

INNERSCAPES
ROSA NAPARSTEK



ARTIST STATEMENT

I am a visual artist and a political activist, although not in the usual sense of the word, working to develop a new body politic integrating knowing and feeling and the personal/political. I am interested in the connection between art (the aesthetic experience) and its transformative power. I present my work in conjunction with community building circles, a process that allows participants to explore their own feelings and deepen connections with one another.

I work with mixed-media, found objects, original poetry and text. I explore both how we attach meaning to the juxtaposition of random objects, and to "the order of things"- looking at our inner landscapes for the emotional roots of the world we create personally and politically. Much of what I do centers around childhood memories and experiences and is concerned with questions of cruelty and its source within us. I believe the fundamental human questions are about good and evil and that each person, culture, and even each civilization asks these through the lens of its own experience. Mine was the Holocaust. Since I can remember, I have wanted to know what makes human beings capable of such cruelty. I have come to believe that its primary source lies in our ability to deny our own pain, fear, and vulnerability.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I came to America as a young child from a refugee camp in WWII. In college I studied physics hoping that by understanding the fundamental elements of the universe, I would understand the world. Finding the approach too mechanistic, I searched for answers in other disciplines and later became a lawyer working for social and political change. After practicing for several years, I began to realize that fundamental political change could not occur without personal transformation. This shift in perspective and a life-threatening event challenged me to look for answers at a deeper level and opened me to my own artistic capabilities.

I have lived in Detroit, San Francisco and now in New York City. My work has been exhibited in solo and group shows in New York City, nationwide and slide show presentations in Germany and France. I have given talks on art and social change at conferences and other venues. I am a co-founder of the NoMAA Uptown Arts Stroll and a founder/director of Artists Unite, Inc. an arts organization which has organized the MTA - Artists Unite Subway Elevator Poster Project for over 15 years - the only community art project of its kind in the city. This was made possible by the collective effort of an entire community who wanted more art in their lives and artists who wanted to show their work.

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LITTLE JEWISH GIRLS DON'T DANCE



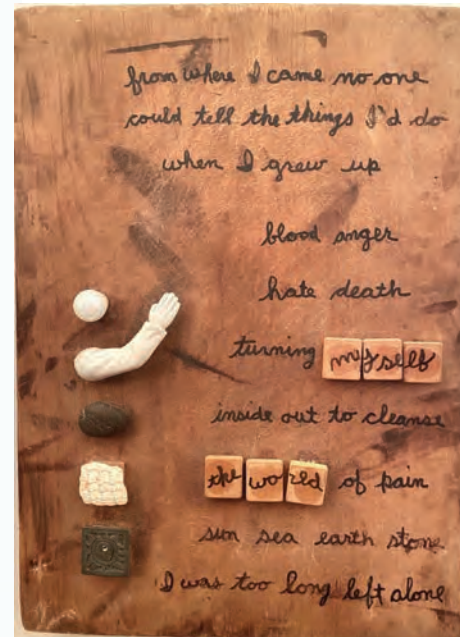
I remember coming home with my father from a school dance performance, (I must have been 8) still wearing my hula costume. I was holding his hand, happy and a little proud because I was told I had done very well. This was important because I was the little foreign girl who couldn't speak English. We ran into a friend of his who asked what I was wearing and my father explained that I had been in a school dance. His friend bent down asking, "Do you want to be a dancer?" I looked up smiling and was about to answer when my father said, "Little Jewish Girls Don't Dance".

I know I could have been a poet,
Or even a this or that...
But things did not materialize
And I'm just where I'm at.

Sometimes things could be otherwise
Sometimes that just can't be
And all the wanting otherwise
Still leaves me with me.

Is that so bad, I ask myself
And wait to hear my answer
It's really not so bad
But, you did want to be a dancer.

ROSETTA STONE



"The way we were treated as small children is the way we treat ourselves the rest of our lives: with cruelty or with tenderness and protection. We often impose our most agonizing suffering upon ourselves and, later, on our children and for some, on the world." Alice Miller

The Rosetta Stone, is a key to these concepts. The "stone", a burnt and scarred cutting board, sits in a crate covered with a rusty oven grill. Mounted on top are a marble, toy arm in half salute, rock, shell, and a metal symbol of the sun. The text of the poem is written in a child's handwriting.

