity these concepts are incorporated in the one person whose resurrection has overcome death. The blood and the water, the soul, the spirit of life, thought and creation, are solid basic elements that have withstood the effects of time, both in Jewish thought and subsequently in Christianity.

Haya Ritter Kaplan