

YE'ELA WILSCHANSKI

#ILYSM4Artists

MESSAGES

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approached my body like I approach a lump
any sculpture materials.

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YE'ELA WILSCHANSKI

by Jenna Elizabeth

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♡: Hi Ye'ela! Congratulations on being a grant recipient voted upon by our community as well as a runner-up selected by Dustin Yellin!

YW: Thank you! I am grateful for this

Winning the grant felt like a warm hug from people that appreciate what I do.





♡: Your work is so distinctive and layered. My first introduction to your work was with your video pieces that featured your wearable sculptures. I'd love to hear more about your thought process in how your work evolved to this place of movement and form?

YW: It starts from a feeling /gesture / movement and then I imagine a garment that can highlight that essence. I usually make a miniature model to see how it looks and then go ahead a make a garment the dimensions of my body. The process of sewing is long. It can take several months between my vision to actually seeing how it looks on me. That is why my work is layered because I continue to develop the garment and challenge the design to have multiple functions.





♡: I'd like to talk about your shape choices in "Pelvic Floor" and "Dress Up." "Pelvic Floor" the shape construction mimics a window panel - "Dress Up" emphasizes shoulders. How do these shapes contribute to the narrative of the pieces?

YW: In addition, the design of the garments need to consider to be comfortable to perform with, washed and stored in my closet.

These wearable sculptures started from being a dancer and a sculptor in two separate art fields. Sewing garments to perform in was my way to bring the two into one body of work.

♡: That's interesting

I was going to ask about that



How the two evolved together or if you had studied them independently?

Were you self taught in sewing or is that something you had to inquire more about in relation to the construction?

YW: The wooden frame in "Pelvic Floor" as you mentioned is the size of a window frame. When I moved to nyc and sewed a curtain for my new room I was curious that the standard window is the size of a standing person and the window opens vertically. The design of the garment is thinking about wearing a curtain and standing between the inside to outside. On a larger scale, I thought about openings in the body such as vagina, openings in clothes such a sleeves and opening in architecture such as windows. I was interested that the name "pelvic floor" names a body part with windows and that skirts give a opening to the pelvic floor like the opening in clothes for the neck.

* and floors do not have windows





♡: I love that insight

YW: The size of the frames in Dress Up are the size of a suitcase.

♡: Can you elaborate on the choice of using the distinct shape of a suitcase, and the meaning behind that?

YW: After I performed with "Pelvic Floor " I understood the frame is challenging to commute with out of the studio. The first thing I did when I worked on "Dress Up" was to buy a suitcase and build frames that fit inside it.

"Dress Up" came from came from thinking about what I'm doing as a professional adult (creating an enviroment and performing in it.) in relation to dress up



games I did as a child. I remember measuring my body in relation to my mother's large clothes and performing giving out food to my dolls on a miniature ceramic set, imagining i will grow up to be just like my mother. Performing Pelvic Floor for me was a restaging of my birth in a positive way (I was born in a forceps birth) and Dress Up was having a conversation with my childhood self and telling me/her I can widen my imagination for my future.

I learned to sew from making dresses for my dolls from clothes that i outgrew when I was 14 i did a summer course to learn how to use a sewing machine and read burda pattern. All the rest I leaby myself. I didn't have money to pay for fabric so I sewed from old table clothes, curtains and bed sheets. In my current art practice, my garments relate to domestic use of fabric. I did a full circle

After "Pelvic Floor " referred to a curtain, i did a performance "Bed Skirt" that was a dress that was also a bed sheet. That performance did not function well. It was to heavy. "Dress Up" started as a exploration of a dress that was also a table cloth. I recalled specific table clothes with the initials of my great grandmothers embroidered into them. It made me think of the nomadic lifes they had (hence, all the performance folds up in a suitcase) and of the gender roles around food and mealtime jewish traditions.



specific movement I'm interested in. I now think I went to far with this working method. Before i started sewing garments I used to perform doing improvisation and I miss that quality of not knowing what will happen. In my next performance, i designed the garments in way to have time i can improvise. I am also inspired by language. Hebrew has adorable understanding of the body. I feel it is access to how my ancestors experienced their body in space

♡: You mentioned you were a sculpture artist and dancer as two separate mediums- what was the moment that made you want to explore sewing as something new to marry the two? Was there a specific awakening that inspired you to challenge the mediums? Or was it organic.

