

GLADSTONE GALLERY

David Stromberg, "The House of Noah," *Jerusalem Post*, December 16, 2011, p. 22 - 24.

ART



FOR SHARON Lockhart, having an audience and getting feedback is a part of being an artist.

'The House of Noa'

World-renowned artist Sharon Lockhart takes prime minister Levi Eshkol's daughter Noa, whom she considers to be a 'national treasure,' and places her within an art context

• DAVID STROMBERG

American photographer Sharon Lockhart – known for her deeply researched yet cool-tempered still and moving image works – has spent the past three years exploring the legacy of a private, strong-willed, and pioneering woman: dance composer and textile collagist Noa Eshkol. The result – an exhibition titled Sharon Lockhart | Noa Eshkol, which opened this week at the Israel Museum – brings together original films and photographs by Lockhart as well as "wall carpets," sketches and other archival material that belonged to Eshkol. "Noa lived a modest life," says Lockhart, who

GLADSTONE GALLERY

David Stromberg, "The House of Noah," *Jerusalem Post*, December 16, 2011, p. 22 - 24.



(Photos courtesy of the artist, neugerriemschneider, Berlin, Gladstone Gallery, New York and Brussels, and Blum & Poe, Los Angeles)

arrived in Israel last week to install and open this exhibit as well as a simultaneous show at the Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv. "She stopped dancing - only one of her dancers actually ever saw her dance. For her it wasn't about fame, it was about dedicating your life."

Noa Eshkol, who died in October 2007, was the first daughter of prime minister Levi Eshkol. She is best known as co-inventor, together with architect Avraham Wachman, of the Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation (EWMN) System. Though it was created as a tool to compose dances on paper for dancers to later fulfill - the way we may think of sheet music for a musician - the EWMN system has wider applications. It has been used by zoologists to record animal movement and by medical researchers to diagnose autistic movement patterns in babies yet unable to talk. But

while Eshkol co-authored numerous academic articles on the system's applicability, its artistic significance - as well as the integrated life-vision of its co-founder and proponent - were left largely unarticulated.

"There are hardly any interviews with her," says Lockhart. "She didn't like to talk about herself. There's very little historical interpretation of her practice so I wanted to place her - and also redefine her within an art context. I think, having grown up in a postmodern context, I see the totality of what she produced in a way she never would have herself, having grown up in a purely modern one." She jokes: "It's a two-person show, but if Noa were alive she probably wouldn't let me do it."

Lockhart learned of Eshkol during a 2008 trip in Israel to research various subjects of interest to her - conservation, anthropology, postmodern dance, tex-

tiles. Diana Shoef, production manager at the Center for Contemporary Art who was helping Lockhart with her research, told Lockhart about Eshkol, who in addition to her minimalist dance works created a collection of over 1,800 "wall carpets" - tapestry-like compositions made of discarded scraps of textile.

Shoef took Lockhart to Eshkol's former house, now the EWMN Center, where her students run the Noa Eshkol Foundation for Movement Notation, created after Eshkol's death, as well as the Movement Notation Society that Eshkol founded in 1968.

"I went there every day," says Lockhart of her first two-week trip to Israel. She came back again in December 2009 and 2010 and spent all her time at the house researching - learning about Eshkol, interviewing the people who knew her and digging through her archive. "I barely saw Tel Aviv or Jerusalem, I was always going to work at Noa's house."

SIMILARITIES EMERGE when one considers the characters of Lockhart and Eshkol. Though Lockhart is warm in person and the preparation for her works depends greatly on relationships she develops over time with her subjects, the execution of her works is exacting, strict and carefully planned.

"Everything I do is very choreographed," says Lockhart. "I'm not out there with a video camera shooting 150 hours of footage."

The inspiration to make her first film, which she completed while still at graduate school at the Art Center College of Design in Pasadena, California, came in part from Morgan Fisher, a conceptual filmmaker and painter who had spoken at the college as a visiting artist. "When I finished filming and developing the film, I didn't know what to do. Morgan walked me through step by step."

