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OCTOBER 2018



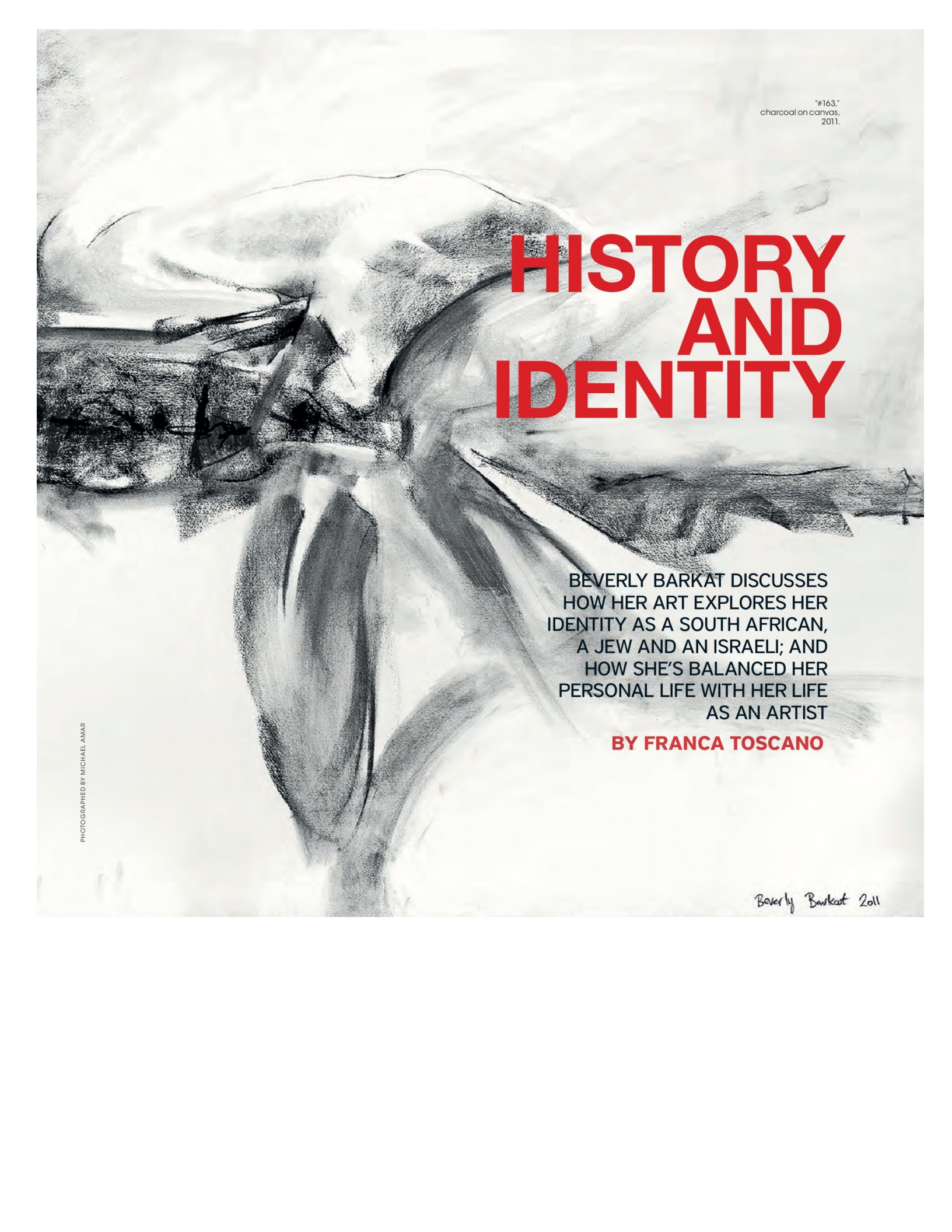
TOP WOMEN ARTISTS

**ROBERT COMBAS,
ECCE HOMO**

**+ JÉRÔME NEUTRES ON MIRÓ RETROSPECTIVE
AT THE GRAND PALAIS IN PARIS**







"#163,"
charcoal on canvas,
2011.

HISTORY AND IDENTITY

BEVERLY BARKAT DISCUSSES
HOW HER ART EXPLORES HER
IDENTITY AS A SOUTH AFRICAN,
A JEW AND AN ISRAELI; AND
HOW SHE'S BALANCED HER
PERSONAL LIFE WITH HER LIFE
AS AN ARTIST

BY FRANCA TOSCANO

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL AMAR

Beverly Barkat 2011



A still from
"Beverly Barkat:
Evocative
Surfaces,"
short film
directed by
Tor Ben Mayor.

The artist Beverly Barkat, 52, was born in South Africa and moved to Israel at the age of 10. Her artworks range from oil-on-canvas depictions of interiors, landscapes and figures to abstract bursts of color on translucent PVC panels — as demonstrated in her solo exhibition at the 16th-century Palazzo Grimani during the 2018 Venice Biennale.

Barkat is also the wife of the outgoing mayor of Jerusalem, Nir Barkat. With her husband now stepping down to pursue a political career at the national level, she feels freer to speak about the impact of being married to a politician.

