

CREATIVITY AS AN EXPERIENCE AND AS A COMPLEXITY: VISUAL-NARRATIVE RESEARCH OF THE ARTWORKS OF TSIPY AMOS GOLDSTEIN

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Received 31 August 2021; accepted 2 November 2021

Abstract. This article focuses on the work *Seven Private Skies* (initiated in 2009) by the Israeli artist, Tsipy Amos Goldstein. This is a series of large panels on which the artist has been painting and embroidering for fourteen years as her main occupation. The aim of the study was to establish the meanings inherent in the work, which is a kind of multi-layered cryptograph, while characterizing it in terms of creativity.

The research method combined visual-interpretive analysis with both a narrative-feminist paradigm and with theories from the field of creativity studies. The findings showed that the series “tells” through artistic means the artist’s personal story in a way that matches two definitions: creativity as an experience and creativity as a complexity. The article will discuss the characteristics of the artist and artwork as an experience and then will present the paradoxes distinguishing the work as complex: 1. Order *versus* chaos; 2. Love and home in the face of disintegration; 3. Cuts *versus* connections and male *versus* female; 4. Understandable communication in the face of conflicting messages; 5. Star of David *versus* the Jewish yellow badge.

Keywords: complexity, creativity, experience, visual analysis, visual narrative.

Introduction

This article deals with the artistic series *Seven Private Skies* by Goldstein, living and working in Kiryat Tiv’on, Israel.¹ The series serves as a case study for exemplifying creativity, which is difficult to qualify (Norton et al., 2013). It features seven large panels on which the artist has been painting and embroidering for fourteen years, with the Panel 7 still in progress.

¹ I would like to thank the artist for generously and openly sharing her life story letting me delve into her work. Her thoughts and feelings greatly enlightened me while interpreting her art. All interviews mentioned in this article were conducted at her home between April and September, 2021.

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Recently the six panels were exhibited in a solo show at the Apter Barrer Arts Center in Ma'alot-Tarshiha, Israel (curated by Shahar Marnin-Distelfeld) (Figure 1).²

The series serves as a kind of a “studio in action” where the artist works daily. It resembles a multi-layered cryptograph, whose language is rich and intriguing, deliberately chaotic. The initial assumption was that the series as a text requires a multidisciplinary research approach, combining visual analysis with narrative research (Rose, 2016; Mannay, 2016, pp. 13–14). As the study progressed, theories from the field of creativity studies seemed compatible with the investigation. Thus, the goal of the research was to decipher the meanings inherent in the series while characterizing it as “creative”.

The research makes the claim that *Seven Private Skies* meets two main definitions of the term *creativity*: creativity as an experience and creativity as complexity. The first relies on a general understanding of the artist's mindset and on the work's characteristics, while the second is rooted in the analysis of the work, while cross-referencing data derived from interviews with the artist. At the beginning of the article, the methodology and theoretical background will be presented. Then, the definition of creativity as an experience in relation to Goldstein's work will be introduced. Later, the findings will be discussed while defining the artwork in line with the definition of creativity as complexity.

1. A theoretical framework and methodology

In literature dealing with creativity there are different definitions of the term, depending on the approaches and the fields studied (Simonton, 2018; Smith & Smith, 2017; Corazza, 2016; Runco & Jeager, 2012). This current study focuses on definitions relating to the creator, the process and the nature of the work itself, ignoring the question of a social definition as irrelevant (Brandt, 2021) since the series was only fully exhibited once, and has not been judged or examined systematically by an audience or by professional critics.

The decision to explore this series using combined methodology, stemmed from the initial understanding of the intensity of the artwork, which embodies the inner incomprehensible world of the creator. It seemed beneficial to adopt a narrative paradigm (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 45) involving a feminist approach (Zelermeier, 2010, pp. 106–107) in order to create an optimal climate in which the story of the artist's life would be freely recounted. This paradigm has been combined with a method of visual analysis, based on the model proposed by Rose (2016).

The series is characterized by thematic and stylistic chaos, a kind of complex and rich cryptograph. The narrative paradigm that allows for in-depth conversations between researcher and the artist, while tightening trust between them, shed a bright light on the oeuvre, in a way visual analysis alone would not suffice. The narrative paradigm inquires for a holistic strategy, examining not only what is being told but also how it is being told (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 60). Through narrative analysis, significant stages and events in the artist's life were explored as well as the cyclical manner of the life-story telling.

² Two panels of the series were exhibited in *The Mother Goddess* (2019–2020, Haifa Museum of Art, Israel, curator: Michal Shachnai Yakobi) within the exhibition cluster “Making History: Feminism in the Age of Trans-Nationality” (sub-curator: Svetlana Ringold). I thank Shachnai Yakobi for introducing Goldstein to me.

Based on a feminist approach,³ the four characteristics that Zelermeier (2010, p. 108) suggests for narrative-feminist research were maintained: reference to knowledge and emotions, identity research, aspiration for empowerment and commitment to reflection. A respectful and collaborative environment was produced, where knowledge and feelings were accumulated in a dialogical and transparent manner. Moreover, during the process that lasted several months, contact between researcher and artist was kept, with the latter being able to comment on this manuscript.

The study included six phases: 1. The hypothesis phase and the understanding that the definition of the term *creativity* should be examined in relation to the series; 2. Visual analysis of the work; 3. Mapping the visual data; 4. Receiving explanations from the artist; 5. In-depth open interviews with the artist; 6. Synthesis of the interview data and the visual analysis data into key themes of the work – a summary of the research findings and a definition of Goldstein's creativity.

