

# Arts & LEISURE

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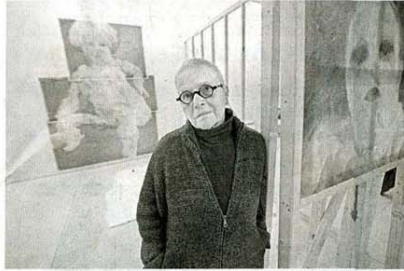
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## PRIVATE MENACE

At 80, the artist Ida Applebroog is far from mellowing. In fact, her latest work, as dark and disturbing as ever, is tough to describe tastefully.

ART

# Keepsakes, Domestic And Dark



LIBRADO ROMERO/THE NEW YORK TIMES  
Ida Applebroog, in front of a version of her "Monalisa." A Hauser & Wirth show will feature drawings from 1969.

By RANDY KENNEDY  
"SEE, you too can do this," the artist Ida Applebroog said, showing a recent visitor to her SoHo studio a box of Crayola Model Magic, the kind of clay that children use, and then opening a glass cabinet filled with what she had made from it: small, doughy white figures that at first glance seemed like grade-school leftovers but upon closer inspection took on the complexity and creepiness of Giacometti by way of Wes Craven.

Much of the unsettling work that has made Ms. Applebroog a revered, quietly influential figure in the art world over the last three decades has looked this way: deceptively simple, like the trademark cartoonish storyboards she began making in the 1970s; funny in a way that skews toward weird without losing the ha-ha; and ominous, carrying the brutal honesty of one of her early influences, Samuel Beckett, into the nooks and crannies of domestic life. "As others take in vagrant cats," the critic Max Kozloff once wrote, "Ida Applebroog's pictures keep home for family alarms and little butcheries."

In other words, even if you could do it too, as Ms. Applebroog suggests (and you can't), you probably wouldn't want to.

As she gets older — she turns 81 this year — her work has become only more uncompromising. And so it seems to delight her no end that much of an installation that she will present in her inaugural exhibition at the new Upper East Side outpost of the gallery Hauser & Wirth on Tuesday cannot be reproduced legibly in a family newspaper, and, in fact, takes a little delicacy even to describe in such a newspaper. That the images forming the installation are now four decades old makes all this even better, in her estimation.

In 1969 Ms. Applebroog, then known by her married name, Ida Horowitz, was a mother of four, a native New Yorker living unhappily in San Diego, where her husband had moved the family to accept an academic position. Ms. Applebroog had been struggling to make a name for herself as an artist and struggling with depres-

sion. Her only sanctuary in her chaotic household came at night, when she shut herself in the bathroom and climbed into the tub.

Over a period of several weeks just before her 40th birthday, she took a sketch pad into the bathroom with her too and perched in front of a full-length mirror, making obsessive self-portraits, more than 150 in all, but portraits focused exclusively on her naked crotch. The drawings — like a long series of practice sketches for Courbet's "Origin of the World," except in this instance made by the owner of the crotch — were done in India ink with a crow-quill pen, each one an elegant variation, depending on her mood or the state of her body. (When asked recently what was going through her mind as she was making these drawings, she just flashed a defiant smile and wagged a finger at her questioner.)

The drawings were never meant to be shown, and Ms. Applebroog, who moved back to New York in 1974, had long assumed that they were lost. But early last year, at the urging of her friend Barry Rosen, an art adviser, she began trying to unearth some of her older work. Rummaging around in the basement of the building where she lives and works near Broome Street, she and her assistants opened a box. And inside, along with jars of San Diego beach sand and air that her children had saved, was a blue 60-cent Strathmore Alexis drawing pad full of her bathroom sketches.

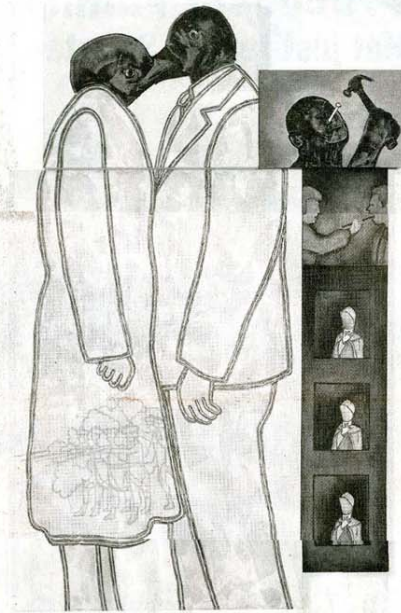
Some of the pages were water-stained, "but they were beautiful," said Ms. Applebroog, a small, intensely friendly woman with close-cropped gray hair and little round Freudian glasses. "With all the amber and the staining that happened as a result, they look like something out of the Renaissance."

The sketches, later scanned into a computer, manipulated and enlarged on Japanese gampi paper, have been transformed by Ms. Applebroog for the show into translucent, skinlike panels that will function not just as drawings but also as architecture, forming the walls of a small house built inside the gallery.



COURTESY OF IDA APPLEBROOG AND HAUSER & WIRTH

"Tobias," a mixed-media work on canvas, an example of Ms. Applebroog's recent work from photographs.