In 2000, Lockhart showed two long film works - *Goshogaoka* (1997, 16mm) and *Teatro Amazonas* (1999, 35mm) - at the Rotterdam Film Festival and in 2009 *Lunch Break* (2009) and *Exit* (2009) were shown at the Harvard Film Archive. At the end of that same year, during her second December trip to Israel, Lockhart shot the dance sequences that appear projected onto rectangular volumes arranged throughout the exhibition space at the Israel Museum.

"The films were shot in 35mm over two or three days at Batsheva [Dance Company]'s Varda Studio," she says of the five-channel film installation *Five Dances and Nine Wall Carpets* by Noa Eshkol (2011), in which the main sound is the ticking of a metronome - the only aural accompaniment Eshkol used in her dances. "The Israeli film crew - the best I'd ever worked with - had never seen this kind of dance before and were mesmerized by it."

During that trip, Lockhart also photographed a series of hanging spherical models that illustrate the EWMN System, titled "Models of Orbits in the System of Reference," Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation System (2011). These photographs, which exhibit Lockhart's patent precision, are presented in series of three or four for each model, showing the particular dynamic of each sphere. They allow the viewer to observe the shifts in movement of each sphere's angular and circular volumes - serving as an abstract animation of the notational system - but they also serve as an example of Lockhart's interest in tracing movement over time and space and of connections made through the observation of differences.

"In the photographs you see the beautiful subtle shifts in form as the spheres spin," Lockhart points out, "but Noa used them purely as tools for understanding the [EWMN] system."

In the same space as these photographs, as well as drawings and scores made using the system, Lockhart has chosen to exhibit three of Eshkol's original wall carpets - chosen from the vast collection Eshkol left behind after her death. Additional wall carpets appear in the films alongside or behind the dancers on rectangular volumes similar to those onto which

MAGAZINE www.jpost.com 23

GLADSTONE GALLERY

David Stromberg, "The House of Noah," *Jerusalem Post*, December 16, 2011, p. 22 - 24.

'I love the process of making the work: I get to go deep into the research, the pre-production and the relationships I develop with the dancers and the film crew. This is an essential part of what interests me'

the films are themselves projected in the final exhibition.

"Noa never put the dances and carpets together," says Lockhart. "The dancers couldn't imagine what it would be like. When they came into Batsheva's studio and saw the carpets on the volumes, it made sense. There's a real dialogue between the dances and carpets."

And though Lockhart did hang the carpets vertically in her films, for the exhibition itself she decided to present them horizontally on raised plinths. "I didn't want to hang them on the walls," she explains, "I wanted them to be looked at as archival." She adds: "The whole show has to do with the floor and with the physical movement of the viewer. You create your own paths as you look at the show. The perspective shifts when looking down or across." It was these aspects of viewing of which she wanted to make the audience conscious.

Lockhart's palate – the color of those elements she has introduced around Eshkol's works – is a flat gray. It started from the floor at the Suzanne Dellal Center and Lockhart then repeated it in the background with the metal spheres she photographed and again with the upright and flat volumes used throughout the work. The exhibit also benefits from the gray concrete floors of the Israel Museum's contemporary arts gallery. This gray creates both a dialogue and a distinction between Eshkol's composed movements and colorful carpets and Lockhart's "filtering" of those works into an exhibition of her own.

The main quality of that filter, characteristic of Lockhart's other work, is the purity of the object being viewed. "It was important to me when designing the show that no technology would be visible," she says. "With the films, you're only going to see beams of light coming through the walls." In this way she makes the subject as open as possible for observation and contemplation.

LIKE LOCKHART'S other projects, this one has involved a deep immersion in the world that is her subject. Her artwork is in some ways the medium through which she engages with that world – her contribution to a conversation that starts with some form of fascination. The house of Noa Eshkol in some ways fits perfectly with her working style because it is itself built on similar immersive principles.

