

## **On the Installation *Regulator***

Tali Tamir

The individual is the original, generating, motivating force. The public is the stabilizing, supervising force which functions as a regulator.

-- Eliezer Rieger. *Hebrew Education in Eretz-Israel: Foundations and Trends* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1940), p. 201 [Hebrew]

Supervising, monitoring, and spacing, the regulator serves Hilla Ben Ari as a foundational metaphor whereby she depicts the intricate complex of the children's house where she was raised, which is called "First Comprehensive House": a single totality arranged as a closed autarchy, containing all the functions necessary for the children's lives. The structure as a whole replicates itself, generating serial structures: a row of bedrooms, a cluster of showers and toilets, the organization of tables and chairs in the dining room and classroom, the clothing cubbies, etc. While everything is dominated by multiplicity and lining, the general structure maintains uniformity and equality, introducing a disciplining, normalizing ambience.

The children's house was indeed intended to offer protection and a shelter, but at the same time—it dictated clear behavioral norms, taking full control over the child's way of life. The architectural plan of the house allotted no space for privacy and intimacy. The situation created in this space was intrusive, legitimized by the assumption that everyone is equal and there is nothing to hide. Ben Ari juxtaposed the architectural plan of the children's house with a mechanical system of pipes and wheels to create orderly trajectories within which "chains" of girls progress. Her installation is steeped in additional mechanical images, such as irrigation systems with bifurcating piping, germination systems used in a plant nursery, and a conveyor belt: the multiplicity of mechanical and automatic elements conveys the sense of an externally operated system, involving dependence on a greater, more complex system which disallows independent movement. Ben Ari's 'girl plait,' contracting into the house, submissively yields to any such process: they are connected to irrigation systems, they move along with pistons and wheels, they grow in planters.

Ben Ari addresses a group within a group: her works always portray closely knit groups of girls, arm in arm, entirely disregarding the presence of "boys." The alienation is thus twofold: by both the architectural space and the group space. Their interdependence is, thus, almost inevitable, and their body language conveys limpness and helplessness: the loosely hanging arms, the bent head, the frontal, crucifix-like posture lacking initiative. The assumption that "everyone is equal and there is nothing to hide," like the belief that basic health will ward off any deviation and disturbance, is undermined in Ben Ari's installation. Out of the light-colored plates and the exact, meticulous work, emerges a "stain": a turbid, viscous fluid leaks from the conveyor belt onto the floor, dripping on... The disturbing drip collects into a puddle, interrupting the order and hygiene of the shiny wheel systems and the proficient cleaning of the children's house. The turbid "drop" ostensibly exposed "under the carpet" bubbles out of the strict order, exposes secrets that had been kept out of sight—bed-wetting, sweat, semen, dirt swept aside—substances whose emergence in broad daylight is akin to a violation of control and a momentary loss of supervision.

[Published in: cat. *Togetherness: The "Group" and the Kibbutz in Collective Israeli Consciousness* (Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Helena Rubinstein Pavilion for Contemporary Art, 2005), p. @ [Hebrew].]