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***A PRIVATE, INTERESTING AND UNPREDICTABLE WORLD***

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John Donne referred to man as an island. In which case, if the island is full of treasures, then studying a detailed map of its private world can be interesting. Lately this was done here by Dan Zalka in his "Alphabet Book", which won the Sapir Award. On the Global scene, and mainly in European literature, there are many cases in which an artist shows his audience a map, keys, a catalogue, dictionary or encyclopaedia. When the scope is relatively small, the writer may rely on a photo or on several documents as a jumping board for a personal text. But when an artists wishes to display a larger scope, with broad horizons, the natural tendency would be to choose an encyclopaedic format.

Artists Karen Russo's book, "Encyclopaedia Thermica" is just that. In a relatively thick volume, with entries set in alphabetical order, Russo spreads out patches of her life as an artists and a thinker. It is obvious by definition, that the pieces we see are those that Russo wants to show us. This is mostly due to her work in the visual arts and her engagement in discussions and opinions that involve thinking about images, about the zeitgeist and about man's condition in our times. Thus the reader receives a text that is in its totality the writer's private move, like the entry "Voodoo", which includes a flicker of information and a short comment, though it is a theme that could provoke a much wider and deeper response, certainly on behalf of a person who is involved in art, consciousness, faith, myth and the connection between symbols and their perceptible influence in the world. Similarly, the entry "SARTAN" (which in Hebrew denotes both "crab" and "cancer"), contains two very short texts. One refers to cancer as a blood-thirsty parasite, busy activating its forceps and the other tells of an American farmer who miraculously recovered from cancer after being struck by lightning. But this

entry reveals Russo's personal standpoint: definition through extremes, dealing with images, touching primordial fear.

Russo's deep interest in myth and imagery, and especially in the deep connection between the two, is displayed before us in a long, thirty-page entry on the Niebelungs. A priori there is a private move here, which is a discourse about discourse as well, because Russo focuses on myth as it is presented in Fritz Lang's 1924 "Zigfried". The text deals with the manipulation of images, symbols and consciousness, with the treatment of the flawed German hero-model, with the question of German national cinematography versus ("Jewish") Hollywood's, and with the German's ethos of loyalty to the bitter end.

In a complementary text Russo goes on to shatter idols, concentrating on John Lennon and Ronald Reagan and their assassins. This reflects the fact that the writer belongs to the generation of TV imagery and duplicated reality, reflected in the logic of her discussion of murderer Charles Manson as well. As an artist and a thinker, Russo is depicted as very distant from the Israeli or Jewish world. Her entry on Blood, for instance, turns to allegory, dealing with rain of blood from the sky, without turning to the wonderful possibilities in Jewish sources, starting with the Bible, or even the Hebrew language. This is part of the process of our getting acquainted with Karen Russo, but these kind of emphases constitute a statement on large parts of the contemporary Israeli art world.

Russo is often attracted by the bizarre, as in her occupation with alcohol and spontaneous combustion. At times the metaphoric focus comes out, as in the Heart entry, the essence of which is Da Vinci's opinion that the heart's purpose is to supply heat. I find Karen Russo at her best when she is prudent with words and relies on a steadfast story, which keeps her discourse from "speaking about" and closer to "speaking the". In too many places we come across clumsy writing, which protrudes on the background of the light clarity apparent in the narrative parts that arouse our interest in Russo not only as an artist and thinker, but simply as a writer with a broad cultural background and an interesting talent.