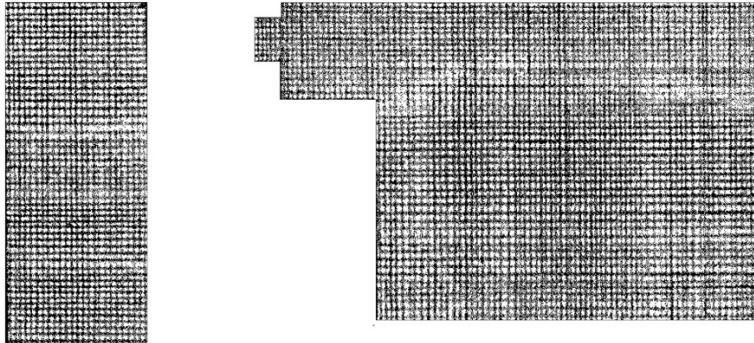


# Graham Foundation



Nelly Agassi, *Plot*, 2019. Digital manipulation of the 1967 Madlener House plans drawn for the Historic American Buildings Survey. Courtesy of the artist and Graham Foundation, Chicago.

**For Immediate Release**

***Nelly Agassi: Spirit of the Waves***

**May 23–August 3, 2019**

Opening Reception: Thursday, May 23, 2019, 6–8:00 p.m.

Chicago (May 10, 2019)—Through a newly commissioned body of work, including a large-scale textile installation, intricate embroideries, works on paper, sculptures, and a performance, Nelly Agassi conjures historical and imagined narratives from the architectural details of the Graham Foundation’s Madlener House. Built in 1901–02 for Albert F. and Elsa S. Madlener, the house was originally designed by architect Richard E. Schmidt, with designer Hugh M. G. Garden, and then renovated in the 1960s by architect Daniel Brenner to transform it into the Foundation’s headquarters. The culmination of Agassi’s 2019 Graham Foundation Fellowship, this exhibition explores erasure, preservation, identity, and architecture’s capacity to change.

Agassi registers both radical and subtle changes to the building. A sculpture traces the outline of Elsa Madlener’s dressing room in what is now the building’s largest gallery, while a delicate embroidery acknowledges the change of color in the original deep oxblood Mahogany molding that frames the first-floor galleries and was bleached in the renovation. The registration of lost and changed details narrates the transformation of the house from a private domestic space conceived at beginning of the twentieth century to the mid-century modern institutional spaces created for different public uses: galleries, library, lecture hall, and offices. As Agassi recreates erased details of the Madlener House—fireplaces, closets, doorways—she reframes every extant detail in the house, and alters the viewers perception of the space as a whole. For every lost detail, another still exists.

In Agassi's other installation and performance work, her body is often confined by or conflated with the architecture of the exhibition space while she performs slow repetitive gestures, such as breathing. In doing so, she creates environments where viewers are invited to slow down, be present with her, and recalibrate their perception of the space they are in. Here, Agassi uses the architectural details of the house in place of her own body to communicate intimate stories of the building's origin and use. In much the same way that she has described the body as a place to both process and record experience, here the Madlener House becomes a conduit between the past and the present—a complex platform that intertwines private and public spheres.

Titled after the bronze relief by Albert Van Den Berghen installed above the central fireplace in the Madlener House foyer since the house was built, *Spirit of the Waves* is Agassi's first major solo exhibition in the United States. The exhibition is the result of her selection as a 2019 Graham Foundation Fellow—a program that provides support for the development and production of original and challenging works and the opportunity to present these projects in an exhibition at the Graham's Madlener House galleries in Chicago. The Fellowship program extends the legacy of the Foundation's first awards, made in 1957 and 1958, and continues the tradition of support to individuals to explore innovative perspectives on spatial practices in design culture. Recent Fellows, including Agassi, Martine Syms, David Hartt, Brendan Fernandes, Torkwase Dyson, and Mark Wasiuta, join alumni from the original class of Fellows, such as Pritzker Prize winning architects Balkrishna V. Doshi and Fumihiko Maki, designer Harry Bertoia, photographer Harry M. Callahan, sculptor Eduardo Chillida, experimental architect Frederick J. Kiesler, and painter Wilfredo Lam, among others.

Chicago-based artist **Nelly Agassi** (b.1973, Israel) received her MFA from Chelsea College and her BFA from Central St. Martins, both in London. Her work has been shown internationally at institutions and galleries such as The Arts Club of Chicago, Aspect Ratio, Hyde Park Art Center, The Israel Museum, Poor Farm, Tate Modern, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, La Triennale di Milano, and Zacheta Warsaw. Agassi is a cofounder of the nonprofit organization Fieldwork Collaborative Projects and a 2019 Graham Foundation Fellow. She is represented by Dvir Gallery.

