

APPARENT - The Political Body

The starting point of the exhibition is the examination of the body as a "place", as a territory with marked borders, internal politics and its own laws. All of these are dictated by personal identity, biological, social and gender characteristics and the like (for example, the kind of behavior expected of women versus men). In everyday life, our body is subject to performing actions that seemingly derive essentially from the various characteristics of our identity. Over time, these actions took root and became "natural" and self-evident, but in fact, they are the result of long-standing social construction, they form our identity artificially and imprison us in performing them over and over again. The boundaries of the body have a physical and mental expression, which are fixed in relation to each other - that is, the definition of the body always moves between language and idea and material and flesh.

The meaning of the body, and in particular its role as a political force field, is a saturated and complex area of research that has been examined through a wide range of aspects. The most important and perhaps the most influential in his research was Michel Foucault. His book *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* follows changes that have taken place in the means of punishment in modern Western society, changes in which the body has a central place. His research highlights the path from a policy of punishment through physical torture to the creation of covert control mechanisms, which operate "quietly" on the human body and seek to 'regulate and fix' it. The person who lives for a long time under invisible supervision, eventually internalizes the external control and exercises self-control instead.

In his book *The History of Sexuality* he goes on to describe the historical process of shaping sexuality through discourse. He claims that sexuality, from which we draw a basic core of pre-cultural human essence, is actually a fiction, which artificially unites and categorizes us. Hence, the discourse on sexuality has a dual value, personal and collective. Sexual identity is seen as a basic outline of private meaning for each person, yet on the other hand, in one's social commitment to it, it becomes an external tool of control.

In her book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler continues this view and refers to those "natural" actions that are performed by the body, as a performance, an external show, that the body has learned to perform in order to mark its identity. Butler proposes a course of resistance: instead of acting in accordance with society's expectations and reinforcing them, to question them, challenge them.

Within the art world, the human body also became a central material, with the practice of resistance offered by Butler often being used. That is, the artistic power of marking the body derives, among other things, from the viewer's ability to identify it, to associate it with a familiar, normative situation, which can

be disrupted. An example of this can be found in **Hilla Shapira's** work, featuring a bald woman combing hair in front of a mirror. The routine, everyday action suddenly becomes empty, deviating from the "correct" way of performing it, and takes on a dimension of madness.

Those repetitive, ritualistic actions that we perform in our daily lives mark and define our private identity, but often they also associate us with something broader. In his photographs, **Ken Goldman** documents his body, while performing various rituals that mark his belonging to the Jewish religion. He uses the real objects, which are identified with these rituals, but creates with them new, unfamiliar markings, in which the object is assimilated into the body and becomes a part of it.

The self-documentation of our bodies allows, among other things, a glimpse into intimate, everyday moments, which are usually not revealed and are even considered transparent or forbidden in the public space. These are not neutral or innocent acts of documentation, but conscious actions, aware of the hidden, political layer that they contain. The artists sometimes interfere, sometimes disrupt, seeking to change their status in one way or another, to take on a renewed ownership of their bodies. In her drawings, **Ola Zaitoun** records her face. She begins with a perfect realistic drawing of it, perhaps in accordance with the ideal of beauty expected of her, as a woman and as a painter. But the perfection of the drawn image evokes in her a feeling of alienation and distance. She decides to return to her face and mess it up, freeing it from impossible perfection.

The desire to share with the viewer instances of human "imperfection" is repeated in the exhibition, when the body is revealed to us, "damaged", vulnerable, fragile and sick. These representations challenge ideals of beauty and power, allowing identification and compassion but also shared anger and pain. In her works, **Hala Abu Kishek** tells the story of many women. She presents us with the body that was hurt, but seeks to mark through it the body that caused the hurt, the body that left behind signs of violence. The after-the-fact documentation confirms the body's ongoing pain and allows it to share its story, but more than that, it asks us to see, to mark and to confirm the terrible, invasive and forbidden nature of the injury.

The possibility that opens up for us to retell the story, in a different and diverse way, also stems from the multidisciplinary nature of the exhibition. Each discipline brings with it different perspectives, arising from the means of representation and its cultural and historical contexts, in particular in relation to the body. Each discipline also allows possibilities to subvert its canonical works and challenge their position. An example of such a reference can be found in the work of **Sohad Deeb**, who acts on a well-known work by the painter Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres, a work that exemplifies the orientalist and appropriative view of the French painter. Deeb uses all the meanings that arise from the old painting, precisely to protest what is happening here and now. She asks about the objectifying treatment of the female body, and the oriental

body in particular, when it was painted by men, and about the violation of women's right to privacy, independence and control over their bodies, then and today.

Marking the body within an artistic context has a dual value. It is, on the one hand, an intimate, personal action. However, when that action becomes public it is charged with critical, social power. These are protest marking actions that do not establish a static new marking - on the contrary, our ability to replace/change/disrupt what seems innate and natural proves its artificiality and offers the potential for constant change.

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