Barkat has just produced another site-specific commission for the Palazzo Ludovisi Boncompagni (through Dec. 31) in Rome. The towering installation consists of 12 circular PVC panels hanging from a tree-like metal structure, representing the 12 Hebrew tribes that conquered the land after the death of Moses. The colors on the PVC panels come from rocks, shells and gemstones that she collected from all over Israel, ground up, and mixed with an acrylic medium that turns transparent when it dries up — blending the ancient and the contemporary.

The following are edited excerpts from an interview with Barkat.

THIS PAGE: COURTESY, BEVERLY BARKAT.
FACING PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHED BY VARTIVAR JAKLIAN



View of permanent installation,
works from the "Evocative
Surfaces" series,
Museo di Palazzo Grimani,
Venice, 2018.





"#189,"
charcoal on
canvas,
2013.

How did this exhibition come about?

It started with the Israeli embassy in Rome asking me to do something for the 70th anniversary of Israel. While I'm an immigrant, I married an Israeli, and my three daughters grew up here. I asked myself, who am I as a Jew, as an Israeli, and what is this DNA of the Jewish people and the Jewish nation? That connected me to the history of why we're here. It led me to the 12 tribes, each of which received a different piece of land when they entered Israel.

What does this new work say about modern-day Israel?

The work itself doesn't only reflect the history, but reflects the future. Who builds up the Jewish nation? You have the secular and ultra-orthodox and all the variety of religious aspects in between. You have the diaspora and Israel as a country. All of these need to be one unit.

It's not like I see Israel or Jews in Israel disconnected from the Jews in the diaspora. Everyone needs to enable each other to live the life they want to, according to their beliefs, but knowing and respecting the other person standing next to them.

This project isn't about a political aspect today, and a solution. It's about Israel's 70 years, and its legitimacy to be here as a country. To come up with this project, I went digging deep in myself, looking for my identity, trying to come up with something that speaks about the story of the 12 tribes and their meaning today, and is also a Contemporary artwork standing alone.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL AMAR

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When did you realize that art was your calling?

I was born to artistic parents who had the biggest ceramic studio for teaching in South Africa and a factory for manufacturing, and who did art exhibitions in clay. I grew up with clay in my hands. If I wanted to see my parents, I went to the school, which was in the garage of our house, where they taught morning, afternoon and evening. They would say, “Go help this student who’s having problems.” So I would teach the students when I was 9 or 10. You say your mother tongue is language: I say it’s also sculpting and clay.

When we moved to Israel — my father taught for many years at the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design in Jerusalem — I studied jewelry design, then worked in metal, then combined getting married and having three children with what I wanted to do.

I worked in glass. Then when we started building our home, I went into architecture and interior design. After studying with [the Jerusalem-based figurative painter Israel Hersberg, I decided I needed to find myself — my own line, color, marking. I opened my own studio and immersed myself, working with a model, with horses, painting the landscape. This was charcoal or pencil drawing, or oil paint on canvas. I then pushed forward and participated in different exhibitions. Venice was a big breakthrough for me.

How, as an artist, did you deal with your husband being the mayor of Jerusalem?

When my husband was elected to be mayor, I thought, “Wow! What an opportunity for me to do art projects in Jerusalem.” I started working on a very large project involving an international artist, Israeli artists, Bezalel students, the Israel Museum, Yad Vashem [the Holocaust memorial], and urban spaces. As I dug deeper, I realized that I couldn’t do the project, because I needed the municipality to be part of it — their agreement, their space. And everyone would come down on my husband, because he was giving money for his wife’s project.

I realized I couldn’t have exhibitions in Jerusalem. So I had two exhibitions in Tel Aviv. Then I thought I should break out and exhibit abroad to get my individual identity as an artist, be



"#173,"
oil and acrylic
on canvas,
2014.



"Turbine
4858,"
installation
view,
Museo di
Palazzo
Grimani,
Venice,
2017.

respected, and come back and exhibit in Israel.

My husband is incredibly giving and open, and participates in the projects. But because he was the mayor, I had great restrictions on what I could and couldn't do. What I realized in Venice was that if the work is really powerful and stands by itself, the story of me being the wife of the mayor really breaks down to nothing: it's really irrelevant.

How has your husband's decision to step down changed things?

Until we have elections in Israel and he does something else, it's a paradigm shift for me. I have those few months where I can be me, and people can really see me as me, and not as the wife of the mayor doing a little hobby in her studio. I feel secure enough that I have developed my own language in art, my own fingerprint.

Are you a political person?

No, not at all.

How can you not be with a husband like Nir Barkat?

He's an extrovert: he needs to be out there, loves people, loves interacting with people. That's what drives him. I'm an introvert. I'm very shy. I love people but I feel that I can't be with them all the time. I need to be by myself in my studio. Art is what gives me the energy to be a wife, be a mother, and be with people. If I don't work in my studio and don't paint and am not creating, I sort of go wild inside. I'm unbearable to the outside world.

Will you have to rein yourself in again if he takes on another big political role?

No. What's coming out in the media in Israel is: "She is an independent person. She's not her husband, she's not in the political arena." My world is my world, and that's why this exhibition and the previous exhibition were so important for me. They put me on the international map of independent artists. It's like breaking the glass ceiling. MP

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