A treasure-trove of color, shape, and pattern vibrates in the fabric collage/paintings of Ruth Adler. Playful, harmonious, irreverent and subversive, the collaged layers of fabrics in Adler’s work are distilled from her years of making traditional gestural paintings and designing wallpaper and t-shirts. Visiting her studio in Tel Aviv, we discussed her process of “painting” with reams of bold fabric collected over the years from historic wholesale fabric shops on Tel Aviv’s Nahalat Binyamin street. Adler often employs scraps or left-overs from other shoppers’ purchases. These previously explored and handled offcuts offer a freedom and an opening of the imagination from those who left the scraps behind.

The fabrics speak to our most nurturing selves: covering, shielding and housing our bodies in their warmth and materiality. In Adler’s work, the fabric is liberated from its original role to conform to our bodies and to societies’ gendered expectations. Sometimes the work rhythmically combines jersey with lace and cotton sheets with child-like patterns.

As much as color, shape compositions have a powerful command in Adler’s work, the way one reads the whole is from a deeply felt emotional and intuitive hand. Adler paints with what one might refer to as an authentic mark: unedited, in full bloom of color. With the textile works, the preformed scraps and scissors become a means of drawing. It is exciting to see how these despairingly different materials and patterns play off of each other, as a painterly drama.

Speaking to Adler’s process, the fabrics are often localized to the city in which she is currently living and working. While in Toronto, working with localized materials helps to ground her. For many of us living between two worlds, the imagination lingers in the place we are not. For Adler, visiting her favorite local discount fabric sellers conjures up the warm feelings of her childhood moments spent in her grandparents’ rural Canadian drygoods store.

Montages of printed photographic images on some fabrics act as an anchor for locating the physical source of these fabric constructions. These photos - taken by Adler on her walks - are usually of facades with laundry on display or the space between the stucco apartment buildings of Tel Aviv. In one such piece, high-key fabric paint of rainbow horizontal paths rhythmically forms space in an open white sheet. The main form - a cutout of a blue/green ombre - overlaps one of the photographic prints of a mundane concrete façade with an unassuming window and air-conditioning unit. To the right of the cutout is another photographic image of a ubiquitous Middle Eastern urban scene: a rooftop littered with water heaters and solar panels. Adler conjures up the vibrant and willful energy between these architectural remnants. The meeting of patterns and fabric materials find their home in an unintentional counter-melody jam.

The languages of vibrant color, shape, and pattern make Adler’s work full with the sensory experiences of living between worlds – Toronto and Tel Aviv – revealing the nuance and the complex layers and codes imbued in the found fabrics from the multicultural intersections of the mind’s eye.

- Ariel Basson Freiberg

Ariel Basson Freiberg is a Boston-based painter whose work explores the accelerators and brakes of sexuality through the body and gestures. Born in Texas of Iraqi/Israeli background, she is represented by Abigail Ogilvy Gallery and is the co-ordinator of the Post Baccalaureate in Studio Art at Brandeis University.