

Rites of Passage: Myriam Bat-Yosef and Performance

From *Éryximaque* 1965, to *My Will* 1990, Myriam Bat-Yosef's performance works demonstrate continuity and a perpetual challenge: she questions the binaries of male and female, animate and inanimate, life, death and procreation. Entering or leaving her studio near the Place d'Italie we are caught in a painted mirror inscribed *DUELOGUE*.... Informed by readings of the kabbalah and the wisdom of Tao, these binaries are constantly antagonistic, seldom resolved. Past the mirror, a small canvas depicts a crouching adolescent girl, naked, vulnerable, ashamed: *After* of 1951. She hides her face. Within the span of two decades, the spaces of clashing continents and cultures, this body would become hybrid, performative, confident and free. Bat-Yosef's performance works offer a new reading of her myriad-coloured objects and body-part sculptures: stemming from an evidently surrealist *merveilleux* they become powerful witnesses to events and movements of the past, both fetishes and *témoins* - witnesses - expressing a longing for a wholeness that invites complex forms of response.

Who is this Marion Hellerman, Mimi, Myriam Gudmunsson, Myriam Josefsdottir, Myriam Bat-Yosef, 'daughter of Yosef'? A child of Berlin, a young Israeli female soldier, a Parisian Beaux-Arts student, an artist working internationally in the 1960s and 1970s, an Icelandic feminist heroine: all of these?

Si dieu est un cerf-volant

*Qui diable est George Sand?*¹

The questioning of surrealist poet Joyce Mansour raises another issue of naming; the fact that for Claude Cahun, Prinner, Toyen, Axell, ambiguous names declare the politics of the 'story of art'. Bat-Yosef's story engages both with the problematics of the female artist who transcends the role of muse or model, and that of the three twentieth-century generations of the School of Paris: emigrants attracted to the intellectual and artistic life of the French capital, so many of whom changed their names as they started new lives. It is a long story of wandering, belonging and not belonging. The archetypal 'nomadic subject' has been linked structurally to a feminism which 'struggles to change the value attributed to and the representations made of women in the longer historical time of patriarchal history... as well as in the deeper time of one's own identity'²

When, as a student, Myriam Bat-Yosef arrived in Paris, her painting was conservative: a post-Cézannism of landscapes and portraits with a hint of Kokoschka, corresponding to the teaching of her masters in Israel; she would not modify her style under the aging authority figures at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. It is interesting that Avigdor Arikha, who came to her first solo show at the Club Israélien in 1955, would persist in traditional figurative genres, ultimately accomplishing an old-master-like facture which has served him well.³ Bat-Yosef and Arikha bore secret scars of trauma and loss at the time, linking them to so many precursors of the prewar School of Paris. In 1951, the veteran painter Marc Chagall, prefaced Hersch Fenster's *Undzere farpainikte Kinstler* (Our martyred painters) which recounted, in Yiddish, the biographies of Jewish artists from France and their experiences through the holocaust period.⁴ Significantly Bat-Yosef, fatherless and with no family in Paris, was regularly invited to the house of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas for the sacred Friday-evening meal which heralds the sabbath.

Even in Florence, under the spell of Siennese madonnas, her elongated self-portrait set against a stacked, rocky landscape was marked with the Star of David, 'my Jewish destiny'. A feeling of isolation distinguishes it sharply from the integrated gold and blue world of beliefs, worship and gothic craftsmanship which was its source.⁵ But then in 1955 came the December masked ball, the encounter with Ferro, painter-Viking and a magical trip round Italy on a Vespa. Myriam's first Venice Biennale in 1956 was a revelation: she discovered the international art world in the company of Ferro and Jean-Jacques Lebel, meeting the critic Alain Jouffroy and veteran surrealist Roberto Matta among others. How exhilarating for the couple Ferro and Bat-Yosef to have joint solo shows in Rome so quickly, both acknowledged by none other than Lionello Venturi! The Icelandic saga began for her as she followed Ferro to his home country. A greater abstraction in her work responded to the impact of the dramatic landscape and dazzling Northern lights, surely involving a recognition of the Northern dimensions of her own origins... Reciprocally, Bat-Yosef would show Ferro her adopted country, Israel, where he exhibited at the important museums in Bezalael, Tel-Aviv and Haifa in 1958: what an exchange for these citizens of the world, on the brink of the 1960s!

Femmes surréalistes: the encounter with EROS

It was a deepening encounter with surrealism back in Paris, however, that would change Myriam's work and lead to performances: how ironic that only much later would she befriend Héléne Vanel, whose *L'Acte manqué - Unconsummated act* was danced in the 'hysterical bedroom' created for the International exhibition of Surrealism in 1938. This pioneer female performance ranks with the dances of Mary Wigman, Isidora Duncan or Valentine de Saint Point, another great female precursor who astonishingly awaits her deserved place in France's artistic pantheon.

The male dominance perceived as entirely natural in the 1950s art world is almost unimaginable today.⁶ Yet in one territory, surrealism, *la femme* had always been accorded a special place as muse, even creator. Myriam's engagement coincided with its second wave of erotic intensity. Returning from Israel with Ferro in autumn 1958 she reconnected to the surrealist world via Jean-Jacques Lebel. Ferro recollects that Joyce Mansour, the poet of female desire, of *Cris* and *Déchirures*, accompanied André Breton to their joint studio.⁷ Ferro's 'apocalyptic' period was tending increasingly to the mechanomorphic, his immense energies producing terrifying metaphors for the atomic age... It is not surprising, therefore, that Breton, was more drawn along with his *complice* to Myriam's work which blossomed in this radiant period of her pregnancy.

