



# EVERY MONKEY IS A GAZELLE IN ITS MOTHER'S EYES

Vered Maimon

David Adika's photography exhibition *Every Monkey is a Gazelle in Its Mother's Eyes* constructs a syntax composed of gazes and signs that tie together the political and the aesthetic. The word "aesthetic" is the only word that appears in any of the photographs, surfacing as part of a sign that reads "Coiffure & Esthétique" (hair and beauty salon) in *Untitled (Paris)*. The shop sign in this photograph, which in many ways encodes the ideas and sensibilities that characterize the exhibition as a whole, features a made-up woman whose black hair is pulled back and adorned with a single white flower. This image functions simultaneously as both an object and a sign: it is designed to point passersby's to the salon and to indicate the services it provides, while the woman is supposed to exemplify the specific "aesthetic" of beauty that the salon would like to convey to its potential clients. The nature of this aesthetic, however, remains unclear; similarly unclear is the question of whether the obsolete appearance of the sign is due to the use of a "hyper-realist" style of drawing designed to imitate the sharpness of a photograph, or whether it is actually based on a photograph that was retouched and transformed into a graphic image. The schematic nature of this image makes the woman appear as a representation of an ideal of beauty whose origins cannot be identified with certainty: on the one hand, this is a Western, classicist ideal embodied in the woman's light, smooth skin. At the same time, it could be described as an Oriental ideal, representing a modern Nefertiti with an elongated face and somewhat slanted eyes. This ambiguity is no coincidence, since the sign was photographed in Belleville, a Parisian immigrant neighborhood which, like similar neighborhoods in other metropolitan centers, is a locus of cultural and social hybridity.

In this sense one may argue that paradoxically, what this photograph, and by extension the exhibition as a whole, offers the viewer the recognition that "aesthetics" is not only a matter of "beauty." Rather, it is a function of the relations between place, identity, image, and gaze, which define and mark what the French philosopher Jacques Rancière calls "regimes" of vision and speech—regimes within which social roles are allocated in relation to a shared sphere of meaning. In this sense, the aesthetic is not the "negative" or the "other" of the political, since they both participate in the construction of the social field by means of the boundaries they establish. These boundaries, which are simultaneously material and perceptual, circumscribe the limits

of what is considered to be "common sense." The exhibition *Every Monkey is a Gazelle in Its Mother's Eyes* examines the manner in which the aesthetic acts to define and mark places, objects and identities. It also restructures the relationship between gaze and sign, so that the realm of the visible opens up onto a more complex set of social and cultural claims.

The title *Every Monkey is a Gazelle in Its Mother's Eyes*, which is based on an Arab proverb, itself underscoring the relationship between the gaze and the creation of meaning, and highlights the manner in which the gaze defines and marks by identifying and attributing a given value to what is seen. Building on this colloquial proverb, Adika photographs objects that are culturally defined as "low" or "kitsch": red roses, display windows on Tel Aviv's rundown Allenby Street, beauty salon signs. Yet the visual rhetoric of the photographs works against the sociological and cultural associations of these objects, since they are all photographed as "still-lives." The gaze directed at the objects, and as a result the effect of the photographs on the viewer, thus produce a new relationship between object, image, and sign. The interest that most artists, such as Martin Parr for instance, reveal in kitsch is documentary or anthropological, as part of an attempt to point to the social construction of taste and to present high art as a material product of economic privilege and power relations, rather than as a representation of universal, spiritual values. Adika, by contrast, eschews such a documentary approach, with its reliance on an "indifferent gaze" that seemingly neutralizes all vestiges of thematic or stylistic preferences. His photographs do not attempt to hide their inherently seductive and sensual quality as they are born of the wandering artist's wonder-filled gaze, which attempts to expose rather than to conceal, the relationship between seduction and the gaze, hence *Every Monkey is a Gazelle in Its Mother's Eyes*. □



David Adika, *(Nancy, Special Edition)*, 2008. Color photograph, 100 x 150 cm. Courtesy of the artist.