In the first stage, various theories from the field of creativity were read to decide on the prism through which this term should be applied in this research. Out of the variety of theories and definitions, two appeared suitable for the artist and the work: creativity as an “experience” (Glăveanu & Beghetto, 2021) and creativity as “complexity” (Lambert, 2020). In the second stage, a visual analysis of the works, which was based on Rose's (2016) three sites and modalities was executed. The site related to the production of the image included an examination of the choice of format, materials and techniques and by the artist, since they usually shed light on the creator's inner world (Orbach, 2020, p. 59). In relation to the production of the works – style, sources of inspiration and motivation were also examined.

Regarding the site of the image itself, its components were scrutinized: the content – what is being described (Rose, 2016), which of the images are “readable” and which are obscure; the style is the image realistic, surrealist, naive, expressive, abstract, *etc.*; color and its placement on the canvas together with its combination with other materials; the use of three embroidery techniques; space design or the illusion of space; whether the composition is open or closed, the viewing angle given to the viewer; the relationship between visual images and text and how the various texts are shaped.

In the third stage, the visual data was mapped: naming and interpreting the images, checking their repetition and versions, cataloging the sources of texts and trying to figure out the connections of the images to each other. The fourth step was receiving the artist's explanations regarding the images, the choice of materials and techniques and the organization of the composition. However, since the works are organized in an unsystematic and deliberately unclear way, in-depth conversations were necessary to discover some hidden contents.

The fifth stage was based on the narrative paradigm, including open-ended interviews. Spector-Mersel (2010, p. 55) argues that “through storytelling we give meaning to our lives and the world around us, ‘writing’ ourselves we create ourselves an identity and achieve a sense of individual personality”. Following her, the study shows that Goldstein's “writing” is done through the work of art, as narrative-visual studies prove (Mannay, 2016, pp. 12–13). This study treats the artwork as a narrative expressing significant aspects of the creator's

³ Similar studies I conducted using narrative-feminist approach are by Marnin-Distelfeld (2021, 2022).



Figure 1. Tsipy Amos Goldstein. Panels 1–6. View from the exhibition *Seven Private Skies* (2022, Apter Barrer Arts Center in Ma'alot-Tarshiha, Israel, curator: Shahar Marnin-Distelfeld) (source: Shahar Marnin-Distelfeld)

personal life, while establishing meanings, transcending the personal to the socio-cultural and even to human-universal realm. The narrative expressed orally provided a detailed framework for the poetic artwork. This seemed compatible with the definitions of creativity as a life experience and as a complexity. Glăveanu and Beghetto (2021, p. 75) explain that “adopting experience as a lens to understand creativity rests in the fact that it necessarily brings together person, product, process and context and anchors them all within the life of actual people”.

Conversations with the artist were documented and analyzed to extract prominent themes and ways of communication. Then, the final stage combined the oral documentation with the findings of the visual analysis. These findings, focusing on several detailed examples from the artworks themselves, will be presented below.

2. Findings and discussion

2.1. Creativity as an experience: the uniqueness of the works

Goldstein's series is exceptional. First, it is enormous in size: each panel is 301 x 206 cm. Inspired by lectures on women artists in the history of art, Goldstein became motivated to challenge gender perceptions of large-scaled works as representing the legacy of male artists, *versus* art created by women, which has been classified as craft. Her art is, in a way, a rebellious act. The panels are also exceptional in the richness of techniques, forms, figures and colors created as a multi-layered work. Their anomaly also stems from the disorganized,

deliberately chaotic cluster of images, some readable while others are not. On top of these images she uses diverse styles of writing, containing quotes of well-known writers, alongside phrases invented by her. “Creating the images comes from an inner need that is stronger than me”, explains Goldstein. She believes that even if the viewer does not thoroughly understand the images, their effectiveness is conveyed at the initial level of absorption, below the threshold of awareness.

The nature of *Seven Private Skies* expresses the four characteristics of “creativity” defined by Glăveanu and Beghetto (2021, p. 77). First, it is open, not carried out according to an orderly and pre-tightened plan, subject to change. Second, it is non-linear in its development. Third, it is multi-perspective, suggesting various interpretations derived from the richness of detail. Fourth, the series is created without leaning on a specific school or genre.

Nevertheless, the unique style of the works does echo the genre of outsider art, starting with art of the mentally handicapped and continuing with art made by self-taught artists (Direktor, 2013). Goldstein states, “All my life I look at things as an outsider” and indeed she fits the definition of an outsider artist, even if in part; although she studied art at in her youth, she never graduated and began creating these works many years later, deliberately avoiding official studies in order to “not belong to any teacher or school”. “After wandering through museums and galleries, I realized that in art anything is allowed, and I was given the inner strength to create. I felt I possessed a treasure, and why should I spoil it?”, she explains. And indeed, studies show that creativity intensifies in early stages of learning when it reaches its maximum. However, when continuing to learn, creativity fades, probably due to the growing commitment to established traditional knowledge (Lambert, 2020, p. 444).

The liberty the artist grants herself to create listening to an internal conversation, in which the intellect, emotion and materials take part, produces a constant process of creativity. The daily work, in which the artist is in a kind of “reverie”, a state in which she grants herself with the permission to be and to create fully and freely, is in fact, Goldstein’s private studio. Orbach (2020, p. 23) defines this situation, where all the conditions exist for the artist to have different ways of expressing herself as a “permission”.

The language of Goldstein’s art can thus be anchored in the theory of Glăveanu and Beghetto:

“a creative experience can be defined as novel person-world encounters grounded in meaningful actions and interactions, which are marked by the principles of: open-endedness nonlinearity, pluri-perspectives and future-orientation” (Glăveanu & Beghetto, 2021, pp. 77–78).

