

# GLADSTONE GALLERY

Michael Ned Holte, "Movement Research: Michael Ned Holte on Sharon Lockhart's *Five Dances and Nine Wall Carpets by Noa Eshkol, 2011*," *Artforum*, January 2012, p. 192-196.



Sharon Lockhart, *Five Dances and Nine Wall Carpets* by Noa Eshkol, 2011. color film in 35 mm transferred to HD video, five-channel installation, continuous loop.

This page, above: Racheli Nul-Kahana, Ruti Sela, Below: Noga Goral, Mor Bashan, Ruti Sela, Or Gal-Or.

Opposite page: Racheli Nul-Kahana, Shmulik Zaidel, Ruti Sela.



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CLOSE-UP

## Movement Research

MICHAEL NED HOLTE ON SHARON LOCKHART'S *FIVE DANCES AND NINE WALL CARPETS BY NOA ESHKOL, 2011*

FOR NEARLY TWO DECADES, Sharon Lockhart's films (and, more recently, HD videos) have maintained a consistent approach to their varied subjects, whether laborers or children playing—so consistent, in fact, as to constitute a kind of signature. Employing a fixed frame and tending toward long takes in a highly structured (if not precisely structuralist) sequence of shots, Lockhart's lens could be described as empirical in its apparently cool remove. In *Goshogaoka*, 1998, the camera, in a series of long takes, records a squad of adolescent Japanese girls practicing basketball drills in a gymnasium, sneakers squeaking along the wooden floor with military precision. The more

recent *Double Tide*, 2009, is composed of two fifty-minute shots of a solitary clam digger extracting bivalves from the coastal muck, the first filmed at dawn, the second at dusk. The clam digger traverses space but never leaves the confines of the screen, while the sky gradually, dramatically transforms from night to day and back again. In both of these works, the activity takes place for a fixed camera, or within the space delimited by a fixed camera; there is little we know or can learn about its subjects beyond their movement within the frame.

Yet in each of these works there is also a palpable sense of the artist *behind* the camera: a suggestion of

questions asked, directions given, and relationships forged beyond the proverbial scenes. Lockhart's unseen presence is felt precisely at the moment when the human subject engages the intensified edges of the fixed frame and the vast world beyond it. (One of my favorite moments in *Goshogaoka* occurs when one of the otherwise-stalwart girls grimaces—to the filmmaker, presumably—after misdribbling the basketball.) In a word, Lockhart repeatedly assumes the role of choreographer, organizing a sequence of human movements within the immobile rectangle of the screen.

So perhaps it seems inevitable that she would turn her considerable attention to dance as an explicit sub-

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ject. Her new body of work investigates Israeli "dance composer" and textile designer Noa Eshkol (1924–2007), who in 1958, along with engineer Abraham Wachman, developed the Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation (EWMN)—a grid-based sign system capable of describing all human and animal locomotion. The centerpiece of "Sharon Lockhart | Noa Eshkol," Lockhart's current exhibition at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, is *Five Dances and Nine Wall Carpets by Noa Eshkol, 2011*, an installation of five films that interpret Eshkol's choreography. The installation has been designed by architecture office EscherGuneWardena, frequent Lockhart collaborators, and notably, it's the artist's most elaborate multi-channel work to date.

The Israel Museum exhibition also includes "Spheres," 2011, a series of photographs—"still life" images, paradoxically—of seven soldered wire and mesh spheres designed by Eshkol and Wachman as pedagogical tools to describe locomotion of specific limbs around a central axis. Lockhart has situated these objects against a gray backdrop photographing them in various positions as they spin. Additionally, a video by Lockhart, *Four Exercises in Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation, 2011*, and archival material, including examples of Eshkol's notation, are on view at the Center for Contemporary Art in Tel Aviv.

Eshkol was the daughter of Israeli prime minister Levi Eshkol, but despite her relation to such a public figure, the choreographer's work rarely engaged an audience beyond her students. So Lockhart's immersive research—and resulting films—centers on the small cadre of Eshkol's devoted followers who knew the choreographer best and perpetuate the EWMN system. Each of the films in *Five Dances* takes a specific Eshkol dance as its starting point, and Lockhart worked closely with the dancers, who performed in groups of two, three, four, or five to realize these notated works for the camera's frame. The setting is an open interior space, coolly blank but punctuated by rectangular volumes displaying the choreographer's extraordinary textiles, which were typically composed using scraps of fabric—dazzling improvisations of design that stand in remarkable contrast to the more scripted dances. Eshkol apparently did not see a close relationship between these two activities, but Lockhart's positioning of the textiles, in various configurations in the same space as the dancers, argues otherwise.

