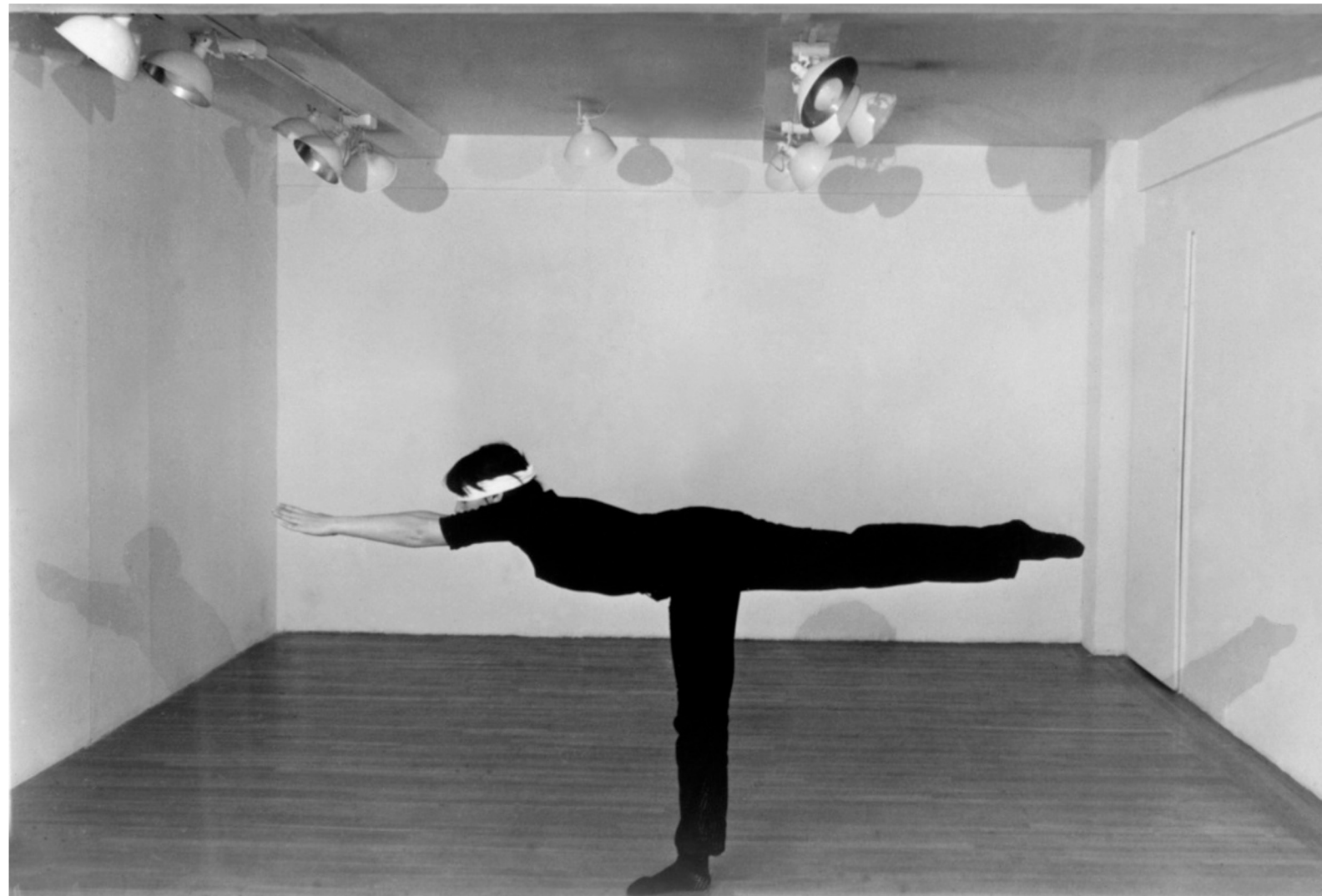


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Art Gab with Shuli Sadé

Fyeahwomenartists: I was really interested that you work with so many techniques with your work. What did you study for your BFA?