Glăveanu and Beghetto propose to examine creativity by searching for these four markers, using any compatible methodology. Later in the article, these elements will be discussed in regards to Goldstein’s creativity.

One of Goldstein’s “person-world encounters” suggests the link of her art to feminist art of the 1960s–1970s, especially the stream of decorative art, which challenged the dichotomy between high art as masculine and low art as feminine (Dekel, 2013). This prism is relevant when observing Goldstein’s work. For many generations, Western hegemony argued for the superiority of Western artwork over other visual works, in which decorativeness occupied a prominent place as an artistic value. In their significant article “Art Hysterical Notions of

Progress and Culture”, feminist artists Jaudon and Kozloff (1978) have quoted statements by modernists condemning decorativeness, such as Adolf Loos’ statement that “ornamentation is a crime” (Dekel, 2013).

Artists of the decoration stream felt that this aesthetics matched the expressions of inner female rhythms and feminine experiences deriving from the physicality of the woman’s body. Three feminist thinkers have contributed to the conceptualization of female creation and the body-related experience: Cixous (1976), Irigaray (1977), and Kristeva (1980). They called on women to create through their physical and passionate experiences characterizing their lives, while formulating a feminine language.

Goldstein was familiar with their heritage: first, the works are characterized by a multiplicity of materials, techniques, colors and shapes, which makes them aesthetically intense. Second, it is evident that the images are in relation to each other in a kind of non-hierarchical flow and it is impossible, for example, to separate image from background. The organization is not dichotomous but integrated and cross-border. Third, Goldstein attests to her aspiration to “respect” embroidery and elevate it to a high degree of art, to be perceived as supreme art rather than as inferior to art made by male artists.

The artistic uniqueness, the desire to create alone at home not being influenced by a specific artist, the low motivation to integrate into the art world – all echo Goldstein’s biography, which was explored in the interviews: firstly, she was surprised when asked to talk about her life, something she had never been asked to do before. She could not believe her life story would shed light on her work in a way that would enrich her own identity as an artist. Her narrative started with her telling about her infancy. At the age of three months, she was transferred from her biological parents, Holocaust survivors who could not raise her, to an orphanage. From there, she was moved to a foster home, where she grew up until the age of nine. Then, she was transferred with her biological brother, to a boarding school, where she lived for ten years, until her high school graduation. The most powerful experience that has accompanied her since her childhood is the loneliness and being forced to get along in conditions of constant uncertainty, without any parental support or love. This was a sentence, she constantly repeated.

She later got married and had children, living peacefully with her healthy family. Then, Goldstein’s life trajectory changed again when she lost her husband in a plane crash and was left to raise their three children alone. This event is highly demonstrated in the work: the name of the series, *Private Seven Skies* echoes something of this groundbreaking event, suggesting a blend of a personal meaning with a spiritual-metaphoric one. Seven is a typological number, significant in Judaism, science, and different cultures. The skies, or heavens – link to Goldstein’s accident in which he fell from the sky to earth, while also connotes a spiritual sphere. Thus, the works embody a world of meanings that is expressed poetically, spiritually, rather than in a concrete or documentary way.

The experience of loneliness, whose two founding events are her delivery to an orphanage and the death of her husband, is evident in the choice to create works alone, at home, without any guidance, with almost no exposure to the world. The way the artist was talking about her life emphasized the experience of her being unsociable, living a feedback-less life. The first

title given by the artist to the series was *General Disintegration*⁴ suggesting a personal space where she allowed herself to create in a fragmentary manner, an authentic and prolonged release of thoughts and feelings put onto the canvas. At the same time, however, these are not works that constitute a passive platform for adversity, but rather those that subtly and sensitively involve discursive connections derived from culture and art, Judaism and science. These connections add meanings to the works, which join those embedded in her life story itself (Shlasky & Alpert, 2006, pp. 223–224).

Mapping the main images and themes that emerged from them while cross-referencing them with the interviews, led to a key principle for understanding the series: ambiguity, contrast between values, or complexity. This finding was evident in the verbal narration as well. The artist kept saying: “Reality is built from opposites, I am a woman of edges and my thinking constantly lies on the edges”. This observation is consistent with Lambert’s diagnosis that creative people tend to create between two opposing ends by mixing them in such a way where they occur as a single bend in the work: “Creative people tend to operate either simultaneously or dynamically at extremes along continua that are generally considered at odds with one another” (2020, p. 431). Accordingly, I will seek to interpret Goldstein’s works as creative, by placing five contrasting elements, which constitute a complexity.

2.2. Creativity as complexity: five contradictory elements in the artwork

2.2.1. Order versus chaos

Seven Private Skies seems like a spontaneous and unplanned cluster, but actually, the artist works according to several rules that serve as a strict framework:

1. The format is the same for all panels and the technique used is oil painting and embroidery;
2. In all works, the color red appears in varying dose and is the only color that will stand out compared to others;
3. The artist employs three embroidery types only: the knot style, lined embroidery covering a space of fabric and dot embroidery. This stems from a desire to maintain stylistic restraint and “not get carried away with work that may resemble traditional decorative embroidery”, in Goldstein’s words. Macramé embroidery is considered a fourth type and appears as the artist’s signature in all panels;
4. Each of the panels was created in a certain period. The artist does not go back “correcting” her work. However, since the works are hung side by side, she does make slight additions when she feels like it, while previous panels always inspire the new ones, therefore, back and forth artistic moves occasionally occur.

