

Light Within the Shadows: A Painter's Memoir by Pnina Granirer (Granville Island \$24.95)

ALL ABOUT EVE &

PNINA

Living through the Holocaust and escaping Stalinism led to

Pnina Granirer's life of making art.

LIGHT WITHIN THE **Shadows: A Painter's Memoir** by Pnina Granirer deftly weaves together two narratives: Granirer's journey as a Romanian Jew who survives World War II and immigrates to North America, as well as her awakening as an artist who develops into a celebrated painter.

Born in the port city of Braila in 1935, Pnina Granirer grew up under the brutal, fascism of the Iron Guard, an ultra-nationalist, anti-semitic, orthodox Christian movement under the dictatorial direction of **Horia Sima**. When **Ion Antonescu** came to power in September, 1940 and soon destroyed the Iron Guard, the Romanian Jewish community were seemingly less endangered than other Eastern European Jews.

But freedoms were steadily eroded. Ownership of telephones and radios was forbidden, cars and finally homes and libraries were plundered. Only much later, when she read **I.C. Butnaru's** *The Silent Holocaust: Romania and Its Jews*, did Granirer understand the full extent of the devastation: half the Jewish population had been slaughtered.

Cattle trucks stood ready to deport the remaining Jews to the death camps, even as the country was "liberated" by the Russian army. This salvation, greeted rapturously at first, turned into another form of persecution. Under Communist rule, Granirer's father, a committed socialist, was forced into hiding until he could be smuggled out to Israel. The rest of the family eventually followed him, their emigration made possible by Israel's willingness to pay ransom for Romanian Jews. Granirer and her mother were each ransomed for \$100.

She describes her adolescent years in Israel as relatively happy ones, in spite of the poverty and crowded conditions. As an immigrant who didn't know the language she worked hard to gain an education, met a fellow Romanian who became her husband and, until marriage exempted her, did the required military service. The young couple hoped to remain in Israel but their departure, like that of most "brain drains" world-wide, resulted from the lack of jobs. The Hebrew University had no position for her husband, who had earned his Ph.D. in mathematics there. The U.S., on the other hand, propelled into the space race by the Russian success of Sputnik, was recruiting mathematicians.

Her husband's career

brought them first to the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana, later to Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, and finally to Vancouver, where Granirer began to find her way as an artist. As a schoolgirl she had been assigned the dubious and frightening task of producing a portrait of **Stalin**; in Israel she

• **Myfanwy Pavelic** and others. She was • honoured that architect and expressionist painter, **Maxwell Bates** bought one of her woodprints.

• During a year in Montreal, her camaraderie with artists living bohemian



JOAN GIVNER

other female artists and by attending a workshop in 1980 with **Judy Chicago**, whose sensational work *The Dinner Party* was drawing crowds. Judy Chicago's statement that no woman artist can ever make it big if

• Burnaby and at the Art Gallery of Greater Victoria, *The Trials of Eve* became the basis of an award-winning book and was made into a film, shown at two international festivals. It is now part of the permanent collection at the Glenbow Museum in Calgary.

• Her next project, *The Carved Stones* series (1985-90), mixed-media works on paper and canvas, was inspired by the rocks and stones of the Gulf Islands that display wild nature in its purest form, and by her contemplation of the contrast between them and the man-made statues of historical figures she saw in Paris.

• Her involvement with an international organization, Fear of Others: Art Against Racism, inspired *Out of the Flames*, a triptych depicting war, destruction and survival. This was accepted by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem for its permanent collection and later included in the exhibition *Virtues of*



Pnina Granirer in her studio.

had found employment in factories that produced painted clocks and lampshades but, lacking a green card in the U.S., she was unable to work. Instead, she discovered a new freedom in drawing and painting to please herself, practising art for art's sake.



IT WAS IN VANCOUVER IN 1965 that she made her first association with a gallery—the small Danish Art Gallery run by **Peder Bertelsen**. There, at the age of thirty, she had her debut exhibition. A year later, a second exhibition was scheduled in Victoria at a small gallery on Pandora Street. This brought her into contact with the artists who in 1971 formed The Limners Group—**Pat Martin Bates, Herbert Siebner, Karl Spreitz,**

• lives devoted exclusively to their art made her question the effect on her work of her own conventional life as a wife and a mother. Her doubts were reinforced by talking to

• she has a family resonated and propelled Granirer into her most ambitious work.

• *The Trials of Eve* (1983) is a series of twelve mixed-media paintings that examine the subjugation of women, beginning with the creation myth in the first two chapters of Genesis. Her model for the figures of Adam and Eve was a wooden marionette—face blank, race undefined, sex ambiguous, limbs easily manipulated. For the voice of Eve she chose the symbol of the Cannibal Bird of First Nations mythology. The structure of the series, to which she added lines of verse, echoed that of a play in three acts.

• After exhibitions in

The Trial from Pnina Granirer's series The Trials of Eve.

• *Memory: Six Decades of Holocaust Survivors' Creativity.*

• For this memoir, each step in Granirer's career is illustrated with her work—from the drawings she made of places and people in Israel and the American mid-west to the ambitious paintings of her most recent period. The paintings, many from *The Carved Stones* series, are reproduced in full colour. The visual component adds a rich dimension to this artist's account of living and creating through eight decades of monumental upheaval and change.

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• A MAJOR RETROSPECTIVE OF Pnina Granirer's work was published in **Ted Lindberg's** *Pnina Granirer: Portrait of an Artist* (Ronsdale, 1998).

• *Biographer and novelist Joan Givner writes from Victoria.*