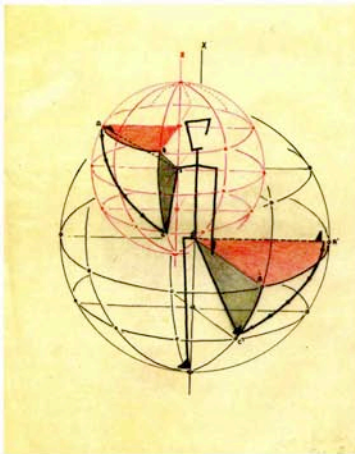
These dances have rarely been performed for a live audience, nor have they been recorded. Not surprisingly, Lockhart's framing is fixed and sets the margins for the dancers' movement as they advance and recede in a deep field, and the straightforward gaze of the camera subtly parallels a seeming indifference of the dancers to the apparatus. (The fact that they

reiterate the frame shows they are complicit with the filmmaker.) Like the wire spheres Eshkol used as study models, her choreography is obsessed with radial and spiraling locomotion achieved by the human body, and the dancers often perform these movements simultaneously, though often at different positions relative to the camera. The choreography unfolds with elegant but nearly mechanical precision, evincing the rationality we associate with modernism; decidedly lacking in ostentation and largely indifferent to an audience, it prefigures the radical incorporation of everyday movement in the choreography of Simone Forti and Yvonne Rainer. Eshkol's movements were always timed to the regular click of a metronome, never to music. (In this way her work parallels Merce Cunningham's rejection of classical musical time.) Each of the *Five Dances* follows suit, with each set to a specific beat, and the relationship of five audio tracks (developed by composers Dale Davis and Becky Allen) produces a rhythmic complexity that continually changes and threads the projections together as the films loop at different rates.

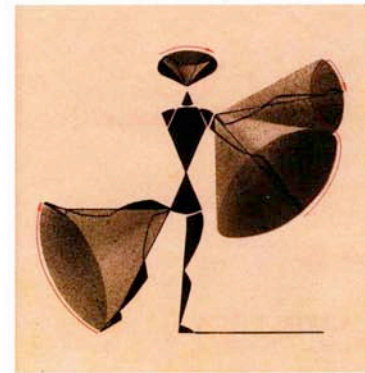
Lockhart's works are always driven by research, with a rigorously constructed image informed by a typically anonymous subject, whether a clam digger or a team of schoolgirls. Eshkol is a new kind of subject for the artist—a complex, historical figure, as well as a fellow artist whom Lockhart explicitly positions as a collaborator. While dancers such as Forti and Rainer have been largely assimilated into the narrative of postwar art, Eshkol remains mostly unknown to contemporary art audiences. The Israel Museum exhibition, which includes a selection of Eshkol's remarkable textile works and will travel to the Los Angeles County Museum of Art in June, will likely change that. □

MICHAEL NED HOLTE IS A FREQUENT CONTRIBUTOR TO ARTFORUM.

Below: Noa Eshkol, John Harries, and Abraham Wachman, sketch describing Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation intermediate planar movements, ca. 1955, pencil and ink on paper, 10 1/2 x 9".

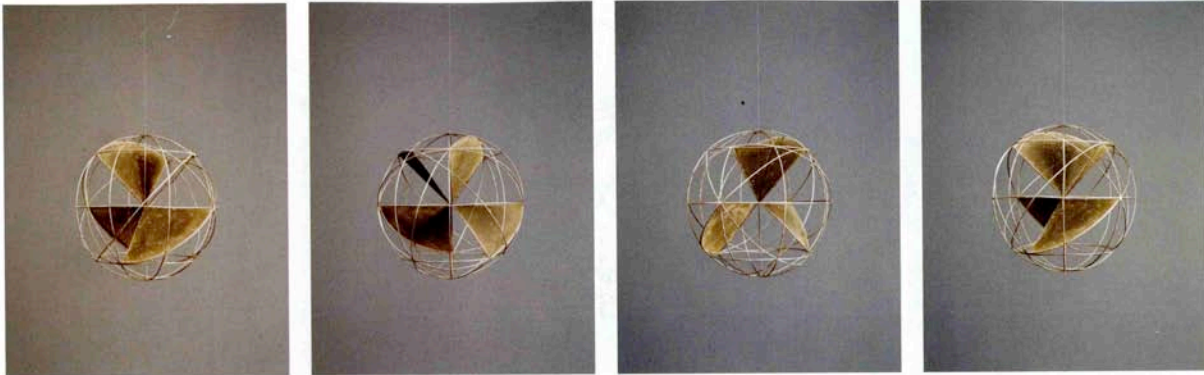


Right: Noa Eshkol, John Harries, and Abraham Wachman, sketch describing Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation conical movements, ca. 1955, pencil and ink on paper, 9 1/2 x 9 1/2".



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Above: Sharon Lockhart, *Models of Orbits in the System of Reference, Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation System: Sphere Two at Four Points in Its Rotation, 2011*, four color photographs, each 19 1/2 x 15 1/2". From the series "Spheres," 2011.

Below: Sharon Lockhart, *Four Exercises in Eshkol-Wachman Movement Notation, 2011*, color HD video, continuous loop. Production still, Ruti Sela. Photo: Alex Slade.

