

Merav Shinn Ben-Alon's *Private Territory*

Each issue of Helicon's *Private Territory* provides a platform for a single artist who creates a series of works specifically for that issue. The series revolves around its own independent axis therein, introducing an exhibit that converses with the texts in an abstract manner, so to speak. Artist Merav Shinn Ben-Alon has created specifically for the present issue of *Private Territory* a new body of works entitled *Stitches*. Stitches, both in the concrete sense and as images, alluding to mending and healing, stitching together a wound or a scar, linking forms, tying organs together. Ben-Alon read the texts and set out to work, progressing along her own path. She comes from a tradition of painting. For three years she exclusively painted bodily segments in black-and-white, among them a series comprised of navels and breasts, and subsequently – a corpus featuring color images of skin and wounds (several of her works were featured in *Helicon 29*, an issue dedicated to the body). Her technique is impressive in its precision, in its almost photographic appearance, in the poetical, sensitive, almost painful effect it conveys. Here, for the first time, a slightly different process is discernible; nevertheless, the end result derives from the very same language Ben-Alon has been formulating and exploring in her *oeuvre*. She addresses themes pertaining to physicality; to the boundaries between the real and the imaginary; abstract vs. realistic; the reading of allusions, signs and meanings.

Departing from a strict painting tradition, Ben-Alon embarks on a journey of experimentation in other mediums. In the present series, she uses items of clothing. She draws with garments: stretching a shirt or a section thereof,

instead of the traditional canvas, across a wooden frame. The mode of stretching, the exact location chosen, the garment's angle: near the sleeve, in the intersection of stitches, next to the decollate – all these generate a product which Ben-Alon defines as drawing; drawing with fabric, drawing by means of an object.

The fabric's stitches and texture are tantamount to the accurate, fine brush-stroked lines or stains found in Ben-Alon's paintings, thus advancing the garment as a kind of second skin, a protective covering. A functional object, possessing a past and evoking nostalgia, the garment avails itself in this case to a process of formal abstraction, and under Ben-Alon's hands, a new image associated with the body is generated, subtly implying its existence.

The series was created under *Helicon's* limitations and conditions – given dimensions, required text-image dialogue, and monochromatic coloration – all of which dictated a site-specific thought process, leading to Ben-Alon's decision to scan the object. Thus, a mode of documentation transformed into a mode of thinking – working in one medium and translating it into another. Scanning highlighted the object; the gray tones were rendered more visible, producing an overall effect that is more akin to drawing or painting.

Timna Rosenheimer

From: "Merav Shinn Ben-Alon's 'Private Territory'," *Helicon*, Magazine for Contemporary Poetry, Spring 2001 [Hebrew].