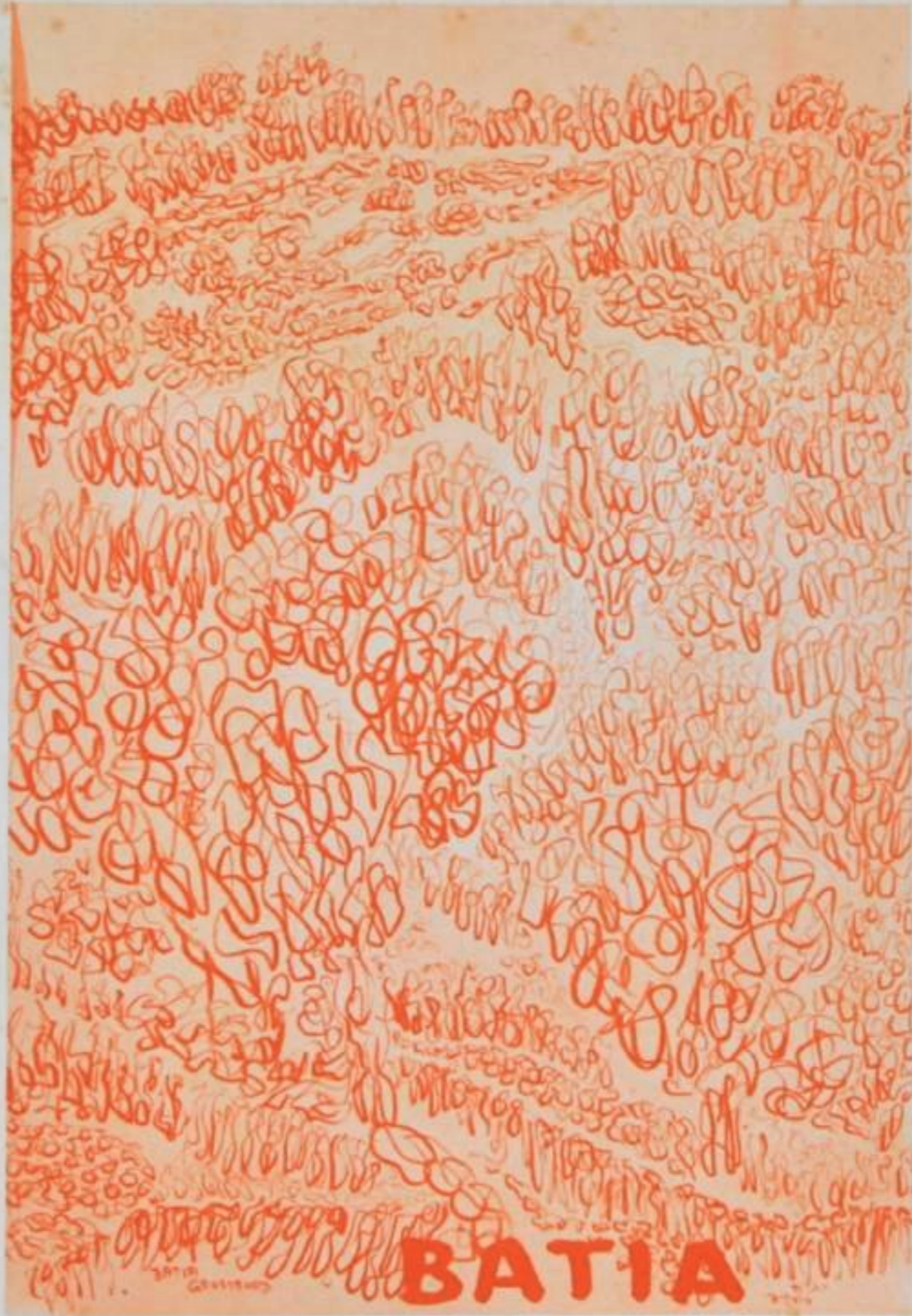


DRAWINGS



GROSSBARD

Batia Grossbard's recent drawings, of the past two – three years, take us back to the periods that preceeded the development of Renaissance thinking or to the achievements of art produced in the geographical area that remained outside the influence of the Renaissance. Her undulating lines seem more like the convolutions of arabesques, and when they cover the page from edge to edge, we are brought close to the *horror – vacui* of Moslem art, to the embellishment of structures of the Far East and to the Mayan Temples of America. We are familiar with forms similar to the ones I have described, in European art as well. The Gothic portal with its sculptured decorations, the mosaics of the church of Sant'Apollinare Nuovo in Ravenna, the stained-glass-windows of Chartres or those of Sainte Chapelle in Paris, and the nartex of Kahrieh Djami in Istanbul are, to my mind, exemplary. I am referring to a de-materialization of complete structures, or their various details, and to creations in sculpture or painting. In the stained-glass-windows mentioned, an artist of the Middle-Ages consciously and pragmatically created a sort of kaleidoscope of multi-coloured panes, in such a way that the observer was unable to discern the individual objects which were portrayed in minutest detail. The Byzantine mosaics are a welding of a richly-coloured spiritual vision to a material element. The stones render into concrete form the lofty spiritual values. The intentional non-differentiation of detail bears the impressive strength of the wholeness of a necklace rather than the beauty of the individual pearls. In the works referred to, not the detail is important, but the wholeness of the artistic concept. We do not think of them as portrayals that are in accord with visible and recognized reality. In such creative works we no longer see Nature — we see the absolute truth of the stroke of the brush, the pencil, or whatever the material by which they are created. It is the *matière* which, through contact, arouses experience.

