

# Ye'ela Wilschanski

Lives and works in Jerusalem, Israel

## An artist's statement

**U**sing my body and voice to express myself, is what I have been doing since I was born. As an artist, my body and voice are the most readily available raw materials to create from and about.

I started my way as an artist sewing clothes for my dolls. I needed to sketch my sewing designs, and those sketches progressed to paintings. Yearning for tools to paint, I went to art school. There, I was exposed to sculpture. I found that three dimensional is much more interesting than two.

The more I learned sculpting techniques, the more I became interested in the movement my body makes when I engage with a material. The process of creating an

art work excited me, but once there was a final product, I lost interest in it. I felt that my body- the tool that creates my imprint on all those materials- is not given the respect and presence it's worthy of.

That is what led me to performance art. Documenting my performances introduced me to the possibilities of video.

Ye'ela Wilschanski



Menstrual blood on a wall "No"

# Ye'ela Wilschanski

An interview by Dario Rufigliano, curator  
with the collaboration of Katherine Williams  
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**What immediately impresses of Ye'ela Wilschanski's work is the way her multidisciplinary and performative approach is capable of taking advantage from different techniques, as Sculpture, Video and Drawing to create a consistent, coherent unity that challenges the viewers' perception, accomplishing the difficult task of leading us to rethink about way we relate ourselves to modern society. Through an incessant process of recontextualization, Wilschanski goes beyond mere subjectivity and individual perception, breaking down the Four Wall and allowing the viewers to evolve from a passive audience to conscious participant of the creative process. I'm particularly pleased to introduce our readers to her multifaceted artistic production.**

**Hello Ye'ela, and welcome to LandEscape: to start this interview, would you like to tell us something about your background? You hold a Bachelor of Fine Arts, Bezalel School of art and design that you have received from the prestigious Bezalel School of art and design: how has this experience influenced you as an artist and impacted on the way you currently conceive and produce your works?**

Providing a helpful environment to produce art work is more complex than what a school curriculum can offer.  
For my needs, going through therapy gave me the strength and tools to be an artist. Travelling the world gave me sensitivity and awareness to materials, in comparison to my familiar



Ye'ela Wilschanski  
(photo by Colette Altman)



surroundings.

***Now let's focus on your artistic production: I would start from Body Land, an extremely interesting project that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article: and I would suggest our readers to visit directly at <http://www.yeelawilschanski.com> in order to get a wider idea of your multifaceted artistic production. In the meanwhile, would you tell us something about the genesis of this interesting project? What was your initial inspiration?***

The inspiration for "Body Land" was refamiliarising my body in relation to the four angles of my bed, following a breakup of a relationship. For a month I stayed in bed until I had the strength to get out. A year later, I wanted to confront the feelings I had experienced, and visually recreate what I had been through, in order to recover. What I do in the performance is to take a pile of dry soil and draw the outline shapes around my moving body, then I gather back the soil and form a square around me, moving in relation to the square. The final stage is drawing a frame referring to the shape of the room and audience within it. This stage is different at each performance, depending on the space.

***I definitely love the way Body Land takes such an intense participatory line on the conception of art. In particular, your investigation about the intimate aspect of constructed realities has reminded me of Thomas Demand's works: while conceiving Art could be considered a purely abstract activity, there is always a way of giving it a permanence that goes beyond the intrinsic ephemeral nature of the concepts you capture. So I would take this occasion to ask you if in your opinion personal***

**experience is an absolutely indispensable part of a creative process... Do you think that a creative process could be disconnected from direct experience?**

A creative process can be disconnected, but it is much more interesting both for me and for the audience to witness my going through an one-off experience .

My choice to be inside my works is because I feel that when I am making an object, I'm totally into it and want to continue being playful forever. When I need to let go, the object becomes a foreign body that I don't want to feel any responsibility for.

"Body Land" is an example of that. The process leading up to the point of this performance began with ceramics pottery works which led on to my studying mud building. The performance absorbs all that knowledge. What I chose to share with the audience is the relationship between body and vessel/shelter. There is no final product in the performance because the soil is dry therefore I do not form a object

The performance has evolved over the years and has incorporated the experience of exposure to the audience. The core of the performance has remained intimate, and each time I perform it, I am emotionally charged. Some of the experiences were devastating, like the one when someone from the audience interrupted me and violently shoved the soil away from me. Some were amazing, like the performance when I did a three-hour durational performance with a musician.

