What Should we do Today?*

Vered Zafran-Gani

An old copy of a handwork book for children lies at the heart of Hila Laviv's exhibition. Originally titled in Swedish "What Should We Do Today?" ("Vad Ska Vi Göra?") the book was translated into English under the title "My Rainy-Day Book." This book was written by Hila Laviv's great grandmother, Anna Warburg, in collaboration with the illustrator Elsa Beskow. First published in Sweden in 1917, the book was translated and printed in several editions in different countries across the globe, and held a profound interest in a material/educational foundation, both aspects of which are touchingly relevant to the identity and contexts of transmitting knowledge, cultivating the skills of making objects that shift between the practical-functional and the decorative. The book contains a proposal for an entire replicated universe, which in fact allows one to give access, through paper objects, to its contemporaneous and subsequent reality. The exhibition features photographed and scanned objects originating in Hila Laviv's grandmother's house, in Omer, Beersheba, in the desert. These are also accompanied by the presence of the passage of accumulating time in the unfolding lineage of women who hold the book, and has

* The text from the exhibition My Rainy-Day Book, Artist's Studios, Tel Aviv, June 2016

now reached Hila Laviv, a Tel Aviv-based artist who has been using paper sheets and cellophane as the materials of her art clearly and distinctly, long before her encounter with the book.
The presence of the book offers a broad context of tradition to her practice as a person and as an artist. In these parts, the break in the flow of time between familial histories and the life of artists (and people in general) in the present is more common than the preservation of knowledge and continuity, and the clear reference to the existence of such tradition is rare and unique. Alongside the direct perspective that emanates from the immediate, the here and now, it is also important to keep in mind the context in which the book was created, when knowledge, education, and the ability to transmit them from women to other people were not commonplace. Some women were able to acquire an education, some of them published books that communicated practical knowledge about arts and crafts, which were translated and published across the world. This way of life was interrupted, and some of the women in the family found themselves in a kibbutz in Israel. Of all places, this is where this book will become a central interest of one family member, who was already born in a country where rainy days are few and far between, and discovers through her artistic practice, a personal family history embodied in one of the book's translations. The translation from Swedish into Hebrew of the words that carry professional relevance to Laviv's practice and art, taken from a hobby book in an unfamiliar language, is one aspect of the conceptual and material engagement with the book. The strange capacity of the dimension of time to float and rise from this continuous process and crystalize in an artist book that accompanies the show: this time without instructions, but rather from a continuing action of photographing and cutting that allows her to animate and bring forth the ghosts of the past.

This exhibition opens a complex reality that juxtaposes photography, scanning, cutting, and installation of works in the gallery space that wish to scratch, peel, and dig into the desire for a seemingly impossible collaboration – between the present and the past that carries on the story while also altering it. The common language of thought and action produces objects that in themselves are related to times and places but also wander between them, bridging and linking people who do not share the same era, yet their proximity and presence exist not only as a memory, but as a shared practice of material and conceptual continuous, changing, and forming knowledge.

Their material presence in the space oscillates between states of planning to realization and execution in which the principles of disassembly, assembly, and the traces of time – evident in the surfaces that were photographed, scanned, and enlarged or reduced – attest to the clear affinities between imagination and reality and their interdependence.

You Might Just Have Stayed Home in the Garden

Sandra Weil

"With a great deal of planning and bother, you can take the children to the zoo and show them the wolves and the bears. Once there they become enthralled by a tiny stone at the side of the road or can talk of nothing but the ladybug creeping along the bars of the wolves' cage. You might just have stayed home in the garden – there are both stones and ladybugs there."
— Elsa Beskow

This year will mark 100 years since the book "Vad ska vi göra? roliga sysselsättningar för barn" – "What should we do? Fun activities for children"* – came off the printing press in Stockholm, Sweden. Anna Warburg (1881, Stockholm-1967, Netzer Sereni, Israel) wrote the activity book and Elsa Beskow illustrated it. The book would have been forgotten long ago if it was not for Noni and Eva, two of Anna Warburg's three daughters.