David Adika, *Untitled (Allenby A)*, 2009. Color photograph inkjet print, 118 x 173 cm. Courtesy of the artist.

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## THE BODY AS RECORD

Nelly Agassi



Nelly Agassi, *Bedroom*, 2005. Wood construction, mattresses, quilt, 8.6 x 11.3 meters. Courtesy of Dvir gallery and the artist.

I work and live in Tel-Aviv. My media is performance, video, installation and works on paper. The essence of my work is in the fact that it is a product of my own biography and being a woman, naturally my artistic terminology is one that derives from the female lexicon, the dictionary, the archive of female consciousness. Still, it is important for me to create through the reading of the human, universal language.

My works start in my own scale and proportions, and then spread, creating an extension of the self, the body and soul. They are both physical and metaphorical. The physical expression towers over the exhibition space, metaphorically delineating the option, the possibility,

the potential, and the infinity where one can arrive, or, rather, the infinity one can take in. That is the reason why the works can be seen as enormous, large-scale installations linked to the space in which they are exhibited. But I tend to relate to them, at times, as miniature works representing action and flow from me as a starting point, outwards, through the exhibition space that has been conceptually breached.

In most of the works, I use my body and presence as the material. The body is accessible for me like a cellular phone or a laptop that I carry with me, portable. The body is an instrument through which I experience life, and record my biography and personal history. It is like a physical

tunnel, through which I transform mental and emotional processes, and with it, this recording device, I transmit in the exhibition space. The body is a storage space to gather life experience, fears, passions, excitements, and dreams.

Pain is diluted by joy.

The use of the body, the performance, is held uniquely during the exhibition's opening. The performance then becomes an installation, a remnant holding the memory and energy of the action within it. It can be seen as an inseparable part of the hanging of the work in the exhibition space and even as a ceremony of parting from it; a kind of threshold, symbolizing and marking the end of one chapter and the beginning of another. □





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and record my biography and personal history.”



Nelly Agassi, *Whispers*, 2004. Coat hanger, knitting installation, 5 x 6 meters. Courtesy of Dvir gallery and the artist.





