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When Paradise Meets Hell

By Dana Gillerman

Miri Segal wanders in "Scanned Life," Michal Helfman diapers in the desert, Masha Yozefpolsky resuscitates salmon – three video installations now showing are journeys in a quest for love and meaning

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Masha Yozefpolsky's "Valeriana" Tel Aviv Artists House is mesmerizing, albeit it creates an uncomfortable feeling. She photographs herself in closed mysterious ceremonies and creates an atmosphere abounding in bizarreness. In the film screened on a plastic partition she attempts to resuscitate a salmon. In another work, which is screened on the floor, she revolves, in a fetal position, on a wheel. Tens of cups filled with white liquid are positioned on and around the screening surface. In the large space, two long platforms, reminiscent of a catwalk, upon which hundred of salmon tails devoid of heads and body, are positioned in perfect order.

At the end of the catwalk two video works are screened side by side. In both of them the (almost) same scenes are screened, at times overlapping, at times separate. Yozefpolsky stars in them too. Dressed in black scales, she is wearing on her head a black hat with bells, reminiscent of the hat of a clown or witch. The space in the films is unidentified and often appears to be a dream or an illusion. In one of the scenes her hybrid figure is turning the leg of a pig ("the borderline between East and West Berlin," she says in a conversation). In another scene she is running in the forest, a dog running beside her. In the background texts in different languages are intermingled. It is not always important to understand.

The viewer watching the film can choose to ignore the sight of the tails surrounding her – until the moment when more illuminated scenes are screened, also illuminating the sides of the stage. Then the tails gleam and intensify the sense of darkness. Those familiar with Yozefpolsky's work will not be surprised: the rituality, the borderline between sanity and madness. All these exist here too, perhaps in a somewhat stronger and more enduring dosage.

Nevertheless, this is the first time that Yozefpolsky links her inner imagination with external reality, which is almost as chaotic as her own. "This work deals with disorientation, getting lost, I believe that we are all lost," she adds.

The description of the course of life the salmon, which appears in the exhibition's catalogue, has been transformed into an overly clear metaphor. The salmon are born in the river, leave on a three-year journey to the ocean, and return to the place of their birth. Two days after they lay their eggs they die and their bodies become food for their offspring. "In the space of their birth the memory of their death awaits," Yozefpolsky summarizes the tragic process. Are there no rebels in their midst? She believes there are. In any event, Yozefpolsky, in the role of the Shaman, finds no cure. Not for her own world, and certainly not for external reality, which she defines as a sleep disorder.

In a circular motion

Yozefpolsky's exhibit is one of three video installations in this exhibition.



Masha Yozefpolsky "We are all lost".

Photography: Dudu Bachar

It is almost impossible to ignore their common features: a feeling of distress and going off on a journey in a quest for love, security, and meaning. This is a quest that reveals itself as a journey to the inner world, and before long it becomes patently clear that motion is circular, in an endless repetition, at times also hopeless...