The World is No No-Man's Land

Don't think that the world is a no-man's land, made for wolves and for foxes to rob and to raid; the heavens—but there to hide from God's view; the mist—to conceal the criminal few; the soil—to soak in the blood that is spilled. Don't think that the world is a free-for-all place.

No no-man's land—no! No jungle, no waste! For measured and weighed are all things on this earth. No tear and no blood-drop are shed without count. No spark in an eye is put out without pain. Of oceans a flood and of sparks will spring thunder. Don't think there is no justice, nor judge!
previous spread
Dusk (detail), 2014
sand and bonding materials
101 × 180 × 5 cm
Sand Flag, 2013
sand and bonding materials
250 × 140 × 8 cm
Tide, 2014
sand and bonding materials
101 × 180 × 10 cm
Dawn, 2014
sand and bonding materials
101 × 180 × 8 cm
A Prince is Born (detail), 2013
Bardiglio marble
56 × 41 × 32 cm
Pickaninny Baby, 2013
Belgian black marble
38 × 43 × 50 cm
Massima, 2013
Portuguese pink marble
57 × 94 × 56 cm

Trava Maria, 2013
Travertine stone
39 × 52 × 48 cm

Trava Maria (detail), 2013
Travertine stone
39 × 52 × 48 cm

Massima, 2013
Portuguese pink marble
57 × 94 × 56 cm
THE WORLD IS NO MAN’S LAND

Salt Bridge Summit, 2011
12 channel video & sound installation,
300 cm round wooden table, 12 laptops

Sigalit Landau, Marie Shek and Andrew Renton in conversation
MARIE SHEK Sigalit, we are starting this dialogue in the midst of a military operation that’s taking place right now between Israel and Gaza. The sounds, the sirens, the news, the death of civilians makes us crazed, enraged and incapacitated.

SIGALIT LANDAU Yes, times are getting harder – not better. The conflict is consuming every bit of energy and erasing the fragile normality again and again. I am thinking of the third and final room of the Israel Pavilion at the 2011 Venice Biennale. There I installed the Salt Bridge Summit, an abandoned negotiation table, a reenacted debate between voices on 12 laptops attempting a quasi-political discussion.

MS Yes, a typically layered situation: under the table, over the table, and echoes of your bridge-building meetings.

SL On all the screens of the laptops I showed a barefoot girl in a cage of 24 seated legs; 12 women and men taking part in a debate. The child was connecting the group by tying their shoelaces to each other. (I used 12 cameras to shoot one ‘take’ resulting in 12 points of view.) But as she ties the participants’ shoelaces to each other, they abandon their shoes, their discussion and the table like refugees or prisoners of war.

MS When we met yesterday, we were both so desperate, so lonely, so sad, our energy was low to a degree that we could not develop any deeper concept or any clear image of what the new upcoming show will be like. A day later, I read your thoughts from the middle of the night and I am wondering...

SL I woke up needing to invent some other time – a different time, where we have legitimate and almost healthy bodies to be in. Archeology, traces of events, the marks, the debris and vulnerable reality construct can be my sources for creation only if I exist – I outline and carry inside me what feels like a weak armature. This echoes something intangible which feels displaced until I treat it...

"Let’s start there: what isn’t body is mass, or substance in the sense of mass, without extension, without exposition, a point. We can just as well call this spirit itself, spirit taken as concentration in itself, which we can say no more. What concentration in itself means for us today is effectively the annihilation of bodies, the annihilation of the body as extension, of the body of which there are always several. Of the body, there’s always a lot. There’s always a crowd of bodies, there’s never a mass of bodies. Where there’s a mass of bodies, there’s no more mass, and where there’s a mass of bodies, there’s a mass grave. And this is concentration.”

MS On one hand, your use of materials like sand, salt crystals, strands of sugar, water, sheep and cow dung... are materials that are everywhere and unlimited. These materials, are local ones, Mediterranean ones, cling well and surround you. But on the other hand, there is always an approach to the limit, a border, a threshold to your effort.

SL Not only are the materials Mediterranean, but my references are very instinctively and consciously local – be it a children’s game on the shore or an ancient Egyptian document. Local to me means the Middle East. The one identified in the past as the ‘Fertile Crescent.’ I am attracted to shadows, borders – places and materials coming from this zone... Bad reception, poor connections.

MS In the video Arab Snow (2009) you treated sugar and cotton candy in a most abstract and attractive way. The watermelon videos in the Dead Sea (Dead Sea, Standing on a Watermelon in the Dead Sea, Under the Dead Sea, all 2005) have powerful form, political metaphor and the simple sweetness of a beautiful local fruit.