# THE FEMALE COMPLEX

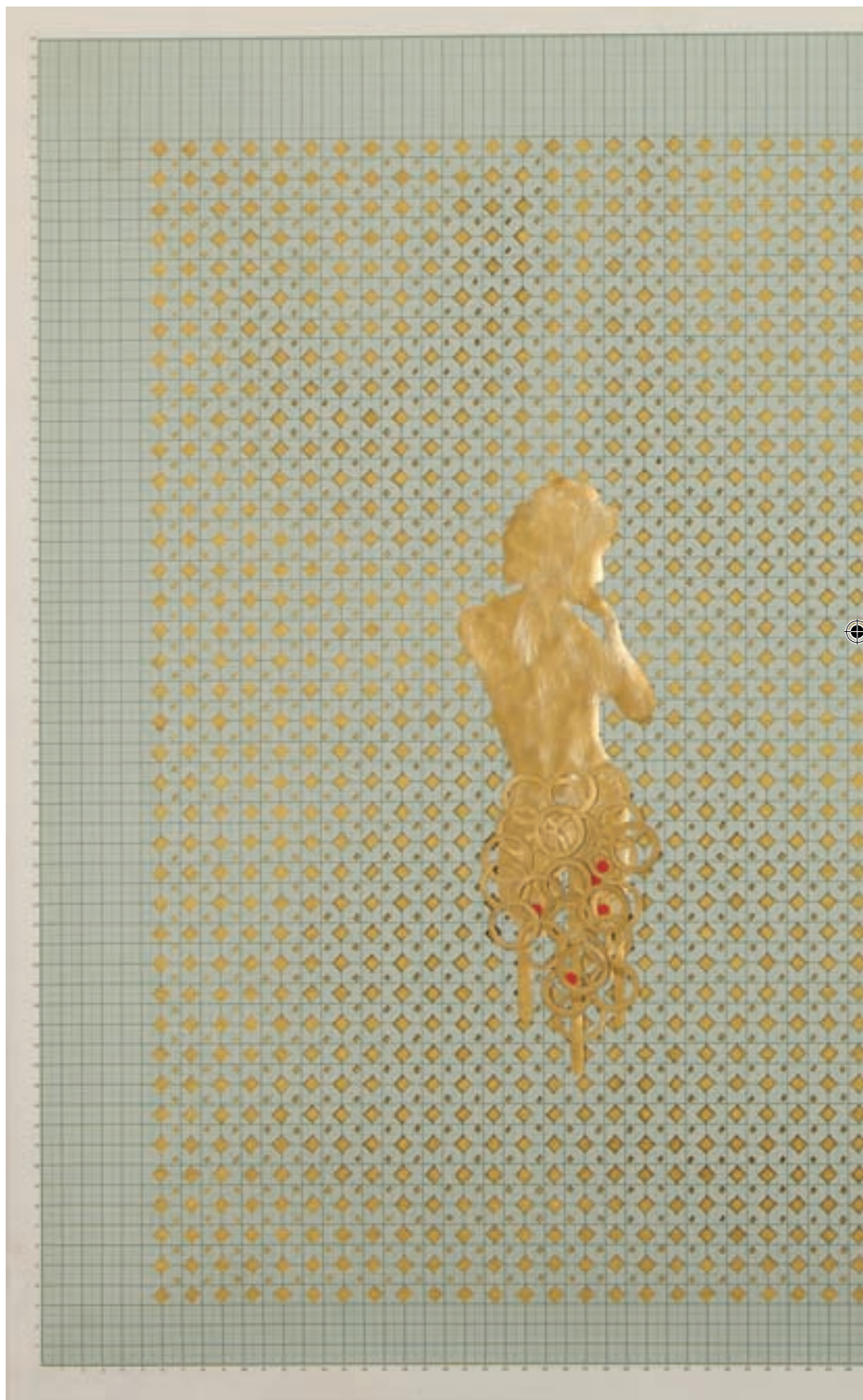
Hilla Ben Ari

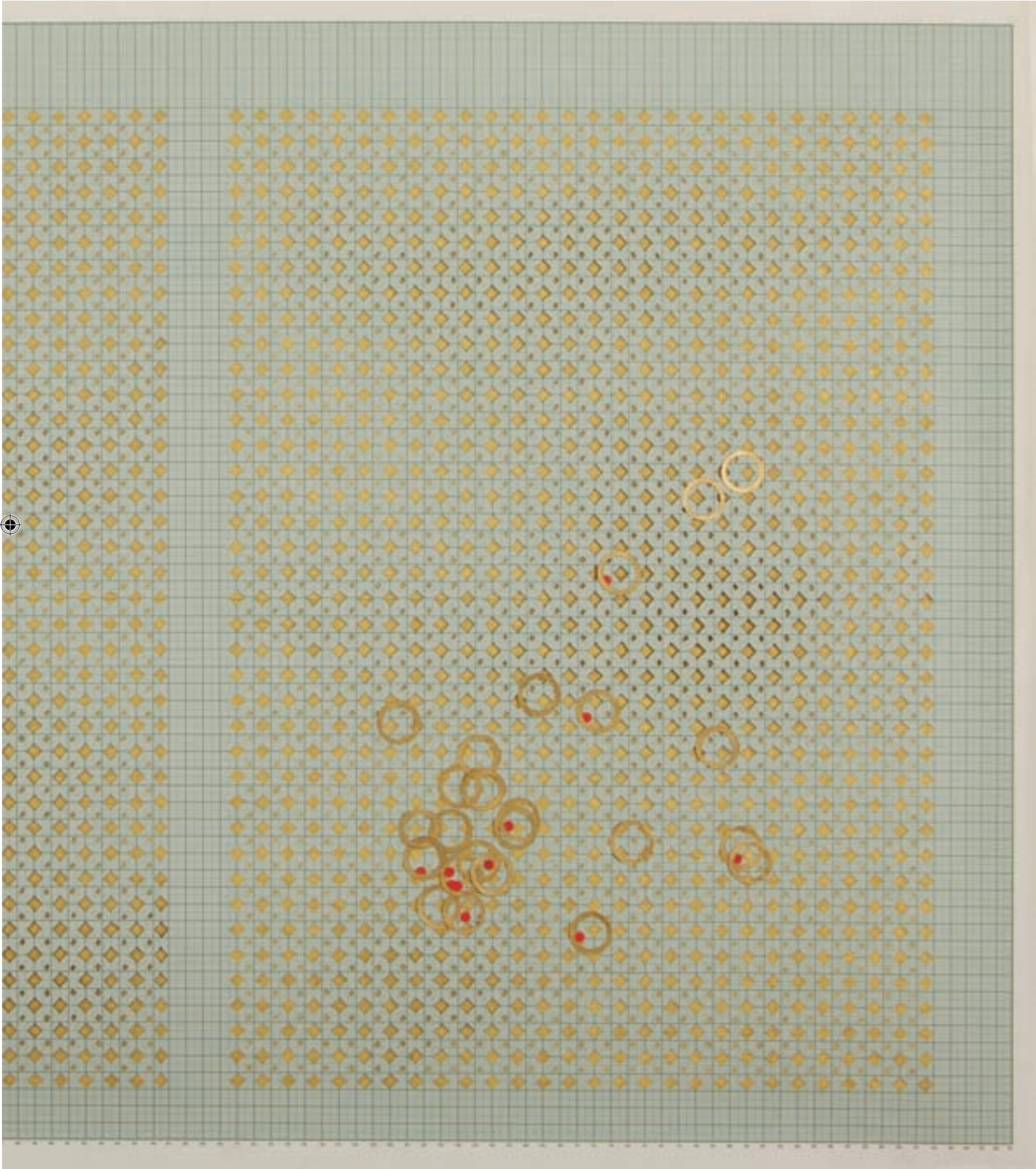
“...one of the reoccurring images in my work is the stag’s antlers, whose intricacy oscillates between a victim and a show of force aimed at sexual and territorial conquest...”

In my work, I combine various mediums such as installation, paper cuts, sculpture, and video. The majority of my installation works are composed of small units that come together to create large-scale objects unfolding in space. The objects are characterized by a grid-like structure whose delicate, fragile boundaries are destined to be penetrated yet are also marked by violence and aggression.

The female body as a crossroads of political and cultural contexts is at the core of my works. In confronting stereotypes of the female, the works present the body as a conquerable sphere, which is nevertheless—despite its weakness—trying to occupy a space as well.

Another main theme in my work is the complex relationship between the individual and the group. This issue is central in the Israeli society and it is also marked deeply in my biography, since I was born and raised in a Kibbutz. In my works, both themes are characterized by exploring the limitations of the body and questions of boundaries and space, which create a strong duality that is always present in the images. For example, one of the recurring images in my work is the stag’s antlers, whose intricacy oscillates between a victim and a show of force aimed at sexual and territorial conquest in a very tight social context. Other menacing bodies or objects constantly confront the female body. These elements pierce the body and, at the same time, create and sustain it; hence expressing the endless tension between frailty and aggression. □





Hilla Ben Ari, *Untitled*, from the series Green Graph Paper, 2010. Paper cuts and mixed media, 75 x 105 cm. Courtesy of the artist.





“The contradictory nature of the medium extends its qualities to the visceral, sexual, and violent images in my work.”

## THE ALIENATED BODY

Emanuel Faytchevitz



This page: **Emanuel Faytchevitz**, *Untitled*, 2003. Watercolor on paper, 50 x 70 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Opposite page: **Emanuel Faytchevitz**, *Here*, 2008. Watercolor on paper, 140 x 140 cm. Private collection. Courtesy of the artist.

Working with watercolor, I am captivated by the uncontrollable nature of the medium and how the vibrant stains function in opposition to the material's lack of depth. The contradictory nature of the medium extends its qualities to the visceral, sexual, and violent images in my work. One moment the stain takes center stage, a minute later it simply supports the fragility of the image, fulfilling both body as image and body as a fluid.

