Ida Applebroog/MATRIX 96
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Willow Point V. A., 1983-84
(Photo: Courtesy of Chrysler Museum)

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Ida Applebroog's work embraces a full range of man's follies, often with compassion and wit and sometimes with reproach and anger. Using the representation of archetypal images and a terse counterpoint of language, she jolts us from habits of indifference and passivity into direct confrontation with unresolved conflicts. These conflicts span from the intimacies of our own personal lives to the large-scale complexities of national and global policies. Applebroog is obdurate in her regard for the welfare of the whole of the human species. She strafes those examples of moral failure which incriminate mankind that we may pay attention to the urgent need for change.

Applebroog first became an underground favorite in the art world when she regularly sent out unsolicited copies of her enigmatic artist's books to a list of artists, curators, critics and dealers. These books were puzzling yet oddly compelling dramas on the human condition and established her reputation as an artist in full control of her material. Subsequently she had a number of exhibitions of her drawings and paintings, often centered on certain themes such as "Current Events," "Cul-de-Sacs," and "Inmates and Others."

The vigor of Applebroog's work comes, in part, from the boldness of her subject matter. She has a facility for animating some of the major issues of our time: alienation, disenfranchisement, violence, racism, agism and feminism. Most artists recoil from the enormity of the challenge these issues present, and few are able to handle the material as well as Applebroog.

*Willow Point V. A.* (1983-84) and *Triptych* (1984) lament the subtle ways in which we program ourselves for war and the enormous costs we then incur. *God's White Too* (1985) and *Helmsley Palace* (1984) protest the injustice of prevailing racial hierarchies and the dishonorable greed this injustice nurtures. In the powerful little sculptures of her *Ocean Parkway* series (1982), and in *Sunflower Drive* (1985) and *I'm Home Helen* (1985-86) Applebroog underscores the pain and despair that result from society's inability to make our senior citizens feel comfortable and welcome.
Two Women I (1985), one of a series of four paintings by Applebroog, is a frisky take-off on Willens de Kooning's well known misogynistic portrayals of women. Hardly threatening or wanton, Applebroog's two women have pleasant, friendly faces. While one is attractive and young, the other is dowdy. Because of our rigid notions of beauty, the image might initially be considered inappropriate or even indiscrete. We might ask ourselves why, despite the well established tolerance for such images of women who are "undressed" by male painters (examples currently on view in the Atheneum include J.-B. Greuze, Indolence, c. 1756; G. B. Tiepolo, Susanna and the Elders, c. 1720; E. S. Bartholomew, Eve Repentant, c. 1850 among others), this painting by a woman artist of women who are apparently in control of their own bodies unexpectedly shocks us?

Applebroog's work is a lexicon of how drawn and painted images impart meaning. She is keenly aware of how to structure a work of art to enhance its impact. For instance, many of Applebroog's works incorporate repetition. In the earlier works such as Sure I'm Sure (1979-80) and I Pretend to Know (1979-80) and in most of her artist's books which are based on photographs of extant tableaux, repetition of the same image is central to the concept of the work and largely determines its basic compositional elements. The effect in these works is cinematic, suggesting a linear progression over time. Ironically in these works there is sequence but no change. Applebroog portrays the ordeal of stasis. What, we wonder, is the unrevealed impediment to change that lurks behind these scenes? Says Applebroog about her books of this period, "Each...is a series of images where nothing ever really happens, is composed more of silence (what isn't being said) than of words. It is the words that punctuate the silence." Seeing the same image again and again also suggests that Applebroog is portraying not just one particular situation but rather a broadly characteristic aspect of human relations. In more recent works the repetition of a figure across the top or down the side of a painting effectively establishes a certain given stereotype as an additional participant in the drama.

Applebroog almost always uses multiple images in each work. Significantly, recent works combine a variety of discrete and ostensibly unrelated images in a single work. These drawings and paintings from the last few years are more layered, more complex and more assertive, and it is these works which directly engage the larger societal and political issues.
Applebroog, however, is hardly didactic or polemical. Rather she allows intuition and instinct to be the determinants of her images and the way she combines them. It is not her intention to be specific and anecdotal, though there are often personal experiences behind her choices. She assumes that multiple readings will be made, not all of which she can or even cares to anticipate. Applebroog also appreciates that our instinct to wrestle narrative meaning from visual images is so intense that the juxtaposition of seemingly unrelated images will usually inspire elaborate and revealing fabrications. A clear example of this is Trinity Towers (1982) in which two adjacent scenes are quickly woven together (no doubt into a wide variety of different scenarios) by many who view this work.

Furthermore, Applebroog's works are usually made up of physically distinct parts: the early works of ink and rhoplex on vellum are often seven panels each; I've Chosen Cyanide (1985) is composed of five canvases; Sunflower Drive includes a real window shade on top of the canvas. Occasionally she has incorporated "found paintings" into her own works. She appropriates these discarded images from a senior citizen's center with affection, tenderly "memorializing" the amateur artists who made them. Three works which include found paintings are in this MATRIX exhibition: God's White Too, It's A Girl, Send It Back. (1985), Pull Down the Shade (1985). Crucial to
our own time is the realization that there are rarely singular truths. Instead "reality" itself is open to multiple interpretations. Applebroog is one of many artists of the day who are less and less satisfied with the validity of a work of art that offers but a single, authorized image. Her individual works are so consistently made up of multiple parts that this approach seems to be a metaphor for our growing awareness of the disparate nature of reality.