Surrealism of the late 1950s was penetrated by a new and strange species of woman. From *amour courtois* to *amour fou*: the boundaries protecting the terrains of the male surrealist poets and painters were dissolving, this time through the automatism not of a Masson or a Miro but those of Toyen, Bona or Unica Zürn who took part in the Exposition internationale du Surréalisme (EROS) at the Galerie Daniel Cordier in 1959. Proclaiming female subjectivity, desire, frustration and rage their work could be vengefully phallic or could deploy the destabilising tropes of madness. The relationship between 'schizophrenic' productions by Alöyse, for example, and the works of a Leonora Carrington or a Zürn (both of whom were close to psychiatric institutions and their practices) was a distinguishing feature of the 'Eros' show, as was its performative

aspect: the 'interior of the body' environment resounding with François Dufrene's fractured languages: a pulsating sound-score for the show which anticipated his collaboration with Bat-Yosef.

This veritable universe of female creators (strongly featured in Breton's new journal, *Le Surréalisme Même*) now welcomed Myriam Bat-Yosef, though she would never wish to join what Leonor Fini sardonically called 'the Group'.⁸ Manina, wife of critic Alain Jouffroy, and above all Bona, wife of the poet André Pieyre de Mandiargues would become close friends, as would Unica Zürn - like Myriam, born in Berlin. Zürn's linguistic anagrams in their rapport with the tangled female limbs of Hans Bellmer's drawings, may be seen as fascinating precursors to Bat-Yosef's *Éryximaque*.⁹

The Sadean heritage of surrealism was transformed at this time under the aegis of Henri Alleg's *La Question* - the moral and political question of torture in Algeria.¹⁰ Art became ever more violent, notably in the now-celebrated history painting *Le Grand Tableau antifasciste*, produced by Lebel, Ferro, Crippa, Baj, Dova and Recalcati in Milan in 1960: 'Bodies ripped apart, mainly women, blood, entrails, eyes squeezed out of their sockets everywhere, lots of heads, lots of mouths screaming or stuffed with information.'¹¹ Deliberately blasphemous, denunciatory, the work nonetheless expresses a paroxysm of masculine painterly *jouissance*. The message was hardly feminist. Nor were the accompanying happenings and performances (genres introduced by Lebel to France): Lebel as De Gaulle in a rubber mask pushing a pram; Ferro as 'sex-priest' dipping a papier-mâché penis into pots of paint held between the thighs of two women; two naked women, wearing Khrushchev and Kennedy masks, strangling each other in a bath of 'blood'.¹² In May 1964 at the American Center's Festival of Free Expression (where Bat-Yosef also exhibited) Ferro with a tank of coloured water on his back peed his 'golden shower' through a metal pipe into various female mouths (*Gold Water*, an anti-Vietnam happening, focussed on the right-wing republican Barry Goldwater). Simulated sex acts, feminisation, were metaphors - then as now - for political humiliation, abjection. An alternative, egalitarian work, Carolee Schneeman's *Meat Joy* offered a different paradigm: a staged *mélange* of naked bodies, 'sensual, comic, joyous, repellent'.¹³ Ferro had played *voyeur* and accomplice for Schneeman's pioneer *Eye body* series which he photographed in New York: 'Covered in paint, grease, chalk, ropes, plastic' Schneeman established her body as visual territory...¹⁴ 1964 would mark a period of betrayal and pain for Bat-Yosef, culminating in divorce; but it would herald her liberation.

Éryximaque: diabolò dance

Mais mon désir est mouvement, Éryximaque,

(Socrates in Paul Valéry, *L'Ame et la danse*)

So *Éryximaque* was not born in a vacuum. Bat-Yosef would refute the passive, sexual position of horizontality, the abjection of smeared liquids, and the voyeuristic male-on-female gaze implied in Schneeman's *Eye Body*, releasing the body into movement, colour, action and a freedom linked with a certain androgeny. *Éryximaque*, the heroine of Paul Valéry's 'Socratic' dialogue of 1921, would now be reborn as the spirit of 1960's liberation.¹⁵ *Éryximaque*, a collaboration between Bat-Yosef as conceptor, costume maker

and painter of objects, Teresa Trujillo, a dancer from Uruguay, and the concrete poet, François Dufrêne, was performed four times in two venues at the Paris Biennale of 1965.¹⁶

Bat-Yosef chose *Éryximaque's* performance space - *Objet (zone blanche)* - a collaborative work by Markus Rätz's, Andreas Christen and Willy Weber: Switzerland's contribution to the Biennale. Three high white walls, were arranged in a triangle, with gaps for entrance and exit at each point, in a space with a white floor. This 'white zone', textured with wall-reliefs, claimed the heritages of neoplasticism and the monochrome as well as a specifically Swiss modernism and spirituality. It offered a perfect space for dance and sound, with spectators standing at each open angle.¹⁷

Already Bat-Yosef had extended her practice to the painting of objects: *Table de nuit* was exhibited with thirty-eight exquisite works on paper in her first major Paris show at the Galerie Garnelle in 1964. She had discovered diablo-shaped, heavy wooden stools designed by Nana Dietzel in the Maison du Danemark, On seeing these, Trujillo desired to dance with them; Myriam's idea was to extend their painted surfaces to that of the dancer herself: a confusion of body and object would take place via both movement and rhythm. Trujillo danced inside *Objet (zone blanche)*, her body painted all-over in a multi-coloured design of flaming organic shapes, like a latter-day Nijinsky faun, body-costumed by Bakst. Dancing with, on and around the stools which supported and extended her body, throwing and receiving them as they rolled back off the walls of the white environment, she realised the androgynous ideal: an ideal central to René de Solier's superb text on Myriam's work as an oneiric universe.¹⁸ Vision as well as gender became bewildered as objects and bodies fused.