In this series, the human form is inspired by images taken from the world of medical simulations that use digital techniques to scan and map the body. The machine, piercing through the flesh, creates an abstraction of the human form, taking it apart and reconstructing it as a body of information while annotating defects and normal functions. My interest lies within this experience, in which a person visualizes their existence and body through a digital and transparent form, as a flat and alienated virtual body. This in turn is processed via a subjective and highly inaccurate rendition through the tip of the brush, giving way to a primal and painterly rhythm. □





Maya Israel, *Gaston's Face (Impersonation)*, 2008. Oil on canvas, 130 x 130 cm. Courtesy of Contemporary by Golconda.

## REMNANTS OF HUMANITY

Maya Israel

In my work, I am preoccupied with the representation of the human form through the dimensions of illusion and impersonation. The works deal with the distance a human has to go through so that it somehow diverges from itself, that is, its human position. The refining of a human, which is also a divergence from humanity, brings me to think and process the concept of "remnants": something within you that is more than just you.

The works are close-ups, in dimensions larger than human dimensions, so as to crystallize characters in their environment and create a tempting situation in which the character asks the viewer to come closer and blend into its reality.

Beyond the transitory aesthetic pleasure, the attractive faces which gaze back at us express the very failure that the eye cannot catch—the gaze of the other. The

eye's pupil remains an empty black hole, which does not return that which we crave the most. Yet I do not settle for the acknowledgement of failure, but continue my search.

The remnant of space functions as a part of the body that is nevertheless external. This backdrop, landscape may best function as that "remnant," related to the refining of the character and its parting with, or perhaps strengthening,





Maya Israel, *Interior Face (Remains to be Seen)*, 2009. Oil on canvas, 127 x 160 cm. Courtesy of Contemporary by Golconda.

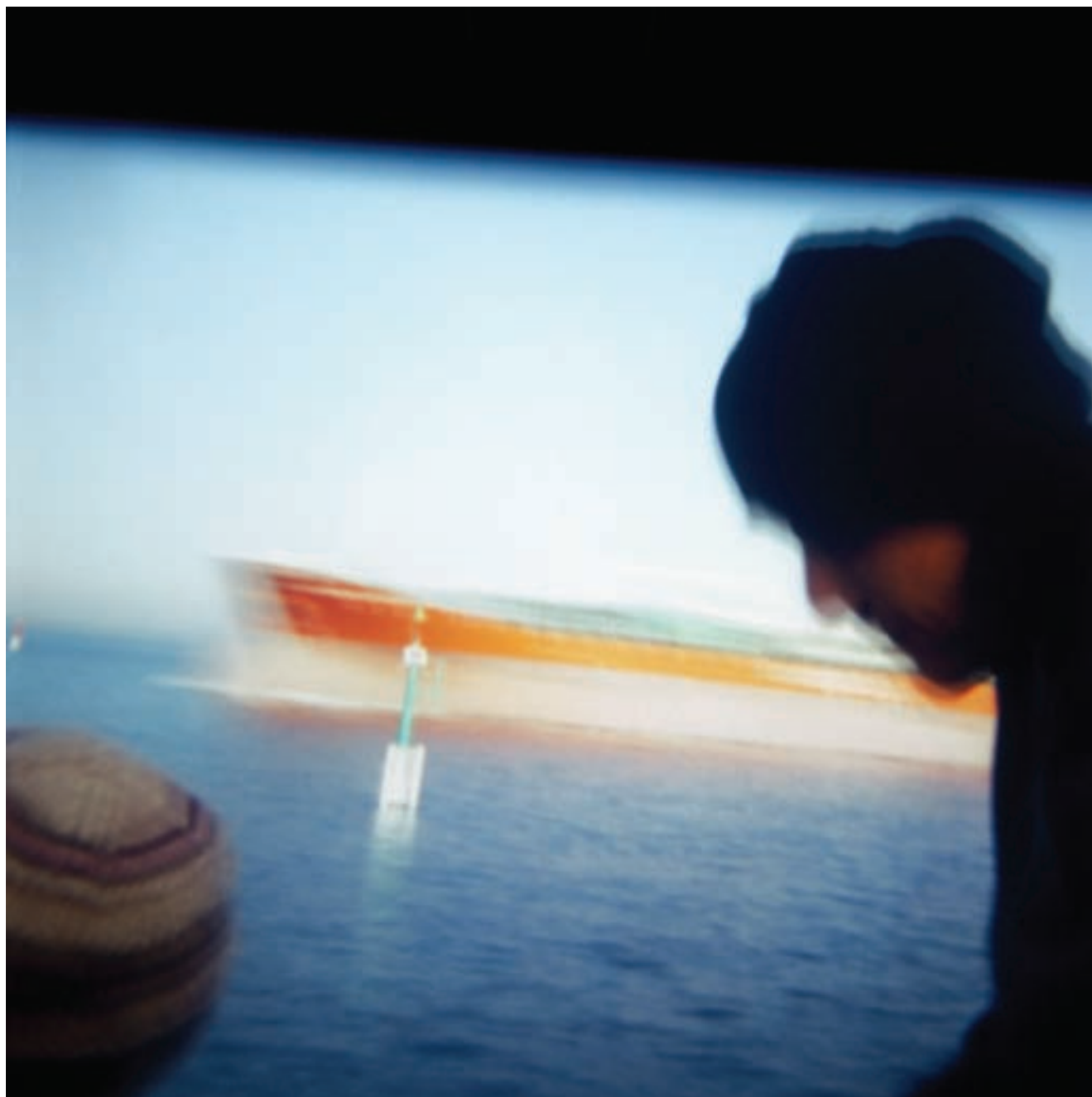
its own humanity.

