

Lentils and Rice / Esther Cohen

Rituals and ceremonies is the subject of Esther Cohen's work - rituals that have been taking place in the house, in the kitchen for ages. There is an unseen, powerful feminine presence behind the chore of sorting rice and lentils, which distinguishes good from bad, and what is edible from what is not. Due to modernism this chore is an almost extinct feminine function. Looking at the works one can easily conjure up the generations of women sitting in the kitchen, busy sorting the seeds as an allegory on the familial discussions they are having. The quiet, clean, accurate dialogue taking place in the paintings highlights the matriarchal figure behind them. The work involved in preparing the basic, simple and dry dish, which does not belong to the "instant" variety, eternalizes a profound and lengthy discussion about culturally linked culinary traditions, and is contrasted with the contemporary fast-changing and disposable scene.

The works present various stages of the act of sorting as interim steps preceding the attainment of the final stage, which is the dish containing the edible stuff. "Looking at the plate from a bird's eye view, you discover diverse processes of sorting rice and lentils, shown as an act that paints and records restrained and controlled circular forms in the course of moving the rice and lentils from one side of the plate to another," says Esther. In this kind of

syntax used by the artist, tension and contrast coexist with the viewer's ability to simulate and associate the unseen movement of the hands. Two further images layer the works and turn into a more extensive discussion about the representations of "poor", basic and simple food: the red dry chili peppers and the moldy bread are also placed on the plate. "The images reproduce the decadent splendor of old Goblin tapestry."

One of the plates decorated with bluish bourgeois features guard a secret - the decoration does not consist of roses alone, as is customary with this kind of plate: various sorts of roaches and insects are concealed among the roses. The thorns of the plant have turned into the insects' antennae or legs. The objective of sorting and cleaning the lentils and rice is to remove the bugs, but here they are, hiding on the plate.

The artist's technique, which requires perseverance and restraint, intensifies the need to internalize the process dealing with every individual seed, rice and lentils alike. An additional, highly Sisyphean re-enactment and layering of the same subject is performed here through the artistic act by means of the brush. The work presents a replica of the painted plate and of the work of the hands in the kitchen: sorting rice and lentils.

Esther alternates with ease between two artistic

mediums - painting and photography. This nimbleness characterizes many of the young generation of artists. The exposure of the technical manipulations is relevant to their artistic outlook and to the exposure and analysis of the processes. Sometimes these processes are sociopolitical, like the discourse displayed on the plate in Esther Cohen's works.