The words "myself" and "the world" are written on moveable scrabble pieces on the backs of which are respectively the letters "i" and "u". These words are interchangeable not only because some of us destroy ourselves and some of us destroy others, but because "myself" and "the world" are ultimately one.

from where I came
no one could tell
the things I'd do
when I grew up
blood anger
hate death
turning myself inside out
to cleanse the world of pain
sun sea earth stone
I was too long left alone

GIRL HOLDING TREE

Who is there to love me
Who is there to care
Who is there to touch me
Who to smooth my hair
Out in the forest
Alone in the cold
This little lost girl
Three years old
No mother or father
Holding tree
This little lost girl
This child is me.

Who is there to love me
Who is there to care
Who is there to see me
Or know I'm even there
Out in the forest
Alone in the cold
With each viewing
The story retold
No one to find me
No one to understand
No one to reach me
No one to take my hand.

Now many years older
this landscape still real
Many years older
this is how I feel:
Empty shadow
Fallen bark
One little girl
Holding back the dark.

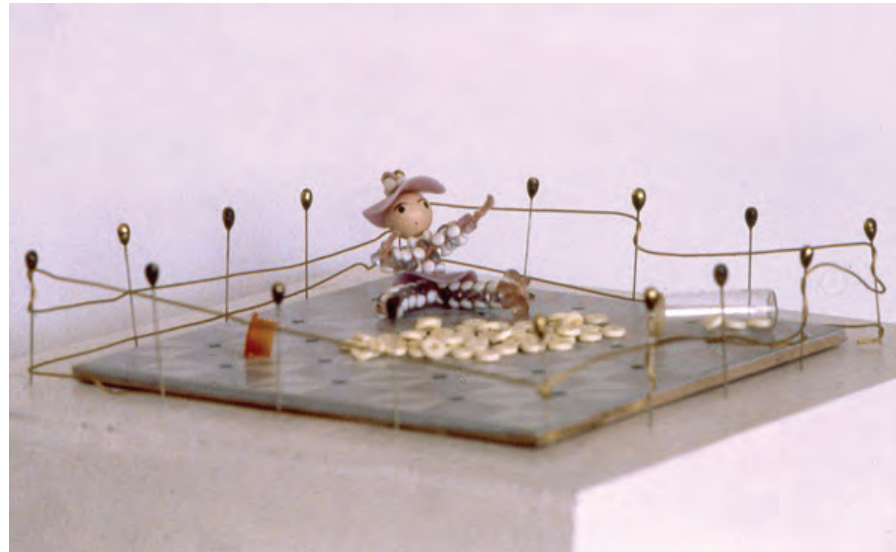


My mother told me that when I was a little girl and would look at this picture, I cried feeling sad for the little girl standing there all alone not realizing it was me.

Mixed media: wood box, photograph, paper strips, tree branch with bark, tacks, twigs, black clay beads, 9" x 5" x 1"



VALIUM DOLL



- I
Mamma goes to Israel
for a reunion of survivors
is photographed at the Wailing Wall
with some Israeli Soldiers
and comes back crazy.
- II
Mother went crazy long long ago
but it took even longer for anyone to know
now I'm afraid that the pattern was laid
in which both my sister and I were made.
- III
Mommy doesn't love me
mommy doesn't care
she's outside on the sidewalk
pulling at her hair
sister's upstairs crying
the house is all bare
daddy's gone to look for work
but there's none anywhere.
- IV
Mommy doesn't love me
but I still love her so
I wish that she could see me
I wish that she could know
that we can go together
all the way inside
to all the lonely places
where we learned to hide
and come out together
both loved and unafraid
of all the lonely places
where we both were made.

Mixed media: wood step stool, wood box, ceramic tile, hat pins, gold thread, spilled valium, post card, photos, a plastic bead doll my mother made. Text written on step stool: the anti-depressants my mother was prescribed.