These rules are in line with Glăveanu and Beghetto’s (2021, p. 2) definition of creativity. They explicitly argue that “lack of linearity” does not necessarily mean lack of advanced planning of a framework, but rather giving meaning to steps and actions that go beyond this framework: “<...> strong arguments have been advanced for examining the intrinsic

⁴ This was a title the artist Goldstein thought of when relating to her works during the years she was working on them. She did not mention when exactly this title came up and when she decided to change it to *Seven Private Skies*.

messiness of creating, including the numerous back and forth movements specific for real-life creative processes”.

In the works exists a marked contrast between images that represent and symbolize aspects of rationality and analytical thinking and those representing emotional sides. A prominent key element demonstrating this contrast is the deceptive brain image (Figure 2). “The brain is described as Earth, with everything spinning around it. The brain is the important factor determining the individual’s unique world”, says Goldstein. “It becomes a maze, either graphic or three-dimensional and illusionary”, she continues.

Inside the brain image, constant motility and flow exist with arrows pointing in and out symbolizing the two-way absorption from and reaction towards the environment. This cyclical movement, according to Goldstein, reflects Amichai’s (2006) poem “Open Closed Open”, a poem based on contrasting ideas. The arrows leading in all directions create a visual chaos since arrows are supposed to direct us while in Goldstein’s art, they become rather confusing. The mind as a maze, containing winding paths and movement in different directions, symbolizes paths of life itself.

It is evident that Goldstein seeks to create an integration between the image of the brain, culturally perceived as masculine, with embroidery work, representing a feminine aspect of handicrafts. This integration matches the artist’s sense of identity, combining a search for



Figure 2. Tsipy Amos Goldstein. Panel 5 (detail): a brain image made in turquoise macramé (source: Tsipy Amos Goldstein)

rationality, while being constantly emotionally troubled due to her life trajectory. “As a child I would always get lost. I experience myself as someone who does not understand where to go”, a sentence she constantly repeats. Goldstein’s life was characterized by a lack of certainty and the need to get acquainted with the intricacies of life – both physically and mentally, mostly by herself. This significant experience is uniquely embodied in the brain-maze image.

Another element consisting of the order-chaos contradiction is an embroidered grid embedded in all the panels on top of the oil paintings. In Panel 1 (Figure 4), the grid is arranged as a set of squares, resembling an arithmetic light blue notebook. “It reminds me of my childhood, scribbling instead of learning math <...>. Arithmetic *versus* creativity, but arithmetic is above all for those who want to get along in life”, says Goldstein. The grid may feature parallel squares as in Panels 1 and 6 (Figure 3) or diagonal ones as in Panels 3 and 5. It is clear that the grid is another attempt by Goldstein to provide order and discipline, a safety net for the creative process.

The artist further creates a structured encounter between an orderly grid and her turbulent inner world, seeking to burst out with full aesthetic power, thus rendering the series an expression of a complexity-based essence. Lambert argues that creativity needs to be understood within the framework of complex adaptive systems that exist in our world (such as the human brain, ant community, capital markets and more): “<...> creativity as an *emergent* characteristic of complex adaptive systems” (2020, p. 433).

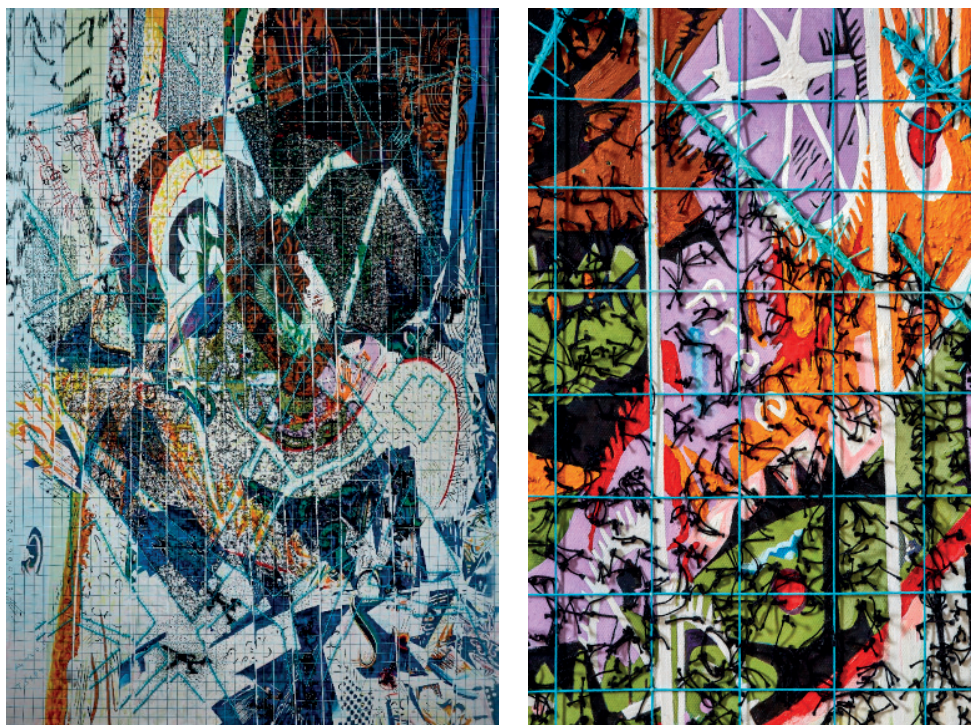


Figure 3. Tsipy Amos Goldstein. Panel 6 (left) and its detail (right): grid of embroidery (source: Tsipy Amos Goldstein)



Figure 4. Tsipy Amos Goldstein. Panel 1 (detail): chessboard (source: Tsipy Amos Goldstein)

Another dominant image reflecting the distinction between order and chaos is the chessboard (Figure 4). The board, featuring a black and white contrast, is described in the series as distorted, neither in its entirety nor realistically. Chess also presents an encounter of queens and kings, bringing about a constant battle between masculinity and femininity, an issue highly important for Goldstein. The queen rules the game, thus undermining the supremacy of male logic, suggesting a feminine power with which the artist strongly identifies. Through the chess image she presents her “inner rebellion”, a feminist effort to construct her art as valuable.

