

Ella Littwitz
Ontology of Void

The Hope Of A Crimson Thread
Text by Ran Oron

"Beauty leaves me lonely. Which means it passes and does not take me." (Avot Yeshurun, "Ostrakon")

1948. One sheet was folded in the backpack of a soldier in a convoy that made its way to the Negev. On its way the convoy was attacked from the air. The warrior miraculously survived. One of the bullets fired at the caravan almost hit him, passed through his backpack and through the sheet folded inside it. It created through it, it did not tear, thirty-two holes.
Ella Littwitz makes art out of this moment.

A *Sheet* is the thesis work she created at the Bezalel Art Academy in 2009. It hangs in my living room, it moves with me from one house to another. "With thirty-two wondrous paths of wisdom engraved Yah...", This is the first sentence of *Sefer Yetzirah*, The Book of Creation, one the mysterious and ancient books of Jewish mysticism. I don't think Ella thought of connecting the thirty-two holes created by one bullet in 1948 to the opening sentence of *Sefer Yetzirah*. Nor did she found in it at the time a Kabbalistic connection or an answer to a secret she was searching for. But the coincidence of the connection, if there is such a thing coincidence in the world in general and in her world in particular, is fascinating. It passes as an invisible 'crimson thread' in her work. Her art, the infinite duality it produces and the danger inherent in it, originates from that moment. In fact all the works in the exhibition start at the same point. It is an explosion, a 'bang' that has lost its size and lacks a scale. A singular moment that creates a new universe and a reality in which existential danger is the foundation for wonders, wisdom and beauty.

The invisible and unexpected point of impact produces a moment of beauty that is beyond human time and existence. It challenges the secret of human existence when facing the secret of existence and an unfathomable universe. The outer universe and the inner universe continuously and simultaneously expand and collapse. This is a moment of total devotion, one might say divine, to infinity and reduction. Black Holes on the edge of the universe are like sinkholes collapsing into themselves in red blood cells that make their way into and out of the heart in an endless cycle of creation. This is a body of work whose purpose is to enter and penetrate inside, to go as low and deep as possible to a place where life does not need air to breath and yet seeks it.

The works in the exhibition are also looking to breath. It is not the air we humans breathe they are looking for, but the space created between things. It is the soul of the void that participates in an alchemical process in which matter take on human properties and human beings become objects and matter. A place where the universe and nature surrender to the infinity and timelessness of human imagination in order to receive from it dimensions for a new life.

The new life will be painted Red. This is the color Ella will choose to document the moment between the personal horror she experienced and the life given to her as a gift after a disastrous exposure to radiation. The 'big bang' moment that symbolizes the creation of the universe is also Red, salt will be painted Red too.

Red will paint the entire exhibition.

"Red is the most joyful and dreadful thing in the physical universe;" writes the English philosopher, poet and theologian G.K. Chesterton, "it is the fiercest note, it is the highest light, is the place where the walls of this world of ours wear the thinnest and something beyond burns through." In 1968, the American artist Robert Smithson went on a journey to search for Red in The Great Salt Lake in Utah, USA. He was looking for a place where the light would paint the lake in an unimaginable Red color. For him it was the sign he was looking for to show him the place where the spaces of time coalesce to create another universe. Describing his journey to create the *Spiral Jetty*, his timeless work of art, Smithson chooses to begin with the quote by Chesterton.

Similar to Smithson before her, Ella finds in the color Red a starting point. A threshold to creation, like him she will look for the essence of salt and will view it as a threshold to a threatening and intriguing universe. A universe containing other forms of life as well as secrets of millions of years. Years squeezed into a single grain which will continue to change form and state of accumulation constantly. She does not hesitate to elevate the Red to the most sublime heights and look into them with a light that is not visible to the naked human eye. For Smithson Red is an almost impenetrable layer of unimaginable thickness and mass of matter. It is the crust on which the *Spiral Jetty* will be constructed and on which he will also choose to run. For the documentation of the geological process and his personal metaphysical journey he will choose to use a helicopter. With it he will record himself running on the spiral of stone and salt, teasing and confronting every preconceived and accepted concept of the meaning of size, scale and time. In contrast, Ella's Red is almost infinite in its thinness and transparency. It is an opening that she does not hesitate to go through in order to travel deep. Red here is as real and present as a passing cloud, inviting and threatening like the sky. Smithson's running will be replaced by her hanging between heaven and earth. The low and high tide of the boiling water of The Great Salt Lake will be replaced by the darkness and coolness of the cave inside Mount Sodom and the depths of the Dead Sea. The cable will replace the helicopter in places where the horizon will disappear and become nonexistent. At times it will be the cable on which she will hang in order to descend into the cave of Mount Sodom. On other times it will be the cable of the robot, the automatic messenger that she will send to the depths of the Dead Sea, a machine she will trust.