Yet the dialogical other for *Éryximaque* was not to be found in the American Center's daring happenings at all: rather in the iconic performances of Yves Klein. Myriam Bat-Yosef recalls her repugnance at seeing a performance by Klein at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris: the helpless passivity of the models, smeared in blue paint, as they following the master's directions.¹⁹ Klein's now celebrated work with these *femmes-pinceaux* ('female paintbrushes') - a brilliantly ironic parody of the artist-model relationship in the era of striptease - was instantly parodied.²⁰ Myriam recalls Guatterio Jacopetti's cruel use of Klein's footage in *Mondo Cane*, 1962, though she has no recollection of Claude Chabrol's *Les Godelureaux*, released in 1961, where at a fashionable vernissage, models' bodies were actually painted by the artist - a procedure akin to her own - prior to rubbing themselves on canvas to the sound of a *piano endiablé*, a joyously painted piano.²¹

Éryximaque, then, must be interpreted as Bat-Yosef's avowed riposte to Klein: a harlequinade of body, dance, colour and sound-poetry, that replied to Klein's *Void - Le Vide* - the empty, white, silent zone of 'immaterial sensibility'. The hierarchical male/female, artist/model, master/slave relationships set up in Klein's *Anthropometries* are refuted in a context of collaboration spurred by individual creativity... Countering Klein's monotone symphony, with its frock-coated musicians, the tape-recorded voices of Dufrêne (with his wife Ginette as chorus) chanted *Tabouret tabou tamouré* It was Dufrêne who had suggested the dynamic, enigmatic title *Éryximaque* - a name whose literary lineage evoked both Paul Valéry and the dances and Muses of ancient Greece. Dufrêne was well known within avant-garde poetry and jazz circuits; his paroxystic wordplay offered an exhilarating remix: French modernism, Schwitters and Artaud met 1960s *lettrisme* and *poésie concrète*.²² In 'Why and how *Éryximaque*?' he chose rhythms, he said, which would

facilitate evolutions in space - *à la danseuse* - of terms and proper names from the worlds of dance and painting he had hitherto never used.²³ His sound-collage evokes a vivid present, the intense life of the Parisian art world and its jazz-inspired rhythms:

Fox trot Abbott...et Castelli
Loulou Gasté à la Bastille

Vite vétyver Yvette vétuste
Arbuste Lambruche myrte buste
Jasper Johns flasque. Roach Max
Rauschenberg à masque.....

Yet meaning is regularly cut at the moment of recognition, long vowels are cut by consonants. With staccato precision, the phoneme is rent from the word. His song both sybilline caress and palindromic aggression, displaced onto Bat-Yosef herself:

Héloise Allouoys Méliés Averrhoes
Bat Yosef agressif récif Rossif agreste

Psychoanalytically, *Éryximaque* represents the tensions between liberation and separation. The female dancing body celebrates a freedom where self-exploration entwines with narcissistic delight. But Trujillo's movements with the diabolo-like stools irresistibly recall Freud's paradigm of the infant playing with the cotton-reel: *Fort-Da*, throwing it away, pulling it back: a symbolic game of control, a recognition of the 'real' and of separation from the mother, producing both pleasure and panic.²⁴ As an artist, for Bat-Yosef the experience of maternity had been determining: 'From then on the surface that I work on and the space I work in is for me a womb...'²⁵ One might therefore read an 'other' *Éryximaque*, where the performance space, a space of containment and protection, resonates with a hidden negative: of the child's separation from the mother, Myriam's separation from her pregnant womb, her once-dependant infant, her husband. Autonomy confronts mastery with the fear of failure...

The painted diabolo stools from the performance would be exhibited as an object-piece, *Éryximaque*, at Arturo Schwarz's Milan gallery in 1969. This show followed her first exhibition at this most prestigious avant-garde space in 1965, where Bat-Yosef's feminist and 'feminised' decorative parodies mocked the iconic ready-mades that Schwarz had thought to edit: Duchamp's coffee grinder, Man Ray's toothed iron or Duchamp's telephone. Also shown in 1969 as an autonomous object, was *Hommage à Pablo Casals*, 1964-6, the painted cello used in the *Le viol du violoncelle*, (*The rape of the Cello*), 1967, a performance at the experimental Théâtre du Bilboquet in Paris: a postscript to *Éryximaque*.²⁶ Bat-Yosef painted the cello, the body of *violeur* Théo Lesoualch, and jazzman Daniel Humair's drumsticks. These provided percussion accompaniment to Lesoualch's passion as he assaulted the cello's hip-shaped curves. His climax, recalling Nijinsky's celebrated final spasm in *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, ridiculed ejaculatory male sexuality with the good humour and sexual provocation of this pre-May '68 moment..... The painted objects, then, may be seen as part performance relics, uncanny 'stills', or *renvois* to poses by Lesoualch, or to Trujillo's in *Éryximaque*; or they may anticipate,

suggest performances for the future: see the head sprouting a leg, *Elle prend son pied*, of 1986. Bat-Yosef's painted heads, successors to Sophie Tauber' Arp's painted mannequin head of 1925, or Eileen Agar's wartime *Angel of Anarchy*, 1940, explicitly proclaim their performance and surrealist origins. Crested with flame-painted knives, they seem prepared for battle.

Significantly, it was after the performance of *My Last Will* in 1990, that Bat-Yosef attempted to recreate *Érixymaque* as film.²⁷ Together with the original film and sound-footage of the performance, Bat-Yosef linked together sequences of colour-slide images of the 1965 action, duplicated, spliced, mirrored, rotating, in sequence. There is a certain pathos and fragility in the reconstruction - we are aware of old technologies and the ephemeral nature of a work once strong and proud. *Érixymaque* as film has its own distinct identity. Trujillo's body often appears doubled on the same slide: she becomes a *Femme cent têtes* (a headless or hundred-headed woman), a Medusa of snaky limbs - evoking not only Rorschach images but what surrealist Robert Benayoun once called *imagomorphoses*: 'an axis of symmetry is a living creature... the game begins, mad, obsessive, inexhaustible'; the angle of *di-vision* collapses time and rationality.²⁸