"Noa expected them to be there every day," Lockhart says of Eshkol's students, who would come to learn her dances as well as stitch the carpets she would compose during the night. "She lived on the top floor; the middle floor was for dancing and for the carpets; and on the bottom floor was the kitchen. They ate lunch together at a communal table." And after lunch they worked on notations. All of their time was volunteered.

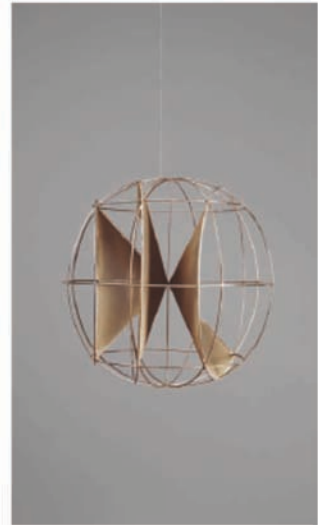
Eshkol left specific instructions in her will about which of the dedicated dancers would be in charge of which aspects of the foundation – from the dances to the carpets to the house to the archive. The carpets, which were never sold in her lifetime, are now being sold to fund part of the foundation and younger dancers have joined the company and started learning Eshkol's works.

For a book exhibition catalogue that Lockhart is preparing on Eshkol – to be published in June 2012, when the show travels to the Los Angeles Country Museum of Art – the artist interviewed those dancers who were closest to her. These include principal dancers Racheli Nul-Kahana; Ruth Sela; Mooky Dagan, who is also responsible for the carpets; and Michal Shoshani, the dance theorist in charge of Eshkol's archive. They are all crucial to Lockhart's exhibition – from the films to the content of the book – and generally work together to preserve Eshkol's legacy.

"I spoke to them about themselves, who they were, how they came to Noa," says Lockhart. "They dedicated their life to her, to her vision."

The book will include stories about Eshkol and a text by a dance theorist about the notation itself as well as one on the inner narratives of the wall carpets. "Michal [Shoshani] said she constantly had to go to the trash to save the drawings Noa would throw away. I'm hoping the book will introduce Noa to the world."

In 2010, Lockhart returned to Israel for exhibition preparations as well as further research for the book. She also filmed another work – this one a solo piece featuring Ruth Sela – which will appear at the Center for Contemporary Arts in Tel Aviv. The Center's largest space has been transformed into a practice and performance space for the dancers. Throughout the exhibition they will hold their daily practice sessions there, along with the lectures and workshops they will lead.



IN SOME senses, Lockhart has herself become one of those people who have dedicated themselves to Noa Eshkol. "I've been so inside her world for these last years," says Lockhart. "I see her as a national treasure here, but so very few actually know who she was or what her life's work was about. She's also a gold mine in the intellectual sense – a brilliant woman."

But unlike Eshkol and her dancers – who stopped performing publicly in the 1970s – Lockhart is as active in exhibiting as in creating. For her, having an audience and getting feedback is a part of being an artist.

"I love the process of making the work: I get to go deep into the research, the pre-production and the relationships I develop with the dancers and the film crew. This is an essential part of what interests me. The technical aspects – the printing, the shooting – don't interest me as much. But when it comes together in the architecture, it becomes a question of how you read or look at culture. I want the viewers' process to be the inverse of my own: starting with the architectural space we've designed and moving back through the dances to the research. It wouldn't be complete without being viewed."

And, yet again, there is also a similarity between the two women – an exactitude and restraint when it comes to the way they work. Like Eshkol did, Lockhart also collaborates with architects – Frank Escher and Ravi Gunewardena from Los Angeles – who help design the spaces of her various exhibitions. Where Eshkol was a dance composer, Lockhart can perhaps be called an art architect – constructing images and situations for her viewers.

"During the filming," Lockhart remembers, "I told the dancers, 'No expressions' and they'd laugh: 'You sound just like Noa!' Or I'd say a certain thing and they'd respond with a laugh: 'Oh no, Noa's back!'"