Shuli Sadé: I studied visual arts, painting, drawing, sculpture and all the printing techniques. In my second year I took photography and video, which was rare those days. I was the only woman doing video at time from my class, in mid 70's, kind of a pioneer. I was moving towards photography and video, but doing painting at the same time. I was often criticized by my teachers that I should focus on one media only, preferably painting but I refused, trusting it's not the media; it's the message, which makes the artwork meaningful. The message should come out through all the options that I know. Instead, I wanted to develop the techniques and I still polish my techniques with cameras software etc. without the need to give up on ideas. To me, art is the bringing out of ideas in the best way; use the techniques that you have to match the idea.

FY: And where did you study?

SS: I studied in Jerusalem at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design. After graduating I came to the School of Visual Arts, sponsored by a scholarship from Israel. That was my first visit to New York and by that time I already had a gallery at 74th Street. It was a good introduction to the New York art scene. I finally moved to NY in 1984.

FY: And did you continue the multi-faceted study at SVA?

SS: I took video classes with Hermine Freed, History of video class with Joyce Neurault who was the director of the video archive at Leo Castelli Gallery at time, and Contemporary Art History with art critic Jeff Peronn, who used to write for Art Forum. I was quiet interested in the historic backgrounds and the actual video making techniques, and at that time I did performances and body sculpture, some with a clear feminist message.

FY: So, what got you interested in talking about feminist issues in your early work?

SS: At that time I was obviously very driven by feminism. Even though it is no longer an obvious part of my work, I still strongly connected to it in my heart. I worked on politically feminist pieces, for six years. I chose to use my own body as a kind of protest, but at the same time I created sculpture with my body, very minimalist. My work was inspired by minimalism and the idea of using no material at all to create art was powerful. So, I conceptualized my own body as a sculpture. In 1982, I made a clear decision to not use my body anymore because it is too personal. I felt vulnerable and I just felt that I have to use other methods instead of the body. So, I stopped

FY: And you were doing live performances?

SS: No. I did performances with a mini crew, with photographers and assistants. As a photographer, I set up the sessions, preparing drawings to make the photographers follow directions to how I wished to be photographed. After I did the performance I would edit and work with the material. I only once was supposed to perform [live] really, but I was not interested in the conversation with the audience during the performance, I was more interested in the documentation of the performance to create the visuals and share that with people.

FY: With your photography, what attracts you to the different areas that you photograph?

SS: From early on, I was interested in space and the meeting point between space, the reflection of time and the shifts of light. It made me start taking photographs of industrial landscapes and sites: exterior and interiors of factories, bridges, textile mills, refineries etc. I was drawn to industrial sites because I found that isolated spaces brought together time/ space/ light in a simple way, silently outlining the monuments, the ruins of our era. The structures gave me a way to understand time or to start trying to understand time in a visual way, when I stayed in one space long enough to watch the shadow moves inside the empty space. When I arrived to NY I was still more of a painter, paintings industrial architecture. When I received the NEA [grant] for painting in 1991. Which marked the first recognition of my work by an American institute, I got a better camera and begun taking photographs more seriously. Since then, I was taking photographs of industrial sites all over the world. I developed my method of tar work at same time.

FY: Yeah, it was just what drew you to industrial architecture? Are you just fascinated by it?

SS: Fascinated indeed. Besides the way they bring space and time to converse I find industrial ruins and architecture in general making a full cycle, of beginning and end, echo life and death. I'm really interested in that circle, a full cycle. Looking at architecture, I'm less interested in the real building, but in the phases of construction and demolition. Those phases document progress, and the process: like the beginning and the end. It's not the perfection of a completed newly built structure but rather the phases in progress, which interests me.

FY: So, I was also really interested in your Tarwork with the industrial areas. Why did you choose to use that specific material combined with photography?

