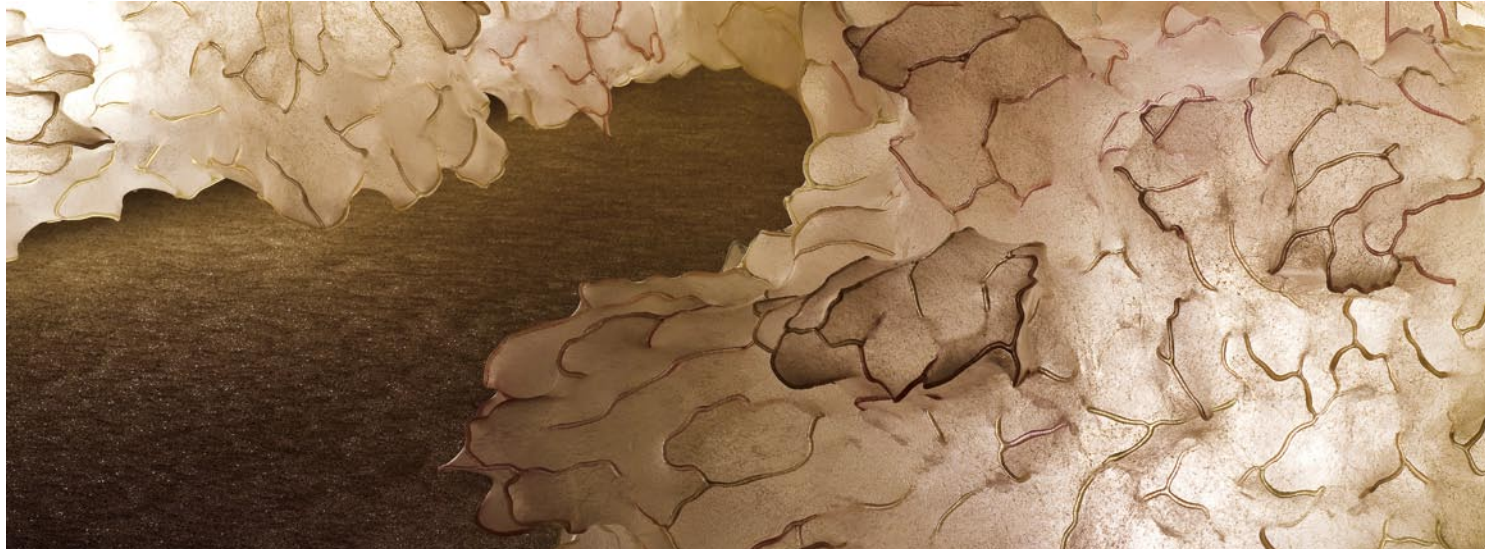




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A Glass Act

Ayala Serfaty's first major solo museum show officially opened on November 13th at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art.

The Assia Gallery at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art was transformed into an intimate sanctuary providing a modern contemplative environment in a preternaturally quiet ambience within a dense space.

After six years of research, what began as a fragile web of glass culminated in an installation of architectural scope entitled "Soma", meaning body in Greek.

The stunning and complex construction challenges the notion of the fragility of glass, showcasing the incredible strength in structural adhesions. The Soma installation initially brings to mind an expanse of translucent moss or a bank of fog hovering over the floor; however, it is a representation of nature in its most abstract form. It is built with thousands of glass filaments encased in a polymer membrane-like web floating atop a sunken surface covered in tiny glass beads. The exhibition was executed in collaboration with glass artists Eytan Hall and Anna Gautier will be on display until February 14, 2009.

On this note, Aqua Creations is thrilled to announce the launch of the new web site for Ayala Serfaty featuring Soma.

The new web site offers six main areas for navigation and aims to provide viewers with updated resources about Ayala Serfaty's ongoing art practice, including her latest installation in the Tel Aviv Museum of Art.





Jōshū asked [his master] Nansen, “The Way – what is it?”

Nansen said, “It is everyday mind.”

Jōshū said, “One should then aim at this, shouldn’t one?”

Nansen said, “The moment you aim at anything, you have already missed it.”

Jōshū said, “If I do not aim at it, how can I know the Way?”

Nansen said, “The Way has nothing to do with ‘knowing’ or ‘not knowing’. Knowing is perceiving but blindly. Not knowing is just blankness. If you have already reached the un-aimed-at Way, it is like space: absolutely clear void. You can not force it one way or the other.”