2.2.2. Love and home *versus* separation and collapse

This contrast is woven into the story of Goldstein’s life, especially related to two formative life events: her giving away as a baby to an orphanage and the death of her husband. In both cases, she experienced a sudden trauma of disconnection and separation from the people closest to her. Being torn from her parents’ home cruelly severed her from her natural nest to a fate of wandering searching for love and safety. Similar to this formative experience, the accident in which her partner and the father of her children was killed, left her a single mother as well as having to run the family farm, alone.

Examining the verbal narrative emerging in the interviews, these two events seemed to stick out as pivotal and key elements to be transformed into the artwork: house images suggesting disrupted world order, graphic hearts implying love, disintegrating figures running away, falling down birds and her husband’s name, Goldstein, next to hers, as a kind of commemoration.

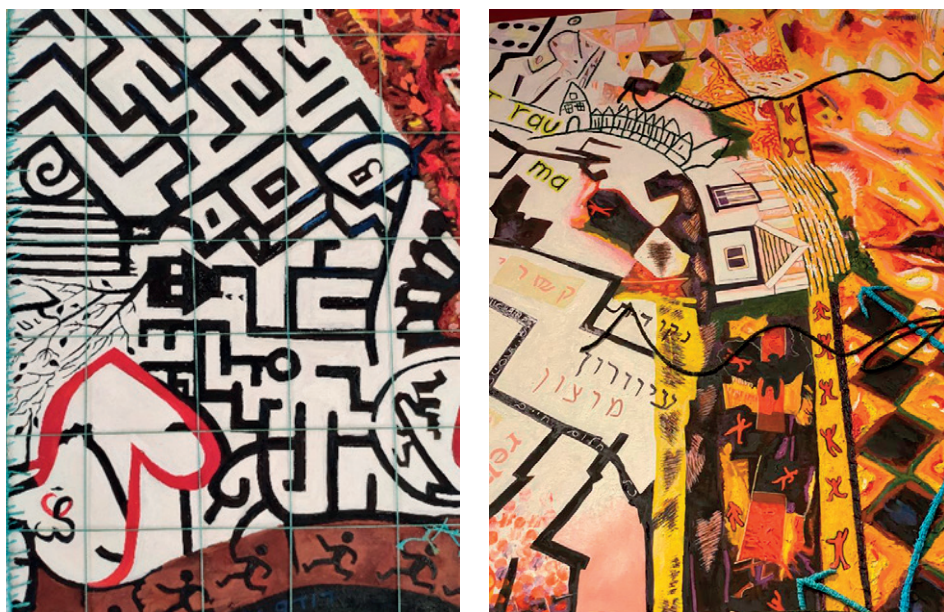


Figure 5. Tsipy Amos Goldstein. Panels 1 (left) and 5 (right): houses (source: Tsipy Amos Goldstein)

In the works, one can identify house images placed tilted instably on the ground (Figure 5). They are never described in the “right” realistic way but rather on their side or upside down. This contradicts the simple and childish typical house form, which actually conveys innocence and optimism. The house image undermines its expectation to be our protective shell. Gaston Bachelard argues “<...> that the image of the house becomes the topography of our intimate being” and adopts the metaphor of Carl Jung to point out that “<...> it makes sense to adopt the house as a tool for analyzing the human psyche” (Bachelard, 2020, pp. 32–33).

A row of houses in Panel 5 (Figure 5, right), connected to one another, is shown in a state of collapse. This reflects a past visual memory of the artist from her boarding school period. Schematic red figures also appear, falling downwards as if wounded. Next to the row of houses leaning to the side, the word *trauma* appears, broken down into parts, whose connection to the house image is clearly evident. The phrase “voluntary blindness” is written (in Hebrew) next to these images. The trauma, then, is related to leaving the natural home and the transitions between places, which were not necessarily experienced as homely. It was the trauma that led the artist to the position of “voluntary blindness”, which is in fact a state of repression.

Panel 1 (Figure 5, left) displays a schematic image of a house inside a black maze to which access is blocked. In addition, small black hearts rise from the chimney like smoke. This image contains a stark contrast between its ideal, naive form, being inaccessibly metaphorical. The love that prevails in it, if there is one, is associated with the smoke of black hearts – burnt and dead. The images of the houses and hearts are linked to Goldstein’s traumatic childhood events. “The house is our spot in the world”, claims Bachelard (2020, p. 205), and for Goldstein it remains a coveted and inconceivable image, certainly not a niche to curl up in.

The images of the shells in Panel 5 (Figure 2) are also perceived by the artist as homes. Bachelard (2020, pp. 167–202) believes that shells represent both ultimate homes for mollusks and a dialectic movement of in-out for the creatures living in them. A shell symbolizes an eternal, protective haven, one that has been formed for thousands of years, a house whose existence is unquestionable and most importantly, one formed to suit the needs and dimensions of its living creature. The shell image contradicts the undisturbed man-made house, which sometimes fails to protect its residents. Contrary to the descriptions of the house, the shells are colorfully depicted in great size, indicating positive feelings attached to them by the artist, consistent with Bachelard's (2020, p. 186) explanations that shells are a source of dreaming and the embodiment of natural beauty complexity.