ANDREW RENTON I’m conscious of these aspects on several levels. Sigalit deals with signs that come out of very local situations and they resonate in a more universal way. I like the willful title of the show, Knafeh, as a provocation to untranslatability. The word doesn’t translate because it is of its place. Actually, Sigalit, I remember one of our very first meetings – twenty years ago – you took me on a surprise journey through Jerusalem, without telling me where we were going. We ended up in that amazing place in the Arab quarter that serves the most delicious knafeh I have ever tasted. I remember it well, because it still strikes me that this was the site of common ground, of a shared language. Something in its place, in its right place. Do you remember that? Do you still go there?

SL I remember taking you from the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, adjacent to the ivory tower of the Hebrew University, into the ancient hidden part of Jerusalem, the north-eastern labyrinth in the Old City. Into the Muslim quarter, we entered the kingdom of knafeh. My big desire on the excursion was to share a knafeh moment with you, also as a glimpse into what this ‘place’ is for me – the optimistic version. Via the tantalizing smells of the Damascus gate, we were very soon surprised! Only ten minutes away from the Department of Art. A palace famous for its delicacies – “Jaafar” – a famous coffee house. Same dark granite covering the floor, as well as the tables, and an identical, overpowering, almost black, marble covering the walls. Skilled, busy, fast and not too friendly workers fill this hive: adding to the knafeh large quantities of honey, butter, melt, bliss !!! ... The colour – orange. Hunger and joy mix the air and make it move. I think I saw that this place touched you because it is where you suddenly understood the east/west contradiction in harmonious parallel?

AR Opposition, or contradiction, yes. It was very personal for me, a cultural, even theological, point of intersection. There was possibly more familiarity for me in that coffee house than in the Jewish Quarter. I guess we were there in more optimistic times, with freedom to pass from one quarter to another, but it remains for me the site of possibilities, of something shared. I don’t mean to be overly utopian, because these places should always be a site of tension ancient/modern, east/west, etc.
SL A fantasy is to belong and coexist and this is what the place essentially tastes like, the best kept haven where I am no longer welcome as of late.

AR ... And after the knafeh into the chaos of the kasbah...

SL ... Where I grew up. My family gravitated there almost every weekend to walk through the alleys of the Old City; colours, life, and excitement. No two visits were ever alike. Affordable jewellery, practical camel wool carpets, garments, shouting merchants, byzantine churches and trolleys with sesame seed rolls speeding through the crowds, screaming for them to “move out the way!” My parents (immigrant Mother and refugee Father) and I, their first born, are unsure to this day which side of Jerusalem was our home. Maybe neither side was. Maybe our ‘projection’ lay in the east side, with the Palestinian refugee/labourer, the oppressed.

AR Looking at the image of someone creating the sticky tray an image of two things is formed. First it resonates in a painterly way. It’s a video of composition in motion. It looks like painterly expressionism. And then there is the politics of making something as simple and symbolic as this pastry. It’s a modest practice, but a tradition that bridges, like so much of your work, as Marie points out. It’s a continuity that doesn’t recognise borders.

SL I agree. The film is rooted in my fascination. By carefully observing the beautiful process, precise components, skilled and elegant movements and compositions involved, especially the materials. It is not only a metaphorical, nostalgic joy/lament, but also an insistent wish to return, to be contained by this other…. A video is already, in its essence, half a painting, half a pixelized two-dimensional representation by air and light. While eating knafeh you feel the maize as grains of sand clinging to your teeth. This actually connects very well to the sand works inspired by the location of the video Azkelon (2011).

AR Yes, I was keen for some of these works to be included in the show. Again, because they speak the language of painting – anything framed into a rectangle should always alert us to this. But they are also materially derived from the place. Political because of this origin. There’s you walking on the sand, cutting into the sand, drawing a flag. Metaphorical because they point to the shifting ground, one that may barely be contained.

AR As a painter I often thought about this in relation to the persistence of conflict there. It was always surprising to me how little contemporary art in Israel depicts the conflict, how little puts an actual image to it. Yet it does seem to carry the conflict’s burden...
SL. Maybe by working away like a ‘siren of hope’, lips just move silently. And passing by the mirror I see my (ageing) lips still whispering: Oh no, but this bombing right now from Gaza…. this can’t continue forever. Heaping fresh and old scars on a leper. Guilt killed the knafeh. Why was it poisoned? Why did Great Britain leave our area with this explosive potential?

