Swartz, a decidedly spiritual artist, has studied the Bible, kabbalah, and a variety of eastern religious systems. Her work *Israel Revisited* (1981), created in Israel, honors ten women, for whom she invented ten ritual performance pieces and created ten individual collage constructions based on biblical and kabbalist sources--creations unthinkable without the feminist movement.

Before discussing this work, I need to explain Swartz's interpretation of the Shekinah. Artist-critic Saul Raskin wrote the following in his book of illustrations for the Pirkei Avot (Wisdom of the Fathers): “When ten people sit together and occupy themselves with the Torah, the Shekhina [*sic*] abides among them" ([1940] 1969, 39). Raskin invoked the presence of the Shekinah in its Talmudic sense. What this means, according to the great scholar of kabbalah Gershom Scholem, is that "in Talmudic literature and non-kabbalistic rabbinical Judaism, the Shekhinah [*sic*]--literally in-dwelling, namely of God in the world--is taken to mean simply God himself in His omnipresence and activity in the world and especially in Israel." But to kabbalists, the Shekinah is also "an aspect of God, a quasi-independent feminine element with Him" (1965, 104-5).

Scholem also contrasts Talmudic and kabbalistic attitudes toward God by pointing out that in the Talmud the concept of the Shekinah's exile means that the Shekinah was with the people of Israel in the Diaspora, their exile from Israel. But in kabbalistic thought, exile does not mean traveling with the Israelites but rather that "a part of God Himself is exiled from God. ... The exile of the Shekhinah [is] in other words the separation of the masculine and feminine principles in God' (Scholem 1965, 107, 108; see also Gross 1979, 167-73; Patai [1967] 1990, 96-111; Scholem 1991, 140-96). In the Talmud, then, God is one; in kabbalistic thought, God is also one but has multiple emanations or aspects (*spherot*), including a feminine aspect.

The kabbalist rather than Talmudic interpretation of the nature of the Shekinah became popular in the 1970s because of the rise of feminism as well as the growing interest in kabbalah at that time. Feminists began their search for a nonpatriarchal God or, at least, nonpatriarchal aspects of God. Kabbalists also held that Creation and the desired reunification of the masculine and feminine principles of the Deity would be completed through the concept of *tikkun olam*, or repair of the world (Scholem [1941] 1961, 268-76).

The combination of the feminist and kabbalist lines of thought are manifested in Swartz's work *Israel Revisited*. This work is, to my knowledge, among the first, if not the first, contemporary, large-scale feminist project in which the Jewish subject matter is derived from the Bible and kabbalah, and, as such, it is among the most historically significant Jewish American feminist artworks of the 1980s. Swartz chose ten sites in Israel in 1980, the same number as the ten *spherot*, emanations or aspects of God described in the *Zohar*, a major kabbalistic text written in Spain in the late thirteenth century (Applehof 1981). At each of the ten selected sites, Swartz, dressed in white, created a ritual and a performance piece to honor not only the Shekinah but also the queen of Sheba; the biblical matriarchs, including Rebecca, Rachel, Deborah, Miriam, Beruriah, and Huldah; Doña Gracia (a sixteenth-century Portuguese woman); and the Unknown Woman. In a conversation Swartz and I had in 1998, she said she was especially interested in honoring the Shekinah and mentioned that she prays to the Shekinah, the nonmasculine aspect of God. "I began to feel that the Shekinah exemplified the concerns of this project, that God has many names and can speak through women as well as men and that feminine energy is part of everybody's heritage." (See also Weissler 2005, 61-65.)

To create the individual pieces, Swartz placed long sheets of paper on the ground at each site, cut and punctured them, rubbed each with glue, poured acrylic gel on them, set them on fire, and covered them with soil. After returning to her home with the remnants, she rearranged each one, then colored and, as she said, "froze" them.

7. Beth Ames Swartz, *The Cave of Machpelah #1*, 1980, ID#: 010. Fire, earth, acrylic, variegated gold leaf, and mixed media on layered paper, 31 ½ x 54 ½ in.

Swartz associated each of the women she had selected with a specific spherotic emanation of the Deity. Rebecca was paired with the emanation Binah, or understanding, and the color indigo because of her self-determination and self-knowledge. The completed work dedicated to her memory, entitled *The Cave of Machpelah #1* (1980, fig. 7), marks the place where Rebecca, Sarah, and Leah are buried. Swartz also noted that Rebecca "exercised her freedom of choice and was willing to leave the security of her native land to start a new life. "She represented those women who “ventured into the world to find personal fulfillment" (*Beth Ames Swartz: Israel Revisited* 1981, 20; Genesis 24:57-61). Swartz paired Deborah, the prophet, with the emanation called Gevurah, or power and judgment, and with the color red. She paired Miriam with Hod, or intelligence, and the color orange because of her willingness to speak her mind concerning the marriage of Zipporah, a Cushite, to her brother, Moses, as well as because of her role as a prophet (*Beth Ames Swartz: Israel Revisited* 1981, 29; Numbers 12). And Huldah, paired with Malkuth, the emanation of God closest to our own world, and the color russet, is represented by Jerusalem. Huldah, a prophet who lived in Jerusalem, predicted the destruction of that city after the death of King Josiah (Second Kings 22:17-20). Swartz chose colors for their associations with the different *spherot*, and a different color dominates each work in *Israel Revisited*. Given the vagaries of Swartz's process of firing and reconstruction, the semblance of a Hebrew letter might seem to appear in the interstices of a piece, but no specific message is intended.

For our purposes here, performance art in which rituals concerned with women's lives, women's space, and women's relation to the earth as well as with ways the Goddess is invoked is of particular relevance. In the 1970s and 1980s, several artists besides Swartz performed rituals, created sacred spaces in both public and private settings, acted as shamans in healing rituals, and celebrated time cycles such as those of the various solstices in order to express women's revelations of the soul and spiritual quests heretofore not openly articulated. By 1976, Swartz was using fire in her ritualistic performances, as had artists such as Judy Chicago, Mary Beth Edelson, and Geny Dignac. In addition, the Israeli artist Miriam

Sharon performed desert rituals to exorcise patriarchal models "that constricted alienating cityscapes of concrete over ancient earth shrines and sacred sites" (Orenstein 1988, 75). Sharon also developed meditation rituals and used the desert as a temple for meditation. And in 1977, a group of ten women sat and chanted within a ring of fire in a mourning ritual ceremony in La Jolla, California, to create a holy space for women.

According to one observer, Swartz's connection to these performance and ritualistic events also had a specifically Jewish dimension. These events provided “an emotional identification with her heritage, and [she] began to realize that from the Burning Bush, through which God spoke to Moses, to the 20th century Holocaust, fire was inextricably bound with Jewish history" (Reed 1981, 43; for additional material on kabbalah in American art and on Swartz and rituals, see Baigell 1999; 2001, 229-42; 2006a, 35-39, 81-85, 109-11, 116-17, 151-52; 2006b; and 2007a, 174-75, 189-211; as well as *Beth Ames Swartz: Inquiry into Fire* 1978; Christ 1979, 273-87, and 1980, 125-29; Nelson 1984; Orenstein 1988, 1994; D. Rubin 2002, 15; Wortz 1982).

With this short description of Swartz's artistic processes and religious and spiritual proclivities as well as of the feminist context in which she worked, I mean to suggest that *Israel Revisited* is a prime example of how secular, traditional religious, and kabbalist feminist concerns can complement each other and why this work is part of both "American American" and Jewish American art history.

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By Matthew Baigell