With time, the remnant becomes more and more dramatic, at times being independent on the canvas. It blends with the character and can function as a screen.

The relation between the character and the "remnant" poses questions relating to the representation of humanity in my paintings, in the most acute manner! □

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Inbal Abergil, from the series *24 Frames Per Second*, 2008. C-print, 33 x 33 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

## REFLEX CINEMA

*Inbal Abergil*

I was born, raised, and educated in Jerusalem, Israel and now live and create in New York City. My photographs reflect my peripatetic life, but also the realities and unrealities of society dealing with modernity and conflict.

I photographed the series *24 Frames Per Second* (2008) inside the cinemas in Israel featuring Hollywood films. Sitting in the audience, I photographed with a medium-format still camera in long exposure, using the movie screen as my only source of light. Because these quick snapshot frames of a moving image relied on the unpredictable combination of the film speed and the reflexes of my finger on the shutter, the resulting stills were only revealed once the film was developed. The process became a chase for the ultimate image within the constraints of a medium that moves at twenty-four frames per second.

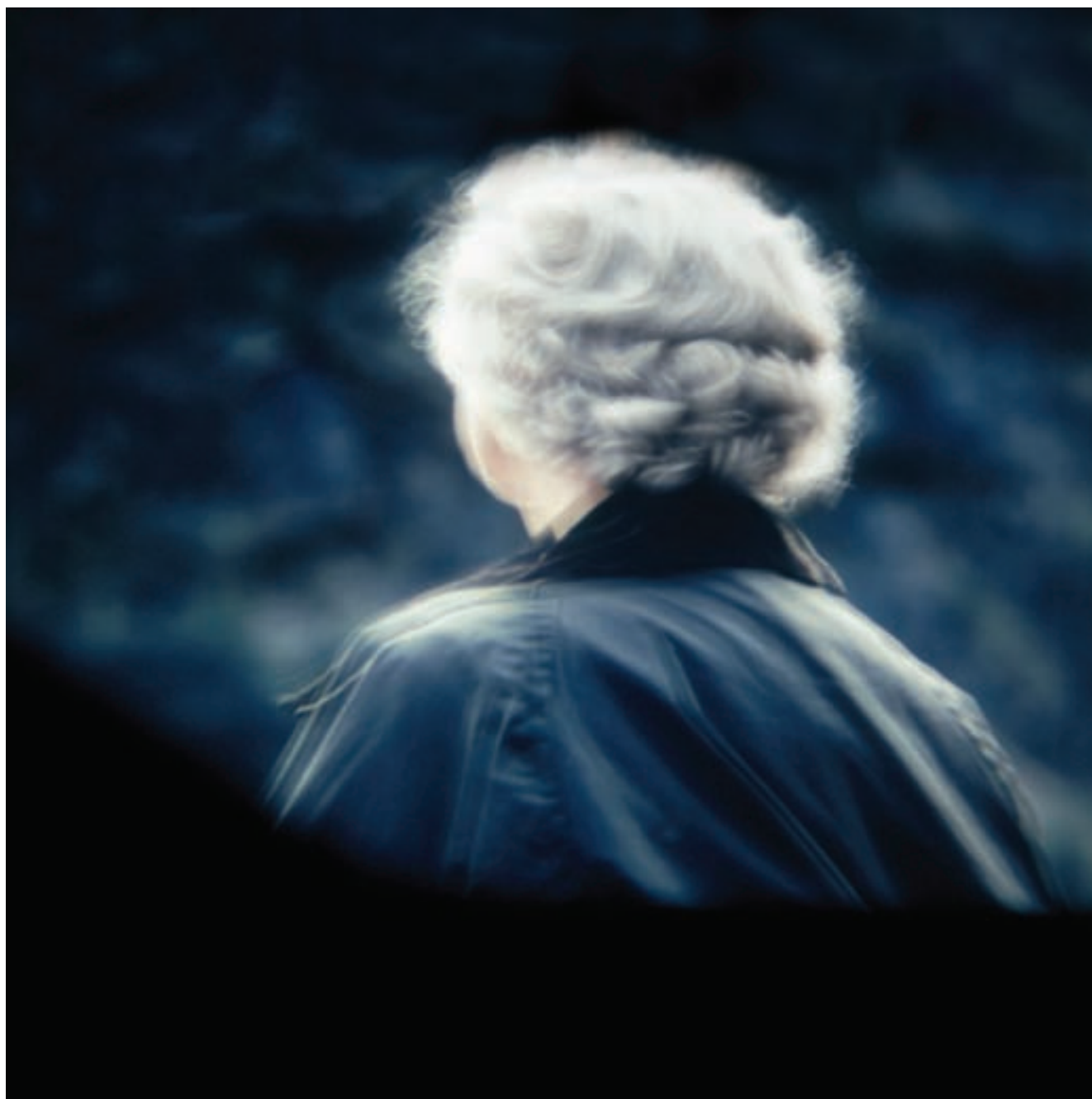
The cinemas in *24 Frames Per Second* are also temporary shelters in a way, providing an escape from the hectic daily life in Israel. Once moviegoers pass a routine

security check to enter the theater, they are transported to another place through conventional Hollywood narratives. I photographed these films as I watched them for the first time, which brought an element of surprise and mystery to a medium that is highly designed and staged. Each 33 x 33 square inch photograph depicts only a portion of the projection image on the screen, the floating black space created by rows of seats. The spectators penetrate the image as shadows. □





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## MIND THE GAP

*Ruthi Helbitz Cohen*

Having entered the space of Ruthi Helbitz Cohen's installation *Mind the Gap*, the viewer finds himself at the heart of an imaginary nightmarish space. The setting, consisting of painted paper cutouts, initially calls to mind a thicket of a wood generated by images whose physical presence in the space is palpable. The viewer is invited (almost forced) to wander inside the work, encountering, amid scorched trees and turbid pools, images from the external natural world (such as insects, dragonflies, mosquitoes, and butterflies), alongside images from the internal biological sphere (such as embryos, umbilical cord, brain, enlarged heart, and throat), suspended from the walls and ceiling.