AR. You might say that the British left when their idea of orientalism, fictionalized through architecture and mapmaking, backfired. It was something of the return of the repressed. But it’s interesting that very little of the mandate era remains, except for a few civic edicts here and there. This is hugely different from any other British ex-colony, for example. On this subject, of course, we should mention your own British roots. Your grandparents came here; your grandfather was one of the crucial intellectual voices in London through the Jewish Quarterly, which he founded in 1953...

SL. After a brief attempt at living in Palestine in the 1930s, as pioneers expected to work in agriculture, my grandparents (he: poet/journalist and she: movement and dance teacher) returned to Vienna and then fled to Prague in 1935 as a result of the fascist Putsch. There my grandfather was helped by the Czech Trust Fund and the National Union of Journalists in England, in November 1938, after the Munich Agreement to refuge in London. The family of my grandmother perished in either Theresienstadt or Treblinka, traces unclear. My mother was born in England in 1942. My father was born in 1940 and grew up in a concentration camp.

MS. The marble breastfeeding pillows, both feminine and phallic, are embracing the theme of the ‘Madonna and Child’, as understood in the history of art throughout the centuries. I assume that it’s the very deep moment in which you yourself became a mother. We can see clear influences of Louise Bourgeois, and also subtly dealing with the fragile relationship between men and women. Henry Moore forms could also be a relevant point of reference as you create an abstract motherly body/site. How was it to move into working with marble ?

SL. My ‘usual’ mineral is salt – those sterile Dead Sea crystals. There I also experience the desert, stones, rocks, drought, silence … My wish to evolve my practice from papier mâché into working with marble came around the time I became a mother. (Maybe becoming suddenly extremely heavy had something to do with it?) Entering terra incognita. Face to face. Me and my concrete being, raising a child. What a sanctified (dis)comfort! Marble was always the stuff of the kitchen work-counter or monument material [mega-place]; but in the nursing cushions – I think I merged the two opposites and I make homage to both Bourgeois and Moore, yet given I started the process with a cast of a mother and baby and started the work process with a cast of a readymade. Marcel Duchamp may also come to mind.
MS. Maybe moving from more temporary, unstable materials to the permanence of marble, makes something which will outlive us and will share space with historical sculptures and feminist issues. The way you give shape to the nursing cushion, following from Bourgeois, is your way of answering this conflict. Motherhood will always be the saviour of manhood: we were born to mother...

SL. Motherhood is part of a woman’s life if she chooses to accept this marvellous role. I don’t think it is our essence in principle, only our need – in practice. Same as breathing. The act of making giving and receiving, love is what we do, or we die. My art is sometimes about what I can’t do but yearn for. I know movement but I don’t know knowledge. I feel and see how women were absent in culture, suffer(ed) a burden, have a different story to yell – but how can we, from this chaos, insist on being burdened, wronged, and so different?

July 2014

notes
2. The title Azkelon is a coined hybrid of the Israeli ‘Ashkelon’ and Palestinian ‘Aza’ (Gaza), adjacent cities, separated by a border, sharing the same shore.
Hope, 2013
rope suspended in Dead Sea water
85 x 30 x 18 cm

Slopes, 2013
rope suspended in Dead Sea water
65 x 30 x 18 cm
previous spread
Azkelon, Freeze-Frame #1 - 3, 2011
archival inkjet prints
120 x 67 cm

Erasing #2-5-10, 2011
archival inkjet prints
120 x 67 cm
Studies

1995 Post graduate extended studies at Bezalel, Jerusalem

1993 Cooper Union School of Art and Design, New York City (student exchange)

1990-94 Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem (B.F.A.)

Solo Exhibitions

2014 Moving To Stand Still, Koffler Centre of Fine Arts, Toronto

2013 The Ram in the Thicket, Maison Hermes, Paris

2012 Solo Exhibitions

2011 The Dining Hall, Kunst-Werke Institute, Berlin

2010 Salt soils + Sugar knots, Kamel Mennour Gallery, Exeter (sonic performance piece), Spacex, Somnambulin-Station, Art, Tel Aviv