At that *instant Jōshū* was awakened to the profound meaning. His mind was like the bright full moon.

Where does the work belong? The work belongs, as work, uniquely within the realm that is opened up by itself. (Martin Heidegger)

Six years ago, in 2002, Ayala Serfaty saw on the wall of the Ceramics Department of the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design something that was to generate a turning point in her work: a fragile web of glass filaments that unraveled her thinking. The process it sparked, which gave birth to the installation Soma, might be described as the transformation of calligraphy into three-dimensions, a manual, labor-intensive process in which fine glass filaments are interlaced to create spatial structures. A membrane-like overlay of clear polymer allows the changing hues of the filaments to shine through, revealing something of the glass maze within.

As the work (or evolving work) on Soma took shape, it broke through into the wider metaphorical space, moving toward abstraction and reduction. The concrete images disintegrated and began to defy clear representations of nature. Behavioral nuances burst from the form into space, intensifying the fundamental qualities of the object. Matter became thought.

How do we choose our specific material, our means of communication? “Accidentally.” Something speaks to us, a sound, a touch, hardness or softness, it catches us and asks us to be formed. We are finding our language, and as we go along we learn to obey their rules and their limits. We have to obey, and adjust to those demands. Ideas flow from it to us and though we feel to be the creator we are involved in a dialogue with our medium. The more subtly we are tuned to our medium, the more inventive our actions will become. Not listening to it ends in failure... What I am trying to get across is that material is a means of communication. That listening to it, not dominating it, makes us truly active, that is, to be active, be passive. The finer tuned we are to it, the closer we come to art. (Anni Albers, Feb. 25, 1982)

The medium is the language; the webs are the narrative. The light shining through the skin of the installation is the body in which form and content merge inseparably. It is a further evolution of the light that shone through the leaves Serfaty painted as a student in London in 1985–87, when she encountered the work of Eva Hesse, the use of the medium as a conduit, the sensual treatment of industrial materials (latex and fiberglass), the physical dimension of the work, the sense of doubt, and the essence of “unravelings.”

Eva Hesse was among the first artists in the 1960s to deliberately turn to unconventional materials as part of a cultural attempt to extend the borders of art. Her work is characterized by a delicate balance between the planned and the random, between conscious knowledge and the dimensions of surprise and revelation. More than twenty years later, this essential quality found its way into the material state of the objects created by Serfaty.

Indications of this development can already be seen in the artist's early works: pictures painted in dust molecules; paintings on wax; plastic bags; topographies of the Judean Desert engraved onto aluminum surfaces; an installation of glass hammers. A whirl of family history telling of settlement in Israel and two families partially lost in the Holocaust eddies through the atmosphere of light.

Mist covers the whole city of Kyoto and the booksellers take their books in off the sidewalks and into the shops because the passersby are walking blindly and knocking the books of philosophy and economics and history onto the ground. (Yoel Hoffmann)

The lengthy process of the creation of Soma — a breathing metaphorical structure of a body within a body — spreads like a hazy topography throbbing over a surface of granulated glass wrapped in felt. The name Eva Hesse gave her work — Expanded Expansion — might also be applied to the large metaphorical space of Soma. Here the quivering limbs operate as an interface of 24 units tangentially linked in a rhizomorphous construction, each breathing into and through the others while breathing autonomously as well.

Soma must be read openly, progressively: the glass filaments are woven into a crystal-like structure and wrapped in polymer threads to create a surface that resembles a brittle, fragile cocoon. Its physical identity took shape in a slow, cumulative process. Yet the moment it was turned into a cocoon by means of the polymeric spray,⁵ the exacting effort of its creation was obscured.

The clouds and atmosphere of the real landscape are not the same throughout the four seasons. In spring they are bright and harmonious; in summer dense and brooding; in autumn thin and scattered; in winter dark and gloomy. When an artist succeeds in reproducing the general tone and not a group of disjointed forms, then clouds and atmosphere seem to come to life. (Kuo Hsi)

Like a journey or a process, Soma went through several stages. It began with the imitation of nature in pictorial works which then fluctuated (in a dialectic phase) between expressions of the consciousness and images of natural phenomena, as if they were ornaments in dissolve. Living nature had become inanimate, a descriptive narrative which gradually emerged from reflections on a Japanese Zen garden. But like a fish in an aquarium confined by the walls and floors of the tank and prevented from swimming out far and deep, as it progressed, Soma yearned to free itself of time and captivity. It now began to take shape not as intersecting lines, but as a surge into the cycle of life, into nature throbbing with life forms. The thick "vaporuous" monochrome of Soma is an embodiment of this passion, the urge to reach out to matter and color, to the color that derives from the matter.

