



# Artists Speak: Ida Applebroog

**Born**  
1929, New York, NY

**Education**  
BFA, School of the Art Institute of Chicago, Chicago, IL  
Honorary doctorate, New School University/Parsons School of Design, NY, NY

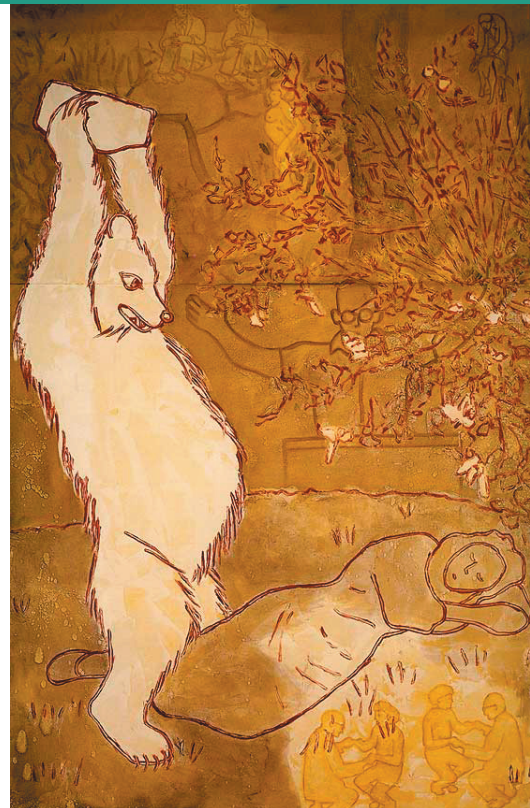
**Lives and Works**  
New York, NY

**Media & Materials**  
painting, photography, sculpture; digital imaging, plasticine

**Biography**  
Applebroog has been making pointed social commentary in the form of beguiling comic-like images for nearly half a century. She has developed an instantly recognizable style of simplified human forms with bold outlines. Anonymous ‘everyman’ figures, anthropomorphized animals, and half human-half creature characters are featured players in the uncanny theater of her work. In her most characteristic work, she combines popular imagery from everyday urban and domestic scenes, sometimes paired with curt texts, to skew otherwise banal images into anxious scenarios infused with a sense of irony and black humor. Strong themes in her work include gender and sexual identity, power struggles both political and personal, and the pernicious role of mass media in desensitizing the public to violence.

*“I use a lot of repetition. And the repetition becomes a filmic way of talking because as you put one image after the other, even though it’s the exact identical image, everyone sees something changing from one image to the next. And it’s just really bizarre — because I know what I’ve done and I know they’re exact, though of course my hand is not exact, but they see actual gestures and they see actual changes in the expression which I never put there.”*

Right: *Mother mother I am ill*, 1993. Oil on canvas, 2 panels, 110 x 72 inches overall. Collection of the Corcoran Museum of Art, Washington, D.C.



Left: *Marginalia (Isaac Stern)*, 1992. Oil on canvas, 2 panels, 35 x 39 inches overall. Photo by Dennis Cowley Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York  
Courtesy PaceWildenstein, New York

*“I do a lot of work on violence all the time, you know. I’ve also had that come at me, ‘Why are you so obsessed with violence?’ And you know my answer? I look at them and I think. ‘Why do you say I’m obsessed with violence?’ I live in this world—this is what’s going on around me. I can’t change that. So when I’m doing the work, it’s like I’m in the studio and I have all this stuff on my back. I have all this baggage, and I try desperately to start working.... I’m carrying in how the postman looked at me that morning, what happened in my personal life, what did my dealer say to me, what did my friend say on the telephone—all the different things that go on in your mind. What do I have to do? What appointments do I have? And then how do you get to do the actual marks on the canvas where that disappears? It takes a long, long time.... And then this is not really what you’re doing, but in a way it’s like peeling off the layers, peeling off the layers. And finally you’re not conscious any more of anything being there, and you’re free and you’re working and you don’t know that time has gone by—and it’s hours and hours and hours. But then you have to go back into the real world and the real world is the world that the six o’clock news is about and your own personal life, because your own personal life is involved in that also.”*

*“I come from a very rigid, religious background. And it’s the idea of how power works — male over female, parents over children, governments over people, doctors over patients that operates continuously. So it’s not as though I set out to say, ‘Well let’s see what the power balance is between this piece in my painting and that piece in my painting.’ This is the part we’re talking about — that you never really know what you’re doing until at the end you realize, ‘Ah, that’s what I’m doing...that’s what I’ve done.’”*

*“The photographs actually start off making art out of children’s modeling clay. When I say art, I mean just doing some very primitive-feeling sculptures. And that’s just the beginning. It’s like making art out of art and continuing the process all the way through. For the first time, technology is at my service when I go from working with the material to the next step and the next.”*

*These little pieces seem so ordinary and like nothing. If I place them on my stage, these little mounds of clay become monumental. You photograph them any way you like, zoom in on any part of the body, and they become something totally different. I take each one – and they’re very small. I set them up as though I’m posing them the way a photographer would. Whatever else goes on has to do with the camera, because they have to be posed in such a way that they do something, say something. They’re able to express the next few steps, and I never know what they are. The best part is that I really never know what these things are going to morph into.”*



*K-Mart Village IV*, 1989. Oil on canvas, 5 panels, 48 x 32 inches overall. Collection of the Artist. Photo by Jennifer Kotter. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York



*Digital Outtake of Work in Progress*, 2005. Production by Rita MacDonald and Robert MacDonald. Courtesy Ronald Feldman Gallery, New York

## Activity Suggestions:

Applebroog makes her small plasticine sculptures monumental by placing them on a stage and photographing them. Alter a found or made object by putting it on a stage of your creation and re-presenting it through photography, drawing, or painting. How is the scale and tone of the original object changed? Present the original sculpture and re-presentation in a way that comments on their relationship to one another.



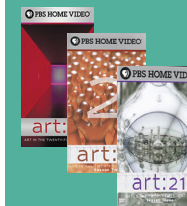
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