The tie back curtains and the pull down window shades have been recurring devices for Applebroog. Here, too, we find multiple meanings. Important components of the early "Performances" and "Stagings," they reappear occasionally in subsequent works such as *Trinity Towers, Pull Down The Shade, and Sunflower Drive*. They help to define the location of the viewer as a voyeur, someone on the outside looking into an essentially private encounter. Simultaneously they also take the role of theatrical stage curtains, suggesting that much of our behavior is public performance based on the expectations of others rather than our own feelings. Curtains and shades also acknowledge, perhaps with irony, the tenacity of the traditional concept of the canvas as a window onto fictional, illusionistic space.

Applebroog whose work so often addresses the failure of individuals to connect and the alienation and powerlessness that are the consequence of such disregard, is herself adept at communicating effectively through her art. With passion and intelligence she impugns those who would dissemble the pain and suffering of others. Those who find themselves troubled by her work might consider whether they are troubled by the works themselves or by the critical issues these works help bring into focus.

Ida Applebroog was born in the Bronx, New York. She studied at the New York Institute of Applied Arts and Sciences, and attended the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. She lives and works in New York City and is represented by Ronald Feldman Fine Arts.

Andrea Miller-Keller
*Curator of Contemporary Art*

Ida Applebroog will give an informal MATRIX Lecture on Sunday, September 20, 1987 in The Hartford Courant Room. The event is free and the public is cordially invited.
Works in MATRIX:

_I Pretend to Know_, 1979-80, ink and rhoplex on vellum, 12" x 75" (seven panels).
_Sure I'm Sure_, 1979-80, ink and rhoplex on vellum, 12" x 75" (seven panels).
_I Can't_, 1981, ink and rhoplex on vellum, 10 1/2" x 74" x 1" (seven panels).
_I Mean It_, 1981, ink and rhoplex on vellum, 10 1/2" x 74" x 3/4" (seven panels).
_It's Very Simple_, 1981, ink and rhoplex on vellum, 10 1/2" x 74" x 1" (seven panels).
_I'm a Jehovah's Witness, Can I Watch?,_ 1982, painted lead sculpture, c. 2" high on wooden base painted white enamel, 9" x 14".
_Five More Minutes_, 1982, painted lead sculpture, c. 2" high on wooden base painted white enamel, 9" x 14".
_Priopism? What's Priopism?,_ 1982, painted lead sculpture, c. 2" high on wooden base painted white enamel, 9" x 14".
_Trinity Towers_, 1982, acrylic and rhoplex on vellum, 85" x 110" (two panels).
_It's a Tipped Uterus_, 1983, rhoplex and enamel on canvas, 12" x 60".
_Willow Point V. A.,_ 1983-84, oil on canvas, 86" x 60" (two panels).
_Helmsley Palace_, 1984, oil on canvas, 100" x 100" (two panels).
_Triple Triptych_, 1984, oil on paper, 56 1/2" x 57" (nine drawings, three each: How Do I Look?; Because You're Ugly; See? I'm Not Crying).
_God's White Too_, 1985, oil on canvas, 86" x 60" (two panels).
_I've Chosen Cyanide_, 1985, oil on canvas, 62" x 132" (five panels).

The LeWitt Collection, Courtesy Wadsworth Atheneum (This painting is on exhibition upstairs in the Contemporary Gallery.)

_It's a Girl. Send it Back.,_ 1985, oil on canvas, 86" x 60" (two panels).
_PULL DOWN THE SHADE_, 1985, oil on canvas, 86" x 60" (two panels).
_Sunflower Drive_, 1985, oil on canvas, 84" x 54".
_Two Women I_, 1985, 1985, oil on linen, 72" x 74" (two panels).
_I'm Home Helen_, 1985-86, watercolor, gouache on treated paper, 39 1/2" x 30".

All works are lent courtesy of Ronald Feldman Fine Arts Inc. unless otherwise noted.
Artist's Books (all 6 1/4" x 7 3/4"):

I Feel Sorry For You, 1979
I Pretend To Know, 1979
It Isn't True, 1979
Sure I'm Sure, 1979
I Mean It, 1981
It's Very Simple, 1981
So?, 1981

Selected One-Person Exhibitions:

Boehm Gallery, Palomar Community College, San Marcos, CA '71; Newport Harbor Art Museum, Newport Beach, CA '73; Women's Interart Center, NYC '76; P S 1, Institute for Art and Urban Resources, Long Island City, NY '77; Whitney Museum of American Art, NYC '78; Ellen Sragow Gallery, NYC '78; Museum of Art, Williams College, Williamstown, MA '79; Franklin Furnace Archive, NYC '79; Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, NYC '81, '82, '84, '86; Nigel Greenwood Gallery, London '82; Spectacolor Board, Times Square, NYC '83; Chrysler Museum, Norfolk, VA '84; Real Art Ways, Hartford '85.

Selected Group Exhibitions:

Indianapolis Museum of Art, IN Painting and Sculpture Today; 1980 Biennial; Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, NYC (in conjunction with The Village Voice), The Atomic Salon '82; Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D. C. Directions '83; Subculture (in NYC subway cars), curated by Group Material '83; Museum of Modern Art, NYC An International Survey of Recent Painting and Sculpture '84; Queensborough College, NY and the Freedman Gallery, Albright College, Reading, PA The Parodic Power of Popular Imagery '85; The Palladium, NYC The Guerrilla Girls at the Palladium '85; Washington Project for the Arts, Washington, D. C. Some Like It Hot '87; Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, NYC Art Against AIDS '87; Kassel, West Germany Documenta 8 '87.
Selected Bibliography about Applebroog:

Frank, Elizabeth. "Ida Applebroog at Feldman (Downtown)," *Art in America* vol. 69 no. 5 (May '81), p. 137.
Linker, Kate. "Ida Applebroog," *Artforum* vol. 21 no. 6 (February '83), p. 80.
Smith, Roberta. "Exercises for the Figure," *The Village Voice* November 20 '84, p. 107.