Nature, with all its forms, structures, and organizing principles — the sea and the land, fauna and flora — has always been a source of inspiration for artists and designers. After generations of formalism, this connection has become even stronger in recent years. Nature's role in design reached its height in three periods: in the Art Nouveau of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in works produced by artists such as Émile Gallé, Victor Horta, and Antoni Gaudí, where it served an ornamental function drawn from the dynamics of plant-life; from the 1930s to the late 1960s, when the interaction between nature and design was aimed at achieving an organic harmony through a purist use of natural materials; and in the last decade in a design language grounded in a new interpretative use of nature. This language does not mimic nature in the ornamental sense, but rather utilizes it and its complex structures as an endless source of inspiration for the creation of new forms.⁷

Understanding the object and understanding the personality — they are to be seen as opposite poles: the pure inanimate object has only an external manifestation, which exists solely for the other and can be fully and thoroughly revealed by the unilateral act of this other (the person who is familiar with the object) — this object — devoid of any internal existence of its own, which is not detached and is not consumed, can be the object of practical interest alone. The other pole is contemplation of God in the presence of God: dialogue, questioning, prayer. The personality must open freely. It has an internal core that can not be used up, consumed. A distance is invariably preserved, in respect to which only the absolute lack of object interest is possible. When it opens itself for the other, it remains at all times for itself as well. (Mikhail Bakhtin)

In terms of the history of Israeli design, Ayala Serfaty has always belonged to another space. She is an artist “without a country,” loyal to herself, outside the local design scene (which is reductive in its use of media and reflective in its creative process, working mainly with ready-made and improvisation). Over the course of two decades, Serfaty constructed her own language, which might be described as the material incarnation of Bacchanalian physical theater, a performance staged in a highly expressive manner with an intensely passionate freedom. Her subjects are undeniably performative. The presence of the female body in her works is also alien to the discourse of local, patriarchal design. Yet the sexuality of the female body is deeply imprinted on the silk works with which she was identified for many years. These soothing, pleasurable creations are suffused with the joy of life.

Write your self. Your body must be heard. Only then will the immense resources of the unconscious spring forth...At last, boundless feminine imagination will be revealed. (Hélène Cixous)

“I do not sculpt birds, but flight,” said Brancusi.¹⁰ Soma holds the viewer’s gaze. In Serfaty’s light installation, the romantic image of grand “nature” has evolved, going through phases of transformation and refinement until it appears today as an enigmatic metaphor more than a source of attraction and temptation. The work, composed of surfaces that trap or merge with one another, operates on the aesthetic level in an attempt to experience movement toward the sublime, to rise above the mundane, above the medium itself. At the point where Serfaty succeeds in unraveling the seams, that which has been lying dormant for years begins to emerge.

Soma captures the viewer’s senses on two levels: on the level of the immediate sensual experience and on the reflective level, as discourse on beauty and the varied and contradictory tendencies it arouses. The glass structure with its membrane-like overlay resembles a rhizome – a horizontal root-like stem spreading seemingly at random over the ground. It makes no difference from which side we enter, as no side is more important than the others. It is only the principle of the myriad entry points, or the hesitant pauses, that thwarts interpretation of the work as an object inviting us to experience it for ourselves. Soma oscillates with the tension between the desire to unravel and the longing to become totally immersed in the infinite possibilities, until one is no longer able to determine where it all began.

-- Yoel Hoffman, *Radical Zen: The Sayings of Yoshu* (Berkeley, CA: Autumn Press, 1978), p. 13.

- Cited in Timothy Clark, *Martin Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 62.

- Cited in Catherine de Zegher (Ed.), *Eva Hesse: Drawing* (New York: The Drawing Center & Yale University Press, 2005), p. 36.

- Yoel Hoffmann, *Curriculum Vitae* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2005), passage no. 53.