YW: Having access to Materials For The Arts was a major component to this exploration to be possible. It is a warehouse that companies give their supply leftovers and get tax deductible (I'm not sure 100% how it works) and organizations from nyc can take art material for free. Being a student at Hunter College CUNY MFA gave me access to free fabric. It was like the chocolate house from Hansel and Gretle but without the witch. It was heaven on earth for me.

When I finished my BFA, i decided I had enough of fine art and i am not interested to develop in that direction



anymore. I wanted to focus on movement and voice research. I felt that those are the most honest expression I can produce and this is the heart of creativity. I was also uncomfortable with fine art production not being environmentally conscious to our planet. I did that for a while but I felt something is missing and decided to look for a MFA program I can learn a way my sculpture and dance can live together. Just before I started my MFA, I got injured so in a way, the sculpture "won" because for a while I wasn't confident to move.

I feel I still haven't found the balance. I'm on a journey to figure this out.

♡: Your work "Her Sheitel" incorporates pieces of your hair tracing notes from your grandmother documenting her survival of the Holocaust. This is such a powerful and intimately linked work, I'd love to hear more about your family history and identity as it relates to this piece.





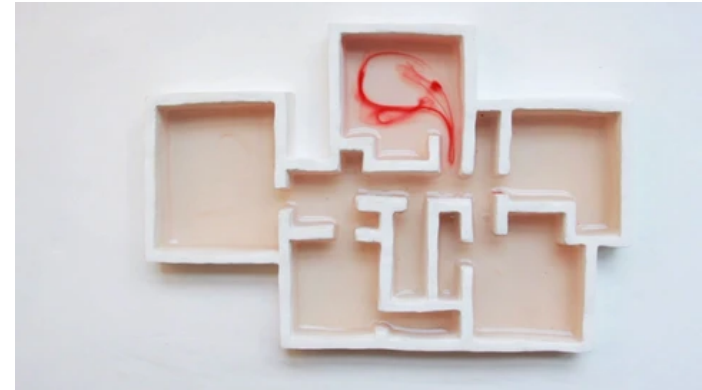
YW: I grew up on stories of how each one of my grandparents were unbelievable lucky to be alive but their community, songs, food, language dialect.... are lost never to exist again. I chose just one story of one grand mother for this project but I hope to tell more in future projects. My family was from Hungary, Denmark and Germany. I never fully understood how my grandmother felt about her extended family being gassed. I also never saw her hair aging because as part of her being observant, she wore a wig. I was surprised when she passed. Going over her life story with my hair was a way to connect with her. The dresses in the photos are the inspiration for the garments in Dress Up.

♡: Thank you for sharing that. I appreciate your openness given the sensitivity of subject matter

I noticed a theme of including direct elements of your body into your work, the usage of your hair with “Her



Sheitel”, “The Maze” womb lining, “Spring” cervical fluid - can you talk about your particular choice of materials as it relates to the larger story of your work?



YW: Yes! I like that question.

Learning the Fertility Awareness Method and the Sherman Menstruation Releasing Method gave me knowledge about my body to that was life changing. I understood that my body is incredibly



smart and knows what it is doing. I can choose to listen and work WITH it, not against it. This powerful experience just bubbled up above the surface and found its way to my art. In the video peices i want to give imagery to these materials that we usually see in realation to control and consumption. I want to show these materials in respect for what they can do.

In the larger picture, there are products that are labeled "Art Supplies", , "Food", "Hygiene ". Just because it has that title, doesn't meen that what is good for other bodies is good for my body. In my sculpture studies, I learning to work with glass, ceramics, wood, wool... I developed sensitivity and respect to the materials that I choose to surround myself with. The videos are moments that I/something of me perfoms that cannot be shared with a live audience.

♡: I'd love to hear more about one of your earlier pieces, "No" where you set up a hair braiding stand and filmed women moving their heads side to side... Can you tell us about the inspiration behind this piece? No as a word and expression has this very impactful, immediate, almost universal registration of communication that I find interesting...





YW: I have long hair and when I dance, I braid it in a way that will not interfere with my movement. The braiding became something of its own and I was interested to work with that image to understand something.