Exile and the Kingdom: *Judith and Holofernes*: 1971

Autofigure with map of Israel, (repro n°) 1967, shows a self-confident artist embracing a painted object that evokes both female mannequin and cello, but an object transformed from the victim of the *violeur* to a body pregnant with Bat-Yosef's dream of fecundity and peace for her homeland: 'the geographical map of Israel becomes an organic symbol' Pierre Restany would remark. 'The spearhead becomes a pubis, the delta, a vagina: a lone woman in the midst of veteran soldiers, pierced in the hollow of her thighs by a thousand envious darts'.²⁹ 'Since I live and breathe only through my art, the image of Israel which I traced in my work was a guarantee of its survival' recalled Bat-Yosef.³⁰ Deeply affected by the Six-Day war, and following her trip to New York for a show in the America-Israel Culture House, Bat-Yosef would renounced her links with France to become a 'world citizen,' based in Jerusalem. A healing rapprochement with Germany had been symbolised by her graphics show at the von Sydow gallery in Frankfurt in 1964 (was the formal kinship with Kandinsky's apocalyptic microcosms noticed here?) Yet despite the 'unisex' spirit of the times, the shaven head of her painted female performer provoked strongly negative reactions when 'The Dancer as painted object' was performed at the opening of her show at the Galerie Gymurzynska in Cologne, 1970, with music by the celebrated composer Luigi Nono.

Myriam's gigantic psychedelic environment, *Art Total* at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem marked the high point of her career in 1971. A whole team of assistants were deployed to paint the Billy Rose pavilion interiors in a spirit of festival. Only recently, however has she recalled the double identity of this vast space, whose personal meaning resonated - enclosed - evocations both Biblical and historical: for the flamy spaces of *Hell* and *Paradise* with its sunny-coloured *autoroutes* of escape, were also called *Exile* and *The Kingdom*. This was an anti-military space: inside and outside on the museum esplanade empty aircraft petrol tanks were transformed into flying, pregnant sculptures, suspended or perched high on masts. And here, to Jossef Mundi's script, and improvised music by Yossi Mar-Chaïm on the painted piano (brought from Paris) Bat-Yosef's *Judith*

and *Holofernes* was enacted, with audience participation (playing with her objects). The protagonists' bodies, transformed with her paint enacted the Old Testament story: the decapitation of the sleeping warrior-male by the sword-wielding heroine: a classic scene of castration and role-reversal.

While he missed the performance, art critic and writer René de Solier, on a trip to Jerusalem witnessed Bat-Yosef's apocalyptic environment: an extraordinary fulfilment of the oriental intimations which had filled his hallucinogenic, diamond-sharp text on her graphic work, in the wake of his learned *Art Fantastique* of 1961: 'Art of the Orient, of the palace and of legend, *munichois*, Lithuanian, Slav... in a sort of luxuriance both sensual and occult....'³¹ (Myrian had surely shown him her illustrated book of Pushkin's fairy tales, her treasure and memorial to her Lithuanian grandfather.³²) His remarkable project for a major monograph attempts to 'master' Bat-Yosef via contemporary psychoanalytic criticism, yet is fraught with fear of the castrating Oriental woman.³³ His links the *très sexy girl* to concepts of transfer/transvestism/ *frottage/autofrottement* (rubbing and self-pleasuring) and, in a premonitory fantasy, fuses her with her dancers: 'A great flexibility and *maestria*. Everything undulates, snake-charmer... the dreamed-of ovoid, moving, open, undulating like a figure eight... charms of the Orient, hebraic lasciviousness at dawn...'³⁴ He writes as a contemporary of Hélène Cixous, whose feminist classic 'Laugh of the Medusa', was surely generated in her earlier piece on Aubrey Beardsley's Salomé: 'Who has killed? Who kills? One never know who is the Medusa... Salomé and again Salomé; danse? Medusa-like *she turns (herself) to stone*'.³⁵ (The flickering, flame-like nature and implicit phallicism of Bat-Yosef's graphic style is contemporary with the cult of Beardsley, hero of the psychedelic 1970s.³⁶) For Cixous, the dancing body as representation is caught in a tautological twist: 'a kind of double fiction, a faked, theatrical fiction that sustains the comedy of signifiers: representation never refers to anything other than a representation', equated with 'the double space of castration (or death)'.³⁷

René de Solier's unfinished project was cut short by death; Bat-Yosef's performances were always already incomplete. Another flight, a world tour, lectures in French and English in Canada, in California, at the Walt Disney foundation in Los Angeles, but more importantly in 'Womanspace' on Venice Boulevard, where Bat Yosef met up with the *doyennes* of American feminist practice... And the beautiful Alain Guémard, encountered after her discovery of Bali, who danced for her *vernissage* in Brussels in April, 1974. Wearing traditional Balinese dance costume, embroidery, flowers and a sword, he created floating, flying forms so close to her paintings - and was trapped with them in the photograph she used for her writing paper above Khalil Gibran's words: 'Work is love made visible'.

An intermediary 'spectacle of combined arts', '*The infusion of the human and the object*', involving prototype painted Verner Pantan chairs and a painted dancer was presented together with Camillo Baciù's theatre-piece, *Chairs*, at the the Universities of Tel Aviv and Haifa and the Binianei Ha-Uma theatre in Jerusalem in 1975-6. It was, however, in 1978 that the *A certain Plume* marked a major stage in the development of Bat-Yosef's art.