The images, garnered from diverse sources, are treated similarly: they are painted on grease-proof paper with industrial paints, spray and ink, and are circumscribed by masking-tape which functions as a demarcation line, but at the same time resembles roots or an umbilical cord. The coloration of the cutouts, ranging from airy transparency to a bleeding-burnt hue, and their materiality instill the images with a similar essence. They fuse to generate a single universe in which a different regularity applies to the images, as the artist shifts and undermines proportion, gravity, and spatial perception, situating her world in an intermediate space between dream and wakefulness, between adult nightmare and a children's fairytale. □





Ruthi Helbitz Cohen, *Mind the Gap*, 2008. Mixed media on parchment paper cutouts, Installation view, Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art. Courtesy of Julie M. Gallery.





“Raff inserts misleading alterations into interior spaces and natural expanses, blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction.”

## A SUBVERSION OF THE REAL

Drorit Gur Arie

In her new series of photographs *Shangri-La* (2009-2010), Orit Raff processes landscape representations, seductive tourist traps, which she downloads from the website of a hotel chain by the name of “Shangri-La.” Shangri-La first emerged in James Hilton’s formative novel *Lost Horizon* (1933) as a utopian model, an inaccessible region in the Himalayas whose dwellers are immortal. The Western phantasm about the land—ostensibly mystical and perfect, yet isolated and sealed off—was also an expression of an exotic yearning for the Orient. Utopia, a reflection of the power of abstraction and the imagination, was described in Thomas More’s novel *Utopia* (1516) as a society of contentment fencing off the land of disorder, limiting the presence of outsiders in its territory.

Raff’s virtual journey into the landscapes of Shangri-La is marked by fragmentation, distortion, and camouflage. She inserts misleading alterations into interior spaces and natural expanses, blurring the boundaries between fact and fiction. The hackneyed, advertising images soon transform into a saccharine-sweet, somewhat threatening, excess. They oscillate between utopian perceptions and a dark postmodern dystopia. The fantasy of perfection is shattered when Raff freezes the blue waters of a pool, casts an invasive light beam onto a dark setting, or opens up a black hole in the foreground of a verdant lawn. The fragmentations, cuts, erasures, and shifts generate a morbid reality, which neither reproduces the existing order, nor relies on the technology of photographic representation as an image-fixing apparatus.

The signs comprising Raff’s “manipulated photography” correspond with her previous works, which explored the traces of objects and bodies in various spaces. Scratches, carvings, stains left by objects, and dust balls are enlarged and examined on the photographic surface as if they were residues left in a crime scene. This time her traces are planted in the virtual as anti-matter: erasures and additions on readymade Internet images that were cut off, emptied, and erased. They introduce the range of possibilities for manipulative intervention in the photographic process, offering a different view of reality, which is not a single truth, but the cloning, blurring, and masking of the photographic reality. □



Orit Raff, *Untitled*, from Shangri La series, 2009-2010. Lambda C-print, 74 x 110 cm. Courtesy of Noga Gallery of Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv.



Orit Raff, *Untitled*, from Shangri La series, 2009-2010. Lambda C-print, 50 x 70 cm. Courtesy of Noga Gallery of Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv.





## THE CONCEPT OF CREATING

Einat Amir

“This practice enables me to create partly staged, partly improvised, partly real-time, partly pre-recorded works, which aim to blend the notions of authenticity, fabrication, and manipulation.”

I am investigating the boundaries of the concept “artwork” by making works that doubt their own creative process, mode of observation, and interpretation.

Combining the media of video and performance, I use actors to perform loose character descriptions that I design for them. This practice enables me to create partly staged, partly improvised, partly real-time, partly pre-recorded works, which aim to blend the notions of authenticity, fabrication, and manipulation. My studio is a “lab of emotional research” where I experiment in creating interactions that engage the phenomenology of the viewer! □



Einat Amir, *Auditions*, 2009. Digital photographs and video. Photo credit: Michal Baror. Courtesy of Scaramouche Gallery, NYC.



Einat Amir, *Ideal Viewer*, 2009. Video installation and performance (detail). Courtesy of Scaramouche Gallery, NYC.