

Welcome Home?

Israeli-Ethiopian Women Artists and Questions of Citizenship and Belonging

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1 Contemporary feminist research suggests that 'experience' and 'voice' are discursive products – the voice is not simply 'there', and experiences do not merely 'happen' to women. Therefore, I acknowledge that we cannot be satisfied with just 'making an experience heard' as a political project for its own sake.

2 Pollock writes in the introduction to her book that, 'In the 1970s–1990s, the necessity, or the intrusion, according to one's position, was Theory ... (such) theory constrains the creativity of the new generation of scholars familiar, perhaps too familiar, with the legacies of the preceding intellectual revolution that can easily be reduced to Theory 101 slogans (the author is dead, the gaze is male, the subject is split, there is nothing but text, etc.)'. See Griselda Pollock, 'New Encounters: Arts, Cultures, Concepts', in *Conceptual Odysseys: Passages to Cultural Analysis*, I B Tauris, London and New York, 2007, pp xiii–xiv.

This article examines the case of Jewish women immigrants from Ethiopia who from 1984 onwards went to the state of Israel, believing it to be their ancient homeland, and chose to take up a career in art. Presenting a polyphonic collection of voices it reflects the individual and collective experiences of women from that community.¹ The article asks how these artists conceive their lives in Israel and the degree of belonging that they feel to the place in which they have arrived. It examines this question by focusing the discussion on the concept of 'home' within the politics of domesticity and ideologies of nationhood and citizenship. I argue that the artists occupy a simultaneous position; feeling oppressed and marginalised subjects, on the one hand, and powerful and enhanced agents, on the other. It explores the artistic products of the immigrants, which manifest their dual position, as they express an urgent call and plea to belong, together with a highly critical stance and clear protest against the marginalisation they undergo in the ethno-national state of Israel.

As indicted by Griselda Pollock in her book *Conceptual Odysseys: Passages to Cultural Analysis* (2007), the field of art history – and feminist art history scholarship in particular – has undergone a paradigmatic shift since the 1990s, moving away from 'Theory' to a more complex analysis,² very often by using artworks as social documents.³ Notions about *specificity*, ie the understanding of an artwork under its unique conditions of time and place, are becoming widely used in the discipline of art history, and, as scholar Ephrat Huss explains, an artwork should not solely be seen on the basis of the aesthetic criteria of elements such as colour, light and perspective, or according to various postmodern perspectives such as poststructuralism, or even on diagnostic criteria that analyse the artist's biography or personality, but also as the creator's way of presenting, elucidating and elaborating meanings and content of