



Tal Shochat: Stars Outside

27.10.22 — 10.12.22

Curator: Maya Frenkel Tene

The current exhibition represents another layer in Tal Shochat's extensive body of work, investigating questions of Identity and Place. For more than two decades Tal photographs her family members in a way that speaks to the inherent conflict between the personal-familial narrative and the national-collective ethos. Through her video works and her carefully constructed photographs, she brings together the mundane reality of the everyday, the trauma of migration and the fantasy of utopian Levantinism - a concept widely discussed in Jacqueline Kahanoff's writings¹. The exhibition is centered around a video work that features another chapter in the imagined inter-generational narrative, and represents a sequel to **Family Film**, 2017. In it a surreal voyage of migration of the tribe members is depicted, led by Tal's father and mother. This current video opens with a night scene, as we see the mother, dressed in black, pacing back and forth on a beach, her gaze is directed at the water. A boat with a person in it (her son perhaps) seems to navigate its way to safe landing. A young girl is standing on a rooftop, looking into the dark night sky. With magical powers, she switches off and on the stars above, helping to steer the boat of the exiled son. In the distance an old crusaders wall can be seen, and on the beach is a model of a sand city, a form of Kasba. The next scene reveals a fantastic space that lies beneath the surface. Inside a Turkish bathhouse a purification ceremony is taking place, its central character is the father, and in the adjoining hall, a young toddler, perhaps one year old, is dancing on a large stone stage, adorned with bell bracelets and surrounded by the women of the tribe.

The ancient story on which the plot is based stretches into a mythological archetypal world, represented by the photographs. Two large sandstones are erected in an area where remnants of ancient quarries and burial caves were found. On the one hand the sandstones seem solid and mighty, deeply anchored in the ground, on the other hand, just like Tal's familiar images of Trees, they are photographed against a dark backdrop, uprooted from their natural habitat. Another rock is shown upside down, as if floating between two worlds. In another photograph, an orange tree is shown against a light blue, turquoise carpet, an image which carries cultural significance in relationship to Jewish mysticism and the history of Israeli art. The Persian carpet represents Nature - in the form of a garden or a grove (Pardes/Paradise) - an image considered sacred in Persian culture for its representation of the world, while the tree itself becomes an aesthetic object in the context of Still Life.

The motion between land and sea, home, diaspora and migration touches upon an inherent lack, and an absence of a primary connection to a place - a country, a state, homeland. From within this sense of estrangement, the family tribe members attempt to recreate an alternative biography and to form a personal mythology that does not necessarily reflect the national one. Tal appropriates the archetypal Eastern aesthetics from a position of nostalgia towards an imagined home. It is a place of non-binary identity, a promise that have yet to be broken, for an intertwined Arabic and Israeli cultures, as briefly happens in the movie, when the toddler finally agrees to be gathered into the matriarch's arms.

¹ Jacqueline Shohet Kahanoff (1917 – 1979) was a Cairo-born novelist, literature critic and essayist. Kahanoff believed that the ancient bond between the Jewish and the Arab people offers a possible outlet for a dialogue that may end the conflict. According to her, the Israeli denial of its own Levant origin is one of the main causes for the fracture and animosity between the two nations. Another angle for discussing a possible solution for the conflict is based in her feminist views, offering that once women would become influential in the political arena, they could remind the two peoples that they historically originated from one womb.

* **Start Outside** is a title of the first book of poetry published by Nathan Alterman in 1938.