A certain Plume , 1978

In 1978, for the Tel Aviv Museum and the Israel Museum, Jerusalem, Bat-Yosef created *A certain Plume*, based on her own translations of Henri Michaux's small prose pieces, written from 1930-1936. These vignettes, particularly the one in which fleeing Bulgarians are shot, and tipped upside down out of the train window, had all-too-recongnisable resonances of flight and pogrom. Searingly political, self-referential, obsessed with *dépayement*, they enact Michaux's anticipation of the second world war. Michaux's *dédoublement* becomes Bat-Yosef's mime. Her painted piano - a German exile named 'Alphonse Blondel' - was billed as an actor along with Yoël Ackelsberg. The piano metamorphosed in the imaginations of actor and spectators, represented the people and the places where Plume found himself. 'At times the Painted Piano becomes a living person while the painted actor becomes an object. The performance as a whole is a living and changing painting-sculpture' Bat-Yosef declared, describing Plume as 'A "Chaplinsque-Kafkaesque" figure in a constant clash with his surroundings, who compensates himself by the inventive spirit of his imagination ... in a train, a restaurant, the city of Casablanca, always in bizarre situations....³⁸.. The *faux-naïf* of Michaux's style counterpointed unbearable resonances of his 1930s texts; just so in *A Certain Plume*: the piebald-painted actor's vaudeville gestures create a gloss on contemporary politics. A dynamic musical accompaniment ranged from the whimsical, Tchaikovsky's *Nutcracker Suite*, to the apocalyptic, Handel's *Messiah*. Bat-Yosef's own sketch, '*Plume in Jerusalem*' presented a dysfunctional paradise with LSD dimensions - white mushrooms push through the cracks of a wall in a lake, then through Plume's eyes; the sky grows inside houses, and a vision beginning with camels, olives and 'Amen's' ends with a vision of the 'Un-fini'...³⁹ Unfinished, always...The film of the performance, in which the Casablanca scene was played on on to Jerusalem's streets, contained a postscript: the 'Undressing' of Plume - his gouache body-paint running off in the shower; the transformation of a painted 'object' back into a sexed, particular individual.⁴⁰

In 1978-9, Bat-Yosef exhibited twice at the Cité internationale des arts, where she was living for the period.⁴¹ 'A fantasmagoric promenade around a living sculpture' - a quartet for 'painting, body, music and lights' based on André Pieyre de Mandiargues' tale, *La Grotte* was performed four times.⁴² The grotto was represented by her painted *autocube*, a 'self-portrait'; other elements included a ladder and the *Tour d'Arabesques* (1964-74) with its doubled, oriental arches big enough for a dancer to pass through. A mélange of objects and moving bodies, around which the shoeless spectators promenaded, taking part in a 'trip' experience analogous to the magic-mushroom sexualised visions of Denis, hero of the tale. The hour-long performance was accompanied by experimental music for flute and wind instruments by Etienne Rolin (a student of Nadia Boulanger, Messaien and Xenakis).

Bat-Yosef's provocation of a 'loss of identity' in her painted bodies led to problems with Yoël Ackelsberg, protagonist of *A certain Plume*. His sentiments were confirmed in 1981, when the handsome Asiatic man whose body she painted for *Transmutations* - a film by Catherine Dreyfus and Franco Contini - explicitly spoke to her about his discomfort.⁴³ Yet when the actress Eugénie Kuffler was painted for the performance *Corps-Accords* at the Galerie Jacques Donguy in 1982, she revelled in the sensuality of her metamorphosis. Bat-Yosef declared 'Caressing her with my brushes I

transformed her, for an evening into an object, while she, defying me, was animated, animating my other painted objects': Kuffler riposted: 'A faunesse plays the flute on a multi-coloured prop...projections, curves, angles, surfaces, resonances, liaisons between objects...' ⁴⁴ She wreathed herself in and out of the doubled stools, both cage and towers, with their oriental cut-out shapes, **playing Mozart on a painted, bamboo flute**. The painted woman was exultant: the painted man afraid. Was this, then, a question of sexual difference? **The doubling, essential always to Bat-Yosef's work, achieved a spliced embodiment that same year in Reykjavik, when identical twins, Haukur and Hôrdur, painted in complementary yin and yang colours (left versus right, head versus tail) danced to slate percussion instruments. Powerful experimental music, as always; a doubling which preceded the artist's own *dédoublement* as both conceptor and performer.**

Mourning and metamorphosis: *My Will* , 1990

' I thought I was learning to live: I was learning to die' Leonardo da Vinci⁴⁵.

For Bat-Yosef, 'Plume in Jerusalem' was a vision of the 'Un-fini'. In 1981, a major development took place in her work. At the age of fifty, Bat-Yosef started elaborating upon the process that would lead, inexorably, to the future performance of her own death: infinite finitude. At last she turned towards herself - both inwards and outwards - as she became the living subject of her own work. She painted herself live for W.D.R television on 14 November, 1981, her second performance event in Cologne. **(Reprod n & b)** Subsequently she would pose for a powerful series of photographs against a black ground for the photographer Jacques Besse: *Symbiosis* demonstrated the intertwining of her own body with her art: she wore a tunic and shorts created from a printed, scarf-like material with striped border, a square of which was mounted like a painting on a stretcher. This prop, with a mirror fragment attached, painted additions and the representation of a single green Carel snakeskin sandal, was used when *Symbiosis* was performed in a mixed evening at the Galerie Alain Oudin in 1983.⁴⁶

Bat-Yosef was deeply affected at this time by her mother's death, indeed the sight of her cadaver, and subsequently by her father's last illness in Israel and his wish for assisted suicide.⁴⁷ *Symbiosis* had been a positive rather than morbid development, yet it was the genesis for *My Will*, created seven years later using the same costume, the same mirrored scarf. The meditation upon death finally pushed Myriam to the greatest affirmation, the greatest self-assertion: the recognition, forty years after painting the post-virginal body of *After* in 1951, that she herself *was* the painted body. As she had 'become' Michaux, the writer of 'Plume in Jerusalem', she would now become the performing figure. 'I will' : the pun on will as a desire or resolution is forward-looking, the counter to a 'last will and testament'. In French the work acquires a doubled title: *Ma dernière volonté (Mon testament)*. Elements from *A certain Plume*, the painted body and painted piano, were taken up again, but the theme was not travelling, but arriving. In terms of its own performative time, 'I will' looks to the future, transcending the isolation of its subject: 'Time is not defined an isolated, lonely subject.. it is the very relationship of the subject with the Other.'⁴⁸