A colorful heart-like image of a plant is seen above the shells in Panel 5 (Figure 6). This image combines embroidery with oil painting in such a way that only when approaching the canvas closely would one notice it. The artist states that in Panel 5, she reached the level of harmonious combination of oil and embroidery, a kind of “synthesis of the masculine and the feminine”, which distills the aesthetic qualities of the work. The images of the house and the shell appear to be fundamentally opposite in Goldstein's works.

In contrast to the houses and shells representing stationary objects, Goldstein's birds represent movement and mobility, always falling down, implying her husband's plane crash. In Panel 3, black birds appear in oil colors, while in Panel 4 (Figure 7, right), they fly around the maze, consisting of letters breaking down into geometrical forms. They appear near children's figures depicted within red road signs in this work (Figure 7, right). These may symbolize Goldstein's children, whose life ordeal went awry following their father's death. Perhaps these images serve as a metaphor for her attempt to protect them from the world's hardships.



Figure 6. Tsipy Amos Goldstein. Panel 5 (detail): integration of oil painting and embroidery (source: Tsipy Amos Goldstein)

2.2.3. Cutting *versus* connecting, masculine *versus* feminine

The most dominant element in the series, the artist’s signature, is the macramé embroidery, which appears in straight or rounded lines in light blue-turquoise (Figure 7, left and Figure 8). It consists of a thick line crossed by thinner lines vertically. The macramé in Goldstein’s work connects two pieces of fabric, which were cut by her as a preliminary action.



Figure 7. Tsipy Amos Goldstein. Panel 6 (detail): falling down birds painted in black on a black background (left). Panel 4 (detail): falling down birds (right) (source: Tsipy Amos Goldstein)

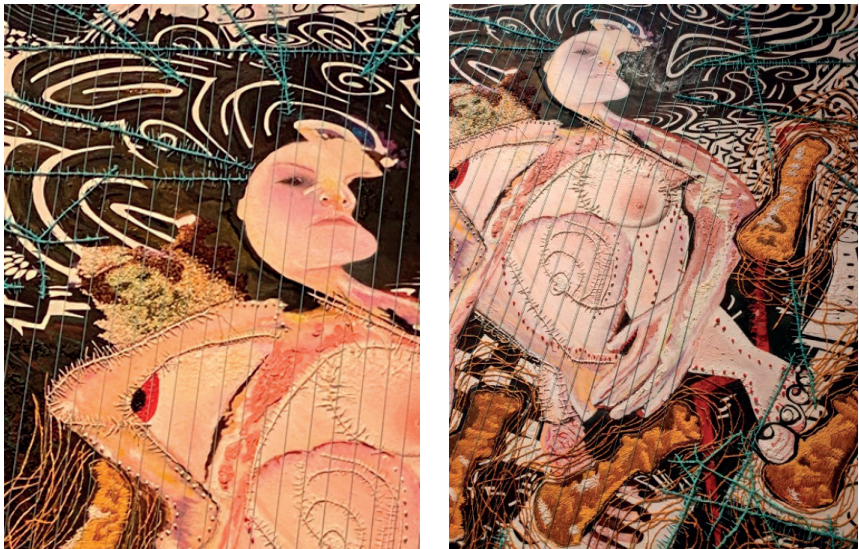


Figure 8. Tsipy Amos Goldstein. Panel 5 (details): female figures (source: Tsipy Amos Goldstein)

These two opposing, pre-planned actions symbolize masculine elements *versus* feminine ones; cutting is the physical act of using force to create a rupture, injuring the whole – the fabric or the body – while knotting (in the macramé technique) involves the obligation to connect and heal what is torn.

Using macramé sharpens the works' expressive aspect as if the giant fabrics were battle sites or wounded skin parts of a living body. Macramé knots always appear on top of the oil painting and sometimes also surpass other embroidery textures. It is the upper layer, which creates a material emphasis to the “injured lines”, as the artist calls them.

The artist states that macramé was perceived as an inferior craft, yet she aspired to give it a dominant place in her works in order to raise it to the status of “high art”. The contradiction between cutting and connecting symbolizing the dialectics between male and female, also resonates in the distinction between oil-painting technique, perceived as masculine, *versus* embroidery and macramé, perceived as feminine.

The female figure featuring in Panel 3 (Figure 8) embodies the inherent contrast between whole and cut, and between feminine and non-feminine (not necessarily masculine). The figure's limbs are unrealistically connected to each other, her head and chest twisted, her face distorted and her many hands bony. This woman clearly lacks beauty and tenderness – distinctive feminine qualities. The highlighted chest and abdomen are filled with light macramé knots, which grants the body an injured look. Out of her head blue macramé lines emerge, as a kind of hair-replacing rays, which actually follow an outline of broken glass the artist used. If the lines were to continue, they would have cut the woman's head, and even without that happening, the figure looks somewhat monstrous.

Next to the woman's right shoulder a smiling queen figure is depicted, made of embroidery in the French point technique, a kind of small balls of thread forming a rough surface. The image of the queen, which is based on an old photograph of the artist in a queen Esther costume, is rendered realistically, beaming with joy, as opposed to the twisted woman figure. The artist remembers not feeling like a queen at all, albeit dressed like one, but rather odd. It is possible that the contrast between the costume and her inner thoughts is conveyed by portraying two opposing features of a woman figure: one (queen Esther) representing dignity and femininity, while the other (a monstrous woman) representing abnormality.

