

Exhibition June 2 – September 27, 2021

Sabatini Building, Floor 1

Ida Applebroog

Marginalias



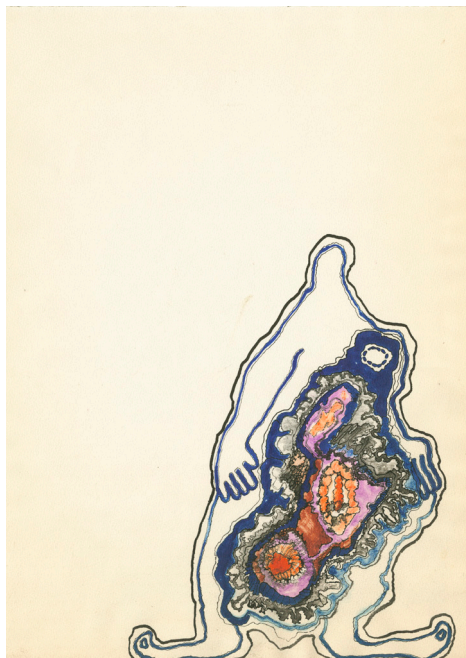
Galileo Chronology, I Too Am of the Male Race, 1975. Private Collection, courtesy Hauser & Wirth

© Courtesy Ida Applebroog and Hauser & Wirth

Marginalias charts the broad artistic trajectory of Ida Applebroog (New York, 1929) over a career spanning six decades. This comprehensive retrospective documents the artist's lifelong interests and concerns and shows how her visual style developed through introspection and critical analysis of issues such as the blurred line between the private and the public, the creeping medicalization of advanced societies, the violence that underpins accepted patriarchal relationships, and the media's lack of sensitivity toward the suffering of others.

Unwilling to be pigeonholed stylistically, Applebroog has employed a wide range of media and materials—drawings, watercolors, paintings, sculptures, artist books, installations, and so on—to realize her work. Her pieces often have performative qualities and call for active audience engagement, with interpretation of the work dependent on a viewer's own personal experience.

Certain constants that would come to form the backbone of her work began to take shape in the late 1960s and early 1970s, following an episode that would prove to be a turning point in her life and art. In 1969, after suffering a nervous breakdown, Applebroog was admitted to Mercy Hospital in San Diego. She spent several weeks in hospital and, initially as a form of therapy, produced a vast array of pictures of biomorphic figures in ink, watercolor, and pencil, often accompanied by a few words or short phrases.



From the series *Mercy Hospital Drawings*, 1969
Beth Rudin DeWoody
© Courtesy Ida Applebroog and Hauser & Wirth

The exhibition takes a selection of those drawings as its starting point, alongside the installation *Monalisa (Vagina House)*, 2006–2009, for which Applebroog revised and repurposed sketches she made of her vagina in the months that followed her time in hospital. These drawings might be seen as an exercise in self-(re)discovery with an echo, if an unconscious one, of the feminist movement’s commitment to making private and domestic issues political. Applebroog’s period of convalescence allowed her to begin a process of introspection that enabled her, on the one hand, to redefine her identity—even adopting a new name a few years later: Applebroog (a sort of twist on her maiden name of Appelbaum)—and establish her artistic language on the other. In 1974, she moved back to New York and became involved with the feminist collective Heresies and, several years later (1992), the Women’s Action Coalition. She played an active role in these organizations alongside the likes of Mimi Shapiro, Judy Chicago, and Lucy Lippard. In this manner her work acquired an explicitly feminist focus and began to critique patriarchal structures as yet another symptom of a sick and submissive society.

Meanwhile, performance assumed an increasingly central role in pieces such as *Galileo Chronology* (1975) and the “stagings” that she developed from 1975 to 1977. These scenes, heavily influenced by Samuel Beckett, feature certain tropes that would reoccur in later work: the use of parchment as an adjustable framework, able to provide depth and shadow in the manner of the theater; a simplified, comic book illustration style (a product of her background in graphic design); the motif of the theater curtain; and the mechanical repetition of scenes that speak of people trapped in routines imposed on them by social conventions. Applebroog also incorporates simple phrases into these theatrical scenes, with humor her trusty ally, to show how every life experience contains an element of fiction, a consequence of our existence being so



Everything is Fine, detail, 1990–1993
Private Collection, courtesy Hauser & Wirth
© Courtesy Ida Applebroog and Hauser & Wirth



Marginalias, Flower Woman, 1992
Private Collection, courtesy Hauser & Wirth
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shaped by toxic, systematic social inertia. From 1977 to 1982, Applebroog developed these works into a three-stranded book series entitled *A Performance Books*,

further confirmation of just how integral staging had become in her art.

Other works such as *Variations on the Emetic Fields* (1990), *Everything Is Fine* (1990–1993), and *Catastrophes* (2012) portray a sick, disjointed, and dysfunctional society and highlight Applebroog's concern for our increasingly medicalized world. She employs medical terms to draw attention to the vulnerability of the patient, the interchangeable nature of the patient-doctor relationship, and the subjectively fine line between sanity and madness.

The show takes its title from a broad and open-ended series of works called *Marginalias*, which Applebroog referred to as “notes in the margin”. While each is a standalone piece, Applebroog likes to add them to existing works to give an extra layer of meaning through the change in visual context or concept, thus altering the significance of the original piece or shifting the focus of the main argument. This device is yet another demonstration of the discursive and iconographic power of an artist who ruthlessly exposes society's perennial ills without losing her sense of humor and irony.

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