One of the most intriguing and stimulating psychoanalytical concepts, “the Uncanny,” was formulated by Sigmund Freud in his article of that name. Freud defined the uncanny as “belonging to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror.” Amongst the complex of creeping and frightening things, Freud distinguishes a certain quality of the uncanny: “That class of the terrifying which leads back to something long known to us, once very familiar” (ibid.). In German, the word *Unheimlich* means “domestic” in a negative sense: the unfamiliar, the non-homey. This is a contradictory term, however, articulating the unfamiliar and the familiar, the known and the unknown, hidden and mysterious. Freud concludes that there is a hidden threat deeply rooted inside the apparently safe and known.

Women, in particular, are subject to the perilous nature of the uncanny, the unsafe, the unstable, the horrifying. Jacques Lacan elaborates Freud’s theory and claims that a woman, who has no penis to identify with, takes part in the social order only as non-man. The woman does not voice herself but only exists as opposite of man. Both the girl and the boy need to compensate their mother for her lack of a penis by “becoming a phallus” i.e., identifying themselves with the social order and norms represented by the name of the father (75–98). However, many feminist thinkers confronted Lacan. In her book *The Second Sex*, Simone de Beauvoir, for example, argues that “one is not born a woman, but becomes one”; namely, it is the social construction of women as the quintessential “Other” of Man that is fundamental to women’s oppression.

In her book *The Beauty Myth* Naomi Wolf contends that the modern “liberated” woman is, in fact, vulnerable and exhausted from within due to a constant need to protect herself from potential assault. The successful
working woman, more than her counterpart the housewife, is at risk of home violence, while also exposed to potential sexual harassment in her work place and the possibility of confronting “invisible attackers.” Further, millions of women around the world are being abused and even raped by their husbands or partners every year. Under these circumstances, women develop fantasies of protection.


According to Freud, the severed head of Medusa in Greek mythology is symbolic of castration anxiety. It is the moment when the child first lays eyes on the feminine vagina. The child freezes with dread and horror. Freud perceives the Medusa’s head as a threatening female sexual organ surrounded by undulating snakes/penises. Cixous criticizes this perception: “Woman will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her, which has been turned into the uncanny stranger on display – the ailing or dead figure”; and she adds, “Which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions.”

Cixous responded to the notion of the vagina as uncanny by encouraging women to write their own subjectivity and identity; to write (or create artistically) the beautiful and the poetic in the female corporeal experience, and not to be subordinated to the misogynist definitions of the woman’s body: “I write woman,” she explains, “woman must write woman. And man, man.” (4) Whereas the Phallic Eye is conventionally regarded as a masculine “scientific” way of defining women through knowledge (the kind of knowledge established within the patriarchal framework), I prefer a feminist perspective of a feminine uncanny, addressing the “dread and creeping horror” back to masculinity and its perilous pleasures and horrors.

I initiated the exhibition The Uncanny XX at a Tel Aviv gallery in February 2012. The exhibition sought to represent the psychological and social implications of this particular type of “uncanny,” the feminine uncanny. The name of the exhibition was derived from the biological definition of female genetics by the chromosome XX. The home environment proved to be fertile for extracting memories and experiences of women, who summoned the home space into their artistic work. The re-imagined home scene in this exhibition was constituted from the uncanny felt by women. The Uncanny XX problematized both body and soul: the desecration of the female body on the one hand, and the dismantling of her fragile mental trust, on the other.