The piano, percussion, and the buzz of more ancient instruments, with characteristic dissonances, here become a dirge. We perceive the artist, in the spaces of

the Ramat-Gan museum, silent. There is no invited audience but a gallery with paintings, not always empty. Myriam, in her *Symbiosis* costume, self-absorbed, looks into the shard of mirror stuck on her stretched painted scarf. A broken fragment: a mirror of discord? She paints her face carefully, first with white, then yellow, then red; then, on the other side with green and blue, cold complementaries. The gestures are those of a woman putting on make-up to beautify, not to conceal herself. Her gestures are self-caressing, self-absorbing. Her body is still plump and sunburned; she wears the green summer sandals with heels: white-painted legs, yellow toes. Filmed from behind we see her eyes in a mirror: the viewpoint is intimate, voyeuristic, though sometimes distant, filmed from above. We glimpse the bearded musician who plays the piano first exhibited at the Jerusalem Museum in 1971. Like Myriam's body, its hot colours blend to cold, always bright, with patterned sequences, psychedelic swirls and a sense of imminent animation. The action becomes more erotic: sitting, she puts her hands around the screen-mounted mirror like a harp; she raises the stretched scarf behind her head like a halo, she raises her legs taut in the air. One senses the concentration, the slow deliberation as the next move is improvised, the concentration of the musicians; their respect for the sacred space of performance. The pose with the legs in the air, almost sculptural, is repeated on top of the piano. Another actor, a chair, also painted with complementary colours is taken up by the artist onto the piano lid. Almost affectionately she curls up with it; the music and the tension preclude any notions of a Kantor-like absurd. Posing, then nestling, then sleeping almost... a wind instrument introduces the notion of blowing and breathing. The piano is straddled: the colours of instrument, body and object come together in a synaesthetic melancholy. The music becomes more plangent, trance-like.... A sense of chanted vowels and exhalations remind one of the insistent context of Israel, of a Hebraic mysticism. The artist is under the piano: seeing her eyes shut we imagine her intense, subjective experience, so different from the viewer's or the eye of the cameraman... Finally Bat-Yosef, this strange, painted creature, takes the stretched scarf frame and hangs it on the wall between two photographs of her own performance. A rite of passage has taken place; a ritual has come to an end.⁴⁹ (See DVD)

GAAGOUIM: the future.

After pregnancy and childrearing comes the third phase in the life of women: 'I felt that women were privileged more than men: the lunar cycle of menstruation, the capacity to create life in one's own body, and the menopause' Myriam has declared, despite the fact that this position is 'contrary to Jewish faith and tradition, which is where I had my roots'.⁵⁰ Like Orlan, she rejoices in the rejuvenatory possibilities of contemporary science.⁵¹ Contrary to those who cannot take the menopause as another positive development, joins women such as Simone de Beauvoir, Germaine Greer and recently Pina Bausch who have confronted the issue with wisdom and humour. In *My Will*, Myriam creates with her own, maturing body a performance of beauty. She chooses the Hebrew word GAAGOUIM (longing) as her symbol, with its A's like eyes.⁵² (See DVD objects "Yin and Yang self portrait") And she could not be more explicit about sexuality, memory and the sublimatory dimensions of her art: 'The most faithful of my lovers is my art: the more I give it my attention the more it fulfils me. I draw on different

papers and paint on different surfaces and materials. Each time it's like caressing the skin of another man. It's my desire that I expose in my works.⁵³

It is this desire which transcends death, and which is expressed in the contract drawn up for the ritual performance of her death that will precede Bat-Yosef's final passing into flames: *My Will*. At the time when Myriam, a young student, was singing Hebrew folk songs to his baby son Michael, the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, perplexed by the 'absolute otherness' of the feminine, was elaborating the same thoughts: 'A caress is the expectation of this future pure and without content. It stems from an increasing hunger, from always richer promises, opening new perspectives towards an ungraspable reality. I propose voluptuousness as the very event of the future'⁵⁴

The slow gestation of Bat-Yosef's performing projects over long periods of time, always a *duologue*, dialectical but ultimately affirmative, counters the female masochism of so many of her performance contemporaries. Herien lies the depth of their meaning. Looking to the future she concludes 'I have had a marvellous life'.

¹ See Joyce Mansour, *Cris*, 1953 and *Déchirures*, 1955, in *Joyce Mansour, Prose et poésie, Oeuvre complète*, Arles, Actes Sud, 1991.

² Rosi Braidotti, 'Nomadic Subjects? Embodiment and Sexual Difference in contemporary Literary Theory' in M. Eagleton ed., *Feminist Literary Theory. A Reader* Oxford, Blackwell, 1996 p. 415.

³ Arikha (who figures in a 1955 group photograph) drew Bat-Yosef's portrait at this time.

⁴ See Hersch Fenster, *Undzere farpainikte Kinstler*, Paris, 1951 and Nadine Nieszawer, Marie Boyé, Paul Fogel, *Peintres juifs de Paris, 1905-1939, Ecole de Paris*, Paris, 2000. Based on Fenster, this details the lives and often tragic deaths of 151 Jewish artists of the pre-war Ecole de Paris: sixty-four were gassed in Poland.

⁵ See Carlo L. Ragghianti, *Pittura del Dugento a Firenze*, Florence, Vallecchi, nd.

⁶ See letter from Bat-Yosef to the author of 2.11.01: 'Went to see "La peinture comme crime" today. Was cynically "appalled" not to see works by Gina Pane who really mutilated herself, probably in a more *real* way than Schwarzkögler and Mühl ... Of course there isn't *one* woman in the show... as usual....

⁷ Bat-Yosef does not recall Mansour's presence at this visit.

⁸ The five issues of *Le Surréalisme Même*, from 1956-1958 featured Mansour, Nora Mitrani, the Czechoslovakian, Toyen, Carrington from England, Marcelle Loubchansky, Meret Oppenheim from Switzerland, Marie Wilson, Monique Watteau and Manina. See also *La Femme et la Surréalisme*, Musée Cantonal des Beaux-Arts, Lausanne, 1987. Bat-Yosef maintained surrealist links with the *Supérieur inconnu* review and group.

⁹ See Alain Chevrier, 'Sur l'origine des anagrammes d'Unica Zurn, in *Hans Bellmer, Unica Zürn Lettres au docteur Ferdière*, Alain Chevrier dir., Paris, Séguier, 1994, pp. 125-140.