When Anna's great grandchildren grew up in Israel, far away from the place where Anna sat and wrote the book, her daughter Noni taught them the same activities that their great grandmother suggested in

* The book was translated into English in 1938, under the title "My Rainy-Day Book: a Handwork Book for Children."

her book. On school holidays, in the summer, for Pesach and Sukkot, the grandchildren used to go to grandma Noni's house in the desert city Beersheba. There, they made paper toys, folded and cut them to make dolls, cups, boxes, plates, forks, knives and spoons. They created moving images, cutting and putting them together, attaching a string to make them come alive. They made the Christmas tree decorations their great grandmother Anna suggested her readers to make, but used them to hang in the Sukkah – the temporary hut where one eats the meals during the holiday of Sukkot. They made a donkey with a carriage out of empty matchboxes. They went on excursions and gathered pinecones, flowers, stones, and leaves and created even more.

Noni also had all those Swedish children books. They were in Swedish, so none of the grandchildren understood what was written in them, but they used to sit together and look at all the pictures. They were drawn in by the magical pictures of the storytelling world of Elsa Beskow (1874 –1953), a close friend of Anna's whom Noni had also met. "Aunt Green, Aunt Brown and Aunt Lavender," "Children of the Forest," and "The Sun Egg" are three of the 40 books that she wrote and illustrated, which are full of fairytales of forests populated by fairies, trolls, and elves. Fairytales that every child in Sweden grew up with. At Noni's house, they met for the first time the characters of Astrid Lindgren, the same characters that Noni's daughter Tamar translated into Hebrew, Pippi Longstocking, Emil of Lönneberga and Ronja the Robber's Daughter.

The photographic books of Anna Riwkin-Brick (1908-1970), a friend of Noni's ten year older sister Eva, were all there. The 1950s book series "Children of the World" with Elle Kari from Lapland and Noriko-san from Japan and many more. The world of "Moomin,"

the troll living in the Moomin valley with his family and friends by the Finish writer Tove Jansson was there too in the house and garden of the grandmother.

These hours spent with Noni came to influence one of the grandchildren more than the others. For Hila, this world did not only affect her as a person but also influenced her whole artistic life.

In the Swedish history of education, Anna Warburg is known as one of "the three kindergarten pioneers." In her early life, Anna was inspired by the ideas of Friedrich Fröbel (1782-1852), the German pedagogue who coined the term Kindergarten in 1840. Fröbel, whose motto was "Come, let us live for our children," envisioned a place attended by 4-6 year olds, where children would be nurtured and protected from outside influences – like plants in a garden. His vision was to stimulate an appreciation and love for children, to provide a new but small world for children to play with their age group and experience their first gentle taste of independence. Anna, who studied his teachings in Berlin at the end of the 19th century, introduced his ideas to Sweden.

In 1918, one year after her book was published, Anna founded the Swedish Fröbel Foundation. She continued to be the foremost spokeswoman for his ideas in Sweden and contributed to the translation of his writings into Swedish and helped spread them there. Even after she moved back to Germany (1920), Anna still used to visit Sweden often and follow the progress of the Swedish kindergarten teachers pedagogical and trade union struggles.

Noni, who was born in 1922 in Hamburg, Germany, came to follow in her mother's footsteps and dedicated her life to education. She

worked as a kindergarten teacher in Sweden and Germany before coming to Israel in 1949, and continued to do so in her new home country. Here, Noni had to fight for what she believed in, at a time when the country was building itself and while doing so worked hard to erase the past. She fought just like her older sister Eva for the educational tradition that was such an important part of her mother and her life. In 1988, Noni founded the youth wing of the Negev Museum of Art in Beersheba led by Noa Tal, and worked there for two years.

Grandma Noni did not only open up for her grandchildren a window into a world of children's books written by others – she also created books for them. In these books, she recounted the stories of objects and people from her past, and the children themselves were the characters.

For Hila, the past was something magical, the fantastic world of Noni that she got to know in that house of hers in Beersheba through the objects – the lampshade, both a gift from her mother Anna and painted by her, the white rocking chair, the wardrobe and the box for toys painted by Aunt Gerda – all from her childhood home in Blankenese outside Hamburg. The photographs from the summers they spent there show the family from Sweden and those living in Germany all sitting together outside, eating, laughing, reading books, and putting on plays, always surrounded by nature. Pictures of Noni playing with dogs and dolls, with rabbits and a goat and at her playhouse, inviting family members to sit down for an imaginary coffee break.

In Hila's mind, the reality of her grandmother's past came to be mixed up with the fairytale stories that she told. Aunt Green, Aunt

Brown, Aunt Lavender, and Uncle Blue in the series of books by Elsa Beskow became her relatives from those pictures. The nature of Noni's childhood in both Germany and Sweden was for Hila the same as the one she encountered in the drawings of magical forests in Beskow's books like "Children of the Forest."