SS: During my art school days, I took an etching class, and that is when I first fell in love with asphaltum. It was so beautiful and alive, sepia brown and dark tonalities. I started drawing with it and since then I never left tar as a material, for many years. I used it on my sculpture and I used it on my paintings. Then, when I started working with black and white gelatin silver prints, which I printed at my dark room, (I loved the process inside darlrooms as well) I had begun experimenting with it. Weather I used large mural scale 50x90 prints or smaller prints, I used to cover the surface of the photographs with tar and asphaltum, let it rest for a few weeks, and than removed the original tar with fresh wet tar. I thought that tar and asphaltum were of the same vocabulary as these industrial ruins. The sepia color reflects on the past, reminded me of old photographs. I also choose to use tar to create another dimension of memory on the photograph, already layered with information. There was a play of dimensions, between the memory on the two dimensional photograph and the added texture, or the removed texture of tar. Tar never dries completely. Just like when you walk on the roof in a hot day and make marks in the tar. I used wet tar to soften dry tar, but I also used the idea that it keeps the memory alive by not drying out completely, like breathing alive. The process was interesting by itself: I covered the total surface of the images to completely forget what was photographed so carefully on site. In that sense, the photographer's ego was taken away, as I would return to a group of heavily covered tar photos, not knowing what is on the photographs. Not until I started removing the tar, by hands, cloth, brushes and other tools, till memory was unveiled bit by bit. At which point I could choose what I wanted to unveil and what should remain hidden forever under heavy tar, often three-dimensional.

FY: I was interested in the contrast with that and these other photos where you had photographed industrial sites and the colors were very vivid. I was just wondering why you chose to do such contrasting works of similar spaces?

SS: Most of the early photography is black and white, no color. The color photography, probably that you saw, came much later when I became more and more acquainted with architectural photography and the power of color took it's own place in my heart. Whenever on site, I would shoot black and white and color and then I could choose from it. I only used black and white imagery for Tarwork.

FY: I was also interested in your work where you had filmed yourself on different train rides.

SS: Oh that's not film myself, but film the rides.

FY: Oh that's what I mean.

SS: Okay. That started in 2004, when I took part in Time Capsule, a show at Art in General, NYC, where I made an installation of an Archaeological dig, including two video pieces. The question of time was very relevant in this project. I thought I really need to try to visualize time by using movement. This made me choose to use video as a medium I have not done for many years. The piece titled Forward Backward Linear Strata. I went to Penn Station without thinking ahead and I decided to go to Elizabeth, New Jersey, for no reason whatsoever, shooting all the way to Elizabeth through the train window facing Elizabeth. At Elizabeth train station I cross to the other side and took a returning to NY train. I was shooting video backwards, facing Elizabeth, with my back turned to NY, my future, which just moments ago was my past, when I was heading to Elizabeth, than my future. The question of time becomes so evident on a train ride, between two points, on a straight line; past and future intermix with just a head turn.

The train car itself makes a symbol for the present, although well connected to past and future, as it is connected to the moving landscapes. The train car resembled Heterotopia, (Michel Foucault) a place with its own rules and codes of behavior, well connected to the outside world. In a train car, I thought the present is mixed up with layers of time from inside the car to the surroundings of the train and further linked to the world, with cell phones chatter. I am moving and seeing the landscape and I can photograph it, but at the same time I am inside that place, breathing, hearing voices of people talking, the sound of the conductor announcements etc. A world within a world. Train rides still inspire me greatly.

FY: Where else have you been? Where did you most recently go?

SS: Well, I do a lot of train rides along the Hudson, which I am using for another project I am now working on. Recently I had an installation of some of the video shot from the trains, titled Water Fall, installed at the Brattleboro Museum. Fifteen videos shot from train ride along the Hudson River turned, vertically to create 15 waterfalls from a speeding train and the river. The fifteen video screens were installed in a room, which was once the ladies waiting room at a train station, before it turned to a Museum. How perfect for my earlier work about Feminism.

FY: So you mentioned Foucault, but do you have any other methodologies that are sort of underlying in your work?

SS: Well, when you say methodologies, I would think of inspiration: Minimalism, conceptual art are among my early influences. French Philosophers such as Henry Bergson, Gilles Deleuze, George Perec, Emmanuel Levinas and others are true inspiration to my work with time.

FY: Where do you draw your inspiration from?