2.2.4. Communication *versus* paradoxical messages

This contrast is reflected in the depiction of three recurring images that usually exemplify means of communication: verbal texts, musical notes and clocks. While these usually convey various messages, in Goldstein's works, they contain an internal contradiction, rendering the entire series a field of paradoxes: the writing appearing each time in a different font, size and color contains contrasts, undermining something perceived as an objective truth; the notes do not communicate any melody, instead they are scattered around, while echoing the artist's music lessons in her youth; the clocks look displaced and detached from any time zone.

More than any other image, these images raise a paradoxical complexity (Lambert, 2020, p. 433) suggesting the third characteristic in Glăveanu and Beghetto's theory (2021, p. 79), “multiple perspectives”, allowing for broad interpretations. In Panel 3, the artist writes *no infinity* (*ein ein sof*, in Hebrew) suggesting mankind's stubborn desire to stop time, albeit its

infinite progress. Words and sentences feature dominantly in this series. Sometimes it is a short sentence extending the main idea that appears in the visual description, while at other times it is a narrative, bearing enigmatic, uncertain content. The lyrics are sometimes taken from familiar Israeli poems or hymns (for example, by poets Amichai or Ehud Manor), while in other cases these are terms in both Hebrew and English. The word *keshet* (*connection*, in Hebrew) is highly significant for the artist who fails to create normal relationships, as she herself testifies. Thus, this word stands for an ideal concept, a non-achievable one to her. It is worth mentioning in this context that there are no significant figurative scenes in the series other than a few schematic ones.

The text embodies a contrast since instead of being an understandable communication tool, it becomes a deliberately incomprehensible one. The letters are sometimes hidden within color spots, floating or even becoming abstract forms. The artist admits she likes to play with these texts, creating “quizzes”. In doing so, she expresses the constant tension she feels between the need to be communicative on the one hand, while remaining “under-cover” keeping her personal world to herself, on the other. The texts enrich the work, reflecting Goldstein’s ambition “to eliminate dullness and to expand the prospects of understanding not only for myself but also for the viewer”. These texts also include right-to-left English writing, in order to deliberately disrupt the viewers’ decoding ability.

In Panel 1 (Figure 9, right), the artist wrote an anecdote based on the well-known phrase “which came first: the egg or the chicken?” in terms of cause and result. In using this fable, the artist poses the question of what is better: the outside lit world of the chicken, where reason dictates the rules or the inner one, a protected egg, where the chick can curl into a plunge of delightful music provided with love. The text deals with the opposing forces existing in the world: whole *versus* cracked, ability *versus* failure and emotion *versus* reason.

In Panel 2 (Figure 9, left), the text begins with, “It is a double scribble about pain, being alone and time”. The addition of the word *alone* underlies the content of the panel. It continues,

“I am wounded, save me, the soul cries out and only the silence/solitude is witness to a person’s dying. And now nothing has an end or a beginning. There is no one to wait for as he will never return. This is a story about an illusion/wish with a definite ending”.

This entails the pain of the artist’s separation from her husband, and its emotional consequences for her life. It was figured out through Goldstein’s personal narrative, while telling of her husband’s plane crash, when he was badly injured waiting for rescue uttering his last words, “It hurts, save me”. Without the artist’s mediation, it would not be possible to extract the meaning of this text. The connection between the *œuvre* and the event underlying it, can be understood by Glăveanu and Beghetto’s (2021, p. 80) definition of creativity as an experience open to flowing moves, influenced by unexpected encounters between the creator and the world.

The musical note images (Figure 10) treasure the ultimate connection between the abstract world of the intellect and the world of emotion and nostalgia. The artist reiterates the importance of music in her life, either as a child attending music classes, or as an adult, working while listening to music. The notes, even more than the letters, lose their original

function, becoming abstract signs only. Sometimes they are related to words, as if accompanying the lyrics, while at other times, only a note-less staff is depicted. The notes might represent a liminal position where the artist dwells – that of logic and structure of language on the one hand and potential abstract emotions on the other.



Figure 9. Tsipy Amos Goldstein. Panel 2 (detail): verbal text (left) and Panel 1 (right)
(source: Tsipy Amos Goldstein)



Figure 10. Tsipy Amos Goldstein. Panel 6 (detail) and Panel 5 (detail): notes
(source: Tsipy Amos Goldstein)

Clock images are found in the series in several forms: round Roman numeral clocks, hourglasses and digital clocks. In addition, the word *time* appears in several places linking the viewer to the concept of time, as well. The time motif is also represented through various quotations of songs, poems or biblical phrases, which express the inability of humans to stop time or turn it back. The artist is intensely preoccupied with time due to those significant life events interrupted in an abrupt manner: her moving to an orphanage and the sudden death of her husband.

2.2.5. A star of David versus a Jewish yellow badge

The contrasting symbols – the star of David and a yellow badge (Figure 11) are perceived by the artist as one image. She does not separate them when describing them verbally and in some of the panels they are even visually incorporated into each other. This echoes some visual proposals for the Israeli flag which included yellow gold stars next to the star of David (Mishory, 2000, p. 132). The star of David as a visual image was born in the early modern period as being associated with Jewish printing and became a symbol of Jewish communities in Europe, engraved on Jewish gravestones (Mishory, 2000, p. 125). It later became a Zionist symbol and finally has dominated the flag of the State of Israel.

Over the years, the star of David has become both a religious emblem and a national one. The yellow badge was born in Nazi Germany and became a symbol of evil and racism against the Jews who were forced to wear it during World War II. While the star of David symbolizes a resurrection of the Jewish people, the yellow badge symbolizes its lowest condition.