- The creation of light fixtures in the shape of a plant bulb or cocoon became possible in the 1950s and '60s through the use of a new self-skinning spray developed in the USA during the Second World War to coat ships and protect from dust. The American architect and designer George Nelson (1908-1986), also known as an insightful thinker, produced the series “Bubble Lamps” over the course of thirty years, starting in 1952. In 1960, the lighting company - Flos displayed the Taraxacum series of hanging cocoon-like lamps designed by the Castiglione brothers. Ayala Serfaty saw an exhibition of these lamps at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1998.

- Kuo Hsi, *An Essay on Landscape Painting*, trans. Shio Sakanishi (London: John Murray, 1936), p. 36.

- In 2007, the Museum für Gestaltung in Zurich mounted a fascinating exhibition entitled “From Inspiration to Innovation: Nature Design,” which examined new techniques for revealing nature and offered several interesting insights.

- Mikhail Bakhtin, *Late Essays and Notes: Philosophy, Language, Culture*, trans. Sergei Sandler (Resling Publishing, 2008), p. 39 (Hebrew; English translation, S.K.).

- Hélène Cixous, “The Laugh of the Medusa,” trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, in Robyn R. Warhol and Diane Price Herndl (Eds.), *Feminism: An Anthology of Literary Theory and Criticism* (New Jersey: Rutgers UP, 1993), p. 338.

- Tretie Paleolog, *Conversations with Brancusi*, trans. Kenny Schuller (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 2004), p. 70 (Hebrew; English translation, S.K.)

Take Your Sleeping Bag and Spend the Night at the Museum

by Yuval Saar

Translation: Naama Tourgeman



Ayala Serfaty, whose solo exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum opened on November 13th, had a dream: to spend at least one night in a sleeping bag at the Assia Gallery with her installation. A few moments inside the glow infused hall are enough to understand her dream. There is something alluring in the piece; the viewer is instantly drawn into the room, disengaging himself from the outside world and giving in to what it has to offer.

Soma, body in Greek, has been in development since 2002 in collaboration with glass artists Eytan Hall and Anna Gautier. In 2007, Serfaty first exhibited smaller scale Soma light sculptures in Milan. The current installation is an exact depiction of what she envisioned it would be like during the first 24 hours of its inception. Serfaty even recalls the exact time and date of the birth of her idea: February 26, 2008 at 3 PM. However, the installation is not a case of chance or coincidence.

The installation is built from an interweaving of fragile and fine glass filaments encased in a liquid state of matter polymer. The polymer spray clings onto the filaments like a spider web and becomes a brittle and fragile membrane-like surface. The color of the membrane is a result of the glass filaments reflected by the hundreds of light bulbs hidden beneath them. The final result alludes to a coral reef hovering over a 7 x 11 meter sunken surface covered in tiny glass sand beads. The average height of the installation is 20 centimeters in the 3-meter-high room. The walls and floor are completely covered in a gray felt, creating a soundproof environment with an affixed light.

"I was in search of silence; a soundless place to connect with oneself, devoid of glittering lights and preconceived notions of how one should act or feel," explains Serfaty. "Utter silence is a necessity; any sound would have narrowed the endless possibilities of sound and tunes present within the piece. Only in the silence can one hear the sound of Soma. The light intensity was also very carefully calculated so that one can continuously stare at the piece without being blinded."

Serfaty (b.1962) began her creative path in the fine arts. In 1992, she and partner Albi Serfaty founded their studio, Aqua Creations, and has since gained recognition as one of Israel's leading designers worldwide. The unique and theatrically inclined silk lighting fixtures inspired by under water creatures can be found in hotels, casinos, restaurants, offices, and private homes worldwide.

Serfaty first became fascinated with glass after having visited the Bezalel alumni exhibition six years ago where she came across the work of Eytan Hall. "Glass has always interested me, but because I am a strong advocate of originality, I was not interested in creating something similar to anything else. I visit many fairs and exhibitions all over the world and so many of those places look so much alike that if one were to cover up the venue's name, it would difficult to know where you are. Everything is the same. What for?"

Even if her earlier works are evident in Soma, there is a certain deviation from the usual lines which characterized Serfaty's work until now. Her current work contains something more subdued which she describes as an "accelerated intimacy." The motivation for creating something different was prompted by the opportunity to go all the way and display her work in a solo exhibition at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art; thus Serfaty's lack of interest in creating a retrospective of her works.

