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## **Aesthetic Wit(h)nessing in the Era of Trauma**

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### **Abstract**

Israeli/French artist and psychoanalytical theorist, Bracha Ettinger has declared: “In art today we are moving from phantasm to trauma. Contemporary aesthetics is moving from phallic structure to matrixial sphere.” In analysing the significance of this claim, this article will bring together the legacies of feminist, post-colonial cultural theories in relation to the current focus on trauma, memory and aesthetics in an international context. The understanding of the twentieth century as a century of catastrophe demands theoretical attention be given to concepts such as trauma, as artists with deep ethical commitments bring issues of traumatic legacies to the surface of cultural awareness and potentially provide through the aesthetic encounter a passage from the traces of trauma. This article introduces, explains and analyses the contribution of Bracha Ettinger as a major theoretician of trauma, aesthetics and above all sexual difference. In addition, it elaborates on her parallel concept of a matrixial aesthetic practice, enacted through a post-conceptual

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painting, that retunes the legacies of technologies of surveillance and documentation/archiving, as a means to effect the passage to a future that accepts the burden of sharing the trauma while processing and transforming it. The article demonstrates the dual functions of Ettingerian theories of a matrixial supplement to the phallogentric Imaginary and Symbolic in relation to the major challenges we face as we seek to understand, acknowledge and move on from the catastrophes that render our age post-traumatic.

**Key Words:** trauma, aesthetics, the matrixial feminine, contemporary Western painting