Agassi worked with Hand and Lock embroidery house in London and The Weaving Mill in Chicago to produce works in the exhibition.

**Hand & Lock** are London's premier embroidery house providing embellishment services to the Royal Family, top European design houses, the Royal Armed Forces, Savile Row and members of the public.

**The Weaving Mill** is an experimental weaving studio in Chicago's Humboldt Park that blends design, fine art, textile education, and research-based practice.

*Spirit of the Waves* is commissioned by the Graham Foundation and organized by director Sarah Herda and Ellen Alderman, deputy director of exhibitions and public programs, with James Pike and Ava Barrett. Special thanks to Lori Hanna Boyer and Christopher Rosenberg, Department of Architecture and Design, The Art Institute of Chicago; Jaime

Fuentes; Chandra Goldsmith Gray; Scott Heron and Jessica Jane, Hand & Lock; Sharon Hoyer, High Concept Labs; Duncan Jackson and Simon Kristak, Billings Jackson Design; Jennifer Keats, Service Bureau, School of the Art Institute of Chicago; Lauren Mack; Peter Maunu; Ryan Packard; Nathaniel Parks, Ryerson & Burnham Libraries, The Art Institute of Chicago; Emily Frances Winter, The Weaving Mill; and the Graham Foundation staff: Vidisha Aggarwal, Alexandra Drexelius, Carolyn Kelly, Ron Konow, Junxi Lu, and Alexandra Small.

#### RELATED EVENTS

Thursday, May 23, 6–8:00 p.m.  
Opening Reception

Thursday, June 20, 6 p.m.  
*The Führer and the Decorator: Hitler's Homes as Nazi Propaganda*  
Despina Stratigakos  
Talk

Thursday, June 27, 6 p.m.  
*On the Rock: The Acropolis Interviews*  
Allyson Vieira in conversation with Terri Kapsalis  
Talk

Thursday, July 25, 6 p.m.  
*Architecture in Motion*  
Diane Simpson  
Performance

Wednesday, July 31, 6 p.m.  
*Spirit of the Waves: Performance*  
Nelly Agassi with Ryan Packard and Peter Maunu  
Performance

#### ABOUT THE GRAHAM FOUNDATION

Founded in 1956, the Graham Foundation for Advanced Studies in the Fine Arts fosters the development and exchange of diverse and challenging ideas about architecture and its role in the arts, culture, and society. The Graham realizes this vision through making project-based grants to individuals and organizations and by producing exhibitions, events, and publications.

#### THE MADLENER HOUSE

Since 1963, the Graham Foundation has been located in the Madlener House, a turn-of-the-century Prairie-style mansion designed by Richard E. Schmidt and Hugh M. G. Garden, built in 1901–02, and later renovated by prominent modern architect Daniel Brenner. The 9,000 square-foot historic home now hosts galleries, a bookstore, an outdoor collection of architectural fragments, an extensive non-lending library of grantee publications, and a ballroom where the foundation hosts a robust schedule of public programs.

**BOOKSHOP**

The Graham Foundation's bookshop, designed by Ania Jaworska, offers a selection of new, historically significant, and hard-to-find publications on architecture, art and design, many of which have been supported by grants from the Graham Foundation.

**GALLERY HOURS AND VISITOR INFORMATION**

The galleries and bookshop are open to the public Wednesday through Saturday, 11 a.m.–6 p.m. Admission is free. Group tours are available by request.

**ACCESSIBILITY**

The second-floor galleries and the third-floor ballroom, where events are held, are only accessible by stairs. The first-floor galleries and bookshop are accessible via outdoor lift. Please call ahead to make arrangements.

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**MEDIA CONTACT**

High-resolution digital images are available on the press section of our website; email Ellen Alderman for the press login or additional information. Press tours welcome by appointment.