2009 Garden of Learning, Busan Biennale 2012, Busan Museum of Art, Busan

2008 The Absent Body, Beit Haftosot, Tel Aviv

2007 Sport in Art, MOCAK, Krakow


2005 The Natives are Restless, New Work, Sherman Galleries, Sydney

2004 Salt sails + Suger knots, Kamel Mennour Gallery, Exeter

2003 Margin, Mucsarnok, Kunsthalle, Budapest

2002 The Endless Solution, Helena Rubinstein Pavilion for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv

2001 ‘Dreaming Art / Dreaming Reality’, Y Gallery, Ramat-Gan

2000 Suffering and Redemption, SCHUNCK*, Heerlen

1999 The Natives are Restless, New Work UK, Chisenhale Gallery, London

1998 Resident Alien II, The Israeli pavilion to the Venice Art Biennal (with Yassi Bregenzar Kunstverein, Bregenz)

1995 VooWerk 5, Witte de With Center for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam

Lives and Works

in Tel Aviv

1995-1996 Lives and Works, Jerusalem, Israel

1999 Born

Group Exhibitions

2014 Corpus, Zacheta National Gallery of Art, Warsaw

Feast Your Eyes, Davis Museum at Wellesley College, Wellesley

A Moving Image, Art Gallery of Alberta, Edmonton

Don’t Talk, Man, Wanás Kunst / The Wanás Foundation, Wanás

The expression of suffering in the art of the XX and XXI century, Red Cross Museum, Grenoble

Sculture du Sud, Villa Mattis, L’ile sur Sa"ange

Carte Blanche, Galerist, Istanbul

Silent Among Us, Loft Project ETAGI, St. Petersburg

The Chicago Triangle, Haifa Museum, Haifa

The Art Of Life - Between Tradition and Change in the Middle East, Uppsal Art Museum, Uppsala

Politics, Political and Social Issues of the Body’, Sungik Art Museum, Seoul

Danse Macabre, Binyanini Gallery, Tel Aviv

Confrontation, Galerie Minotaure, Paris

Go Get Your Knife, Salon Academi, Warsaw

International Biennial of Photography and Visual Arts, Liege

Ziba El-Aid, Hay El Printers & Publishers, Tel Aviv

Zaryn Centre of Contemporary Art, Vlaardingen

Anti Atlas of Borders Exhibition, Tapestry Museum, Aix-En-Provence

The Compromised Land: Recent Photography and Video from Israel, Neuberger Museum of Art, New York City

Tempocolor Festival, Les Chirous, Liege DIGGING UP, Group Show, Binyanini Gallery, Tel Aviv

Unstable Territory, Borders and Identity in contemporary art, Center of Contemporary Culture Zenina, Palazzo Strazzoi, Florence

Between Language & Image, collected stories #5, Watau Art Festival, Watau Emulsion, Chonam College, Collaboration with David Grosse, Tyon Six Memos for the Next, Magazine

Bregenz Kunstverein, Bregenz

Moving images, inspired video-art, Deventer

Skin, Royal Hibernian Academy, Dublin

Here, elsewhere, Contemporary Art Museum, Marseille-Provence

Ca’dorov exquis, Musee Granet, Aix-en-Provence

Arts in Memoria, Sinagoga di Ostia, Rome

Flash and Blood, Museum on the Seam, Jerusalem

Touch, FUTURA Centre for Contemporary Art, Prague

Alone Together, Rubell Family Collection, Miami

Muezzin, Kayma Gallery, Jaffa

CARNEM, DOCVA Documentation Center for Visual Art, Milan

Private/Corporate VII, The Doron Sebbag Art Collection ORS., Ltd., Tel Aviv

In dialogue with the Damier Art Collection, Stuttgart/ Berlin

Exposition Pluriel – Regards sur l"art contemporain Israélien, Villa Emerige, Paris

Garden of Learning, Busan Biennale 2012, Busan Museum of Art, Busan

Who is Afraid of the Cylinder, The Sphere and the Cone?, Musee d‘art contemporain de Rachechouart, Rochehouart

The Female Crescent: Gender, Art and Society, Rutgers Institute for Women and Art, New Brunswick

Memories of the Sea, The Avignon Castle, Camargue

Baruch Ben Dor, Beit Hafotso, Tel Aviv

Art Darkness at the edge of town, exURBAN Screens Project, Frankstone Arts Center, Melbourne

EXenMOORD, Rotterdamse Salon, Rotterdam

Silent Among Us, Loft is another man’s flesh, Israeli Pavilion, Venice Biennale

And Visual Arts, Liège

Go Get Your Knife, Salon Academi, Warsaw

Installation at the Thread Waxing Floor is another man’s flesh, Israeli Pavilion, Venice Biennale

