



## Carol Es: "She Dreamed She Remembered" at George Billis Gallery

by Shana Nys Dambrot

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LOS ANGELES

Carol Es' mixed media works on canvas and on panel function like a human mind—rabbit warrens of memory association, chemical chimera, and physiological mystery, in all their cross-referenced, faith-and-reason, pain-and-joy wrestling match glory. Her style of image-making uses a host of alternative strategies for achieving dimensionality and shape, as in the nearly all-white *Stop Apologizing for Who You Are* (2008), in which painted-over textile builds a snowy topography of shadows, and the more elaborate *Arctic Memory* in which Es depicts an atavistic dream of Jewish/Swedish ancestors herding reindeer and pondering the Northern Lights against a snowy vista. In addition to a bevy of pigments from oils to pencil, she uses collaged fabric and hand-stitching as compositional elements (a common overall feature of her work rooted in her family's background in textile manufacture). The visible scars and heavy seams left in place reiterate forms made by other means, reinforcing and resonating rather than competing with the figurative elements. This series features stitched-on Hebrew lettering—sometimes translating the titles, more often single large characters hovering in the middle ground of the picture plane, a device generating dynamism in the composition as well as moving the story.

*Eve's Dilemma* (2008) presents a recurring image of her elderly parents, along with talismans of her own occupations including a drum set, objects from an art studio, and, as with all the work, passages of caustic text lifted from her own confessionals. *Argument Park* (2008) posits a head-on car crash in a pastoral setting as a metaphor for bodies and souls in a tortured relationship. A forest of tree trunks made from paint drips frames a lush green hill side, where her parents' speech bubbles spell out sweet nothings like, "You have always been a mental case," and "Well at least I'm not stupid." This work is a prime example of her gentle, gestural use of embroidery, crystallizing her childlike drawing technique in precise, labor-intensive tracing with a cake-frosting graphic quality and a sketchy spontaneity. The Hebrew character is *Pei*, which refers to the mouth, as well as to the power of wicked or wise speech, and numerically to marriage—forming exactly the kind of neatly tied-up psycho-conceptual bow her work cultivates. The power of her art lies in her no-holds-barred honesty, and her knack for leaving traces of the entire fraught process in the finished work, the better to both populate the visual field and approach metaphorical resolution for herself and her viewers.

"Eve's Dilemma," 2008, **Carol Es**, Oil, paper patterns, pencil, thread, embroidery, fabric on canvas, 30" x 30"

Photo: courtesy of George Billis Gallery-LA

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