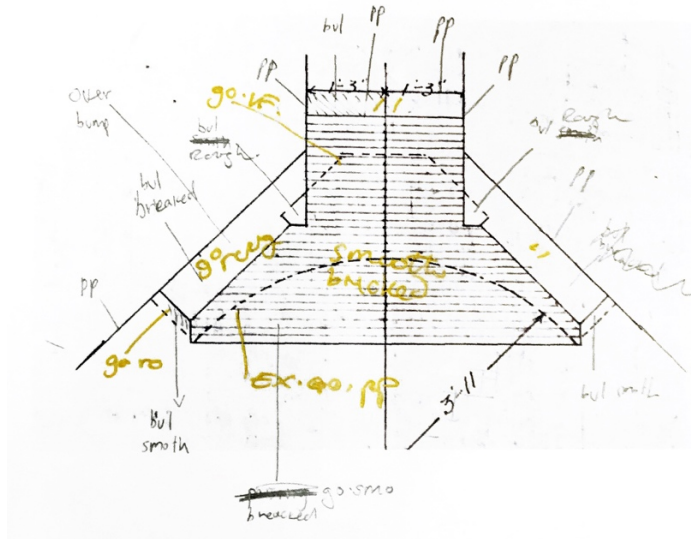
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(1) Nelly Agassi, *Dressing Room*, 2019. Pencil, laser print on vellum, and paper. Collage using architectural plans for the Madlener House by Richard E. Schmidt and Hugh M. G. Garden (1901–02). Courtesy of the artist and Graham Foundation, Chicago. (2) Nelly Agassi, *Music Room*, 2019. Pencil, laser print on vellum, and paper. Collage using architectural plans for the Madlener House by Richard E. Schmidt and Hugh M. G. Garden (1901–02). Courtesy of the artist and Graham Foundation, Chicago. (3) Nelly Agassi, *The Mister's Portals*, 2019. Pencil, laser print on vellum, and paper. Collage using architectural plans for the Madlener House by Richard E. Schmidt and Hugh M. G. Garden (1901–02). Courtesy of the artist and Graham Foundation, Chicago. (4) Nelly Agassi, study for embroidery work included in the exhibition *Spirit of the Waves* at the Graham Foundation, 2019. Annotated plan detail of fireplace for Elsa S. Madlener from the Madlener House architectural plans by Richard E. Schmidt and Hugh M. G. Garden (1901–02). Courtesy of the artist and Graham Foundation, Chicago.

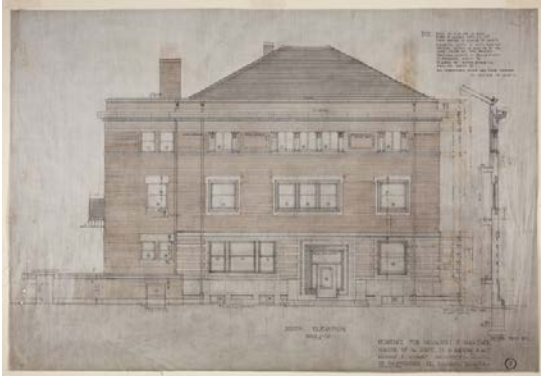


The heavy original deer (above, left) led to an impression among history-minded Chicago architects that, while the mansion's exterior was imposing, its interiors were not. The lower photo—the office of Edman and the secretary—shows the strength which Brenner found beneath the clutter.

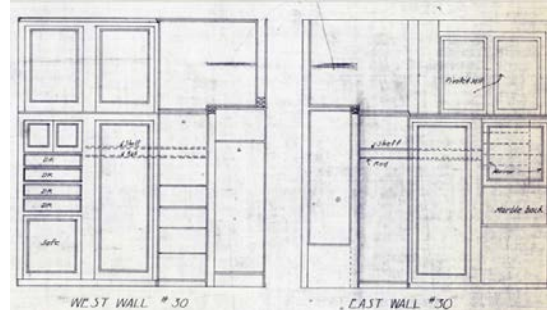
The figure ceiling of the board room (right), formerly the dining room, is emphasized by tapered square features. The window in the background of the lower photo represents, actually the only change which affected the mansion's interior: its depth was increased to match other sill heights.



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(5) Spread from the article “Improving on History,” in *The Architectural Forum* 122, no.1 (1965): 90–95, representing Madlener House spaces before and after the renovation by Brenner-Danforth-Rockwell, Architects. Top photos: Henry Fuermann, ca. 1903. Bottom photos: Richard Nickel, ca. 1965. (6) Richard E. Schmidt and Hugh M. G. Garden. *Madlener House, Chicago, Illinois, South Elevation*, 1902, Chicago. Ink on linen, 20 1/2 × 29 15/16 in. The Art Institute of Chicago. Gift of Schmidt, Garden and Erikson (1988.242.7) (7) Richard E. Schmidt and Hugh M. G. Garden. *Madlener House, Chicago, Illinois, Closet Details* (detail), 1902, Chicago. Ink on linen, 19 × 32 in. The Art Institute of Chicago. Gift of Schmidt, Garden and Erikson (1988.242.21)