Ella descends into the cave with a messenger who died in battle on October 7th, 2023, not far from the place where seventy five years earlier a folded sheet traveled in a warrior's backpack. The video *Ontology of the Void* is dedicated to his memory. Each of her artworks required an unknown soldier, a silent messenger. Nickname *Crido* (to cry out in Latin), is the one who will watch over her on her journey to the frozen bosom of Lot's wife, where biblical time merges with geological time, with the divine. Thousands of years before her, along the Afro-Arabian Rift, at the deepest point of the geological rift, on the other side of the sea, in Jericho, Rahav, another brave woman, believed and trusted the messengers. She hid them and then sent them to the desert hanging on thread between heaven and earth, a crimson thread.

The Bible tells us about the meeting between Rahab and the two spys sent by Joshua. The meeting, perceived by Bible interpreters as a cosmic encounter between two worlds, can be given the name that Ella chose for her sound work *For Chaos They Yearn*. The meeting is a 'big bang' moment just before the disappearance of one world and the creation of a new and different reality. A reality also emerging with blows of trumpets, generations before the prophecy of The Battle of Light and Darkness, a story on which her sound work is based on.

The war will be fought in seven acts, with precise choreography and will finally be decided with the help of God. Rahab will be the only survivor. She will follow the advice of the messengers and mark her

window with a crimson thread. A 'biblical cable'. The hope of the crimson thread is a lifeline, the line that separates life from death. A line between chaos and a new order, one that is also temporary.

Suspended between heaven and earth, between life and death in the lowest place of the world, Ella documents the destructive human intervention within the geological time that lives at its own pace. She colors the salt, formerly a precious ore, red, breaking down the word potash (*Ashlag* in Hebrew) into the red of fire (*esh*) and the white of snow (*sheleg*). Occupation is forever Red and painful. At the space of occupation music also loses its purpose of hope and the sound of trumpets becomes the sound of destruction. The only one who can withstand the unbearable burden of loss of human moral is the airless robot. Facing the frozen Lot's wife in Mount Sodom, facing a personal loss, Ella is connected by a cable to the automatic messenger who performs human miracles. She believes in his unpredictable journey into the lowest sea in the world, trusts him to find a heart in its depths.

Ella's works are silent warning signs that have gained new life and a different meaning on the invisible fence of human existence. Where humans have learned to see their destruction as an aesthetic pleasure of the highest order, she is the guard at the gate. She is the brave warrior, like Rahav thousands of years before her, who shows the moral compass to the newcomers to the Promised Land. She is the guardian of their souls in a place where language becomes silent and words disappear. Her works are the 'crimson thread' that glows in the distance from the walls on the border between the desert and the city. Between man and the divine creation they are beautiful signs of warning and direction. Fearlessly she enters and descends into the unseen places of the mind, offering each of us to go with her to the depths for a long journey inward. In her hands, the 'crimson thread' becomes also a line of hope, and lifeline to the inhabitants of the land. She is the feminine wisdom who, in the face of exploding masculinity, is not afraid to take on the mission assigned to her.

The Hebrew word *tikvah* means hope and appears in the phrase describing the 'crimson thread' meant. In ancient times it also meant a thread. In her works the thread became a cable. It is the sign of a place and a person that will be saved from Hell. *Tikvah* can be linked to the Hebrew word *Kav* that appears in it and means 'a line'. The connection between the crimson thread and its meaning as 'a fundamental and essential line, a guiding idea' was first made by the German writer, poet and scientist Johann Wolfgang von Goethe in 1809 and first appeared in Hebrew in 1895 in a series of articles "At the Crossroads" written by Ahad Ha'am. The line, Red at its heart, runs as the crimson thread in her works. It will be the idea interwoven in, and at the same time fracturing her works. As Goethe writes about the heroine of his story; "Yes, the thread of affection and conversation runs through her diary... and it connects the whole thing, and it is it which makes his mark on it all." Like every line, it will start with a point searching for direction. In Ella's case a 'bang', a connection, a link between past, present and future regardless of scale or size. Dangerous and reassuring simultaneously, in her hands the line will also become a fracture.

The fracture is the key to the entire exhibition. She names it *Longing*.

Longing was created as a response to the traumatic events that started in October. The ground fell from underneath her feet, she told me, cracked. The fractured line of *Longing* is the evidence that her works are deeply rooted in the earth. Even as the ground falls underneath her feet she comes back to it, never losing hope or stopping to seek an edge of a thread. The work is full of faith, rooted and patient like a seed about to germinate from the ground. A seed waiting to meet the light in a daily struggle of existence, of being. Human intervention miserable. In a moment when the miserable human intervention brings on pain, loss and longing, Ella returns to the earth, to making.

The choice of the fracture comes from the desire to freeze, witness and illustrate one moment of a continuous process of disintegration. The fracture as a metaphor for a personal and collective existential condition. Something is broken again. An insight to her creative process can be found in Avot Yeshurun's poem "The Poem on the Eve of This Day" which opens his book *The Syrian-African Rift*. The book was published in 1974 after the Yom Kippur War, another cursed October day in the Israeli collective memory. He writes: "Ancient humanity and hammered land." / And when they desired a change in the earth / they had to use anesthesia. / After they wake up the earth."