I AM A CHILD



I am a child I am a child
 Inside of me I am a child
 A wild and funny sunny child
 With wings for arms and song for voice
 And worlds to travel at my choice

There's nothing in my life unreal
 No thing or thought I will not feel
 No pain or sorrow I can't heal

Above my head the sun bursts gold
 And grasses green beneath unfold
 To hold the child I am I am
 Of light and love and all things fair
 And unafraid to be aware
 That light and dark are both out there.

(TEXT ON BACK OF CRATE)

Mixed media: wood wine crate, wood table stand, color photograph with color drawing,
 wood board with color drawing, fence from wood bird cage, text written on back, 44 "x 14" x 6"



IF LOVE HAD WINGS

I was born in Siberia January 16, 1944. On January 16, 1991, I was standing on a street corner in downtown San Francisco handing out flyers to prevent an upcoming war. In the middle of doing so, I found out that we invaded Iraq starting the Gulf War. *If Love Had Wings* is a love song to and between two children embroiled in war. One is an Iraqi child holding her doll at the bombed out ruins of her home, the other is me, also holding a doll at the end of WWII.

When the doors to the record cabinet are opened, a music box starts to play "It's a Small World After All". This song was written for Walt Disney for the 1964 World's Fair in New York City *Children of the World* pavilion. I found the music box on the street in San Francisco and only after installing it, did I find out it's title and words. This brought everything together connecting the wars, the children, the poem and that "It's a Small World After All".

If love had wings
 and moonbeams stars
 and I no cares
 stored up in jars
 I'd fly my way
 through all life's bars
 to bring to you
 the moon and mars
 and all the bric-a-brac
 in space to lighten up
 your lovely face.

If love had wings
 I'd be with you
 despite despair
 that I know too
 I'd chase away all
 numbing thought
 with treasures that
 the seas have wrought
 and bring to you
 all shells and waves
 all coral grown in light of caves
 all broken pebbles smoothed by time,
 then soothe your heart
 with silly rhyme
 if love had wings.

(TEXT ON DOORS)



Mixed media: Vintage record cabinet, rubber doll, newsprint photo of an Iraqi child, b/w photo of a little girl, plaster, rocks, text on both doors, light, music box, 27" H x 34"W x 16" D

CROSSOVER



Outside of the Foehrenwald refugee camp near Munich was a large open field that led to a forest. I was too young and afraid to enter the forest by myself, but the open field of grass and flowers drew me in every day until I had the experience described in the poem.

This event profoundly affected me and led to my exploration of cruelty and the journey (Crossover) from innocence to becoming the very thing we fear the most.

Each and every day
in the early morning sun
I would run run run to a place I knew
where a red red flower grew.

Then once along the way
I met with some delay
and when I got there I could see
someone had been there before me.

The petals were all pulled apart
the leaves all torn and scattered
and the long green stem
thrown far away from them.

I could not then yet understand
who could put their hand to this
but time would show how easily
that soon enough it could be me.

(TEXT ON CRATES)

Mixed media: wine boxes, doll, knife, rose petals, cut plastic strips with text, 26" x 44" x 12"

SONG OF ATONEMENT

I was not in a concentration camp
I did not suffer pain
my mother and father fled Poland
I was born on a Russian plain

