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RUTH MORDECAI

Soprafina Gallery
450 Harrison Avenue #101
Boston

November 5 through 27

Just two letters, identical but carrying potentially different meanings, one capital, one lowercase, juxtaposed side by side, divided by a comma, have intrigued and inspired scripture readers for two millennia.

Over centuries, they've been interpreted

and dissected: as a stripping away of egoism in the presence of God; as an awareness beyond the self that leads to experiencing God; as an enduring and deep connection between God and the self, with God being "I," and the self being "i."

Gloucester artist Ruth Mordecai, for her part, doesn't know what the passage means, and she doesn't portend a hypothesis.

"But," she says, "I love the discussion of it."

It's a discussion she continues with her own visual and visceral renditions of the passage and the scriptural mythology behind it, part of a body of work that comprises more than a dozen pieces in this exhibition, which she considers a "summary" of her 40-year artistic career.

"It's about experiences," Mordecai, a tall, thin form with curly white hair, explained earlier this summer from a seat in her gallery overlooking a section of the Gloucester bay, sea air and the cawing of seagulls wafting through open windows. "After all these years of working, I feel that I finally have my own strong voice."

But it's less a voice than a long-cultivated philosophy encompassing the abstract and the indefinite. Textural, sculptural-inspired works on canvas, Mordecai's pieces offer simplified, gestural forms in randomized color schemes. Most notably, universal symbols, as well as a personal alphabet of forms developed over time, are ubiquitous throughout, serving as a sort of connective tissue.

Ultimately, though, "it's probably better not to define all those things,"

said Mordecai, a sculptor by training, "and just let the viewer respond to it." Because, she acknowledged, another person coming with a whole different set of values and experiences may see something completely different, something she never intended.

"The work is about my painting but, more importantly to me, it is about my life," Mordecai explained. "In telling my story I tell the truth about who I am, and sometimes it resonates with another person's story or life."

For instance, in her life, she has had what she called a "happy connection" with apples, fueled by childhood memories of her mother making applesauce and baking apple pie. It's a theme she explores in the appropriately titled piece, "Mom and Apple Pie." In it, an anvil-shaped cart is mounded with apples and balanced with a tan, cutout circle labeled "pie." Meanwhile, "Mom" appears in shadowy writing, and an orange, red and green backdrop suggests a simplified tree form.

Similar images are evident in "Jacob's Dream," Mordecai's rendition of the Genesis story. How it goes: While wandering the desert, Jacob dreams of angels on a ladder. It's then that he announces, "God was in this place and I, i did not know!"

Mordecai's interpretation of this passage encompasses a cyclone of white and



Mom and Apple Pie, 2010, acrylic, oil, collage on gessoed paper.

“God was in this place and I, i did not know.”

(Genesis 28:16)



Jacob's Ladder, 2010, acrylic, oil, collage on gessoed paper.

orange, a menorah protruding and light scrawlings confessing, "I did not know." This undefined mass grows out of a monolithic base, which again hints at a tree shape, with a backdrop of a tan and earthy green.

Meanwhile, in other pieces, a dark ladder is obscured in shadow and a white and light ladder is hidden by a willowy form; two smaller pieces simply explore the

intellectual and structural temperature of "I,i."

Ultimately, good art, Mordecai says, is a successful integration of the simple and the complex. "The best work is a combination of primal expression and intellect," she said. "Unless the two are integrated, the work usually falls short."

| Taryn Plumb