SS: Besides reading and being connected to ideas and developing projects I find the energy of the city to be very inspiring, whether it is by being here or leaving and coming back to it. I get inspired by architecture, architects and recently started collaborating with neuroscientists on two projects. This recent collaboration is wonderful in many ways. There is a lot in common between us artists and scientists, as we all start from an abstract idea, aiming to the unknown. My recent collaboration will result in a permanent installation at the neural science department at New York University, which will open in the spring.

FY: Were there any artists that have inspired your work?

SS: Joseph Beuys was very important at the time I was a student. Artists who worked with the body in the 70's were important to me at the time. Oskar Schlemmer, Arnulf Rainer, Rebeca Horn, Bruce Newman, Bill Viola, Vitto Aconcci and others. At same time American painters of the 60's were leaving a strong mark as much as Minimalism and Conceptual art. Beauty is a part of the aesthetic, but the idea, the question or search for answers hold it all together. And than there is magic, interwoven in the artwork, its shadow or aura.

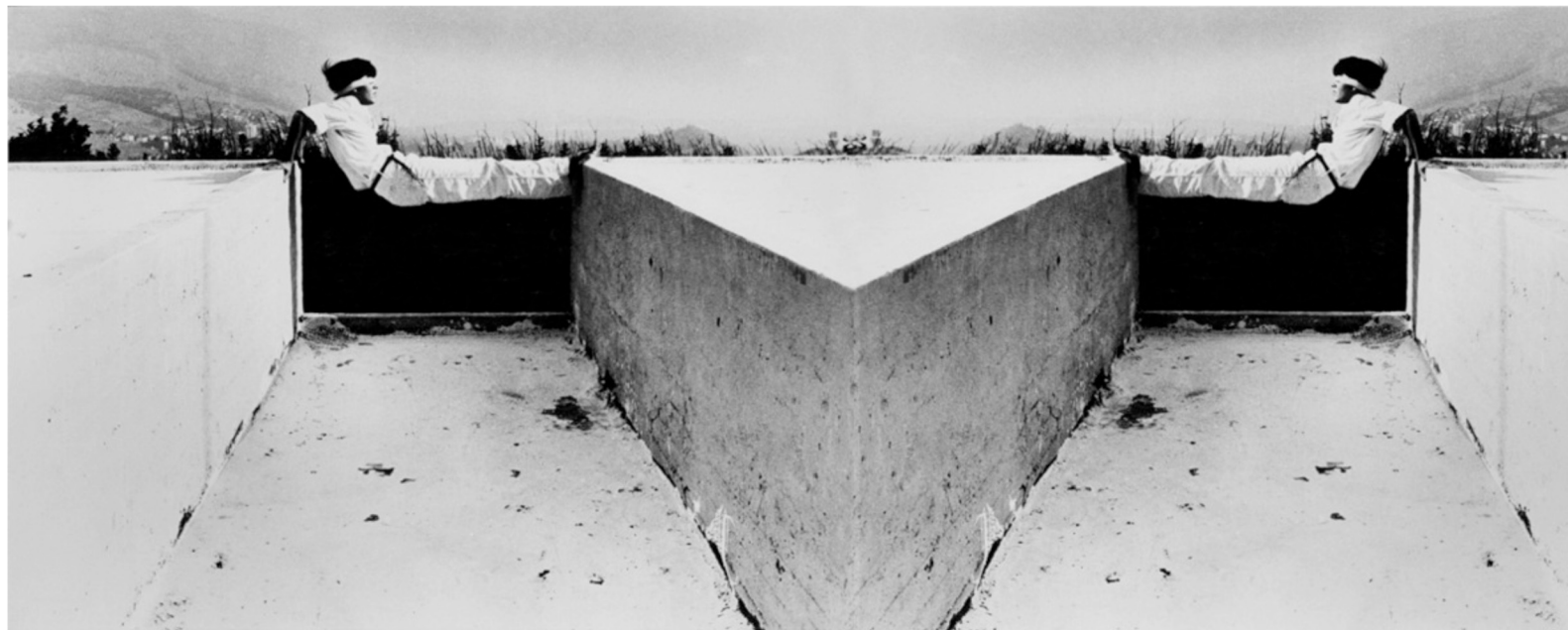
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