

HOSTLER BURROWS

ANAT SHIFTAN (Israeli, b.1955)

Flora Series:

The format for Flora is that of a “center piece.” It echoes a long tradition of arranging a still life (bowl with fruit or floral arrangement) as a center presence on a table. That arrangement is seemingly neutral but is actually symbolic*. When I make my floral piles, I explore the ambivalent condition of our relation with nature. As I attempt to look at nature I realize it is not there for me to view. Nature as an authentic, unpredictable, and uninterrupted phenomenon is not present in our world. Our “nature” is stylized and cultured. Further, nature as a cultural concept is placed in contrast to the mechanized world yet nature is in fact mechanical and predictable. Finally, nature is not neutral or objective but rather powerful and “opinionated.” Nature embodies the texture of sexuality, life and death, of power and subversion and is very similar to complex political and social phenomena.

For these reasons the form of my flowers is an invented one rather than one made through observation. In Flora, the floral objects are flower-like but are not attempting to represent any specific species. The stem has a geometric hexagon core that alludes to the mechanical way of making these flowers as well as the geometry and predictability of nature as witnessed.

In the end, Flora celebrates my fascination with nature. I capture nature as something that is ambivalent and get as close as possible to presenting nature the way it is in our world today.

*Virginia Woolf uses the bowl of fruit as a metaphor for harmony in *To the Lighthouse*, and in the history of painting there is a long tradition of the seemingly objective/natural still life to suggest a critical view of the human condition.

Born in Israel in 1955, Shiftan studied English Literature and Philosophy (BA 1980) at the Hebrew University, Ceramics at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, (1980 -1982), Eastern Michigan University (MA 1984), and Cranbrook Academy of Art and Design, (MFA 1986). She worked at Pewabic Pottery, Detroit Michigan (1986 to 1999) as Instructor, Production Manager - Senior Designer, and Director of Education. She taught at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design (1999-2002) and is currently teaching ceramics at SUNY New Paltz since 2003, where she is head of the Ceramics Program.

Shiftan has twice received the Michigan Grant for Individual Artists and exhibited her

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work extensively. Shiftan has collaboratively organized: *Contemporary Issues in Clay: A British Perspective*, (2006) and *Why Clay* (2008), and organized *Beyond Hand Made* (2008), all symposiums examined theoretical, social, and economic trends that are the context in which creative practice in visual arts occurs today. Shiftan's own work in clay explores the subject of ambivalence in floral and zoological imagery and the representation of nature in art.

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