**Multidisciplinarity is a crucial aspect of your art practice and you seem to be in an incessant search of an organic, almost intimate symbiosis between several disciplines, taking advantage of the creative and expressive potential of Sculpture as well**



(photo by Yonathan Shehoah)



(photo by Yonathan Shehoah)

***as of Drawing: while crossing the borders of different artistic fields have you ever happened to realize that a symbiosis between different disciplines is the only way to achieve some results, to express some concepts?***

I don't consciously choose the multi-disciplinary approach to my work. In the past ten years, each time I wanted to focus on one particular art medium, it opened a desire to study another field. This is an ongoing process that I hope will never end. As a result, I have slowly built up a variety of tools. When I start a new project, I analyze it through the lens of different disciplines until I feel that I have found the right medium.

I get inspiration from my dreams. I wake up with a notebook next to me, and write down what I remember. I respect and listen to my dreams, because in them, a kaleidoscope of people and objects in bizarre situations make sense within one frame. That notebook is my laboratory of fascinating "raw footage" that I work with. I also make decisions concerning day-to-day life, when I am still half-awake because then I'm naturally free from my brain's limitations.

I come from a multicultural bilingual family. Not having a one solid base to start from, influences my identity. Going away from my comfort zone and re-adjusting is my default. This may explain why as an artist I work with multiple disciplines.

***In the APPROACHING you drew outlines of the passengers silhouettes on the glass of a train station: I can recognize in this interesting project a subtle but effective investigation about the emerging of language due to a process of self-reflection, and what has mostly impacted on me is the way you have been capable of bringing a***

*new level of significance to signs, and in a wide sense to re-contextualize the concept of a track of our existence. This is a recurrent feature of your approach that invite the viewers' perception in order to challenge the common way to perceive not only the outside world, but our inner dimension... By the way, I'm sort of convinced that some informations & ideas are hidden, or even "encrypted" in the environment we live in, so we need -in a way- to decipher them. Maybe that one of the roles of an artist could be to reveal unexpected sides of Nature, especially of our inner Nature... what's your point about this?*

In the crazy city of Jerusalem, the Light Rail route reflects a political statement on the part of the Authorities. My inspiration for this project came from the text on the station screen:  
 מתקרבת APPROACHING عودتة Appearing in Arabic, Hebrew and English a minute before the train's arrival. To me, the word approaching express warm communication . People all over the city, hope to see the word "Approaching", followed by a language used by the other side of the city they would never approach. On the same screen, is a request: "Attention please! Before entering the train, please make sure you have not left anything at the station". This is a forceful reminder that, at any given time, this place can become violent and even deathly and passengers should be aware of suspicious people and objects.

Within this reality, I chose to approach passengers sitting on the bench as close as I can, with just the glass walls of the train station between us. Using an erasable marker, I drew their body outline on the glass station-wall. As time passes, people and objects that have passed through on the way to their



(photo by Hadar Levy)



destination, remain present in the station .

The street responded to my action and people approached me. Some were angry that I was violating public property, warning me I could be fined for doing this. Others appreciated the drawing and asked me not to erase it. Whatever the conversation was, my audience changed repetitively as the train arrived.

For four months, I drew on the same station. The video documents an exceptional day, when the security guard wasn't harsh at me, and wanted me to draw him. He is not allowed to sit when on duty, so I drew him standing. At that day's drawing, the security guard is in the center, hovering above the people sitting, as if they are looking up to him.

**Another interesting work of yours that has particularly impacted on me and on which I would like to spend some words is entitled No and it is based on a performance at the entrance to Mahane Yehuda market in Jerusalem. I have found really stimulating the way you have extracted from the apparently simple act of shaking one's head no a distinctive feature from each of the involved people: as you have remarked once, we use your body as a tool to express yourselves from the moment you are born : and I have appreciated the way your approach forces us to evolve from being a passive spectator to more conscious participants to the act you perform... By the way, although I'm aware that this might sound a bit naïf, I have to admit that I'm sort of convinced that Art -especially nowadays- could play an effective role in sociopolitical issues: not only just by offering to people a generic platform for expression... I would go as far as to state that Art could even**

**steer people's behaviour... what's your point about this? Does it sound a bit exaggerated?**

"NO" is a piece about my feelings as a woman, using my own hair to communicate my research . For two and a half weeks, I had a trading stand in the market designated to woman.

My own braided hair advertised the hair-do I was offering to do. In exchange, I asked for posing to the camera time. One hundred and thirteen women chose to participate. With each woman, as I braided her hair, we discussed her feelings about being a woman in the market, and how she feels about the way the society makes her feel about her body.

When I finished doing the braids, I stood behind the camera. My instructions then to the woman was to nod her head, as if saying "No", simultaneously showing off the different angles of her braid.

