

*area of
denial*

MIRA SCHOR

(cover)

AREA OF DENIAL

1991

oil on linen

16" x 20"

INTERVIEW

STUART HORODNER Your parents were both artists, making ornate religious objects, jewelry, etc. How did this impact on your ideas about making art, and how art functions?

MIRA SCHOR They both worked at home so I got to see people making art objects as a daily practice. I'm continually amazed at all the artists I know who became artists without having had the opportunity to watch art being made.

My parents transmitted two very different art traditions. My father, Ilya Schor, was initially trained as a goldsmith and engraver. His work passed on a Hasidic spirit, something very Other to modernism. His work, from silver and gold Torah crowns, mezuzahs, and jewelry to small gouache paintings of scenes from the shtetl, was figurative, playful, tender. My mother, Resia Schor, is a modernist of the School of Paris variety. She was a painter until my father died, then she continued his Judaica and jewelry practice and truly found herself in the craft media. Inasmuch as art movements are gender-coded, I got a crossed gender art message from them. My father's work—folkloric, figurative, narrative, Jewish, delicate, light in weight—carries a feminine code. My mother's work, abstract, muscularly sculptural although small in scale, heavy in weight—carries a masculine code.

SH You had the unique opportunity to know some of the European and N.Y. School painters in Provincetown during summers and in Manhattan. How did this contribute to your understanding of the art establishment?

MS It is true that I grew up in the art world. My mother took me to see silent movies many Saturdays at the Museum of Modern Art. Then we'd wander through the galleries. My father and Jack Tworkov were close friends. Through Jack and his family, I got a first hand view of the New York School and had transmitted to me a particularly sensitive painterly touch in oil. I wish he'd lived to see me finally address oil paint. But by definition my parents were outsiders. I was exposed early to the prejudices and limitations

of the New York School, against craft, against narrative content, small scale, and unconventional or feminine materials. Some of the artists we knew, like Chaim Gross, were genuinely appreciative of artists' work. I'd say the more a part of mainstream modernism people were, the more exclusionary were their categories of art and non-art. I treasure the last time I saw Chaim. I exhibited one of my ear>penis>ear paintings in Ptown in 1989. Some old blowhard said to me, "Well, I'm shocked." And he was too pompous to be kidding. Chaim, old and feeble, summoned all his forces, shook his cane in the guy's face and said, "If Max Ernst did it you would like it." Then he took me aside and said, "You're really a surrealist, and don't let anyone stop you!"

So, it was a unique background, I was lucky! I also learned how many art worlds there were. I worked for Red Grooms and Mimi Gross, at their house met Yvonne Jacquette, Rudy Burckhardt, Edwin Denby, and George Kuchar, but also hung out in Pat Steir's studio, right across Mulberry Street. Graduate school at CalArts in the early 70s, including participation in the first feminist art program in the country, provided a vibrant and important experience.

SH How does writing influence your work?

MS I started to paint in oil around the same time I started to write, in the mid 80s: the process of editing, the potential for mutability, intrinsic to both, was synergistic. And both were more public activities than what I had been doing before. I was finally grappling with the major mainstream material of painting and breaking out from the position of silent victim in the art world. My essays research the same concerns as my paintings. I'm proudest of "Figure/Ground" which juxtaposes a particular critique of painting with certain feminist texts to reveal some of the gut fears (literally) behind that critique. I think "Patrilineage" is a useful text, pointing to a mechanism in art history that routinely erases women. "Representations of the Penis" is fun. And I'm still glad I had the nerve to write "Appropriated Sexuality," about David Salle's depiction of women, with no effort at journalistic evenhandedness. I recently found out he had at last seen it. It was like shooting a gun, and having the bullet arrive at its target 7 years later. I'm concerned that some painters embrace my written defenses of painting as permissions to retreat into formalism and craft without realizing how much I think painting must operate at the intersection of the richness of its past and its materiality with the critique of painting, the challenge of the real. My own work wouldn't be what it is if I had just stuck with all the art that I love, it owes as much to all that seemed anathema to painting and to love of visual art.