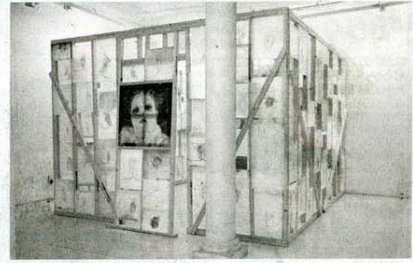


COURTESY OF IDA APPLEBROOG AND HAUSER & WIRTH

Viewers will be unable to enter the house. As with Marcel Duchamp's "Étant Donnés," however, they can walk up to it and, making themselves active voyeurs, peer inside through gaps between the drawings to see more drawings — and an amorphous portrait of a figure that Ms. Applebroog calls Monalisa, based on one of her ungainly clay figurines. The front of the house will be adorned with another portrait

derived from the figurines, this one of a nightmarish-looking male character she invented whom she calls Brian. "I think of him as a kind of a Mafia figure," she explained.

The whole installation, titled "Monalisa," conveys, in imposing and distilled form, the kind of just-completed or about-to-happen menace that hovers over much of Ms. Applebroog's work. In one of her late 1970s cartoon-



ABBY ROBINSON

Three works by Ms. Applebroog: left, "I'm rubber, you're glue" (1993), oil and resin on canvas; above, "Monalisa," a work at Hauser & Wirth with translucent shingles on a house; and, below left, "Sure I'm sure," one of her 1970s stagings.

like works, which she called stagings, a simple scene is repeated over and over of a man beginning to take off his coat, standing over a woman lying on a bed. The words at the bottom of the scene (whether they are spoken by the man or the woman is unclear) are "I threw it away" and then "Sure I'm sure."

In later works, which are sometimes based on news articles or photographs cut out of newspapers or magazines, the specter of violence or horror is more explicit: a red-hooded Klan figure, a woman gingerly holding a gun, a man swinging an ax like a golf club, a violinist playing while wearing a gas mask (based on accounts of Isaac Stern wearing one at a rehearsal in Israel during the gulf war).

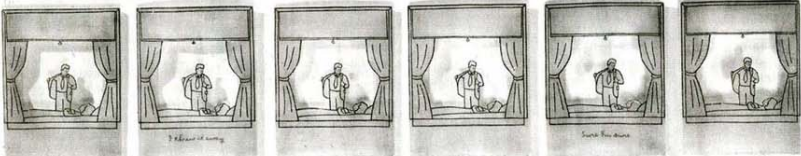
In an essay accompanying the new exhibition, Julia Bryan-Wilson, an art historian at the University of California, Irvine, whose first profound art experience came when she was a teenager and saw an Applebroog exhibition in Houston, writes that "in the 'Monalisa' project, as in

Applebroog's past work, the home is not a stable location but an unfixed nexus of sexist violence, perversion and thwarted safety, as well as tenderness, secret stolen moments, bodily pleasure and honest labor."

Sitting recently in her studio while her assistants, Robert Macdonald, Emily Poole and Andrew Coppola, prepared the frame of the small house and its translucent anatomical shingles to be trucked uptown to the gallery, Ms. Applebroog said: "I don't see my work as particularly tough. But we live in a world that's tough, and this is what happens. It just comes out of my head, and it's here."

For many years her world was quite tough itself. She was raised in an ultra-Orthodox Jewish family in the South Bronx, the daughter of a furrier, whom she says "all of us were always afraid of." Against his wishes she pursued an education and studied graphic design, using her training to get a job at an advertising agency,

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COURTESY OF IDA APPLEBROOG AND HAUSER & WIRTH

## Keepsakes Domestic and Dark

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where she was the only woman in the creative bullpen.

"It was horrible," she said, describing routine ridicule and aggressive sexual harassment. "I dreaded even getting up out of bed every morning. I didn't last a year."

When she and her husband, Gideon Horowitz, who had been high school sweethearts, moved to Chicago so he could earn his doctorate, she attended classes at the Art Institute of Chicago, to

which she earned a fellowship. But she was so desperate to earn a college degree that she enrolled in a television correspondence school.


"I was so unknowledgeable," she added. "You have no idea."

She commandeered the family's Chicago basement as her studio, making jewelry that her husband and children would sell at art fairs. ("I never went," she said. "For many years I just wasn't capable of being in the world.") In San Diego she found a space in a former Chinese market

and began to show her work for the first time.

But even upon her return to New York her lack of confidence was so acute that she quietly destroyed much of her early work (it was soft sculpture that she felt

**ONLINE: IDA APPLEBROOG**

 A link to her official Web site, which includes images of her art, related videos and excerpts from her books:

[nytimes.com/design](http://nytimes.com/design)

looked too much like that of Eva Hesse) and participated in the art world only at a great remove, making her first booklets of the serial storyboards and mailing them out to art-world people, most of whom she had never met.

"I still have a big file of the correspondence I got back," she said, laughing impishly. "Some people loved it, and some people wrote back: 'Don't you ever put that poison in my mailbox again.'"

But she began to find her voice, partly in the feminist movement, joining the influential art and

publishing collective Heresies and slowly reinvented herself, changing her name to Applebroog, a fairy-tale-like coinage based on her maiden name, Applebaum. (She and her husband, who is retired and sometimes lends a hand in the studio's finances, remain married. "I'm not going to tell you about all of our ups and downs," she said. "But we're still together.")

Decades later, with honors like a MacArthur Foundation "genius" grant to her credit, a group of collectors (including a celebrity or two, like the U2 bassist Adam Clayton) devoted to her work and the courage to delve deeply into her past for the first time, there is little Ms. Apple-

broog has to prove, to herself or others.

At one point she handed a visitor a stack of old hardback notebooks that she began after moving back to New York, pages in which she first created the strange disembodied voices that she later mined for her work.

Scrawled in one, as if Ms. Applebroog was trying to convince herself that she would become the artist she has become, were lines that now seem comically prophetic:

"Oh what a teacher I'll make."

"I'll be better than Moses."

"I'll teach them everything."

"They'll know."