

Interview with Shahar Marcus

Realized by Rose Merriman
on the occasion of the exhibition

WATER(PROOF)

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Curated by Rachel Rits-Volloch & Tainá Guedes

I met Shahar Marcus in the Momentum Gallery. Visiting with friends who brought us a box of dried figs, he was happy to take some time away and do a quick interview. We sat in a corner of the room on small stools. I balanced my mobile phone perilously on my knee to record the interview, silently praying it wouldn't fall when we were talking.



My first question to Shahar was about his experiences with food as an art medium. He gave a laugh when I asked him, saying it was a good question as “it is a question, I have been asked many times, about my connection between art and food.” He continued. “From 2003 to 2012, there was a big connection (between my work and food) at this time. People ask why I work a lot with food, why I have lots of performances and art with food. Starting as a performance artist, the notion is that artist works with body. It is one of the most important things. Food is an essential substance for body. It goes inside your body and goes out. It was intuitive to use food as a colour, to use food as sculpture, to use food on my body, inside my body, outside my body. Using food was as natural for me as using my body. That was that. At that time, I did a lot of works with my body as a performance artist and as a video performance artist.”

He went on to discuss his research with different kinds of food, like dough. “Dough is like your friend as it is a living organism. It expands, I have a work where I wrestle and box dough because I wanted an action that needs some reaction. I could do that with the dough.” Shahrar said. “I did other things with traditional Israeli food, with cookies, with oranges. Oranges are a symbol in my country, a symbol of establishment of the country as an agricultural country. The orange was the main export fruit in Israel. Israel was covered in orchards. Today, there are hardly any. In the past 30 years, the oranges went to Spain. Slowly, people began to build houses where the orchards were. Real estate is better money than oranges. In 2003, I did a big work with oranges but then I didn’t touch it again until 2014 because this work was a big success and wherever I go, I would hear ‘Ah, he’s the artist who is doing something with oranges!’ And if somebody wanted to do something with oranges in Israel, they would say no you can’t, Shahrar has already done it.” He laughs. “He owns the oranges!”

Then in 2014, Shahrar returned to the orange as a material in his work. talking about the absence of oranges and the absence of what was once a symbol of his country.

We went on to discuss *Salt Dinner*, a performance he did back in 2012 with German-Turkish artist, Nezaket Ekici who is also featured in the show with the documentation of her 2015 performance *Water to Water*.

“It was spontaneous...The night before, Nezaket said ‘We are already at the Dead Sea, let’s do also something together.’ We thought about what we could do, I don’t remember who suggested that we do a dinner at the sea. We ran to the supermarket and started grabbing things. It was the night before (we filmed). We called the photographer and told him that we would be filming two videos. He said okay, what are you doing? We said we are having dinner in the Dead Sea, He said okay, how? We are taking a wooden board, and you know everything floats on the Dead Sea. The photographer says “eh, if you do that everything will sink!” Because your body can float because it is made of 70 percent water. If you put a stone in the Dead Sea, it doesn’t float! Okay, so what are we doing?”



Luckily, the problem was solved using six bottles of water underneath the wooden board to help to float. There were other challenges however while filming *Salt Dinner*. “So, the thing was we were meant to wake up very early at 2am and get out to the sea at 5am. At 6am, it was meant to be Nezaket’s work being filmed and at 8am, *Salt Dinner*. But things have their own way, time grew, and we finished Nezaket’s video at 10:30. It was August and it was around 45 degrees, and it’s not only that, the Dead Sea is like a mirror. You have the heat and you have the sun, it’s like double, double, double! It’s okay at 7am but 10 o’clock? It’s already

too hot. People were saying let's not do it but Nezaket was determined, No, no we're doing it! So around 12 o'clock, we got into the water, we were very tired. We got into our dress, but we are dead! We didn't even start filming yet!"

It was going to be a short shoot; the entire filming time was only about 15 minutes. In the video, you can see the water of the Dead Sea going into the bodies of both Shahar and Nezaket. They take the lettuce and put it in the salty water and then eat it. Shahar cuts a watermelon and the water from the sleeves of his suit is going into the watermelon, and they are drinking wine that was full of the salt from the sea.



"It was only 15 minutes, but it looks like forever. We didn't think about filming at 12 o'clock, we thought about aesthetics. It was a..." He gives a heavy sigh "...very difficult scene. It was very intense and not enjoyable; you can see that in the video. We are trying to help each other. Half of the time, I am trying not to make everything fall and trying to eat at the same time and trying to give something to Nezaket, as well as trying to give something to myself. (When) it was over, and we got out of the sea, we puked for twenty minutes because we couldn't handle the water."

After *Salt Dinner* was edited, Shahar saw many unexpected results; "What I like about this work is that when we edited it, I saw so many things that I didn't know (were going to happen). I didn't know that we looked that way. I didn't know that it was going to be such an intense and difficult dinner. I didn't know about the relation between us. We saw so many things we didn't know about before. We see a Muslim girl and a Jewish boy eating together, on the border between Israel and Jordan. All the time, the tabletop is shaking, and we are trying to keep the balance. None of this was planned. At the end, you have 20 seconds of quiet and the table is like a still-life."

This would be the first of many video collaborations Shahar Marcus and Nezaket Ekici would do together in the future, in a project they call 'In Relation.'