



Nili Shchory | Reading the City

Curator: Ido Cohen

The Gallery at Kibbutz Mahanayim

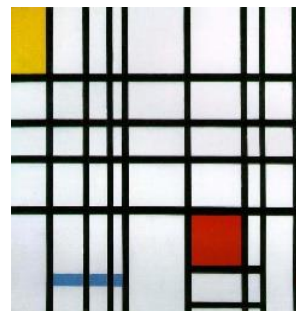
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In her solo exhibition “Reading the City” Nili Shchory showcases photographs of residential buildings in several cities in Israel, made through the prism of her vast professional training and experience as a town planner and specialist in municipal economies. Through her works, Shchory strives to stimulate curiosity and questions on issues which seem on the surface to be solely professional, but actually touch upon the quality of life for us all: issues such as the proper balance between varied construction and generic construction; between financial profit for developers and contractors and site-specific design suited to the locale, community characteristics, and individual needs; between the lack of intimacy forced upon us by transparent building elements and the need to safeguard privacy and fix borders between public and private spaces; and between aesthetic expression of a diverse human mosaic and the formation of an overloaded, visually noisy space.



By choosing to photograph and document perimeter blocks and the common residential urban fabric instead of buildings which are unique architectural objects, Shchory turns our gaze from the monumental – to the banal. Banality surrounds us on all sides, impacting our daily lives and feeling of place. The aesthetics of the banal is repetitiveness, density, and visual greyness accompanying every sortie into the cityscape. It serves as a direct embodiment of our belief system as a society at a given time.

From a formal aspect, Shchory's photographs capture and bound grids. The grid can have multiple meanings in modern art, since besides its use in representing a reality which is “gridlike,” such as buildings or networks of streets, it is also used to express spiritual and metaphysical ideas due to its infinite mathematical potential and symbolic meanings. Other artists have used the grid to define and mark the concrete, entirely self-contained art object.¹



Piet Mondrian, *Composition with red, yellow, and blue, 1937-42* ,



Barnet Newman, *Who's afraid of red, yellow, and blue, II, 1969-70*

In her photographs, Shchory “seeks the personal in the anonymous.” She extracts hints of signs of life from the infinite grids of glass, concrete, and metal of the dense generic residential towers stretching out towards the horizon like the vertical stripes in Barnett Newman's paintings. Shchory thus points to the private-concrete layer in the grid with full force: the transient and marginal breach the eternal in the cacophony of laundry racks, flowerpots, “Keter plastic” furniture, pergolas, bamboo fences and other backyard items. With this focus, Shchory articulates a critical statement about a planning policy biased towards entrepreneurs and economic efficiency, which sends individuals way up in elevators, away from the urban space, thereby endangering the continued existence of the city as an aesthetic, qualitative, and socially vibrant living space.

¹ Rosalind Krauss, “Grids,” in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths*, (Cambridge MA and London, 1985).