In *Longing*, for the first time in her work, the bronze casting will not freeze a moment of the visible object. In its longing for them, fracture transforms the obvious and in contrast freezes the void. 'Longing' does not perpetuate the crumbled element but gives us as a gift the tool that crumbles. In order to rebuild, to fundamentally change. The fracture, both tectonic and human, is the wound that heals through a duration which is beyond human perception of time. Then, only then, it will become a seed again. *Longing* is the key of scales of the entire exhibition and at the same time is disintegrating before our eyes and within our ears. It is the realization, that the Afro-Arabian Rift is inside every human being, every letter, every color, every grain of salt, every object. It is the realization that it is in the air. Everything is a void. Everything is solid. The journey within or into it has no size or scale either, nor to the fears or longings that it evokes. Its voice is the sound of the trumpets as well as the sound of the tectonic layers breaking up into continents in a distant geological time. It is the hopes of the crimson thread for a new order. A challenge to the presence that humbly and silently searches for a new source of light. Longing for beauty.

In the encounter between two worlds, that of the poet, haunted by guilt and dismantling language, and that of the brave artist, she does not suggest how to fix, does not try to preach or discourage. She is an Alchemist and Researcher. Now after she casted the void it's time to break it down to take the line back to the starting point of beauty, to a place where scales breaks down and time collapses like a sinkhole into longings. "...and the sea is not full because all the rivers go back to the rivers." He tells her. "...Back to a tear" she answers. "This is the secret of the theory of longings" he replies to her. This is the whole story.

Tears was created in 2023. It describes the process of disintegration and precedes *Longing*. But, in the locus of fragmentation there is no significance to the archeology of time nor the chronology of size. To understand the relationship between tectonic history and human history, between the Dead Sea sinkholes and the sinkholes of longing, between a body and a tear, one can return to the image used once by Mark Twain to describe the history of the world. "If the Eiffel Tower were now representing the world's age," he said, "the skin of paint on the pinnacle knob at its summit would represent man's share of that age". To the question of whether the purpose for which the tower was built is that very particular layer of paint, he answered with a shrug "I dunno". An answer that raises the thought that perhaps this is also science's answer to the question of what is the source of tears, and maybe helps to illuminate the meaning and role of art.

The groundwater beneath the bottom of the Dead Sea is bubbling. When it meets the salty sea water, salt crystals are formed. For her they are salt mushrooms. The mushrooms are displaced from their birthplace. The harvested mushrooms are placed on copper plates. Once in contact with the air they generate salt water. Tears. As it flows, the salt water will burn the red copper, coloring it in shades of blue. The layers of color created by a chemical process on the copper can be seen as a metaphor for human existence in the universe and its relation to the world. *Tears* of the melting salt that rose from the bottom of the Dead Sea are a living and breathing substance. They are evidence of existence in general and human existence in particular. The essential element which was quarried from the depth of the tectonic layers, from the bottom of the sea, will describe without words the depth of existence and the

meaning of longing. Longings that are common to a drop of water that wants to go back to the sea, to a tear that wants to back to a human.

This is a different strategy of using salt as a material in her hand as a creator. Longings cannot be seen and therefore the salt must disappear. Beauty must pass. The salt will leave its marks, a sign on a wall, this time a copper wall. A delicate line of hope. Enlightenment for the continuity of life and its incessant and invisible movement. Size is not important to her, nor is she afraid to confront scale or to confuse time. To carve the depths, to hang in caves, to wait, to present them in their entirety, to let them cry. She will show them their other, unknown and beautiful sides to the point where they will stand in awe, looking at themselves amazed by their hidden internal beauty. Longing.

The entire depth of the Dead Sea is reduced to one grain of salt. Even if apparently the melting and dripping salt is a metaphor of grief and pain for being uprooted from its homeland, in her world it is not the end of the world. On the contrary, it is a starting point. One of thirty-two which were created by an errant bullet in a folded sheet. One that started a fracture or a thread. The source of salt that originates under the geological rift and the process of its evaporation connects imagination to thought in search of the essence and depth of crying. From the depths of the Dead Sea emerge human qualities of pain, anger and frustration as well as joy, elation and happiness. Of love and life. All are expressed in tears. This work does not look back and does not stand frozen in time. It's living and breathing. This is the beating heart of Lot's wife, this is the heart of the depth brought to her by the robot.

"...And here then infinity reduced itself at the middle point which is at the very middle," writes the Kabbalistic text, "and that light reduced and moved away to the surroundings of the middle point and then there remained an empty space and air and an empty void. Then one straight line continued from the infinite light and instead of space it exalted and forged and created and made all of the entire worlds." The purpose of the theory of reduction in Judaism is to explain the infinity and absoluteness of the Creator and at the same time to tell us who we are. The molten salt is the deepest element (both literally and conceptually) that Judaism can offer to us. In a reduction that ends in a tear, the world is created anew every moment. The diminution of light on the day the sky fell down heralds the beginning of a new life. The bottom of the Dead Sea is the opening of the world. First breath is bubbling ready for the light.

Morning. I woke up, one unfolded sheet with holes watched me from the room. Somewhere far, in a cloud, a salty drop was happy to go back to the sea.