The connection to the underwater world and the sources of inspiration for the installation lie embedded in memories from Serfaty's past. Starting off in the fine arts, Serfaty created fragile artworks using dust from her vacuum cleaner. "It relates to deeper childhood memories. My mother is a biologist and as a child we used to go on field trips, including visits to the Ayalon River, which has since become a highway. It is more about trying to convey a feeling, a memory of a place. Simplistically, one can discuss the cocoon, a being between a caterpillar and a butterfly. Philosophically, I am more interested in the existential state of growth, whether or not it's possible."

Though mostly known as a designer, Serfaty sees her current exhibition as an art exhibition in all senses. "I am a little out of place both in the design world and in the art world. I am not an industrial designer and I don't have the pretension of saying I am. I worked with transparent materials, put light into them and created what became a world-renowned lighting studio. My work is about who I am, what it means to be a human being, and our existence on this planet."

Soma renders glass in a new light
JERUSALEM POST STAFF (Naama Tourgeman)



The Assia Gallery at the Tel Aviv Museum of Art has been transformed into an intimate sanctuary providing a modern contemplative environment in a preternaturally quiet ambience.

Ayala Serfaty's glass installation 'Soma'

Photo: Courtesy

After five years of research, what began as a fragile web of glass culminated in an installation of architectural scope entitled "Soma." Ayala Serfaty's latest project is not a single light sculpture but an entire cluster: an installation of 24 Soma light sculptures in a darkened room.

The stunning and complex construction challenges the notion of the fragility of glass, showcasing the incredible strength in structural adhesions. The Soma installation initially brings to mind an expanse of translucent moss or a bank of fog hovering over the floor; however, it is a representation of nature in its most abstract form. It is built with thousands of glass filaments encased in a polymer membrane-like web; it was created in collaboration with glass artists Eytan Hall and Anna Gautier. The exhibit opens tomorrow and will be on display until February 14.



Education:

- 1985-1987 Fine Arts, Middlesex Polytechnic, London
- 1985 America- Israel Cultural Foundation Scholarship
- 1982-1984 Fine Arts, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem

Practice:

- 2006 Recipient of Israel Ministry of Education and Culture's Annual Design Award
- Since 2002 Soma practice
- Since 1992 Designer for Aqua Creations
- 1992 Established, with photographer Albi Serfaty, the Aqua Creations Design studio in Tel Aviv

Solo exhibitions:

- 2008 "Soma", Assia Hall, Tel Aviv Museum of Art
- 2007 "Soma: The Beauty of the Moon through Clouds", Lorenzelli Arte, Milan
- 2001 The Delaware Center for Contemporary Arts, Delaware
- 2000 "Evolution 19", Meta Gallery, Milan
- 1998 "Aqua Creations", Gallery Blanchart, Milan
- 1998 "Antoine Cicero and Ayala Serfaty, a dialogue", The Museum of Modern and Contemporary Art, Strasbourg
- 1997 "Aqua Creations", Gallery Inter Nos, Milan
- 1994 "Sculptural Furniture", Artifact Gallery, Tel Aviv

Selected Group Exhibitions:

- 2006 "Solos: Design from Israel", Cooper Hewitt Museum, New York
- 2006 "Surfaces..", VIA Gallery, Paris
- 2005 "Promisedesign, New Design from Israel", Triennale, Milan
- 2005 AIDA (Association of Israel's Decorative Arts) booth at COLLECT Expo, Victoria & Albert Museum, London
- 2004 "Red, White and Blue", Dot Fifty One Gallery, Miami
- 2004 AIDA booth at SOFA (Sculpture Objects & Functional Art) Expo, Chicago
- 2003 "Design Museums of the World", Staatliches Museum für Kunst und Design, Nuremberg
- 2003 "Nature Highly Artificial", Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe, Hamburg
- 2002 "Carrefour de la Création", Centre Pompidou, Paris
- 2002 Design show, The Rockland Center for the Arts, New York
- 1996 "Design im Wandel", Übersee Museum, Bremen
- 1995 "Design-Time", Neues Museum Weserburg, Bremen
- 1994 "Object Object: A Dialogue between Art and Design", Janco Dada Museum, Ein-Hod

Museum Acquisitions:

- 2008 Soma, Museum of Arts and Design, New York
- 2001 Lite Light, available at the museum shop, Museum of Modern Art, New York
- 2000 Aqua Regia, Tel Aviv Museum of Art