¹⁰ See Simone de Beauvoir, 'Faut-il brûler Sade?', *Les Temps Modernes*, 75, 1952, pp. 1197-1230, ('Must we burn Sade?' translated by A. Michelson, *The Marquis de Sade*, New York, Grove Press, 1966) and Henri Alleg, *La Question*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1958.

¹¹ Laurence Bertrand-Dorléac, 'Un tableau collectif contre la torture', in *Grand Tableau antifasciste collectif*, Laurent Chollet ed., Paris, Editions Dagorno, 2000, p. 52.

12. *Pour conjurer l'esprit de catastrophe* (following Algerian independence), Galerie Raymond Cordier, November 1962; filmed as a reprise by Gualterio Jacopetti at the studios of the cinema de Boulogne in January 1963. See Alyce Mahon: 'Outrage aux bonnes moeurs: Jean-Jacques Lebel and the Marquis de Sade' in *Jean-Jacques Lebel*, Vienna, Museum Moderner Kunst, Stiftung Ludwig, 1998, pp. 93-112.

¹³ Carolee Schneemann, 'Meat Joy', *Imaging her Erotics. Essays, Interviews, Projects*, MIT Press, Cambridge Massachussets, London England, 2002, pp.61-2.

¹⁴ Carolee Schneemann, 'Eye body: 36 transformative actions', *ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁵ See Paul Valéry, 'L'Ame et la danse. Dialogue socratique par Paul Valéry', 'Le Ballet au XIX siècle', *Revue musicale*, December, 1921, in *Oeuvres complètes*, II, ed. Jean Hytier, Paris, Gallimard, 1960, pp. 148-176 and notes, pp. 1406-1410. He relates how he wished the dialogue itself to become a ballet, in which the abstract and the tangible, *le sensible*, would unite at last in a dizzying whorl - *dans la vertige* - in a letter of 1930 to Louis Sechan (p. 1408).

¹⁶ The invitation card reads 'Éryximaque. Huit minutes d'une rencontre entre Myriam Bat-Yosef, Lauréate de la Biennale de Paris, 1965, costume, maquillage et accessoires, François Dufrêne, Poèmes et exécution, Teresa Trujillo, choréographie et interprétation... vous sera présenté les samedis 16, 23 et 30 octobre dans la salle des peintres suisses à 20 heures précises et dans le cadre de la présentation des spectacles *poétiques* de la Biennale, le vendredi 29 octobre 1965, à 21 heures, au théâtre 102 de l'ORTF...'

¹⁷ The spiritual orientation of Andreas Christen and Markus Rätz is said to bear traces of an epoch marked in Switzerland by Sophie Täuber-Arp Fritz Glarner, Max Bill and Richard Lohse, See Max von Mühlénen: 'Suisse', *Biennale de Paris*, 1965, pp. 111-112.

¹⁸ *Bat-Yosef*, Galerie Garnelle, Paris, 12 May-6 June, 1964. The double-sided brochure published in a series of colours was 'underprinted' with her 'Eight years of work' catalogue from Reykjavik, May, 1963.

¹⁹ Conversation with Bat-Yosef, 11 April, 2005; the event must have been at *Antagonismes II, l'Objet*, March, 1962, though a Klein *femmes-pinceaux* performance has not been officially recorded at this event: see www.yvesklein.net.

²⁰ See 'Enquête sur le striptease', *Le Surréalisme Même*, 1958, 4, pp. 56-7, and 5, pp. 57-60.

²¹ See François Albéra, 'Yves Klein et Jean-Luc Godard rue Campagne Première : chutes et envois', *Art Press* www.visuelimage.com/ch/clouin2/artpress.htm

²² See www.dufrene.net and Henri Chopin, *Poésie Sonore internationale*, Paris, Editions Jean-Michel Place, 1979; François Dufrière, *Archi-Made*, Didier Semin ed., Paris, Ecole Nationale Supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 2005.

²³ François Dufrière, 'Pourquoi Éryximaque et comment' (a calligraphed text dated November 1965) in *Éryximaque. Poésie danse, peinture*, Paris, 1965-1996 *Cidouille pliée*, 16, Paris, nd, and *Archi-Made*, (ibid.), pp. 267-8. For the complete French text see *OU cinquième Saison (Sceaux)*, 25, spécial Biennale, 1965, np.; *KAV*, 5, Tel-Aviv, 1966 and *Archi-Made*, pp. 264-6.

²⁴ See Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' (1920) in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (24 vols, 1953-1973) xvii, pp. 14-15.

²⁵ Bat-Yosef: 'Painter - Woman - Mother - Woman Painter' (abridged, tr. Shân Veillard-Thomas), *Woman Artists Slide Library Journal*, 26, Dec.-Jan., 1988, p. 12.

²⁶ Copi, Martine Barrat and Arrabal were involved in other numbers of an avant-garde medley, staged by Jorge Lavelli

²⁷ On returning to Uruguay, Trujillo made a film using black and white negatives of the performance that Bat-Yosef sent her; tragically lost, only the contact sheets remain.

²⁸ Robert Benayoun, 'Boniment du miroir de poche', *Le Surréalisme même* 1, 1956, pp. 52-5.

²⁹ Pierre Restany, preface to *Bat-Yosef*, Galerie Latina, Stockholm, 1969.

³⁰ Myriam Bat-Yosef: 'Peintre - Femme - Mère - Peintresse' *Art et Thérapie*, 7, September, 1983, p. 295, (in English in Schwarz, 2001, op. cit., p. 177).

³¹ René de Solier, 'Univers orinique (sic). Image et fascination', *Bat-Yosef*, 1964, op. cit.; see also de Solier's immensely learned *l'Art fantastique*, Paris, Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1961 (a scion of André Breton's *L'Art magique*, 1957).

³² Myriam visited her Lithuanian grandfather with her mother when she was six years old; Pushkin's versified old Russian legend was illustrated in Orientalist mode in 1937 and published in Leningrad; a source of pleasure and inspiration since childhood.