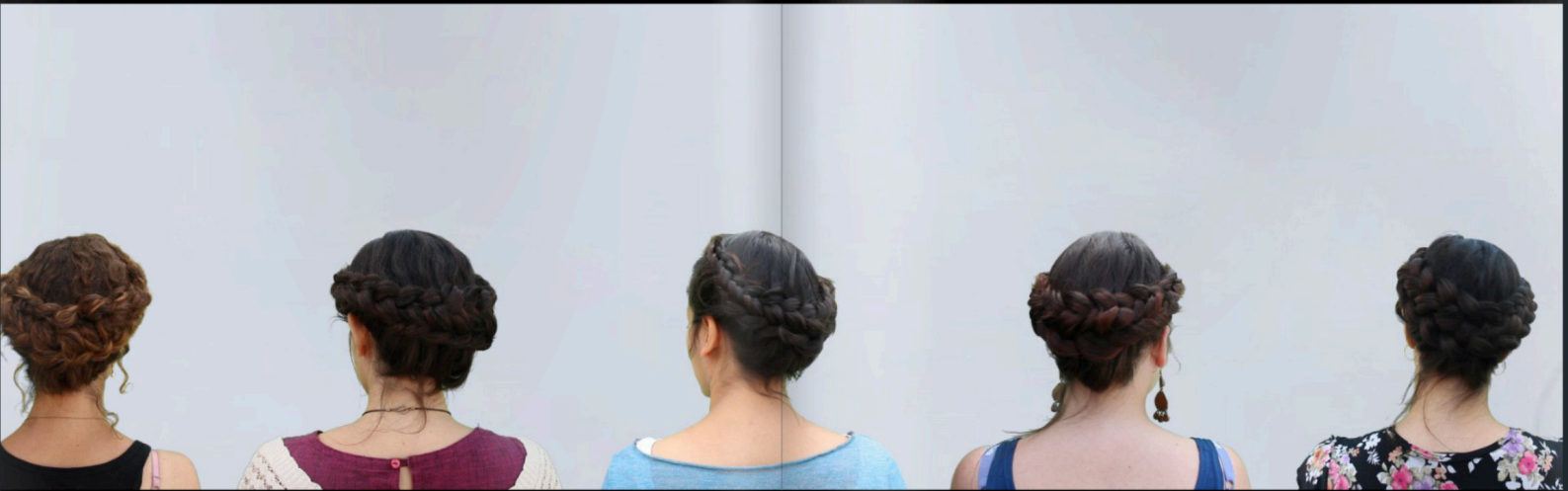
Then they left, adorned with the same hairdo as mine. Over a year has passed since, and I still meet random woman who tell me how the braids changed their day, and how beautiful they felt. I know, that I had taken there unbound hair and closed it firmly to form that.

**You have talked about projects you did in the street, communicating with random people, in "My happiness is your grief", you deal with your closer surrounding. Specifically with your close family. What is the background of this video?**

The video is about my relationship with my mother and my relationship to the model of a mother I was expected to become and rejected. I based the videos sequence on childhood memories from religious rituals at family meals. On Friday night dinner, it is a tradition that the father followed by the mother









place their hands on the children's head and recite a blessing that God will bless and take care of them. There is a different blessing for girls and boys and it's given in order from oldest to youngest sibling. Looking back I thought of the choreography and body gestures that made that ritual what it is. In the video, I am

different generations and times in my body. I thought of the gestures I would have used, expanding on the formal ones to give expression to the complexity of the family situation.

***Before taking leave from this interesting conversation I would like to pose a but***



***cliché question, but an interesting one that I'm sure will interest our readers around the world...***

***It goes without saying that feedbacks are capable of providing an artist of an important support, which is for sure not absolutely indispensable, but that can stimulate to keep on with Art: I was just***

***wondering if the expectation of positive feedback could even influence the process of an artist... In particular, how would you define the nature of the relation with your audience?***

I think of the audience as an integral part of the work, and not a separate stage after I have



finished. I don't expect a specific feedback, but I do want a feedback, otherwise I would of worked alone in the studio. The train station from "Approaching" is the one I use to commute, and the market from "No" is where I do my shopping regularly. At both projects, I was not confined to an art context, and I was careful to even mention the word art when I explained what I'm doing.

**Thanks a lot for your time and for sharing your thoughts, Laurie. Finally, would you like to tell us readers something about your future projects. How do you see your work evolving?**

Thanks for the interview!

In the next couple of months I will be performing in a movement improvisation series at Barbur Gallery, for further information:  
<http://improvement.wix.com/2015>

The project I'm working on now is a video and a performance that deal with the image of a memorial wreath.

In the future, I hope to be attentive to the materials in my body and in my surrounding, and to be precise with myself.

An interview by Dario Rutigliano, curator with the collaboration of Katherine Williams  
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(Photo by Dor Kedmi)