At the time, I was living in central Jerusalem and created site specific pieces in the street, addressing the sensitive location. My unresolved question from the previous piece "Approaching" was how I can make a piece that can function for both audiences at the street and in the white cube. I wanted to find a way that the documentation will not be alienating. I decided to position myself at the entrance to the market with a sign: "FREE hairdo in exchange for posing for the camera". With each woman that chose to participate, as I was braiding her hair, we had a conversation about her experience in the public space, her hair and art. I then put up a green screen and asked her to nod her head as if she was saying no and simultaneously



showing off the hairdo. Although I created a uniform of position in the frame, hairstyle and movement, I was interested to highlight each woman's individual interpretation of nuances in that nod.

The street I shot the video divides the secular and religious neighborhoods. On the religious side, married women cover their hair. Interesting conversation evolved with women that could not participate in the video. The whole process of creating the video was pleasurable, i got to speak to many people, I may have started a fashion of braids and the video resembles a particular documentation of that street.



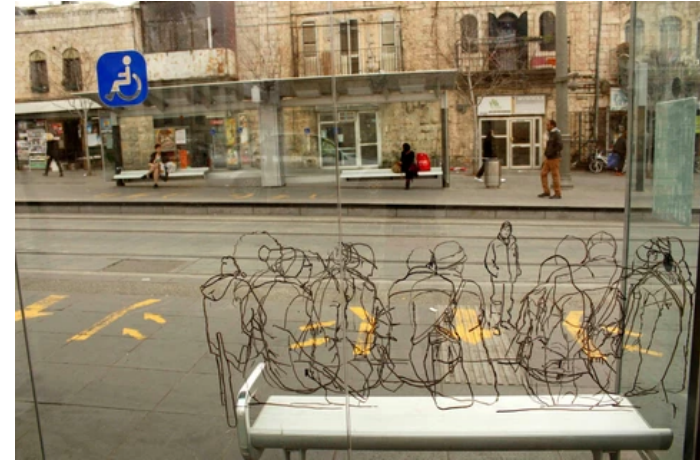
♡: This relates well to my next question

Something I'm interested in your work at large is these sense of being present as a viewer, it challenges the audience to this level of awareness. You have the documentation aspect as well, but the element of



performance is really interesting to me. Looking back at your work in “Approaching” where you drew outlines of passengers on glass with erasable marker - there’s this element of staying present, that at any moment this could be wiped away - and seeing that element of immediacy connecting with an audience evolve in your later pieces... There’s almost a meditative quality to it that’s really beautiful, a mindfulness of the outside world meeting your direction. What do you wish your work to communicate as a larger collection, is there a theme or question you are posing to the viewer?





YW: That is a good question. I liked that you chose the word "collection" because performing in the street is different from performing for a seated art audience. The audience in "Approaching" was not expecting to see art so I needed to put a lot of effort to be accepted and safe.

In performing for a seated audience, I can share how I prepare for a performance and maybe that will answer your question.

Before the performance, I prepare myself to be present in my center and for my center to carry the center of all the room. I designate an exit in the floor where the energy of the audience will flow through my center back to the earth and not get stuck in my space.



Right before the performance, I make a contract with the audience in my mind. I am very clear with my expectations.

This is what works for me to feel confident to open the audience to be in my world. The question that I am asking are my inner conversations of pain and pleasure.

♡: COVID has had a dramatic impact on the artist community... What's next for you, and how can ILYSM continue to support your work?

YW: Everything is stressful and difficult but I want to answer looking through "positive glasses". The way that COVID is affecting my practice is introducing an opportunity to develop performance-for-the-camera work. I am learning ways to create movement sequences that require post production to deliver the movement. It's all new and exciting for me. I would not have done this project if I could perform for a live audience. When it will done. I would love to share it with the the ILYSM community.

ILYSM has already been incredibly helpful. Thanks to the grant and especially voting for final grant, I had a place to share my work during a time that the in-person art world is closed.



♡: Lastly, what are three things are readers at home can look to for inspiration? It can be abstract or literal, a piece of art that moved you, a book, a poem, a song etc

YW: Ivana Müller - While we were holding it together, Xavier Le Roy "Selfunfinished" ,Turbulent -Shirin Neshat

♡: Thank you so much Ye'ela I've enjoyed getting to know more about your process today! Looking forward to seeing your forthcoming work!

YW: Thanks for this interview!!!

Ye'ela Wilschanski's work revolves around the materiality of the body and the materials that the body contacts. She received her BFA from Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem, Israel (2014) and MFA from Hunter College, NY, USA (2019). Performances include Movement Research at the Judson Church and 7Midnights Physical Research, Arts on Site.

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For more of her work follow her on Instagram @ye.ela



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