³³ See the implications of stereotyping of the the 'Jewess' (Deborah, Judith, Salomé etc) in *The Jew in the Text, Modernity and the Construction of Identity*, Tamar Garb and Linda Nochlin eds., London and New York, Thames and Hudson, 1996.

³⁴ René de Solier, untitled and unpublished typescript (1975, for Brussels editor André de Rache's 'Mains et Merveilles' series) , p. 26, p. 19. His thoughts on 'BY' are informed by Paul Ricoeur, 'L'Art et la systématique freudienne' , *Entretiens sur l'art et la Psychanalyse*, Mouton, 1968; Melanie Klein, 'Technique de l'analyse par le jeu' *La Psychanalyse des enfants*, PUF, 1972, Deleuze's 'corps sans organes' and above all Jean-François Lyotard's *Discours-Figure*, Paris, Editions Klincksieck, 1971.

³⁵ See Hélène Cixous, 'L'affiche décolle', *Cahiers Renaud-Barrault*, 83, 1973, Aubrey Beardsley number, p. 31, 34-5; and 'Le rire de la Méduse', *L'Arc*, 61, 1975, pp. 39-54.

³⁶ Beardsley featured in *Peinture romantique anglaise* at the Petit Palais, 1972; see also André Pieyre de Mandiargues, 'Le Tombeau d'Aubrey Beardsley', *Le Musée noir*, [1946], Paris, Robert Laffont, 1973, p. 158 ff. and Robert E. L. Masters and Jean Houston, *Psychedelic Art*, New York and London, 1968.

³⁷ Cixous, op. cit., 1973, p. 33.

³⁸ Bat-Yosef, programme for 'A Certain Plume', the Tel Aviv Museum, 13 and 15 June, 1978; the Israel Museum Jerusalem, 24 and 28 June, 1978. Henri Michaux, *Plume, précédé de Lointain intérieur*, Paris, Gallimard, 1963 (for 'la Nuit des Bulgares' see pp. 150-156).

³⁹ Bat-Yosef, 'Plume in Jerusalem', unpublished typescript. Bat-Yosef's LSD visions may interestingly be compared with Michaux's own mescaline experiences; see also René de Solier, *Curandera : les champignons hallucinogènes*, Paris, Jean-Jacques Pauvert, 1965.

⁴⁰ *Un Certain Plume*, on super 8 film, superbly edited and with Monique Rabanit performing Michaux's and Bat-Yosef's text in French was edited by the Vidéo Cine Troc laboratories (later Fahrenheit 601) in 1979 (music and sound, Haim Zur, light, Tamara Vardin). It was shown at the Haifa Museum in the original Hebrew version, with voices by Ilana Zuckerman, Beni Hendel and Emanuel Halperin, in the context of 'The Human figure - Various approaches by Israeli artists'. See brochure, Haifa Museum, dated 26 April, 1980 (Bat- Yosef exhibited *The war and me* (mixed media, 1973-4 **Repro n° - - -** dedicated to Bat-Yosef's father [**Do you want this ref to father in footnote and not in photo caption?**] The video was created in 1991.

⁴¹ Her first show is reviewed by Léon Abramowicz for the *Tribune juive*, 542, 17-23 November, 1978, (Bat-Yosef press book).

⁴² *Une promenade fantasmagorique autour d'une sculpture vivante*, performed in the Salle Sandoz, 28, 30 March, 2,4,9 april, 1979 (brochure), `Corps: Catherine Mache, Musique: Etienne Rolin, Lumières: Jean-Pierre le Proux'. See also the exhibition brochure *Myriam Bat-Yosef, Christiane Durand, Pelja Penezic, Hélène Vanel*, Salle Sandoz, 1979, and André Pieyre de Mandiargues, `La Grotte', *Porte dévergoncée, récits*, Paris, Gallimard, 1965, pp. 49-96.

⁴³ See *Transmutations*, French version 18', English version 21', Alphascope, 1981 [1982], under the auspices of the Comité audiovisuel Simone de Beauvoir.

⁴⁴ *Corps-Accord*, Galerie Jean-Jacques Donguy, 1982, brochure.

⁴⁵ Bat-Yosef quotes this as epitaph to her testament in `Une peintresse dans l'espace du désir', *Supérieur Inconnu*, 13 , 1999, p. 107.

⁴⁶ Still photographs were taken of this performance in the gallery on 2 February 1983 by Philippe Fabre.

⁴⁷ Conversation with Bat-Yosef, Paris, 11.4.05; in `Une peintresse...' op, cit, she refers to the books on dying by Elisabeth Kubler Ross, and her membership of ADMD (Association pour le droit de mourir dans la dignité).

⁴⁸ Emmanuel Levinas, *Le temps et l'autre*, Paris, Fata Morgana, 1979, (a new edition of four lectures given at Jean Wahl's Collège Philosophique in Saint Germain des Prés, 1946-7).

⁴⁹ The amateur video, made by Honi Hameagel, credits Dvov Elimelech as pianist and composer of the electronic music. It was edited by Bat-Yosef with the aid of Fahrenheit 601 in June 1991.

⁵⁰ Bat-Yosef, `Painter -Woman - Mother - Woman Painter' , op. cit., p. 12.

⁵¹ Significantly, Bat Yosef altered her nose in the late 60s, and has had face lifts: see Noëlle Châtelet, *Trompe l'Oeil. Voyage au pays de la chirurgie esthétique*, Paris, Belfond, 1993, pp. 179-80.

⁵² Moshe Ben-Shaul, `Introduction', *Myriam Bat Yosef*, Ramar Gan Museum, 1990, np. Bat-Yosef's kabbalistic thought is informed by the writings of Marc-Alain Ouaknin.

⁵³ Miriam Bat-Yosef, `Une peintresse dans l'espace du désir', op. cit., p. 102.

⁵⁴ Levinas, op, cit., p. 82.