

Untitled, 1991, 27" x 19", Oil, Artist's Collection

by Elise Levine

Une femme raconte comment elle a été abusée sexuellement par son père, un artiste, après la mort de sa mère.

Every morning, the old towel, furry and moss-stained, and she'd hold it open and wait. Her mother in the water holds one arm up, one arm down, and swims out like she's beating eggs. Then her mother swims back, hardly moving, eyes closed and breast barely visible above water. Hold the towel open, and her mother's long wet hair falls across skin the colour of parchment, the raised surface a braille of goosebumps. One fall morning her mother was gone, drifted so distant only to surface, later, in the town bars: bare trees, brown earth, and everything silent except for the bumping of the canoe all afternoon against the dock.

She grew up on that island. Her father's landscapes utter and utter: a pigment, blemish, for each of root, tree, sky. Late into November his paintings tumescent with colour against the back door where he first piles them, then they slowly upholster the walls of the cabin. She spent her winters like that, dizzy with the slow wandering urge of oil and turpentine. He'd only touch her once (thank God), each spring.

Now she wears her father's skin around her like a canvas. Can pull it tight across her shoulders on cold nights when the lake crisps to curls of black through the trees. She can loosen it, too, let it drape like a barely remembered ache across her bare shoulders when she laughs and her earrings dangle, and she eyes the crowd and thinks she'll take *that* one to bed or behind the parking lot (summer nights hanging around the bar—how she



Shlomit Segal, Survivor, Mixed Media, 1990.

spent her sweet sixteen, then spent it again and again).

Ducks bark in early evening and, later, a billion stars at night in a sky so big it hurts her eyes, before she learned to close them. She's all grown up now. In self-portraits she paints herself crowded into the room—so much colour! Patterns everywhere.

Did you paint this when he was alive?

No, she says, No, even though her dead father still taps her brush—and it's nothing, no colour, white

canvas leaking aimless blank shapes—as he did once last year when she stayed alone in the old cabin for a week, winter framing her like cold white sheets in an old bed.

Elise Levine was runner-up in the 1993 PRISM International Short Fiction Contest. Her work has appeared in Contemporary Verse 2, PRISM International, The Malahat Review and The Fiddlehead.



Shlomit Segal is an activist, tradeswoman, and artist. Her artwork has appeared in Everywoman's Almanac and Mayworks Working Artist exhibit annually since 1989. She was the co-editor of the Jewish women's issue of Fireweed and is an active member of the Jewish Women's Committee to end the Occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza. She lives in Toronto. Shlomit Segal's work appears throughout this issue.