One can say this of Batia Grossbard. Despite the clear identifying marks of the landscape depicted, despite her honest attitude towards it, we remain enchanted with the soft touch of her pencil on the rough paper. It is difficult for us to decide whether the vibrancy of her drawing is that of the view, or of the mysterious quality of the artist's hand which guides the pencil. It is not the beauty of the landscape which arouses the feeling within us of closeness to the spiritual value, but the progression of the lines themselves, their density or dispersion, that impresses their influence upon our senses.

The artist is free from the conventions of "classical", academic drawing. In the course of the years she has developed her own technique of drawing which departs and goes beyond mere accomplishment in drawing. Through technique Batia Grosbard reached a spiritual, purely artistic attainment. In her drawing of 1967, which lies before us, the continuous line is identified with the object portrayed, as if it were its encompassing line. The details of the object that "fill" it are also described in long lines, thrown by a gentle hand. That year was an important turning point in the artist's development. She advances slowly towards the crystallization of her artistic personality, unhesitating, undeterred. Her line gradually shortens until it reaches a source of tiny circles which join or, more often, separate. In the course of time the line becomes an independent value with an existence of its own, no longer serving the object found in nature. It winds in whatever directions it pleases, and only incidentally hints at the existence of the world which is described. It is the line that draws our attention, and not what is hidden beneath it. It has become the subject and is no more the predicate. The artist has succeeded in creating an impression of a denial of nature as a concrete value. Her drawings impart to us that feeling of de-materialization of which I spoke before, of disengagement from the material world. Her drawing lives by virtue of spiritual values which it represents, and not by any imitation of nature. In our contact with Batia Grossbard's work we have the strong impression that what she has drawn is the equal partner of the landscape, that the view and the drawing are congruent, without differentiation. In these drawings executed in black pencil, there is color value. The scale between the black of the pencil's deep pressure is rich in intermediate shades of grey which create an illusion of a wealth of bright colours. A painter

who works with colours "builds" his picture by means of contrasts between warm and cool shades, and thus brings the different parts of the picture closer to the viewer or farther from his sight. In other words, this method, which varies with each artist, creates an illusion of depth, of perspective, in the known historical sense. In Batia Grossbard's drawing there is a certain duality. Perspective, values of breadth which expand the portrayed view inwardly, in depth, are there, apparent to all. Together with this the pattern of lines which exists on its own, completely independent of illusion of breadth, blocks our view, holds it back, and distracts us to such an extent that our eyes with difficulty penetrate to the more distant planes. The influence of this last factor produces the "two-faced" expression of the work. It extends the appearance of the landscape and creates an impression of abstract drawing.

It is hard for us to judge whether or not this was done with intent by the artist, but the impression of abstraction remains. One must assume that the deed was done consciously, and that this technique is appropriate to Batia Grossbard's artistic development and to the goal she is striving to attain. She creates and shows us a world of breadth that has no beginning and no end. We are confronted with a mystery which imparts a feeling of holiness, beauty and greatness. What is more, the artist's methods are simple and modest, and for that very reason the portrayal acquires a new dimension, which only pure art is able to bestow. The austere sounds of a Bach étude are not diminished by comparison with complex and impressive symphonies. Batia Grossbard's accomplishment is interesting. Prolonged observation of her drawing reveals to us a phenomenon which has no parallel in this type of art. Suddenly the black lines vanish. They are transformed into a dark background and by contrast, the whiteness of the paper appears to be the drawing. Similarly, in music, the interval between the tones is the frequent cause of its becoming a composition. Actually, this is how woodcuts are made. In the block of wood which prints black areas the lines of drawing are engraved and these appear on the paper as white detail. This factor also contributes to the feeling of de-materialization, which one should include in the complex of the spiritual expression of a picture, as a significant component of an artistic experience.

When one attempts to classify an artist, no matter whom, to determine his place in the art constellation of any country, there always occur more general, basic thoughts on the very essence of art, at a specific time and place. Such an attempt demands a most inclusive outlook and a consideration of many factors which create an artistic climate not only in a limited geographic sphere. However, above all one most important question arises, which one dare not evade. What is the criterion by which one should analyse and judge these complicated problems? To my mind the foremost condition is that the artist must be honest with himself. An artist must seek (and of course find) his own way of expressing experiences, his artistic vision must find appropriate form and technical method, his work must arouse a feeling of experience in the viewer. Artistic conformity is catastrophic. An artist who speaks in a tongue that is not his own is eventually crushed in the vise of time. Above all one must have respect for the spiritual content of a creation and the choice of appropriate external language. The integration of those two elements is, to my view, of considerable value in our attitude to both the creation and its creator. Those values are timeless. To express it bluntly: the languages of Mozart and of the "Rolling Stones" are utterly different, but both are the proper vehicles to express the feelings of their composers, and right enough to evoke a musical experience in one who understands them. Batia Grossbard's creativity meets these criteria. Her art is sufficiently distinguished to include her in the ranks of artists who create with honesty and are faithful to themselves. There is definitely a place for her in our artistic constellation.

G. Tadmor

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Director of the Museum of Modern Art, Haifa