

HELEN RIBKA



“No Title” (Insulating material, acrylic paint)

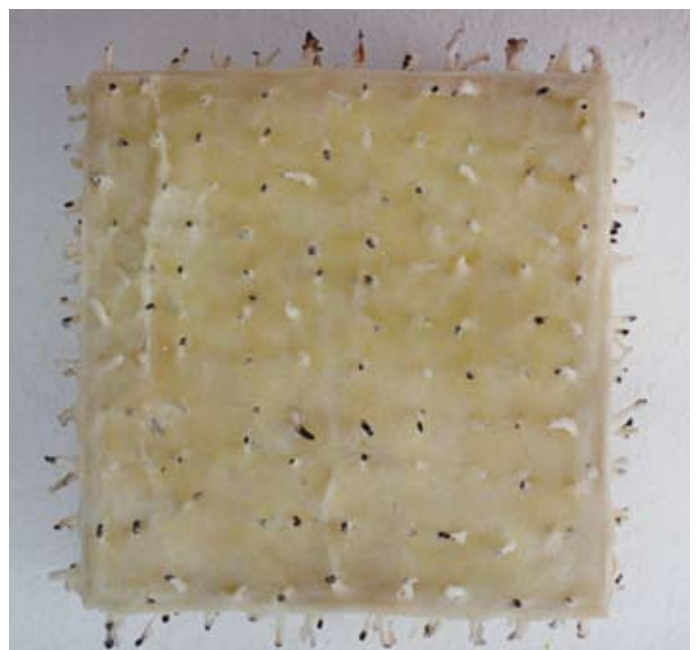
Helen Pavel was born in Prague. When she was a small girl her parents were visiting relations in Britain at the time of the Prague Spring. As they were on the point of returning home, they saw the news of the Russian tanks rolling into Prague dashing all hopes of a better future in their own country. They decided to stay, leaving everyone and everything behind them.

This momentous turning point of history meant that Helen was then brought up in Scotland eventually attending art school in both Kingston-upon-Thames and at The Royal College. She now lives in Germany not far from Munich. It was there while visiting her I first encountered her work.

Goethe says that one of the most important qualities we need to develop to appreciate life is the



“No Title” (Papier-mache)



“No Title” (paper and wax on card)



“No Title” (Papier-mache)



“No Title” (Nettle, wire, paint)

quality of wonder. To look at the extraordinary structure of a wasps’ nest or the fluid forms of a shell or a seed pod; all the countless shapes, forms and marks made by nature can help inspire a sense of reverence for nature; an attitude that makes it harder to exploit the natural world thoughtlessly.

The English artist David Jones goes even further and says of human beings that we are the only species that takes substances and transforms them into something different for the sheer pleasure of it. He describes this transforming power as a continuous transubstantiation, a spiritualization of matter.

I saw Helen’s work on a warm sunny afternoon, in the attic illuminated by sunlight coming through the skylights. I felt wonder at the organic forms of nature and at the human beings ability to transform matter. Helen’s works are delicate and fine in structure. There are leaf forms, petal and seedpod forms, squares and circles and linear forms as stark as winter trees.

I felt as if I had come across an alchemical workshop where the artist had made herself a student of the formative powers of nature , that secret source from which life springs, which was explored especially by Paul Klee and Kandinsky. Dylan Thomas called this the force that through the green fuse drives the flower.

These eloquent and lovely forms are more remarkable because of their base materials. Helen uses hemp, PVA, insulating material, wire, acrylic, paper muslin to fashion shapes of exquisite



lightness and delicacy, catching the light and shadow on their their many surfaces and textures.

I felt that the work was a kind of homage to the creative power of nature and a celebration of our ability to pay attention to the wonder of the natural world and to draw inspiration from it to lose ourselves in the play of making art.

The wasps' nest has a function as does a shell ; art on the other hand has no practical function; it serves only to remind us that human beings who are in touch with their creative powers are also nearest to their own wellspring and their own capacity for joy. Helen's work is clearly a joy to make and is likewise a quiet joy to behold in all its manifold forms.