Goldstein was born to the Holocaust survivors who could not raise her. Up until now, she has not reviewed documents related to her parents. Only now, when she herself is a

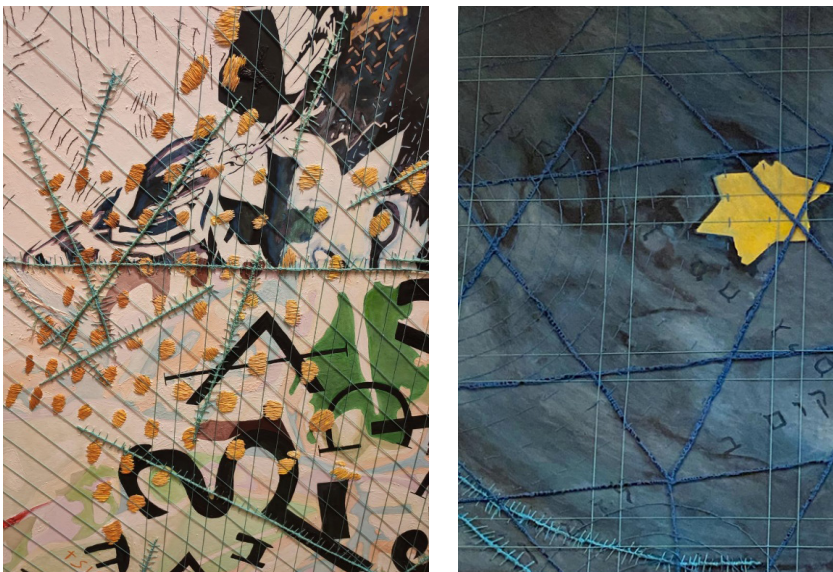


Figure 11. Tsipy Amos Goldstein. Panel 3 (detail): a yellow badge (left) and Panel 2 (detail): star of David and a yellow badge (right) (source: Tsipy Amos Goldstein)

grandmother, is she considering discovering some fragments of her identity. Her artistic creation explores her preoccupation with her past, that of her biological family and the Jewish people as a whole. The yellow badge appears in each panel in a different way: visible (as in Panels 1 and 2), or disguised (as in Panel 3). In addition to the yellow badge symbolizing the Holocaust, a map of the Łódź Ghetto (in Panel 6, Figure 7, left) serves as another the Holocaust symbol. It is not inconceivable that other chaotic descriptions are also born out of unconscious associations to the Holocaust.

The artist's interest in the star of David was aroused following Dan Shechtman's scientific discovery of the quasi-crystal, which features a star shape. This is another example of the intertextuality in Goldstein's work, which testifies to her openness of thought and her rich and diverse knowledge, integrated into her art in a surprising and unusual way. Glăveanu and Beghetto define the first characteristic of creativity as openness to ideas and encounters (real or imaginary) as significant in creative processes:

"Allowing open-endedness to flourish thereby involves becoming aware of different ways of thinking, of doing things, and of being <...> and inviting them into our day to day experience in order to unsettle old and stale routines, habits, and assumptions" (2021, p. 78).

Conclusions

This article presented *Seven Private Skies* by artist Goldstein, aimed at establishing the meanings inherent in the work, while characterizing it in terms of creativity.

The research method combined visual-interpretive analysis with both a narrative-feminist paradigm and with theories from the field of creativity studies.

The findings showed that the series "tells" through artistic means the artist's life story in a way that matches two definitions: creativity as an experience (Glăveanu & Beghetto, p. 2021) and creativity as complexity (Lambert, 2020). The four characteristics of creativity as an experience found compatible with Goldstein's work are: 1. It is open and subject to change, not carried out according to an orderly and pre-tightened plan; 2. It is non-linear in its development; 3. It is multi-perspective, suggesting various interpretations derived from the richness of detail; 4. It is created without leaning on a specific school or genre.

The second definition of creativity by Lambert (2020) was also found to be in line with Goldstein's work, being based on pairs of opposites exemplifying a complex essence of the series. Five contrasts were detected as prevalent: 1. Order *versus* chaos. Despite the initial impression of the series as chaotic and indecipherable, systematic mapping showed that there were recurring elements as well as rules and regulations which shaped the artist's practice. This contrast is especially evident in the images of the brain, the chess board and the grid; 2. Love and home *versus* separation and collapse, which is woven into Goldstein's narrative, and is especially related to two formative events: being given away to an orphanage and the death of her husband. Both events are reflected in house images that hint at disrupting world order, graphic hearts alongside disintegrating bodies, figures running away and birds falling down; 3. Cuts *versus* connections, which also echoes a conflict between the perceptions of masculine *versus* feminine. This contrast is embodied in the macramé embroidery, which

connects two pieces of fabric. The knotting, or macramé, are actions involving the obligation to connect and heal what had been torn. The woman figure resonates the encounter between what is torn or healed; 4. Understandable communication in the face of conflicting messages. This contrast is conveyed through the use of verbal phrases, musical notes and clocks which instead of functioning as expected they all mislead the viewer, failing one's expectations; 5. The star of David *versus* a yellow badge juxtaposing power *versus* humiliation, while the star of David is associated with modern Judaism and science, the yellow badge bears the memory of the Holocaust. They also represent the contrast between rationality and sentimentality, between the outside world and the inner one, which characterizes the way Goldstein experiences her life and work.

In addition to these findings, the research process itself enhanced the artist's sense of personal and professional identity by enabling an external professional view of her work for the first time. During the study, the artist admitted she has gained a better understanding of moves and decisions taken regarding her art and has even acknowledged the research process as somewhat therapeutic. Her solo exhibition, displaying six of the seven panels, explored the series to the public, which was a significant opportunity for the artist to get feedback from a wide variety of people. The exhibition contributed to her self-esteem as an artist, while also boosted her to go on completing the Panel 7 on which she is still working.

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