

## Hedy Ritterman: In My Mother's House, Nocturnes

By Janet McKenzie

Gaston Bachelard's 1958 book **La Poétique de l'Espace** (published in English in 1964 as **The Poetics of Space**) remains one of the most engaging and effusive explorations of home, and how our perceptions of architectural space shape our thoughts, memories and dreams. **The Poetics of Space** interrogates the meaning of space in relation to art and poetry, intimate spaces such as a house or a room, and small parts of them such as furniture, and their position within the wider world. Bachelard makes a phenomenological study of private architecture and its relationship to the 'architecture of the psyche'. The domestic space becomes the 'primal universe' of psychological existence. In Hedy Rittermann's new exhibition, **In My Mother's House, Nocturnes**, Bachelard's notion of the house as the "quintessential phenomenological object" is one of a number of important influences. **In My Mother's House** is imbued with a lifetime of memories and experiences.

Hedy Ritterman studied psychology, photography, interior design and fine art, which have all informed her practice. The photograph of Holocaust survivor, **Richard** won the Human Justice Award, in the 63<sup>rd</sup> Blake Prize, 2014. Her role as carer for husband Henry Ritterman as he fought cancer contributed to the use of highly experiential material culminating in "Hedy Ritterman: A Man of His Time" at the Jewish Museum of Australia, (2016-17).

**In My Mother's House** extends through every part of the home of artist's mother Ruth Waislitz (1927-2018) embracing Carl Andre's idea of "sculpture as place" rather than "sculpture as form" enabling the viewer to occupy the psychological space through the artist's orchestration of light and sound within architectural space.

The music of Chopin, modernist architecture and personal objects establishes a potent cultural backdrop that challenges conventional mourning in rendering the home of the deceased to assume a new identity as the vessel of memorialisation.

Two mirror images in **Prelude** (2020) presage multiple readings. An acceptance of duality alludes to the mother/daughter relationship and the passage of time; to private and public perceptions of life, to fragility and fear in the face of one's mortality. The light box work **Imi after Ema**, (2010) is a photographic portrait of her mother as part of: "Conversation with Gerhard Richter" (2010-). His work,

**Ema (Nude on a Staircase)** (1966), references Marcel Duchamp's iconic **Nude Descending the Staircase** (1912). **Imi after Ema** is situated at the bottom of the same stairs where Hedy photographed her mother descending, and is reflected on the roof light above. The effect is that of an intimate conversation that traverses time.

The exhibition draws on a range of cultural and artistic sources: the work of Louise Bourgeois, whose long career explored domesticity and the family; death and the unconscious; Annette Messager's installations that incorporate a preference for bricolage over fine art materials. Ritterman includes embroidered tablecloths and threads to create a theatre of quotidian female life juxtaposed against the precision required for photography and lighting that sometimes evoke the grainy surface of ultrasound forms and the dynamism of Oskar Schlemmer's **Triadic Ballet** (1922).

The spectacular tableau, created from her mother's collection of over 1000 pieces of glass, is lit casting shadows through the entire space. It is at once revelatory and fragile, daring and sublime, a metaphor for an exceptional life: the creative sensibility of the concert pianist who endured a traumatic escape from Nazi Europe, her new life in Australia, an inspired example.

Hedy Ritterman's narratives thus evokes enable a poetic immersive identification of unconscionable loss through the beauty that we understand as the Sublime. Ruth's memory is presented through the magical properties of light and faith in the company of her beloved Chopin, asserting hope in the creative act itself.