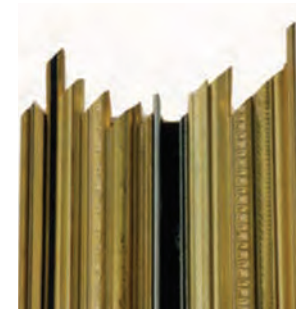
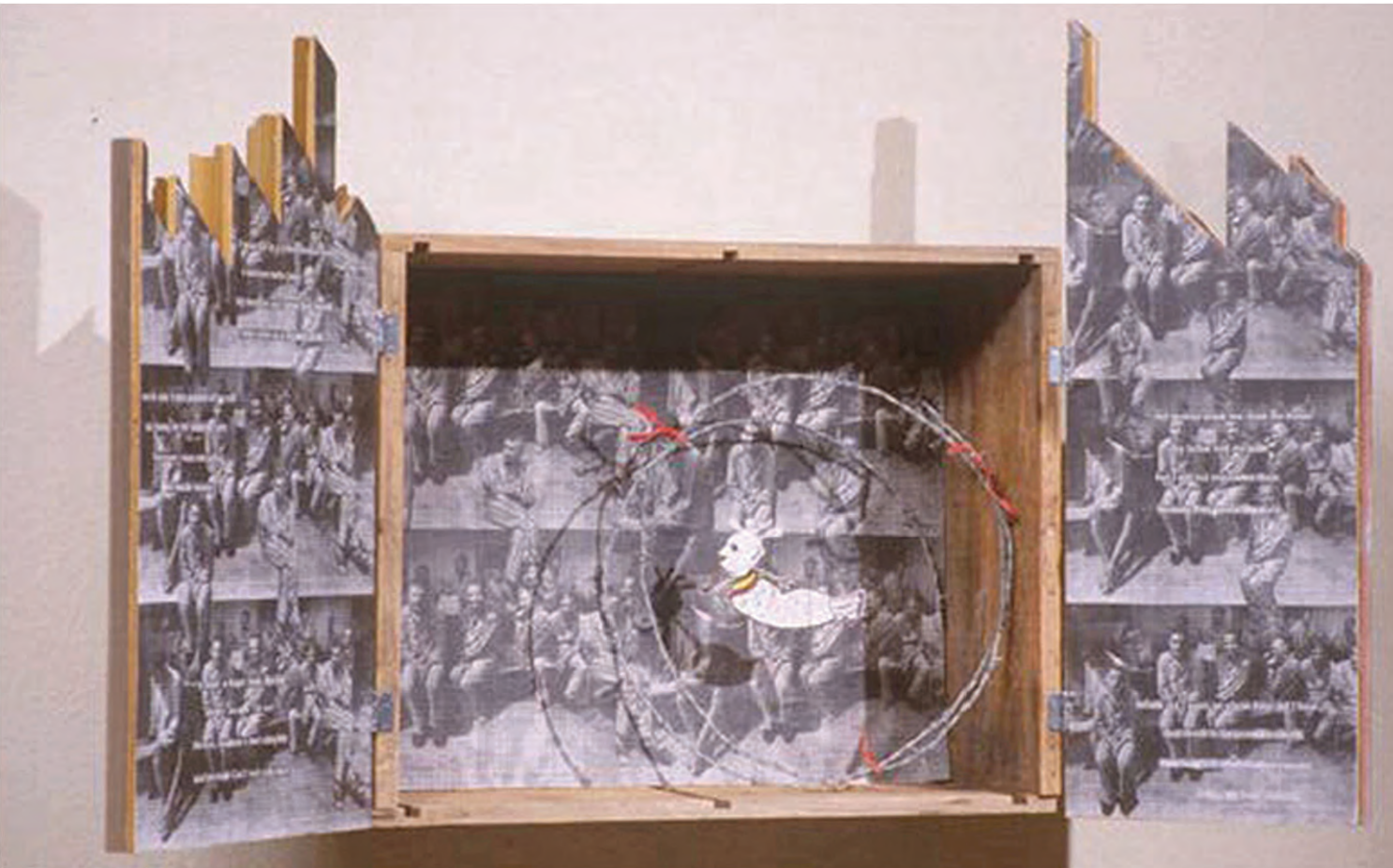
each day I tear a piece of myself
to hang in wind or rain
because I was not killed
or made insane

a hand, a finger, toes, the feet,
an eye, an arm, an ear,
the less, the more I feel complete
and promise God I will not cheat

my mother made me clean the house
my father told me tales,
but I will not remember them
because they pierce like nails

where did I learn, at whose knee did I hear
that death is the answer to death
how long will it take before I awake
to live my body's breath.

(TEXT ON DOORS)



Mixed media: wood crate, frame sections, barbed wire, twist ties,
Romanian Asylum inmates photo, paper flying figure, text written on doors,
22" x 20" x 10"