Video and zoetrope installation, Six Memos for the Next, Magazin

Emulsion, Oranim College, 5 Lichtsicht – Unstable Territory, Borders and Identity in contemporary art, Center of Contemporary Culture Zenina, Palazzo Strazzoi, Florence
Contemporary Arts, Victoria
Borderlines, Theaterfestival 2003, Antwerp
35 prints, 35 Years of Occupation, Artists’ House, Jerusalem
Young Israeli Art from the Jacques and Genia Ohana Collection, Tel Aviv
Museum of Art, Tel Aviv
ArtFocus 4, International Contemporary Art Biennial, Underground Prisoners’ Historical Museum, Jerusalem
Heiliger Sebastian, A splendid readiness for Death, Vienna Kunsthalle, Vienna
Attack!, Art and War in the Media Age, Vienna Kunsthalle, Vienna
Spiritus, Magasin3, Stockholm
Kunsthalle, Stockholm
2002
Imagene, Umm el-Faham Art Gallery, Umm el-Faham
Video Zone, International Biennial of Video Art, Herzliya Museum of Art, Herzliya
Side Effect, Midrasha Gallery, Tel Aviv
Land of Shadows, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv
2001
Spunky, Exit Art, New York City
Messages to the New Millennium: Israel Art Today, Museum of Modern Art, Saitama
Action Express, The Rachel and Israel Pollak Gallery, Kalisher Art School, Tel Aviv
Four Israeli Artists, LeQuartier, Centre d’Art Contemporain, Quimper
2000
Contemporary Art from Israel, Heidelberger Kunstverein, Heidelberg
Angel of History, The Herzliya Museum of Art, Herzliya
1999
Tales of the Sand, The Fruitmarket Gallery, Edinburgh
1998
Habew Work, Museum of Art Ein Harod, Ein Harod
Ninety Years of Israeli Art, Selected Works from the Hachmi – Israeli Phoenix Collection, Tel Aviv Museum of Art
Political Art of the Nineties, Haifa Museum of Art, Haifa
1997
Imprisoned without Trial, Beit Ha’am Gallery, Tel Aviv
1996
Resident Alien 1, ArtFocus 2, The Herzliya Museum of Art, Herzliya
The Event Horizon, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin
1994
Transit, ArtFocus, Tel Aviv central bus station, Tel Aviv
Export Surplus, (ArtFocus 1), Bugrashov Gallery, Tel Aviv

Awards and Scholarships
2012
Artis Grant Recipient
2007
Dan Sandel and the Sandel Family Foundation for Sculpture Award, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv
2004
The Beatrice S. Kolliner Award for Young Israeli Artists, Israel Museum, Jerusalem
The Nathan Gottesdiener Foundation Israel Art Award, Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv
2003
The America-Israel Cultural Foundation
Jannette and George Jaffin Scholarship
‘IASPIS’ – Stockholm, May–September
Residence
2001
Acquisition Prize, Tel Aviv Museum, Tel Aviv
Young Artist Award, Ministry of Science, Culture and Education
2000
Winner of the ArtAngel/Times commissions 2000 competition, London
1999
Artist-in-residence at the Hoffmann Collection, Berlin 1999
1998
The Ingeborg Bachman Scholarship, established by Asselm Kiefer, Wolf Foundation
1994
America-Israel Cultural Foundation Scholarship; Mary Fisher Award, Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem
1993
The Jewish National Fund (USA) Sculpture Award

Selected Bibliography
2012
“Sigalit Landau - Caryatid”, The Negev Museum of Art, Negev
“Jean de Lassy, Ilan Wagan, “Sigalit Landau - One man’s floor is another man’s feelings”, éditions kamel mennour, Paris, 54th International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di venezia, Israeli Pavilion
“Yoigal Zalmona, “100 Years of Israeli Art”, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem
“Signs of life”, Kunstmuseum Luzern
2008
“Sigalit Landau, Publishers: Hatje Cantz
“Eventually We’ll Die: Young Art in Israel of the ’90s”, Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art
1999
Volker Adolphs and Phillip Norten, “Going Staying: Movement, Body, Space in Contemporary Art”, Hotje Cantz, Germany
1995
1997
“Friction: I-body, I-language, I+you”, The Venice Biennale / The Ministry of Education

Works in Public Collections
Israel Museum, Jerusalem
Kunstmuseum Kloster Unser Lieben Frauen, Magdeburg
Pompidou Center, Paris
The Tel Aviv Museum of Art, Tel Aviv
The Jewish Museum, New York City
The Brooklyn Museum, New York City
Magazine 3, Stockholm
Museo De Arte Contemporáneo De Castilla Y León Musak, León, Spain
Museos Archivos y Bibliotecas, City of Madrid, Madrid
Museum of Modern Art, New York City
Knafeh (detail), 2014

Video
16:20 min

Poem by Y.L. Peretz, translated from Yiddish by Landau’s grandfather, Jacob Sonntag, and included in the first volume of Jewish Quarterly in 1953, which he founded and edited. (S.L.)