

SIGALIT LANDAU SOIL NURSING

2 June - 25 July 2012

Kamel Mennour is pleased to present "Soil Nursing", Sigalit Landau's third solo exhibition at the gallery.

Soil Nursing. The wrack of olive trees. If fireflies still exist [as Pasolini so felicitously calls them] then, Sigalit Landau must be one of them.

The artist ushers us into a land of dreams, a sort of Garden of Eden. We find ourselves in the midst of a fable, in an olive grove in the Negev Desert in southern Israel. Poetic and dreamlike, "Soil Nursing", an exhibition at the Kamel Mennour Gallery, features photographs, videos and sculptures, which represent the points of tension towards which the intimate and the political, the collective and the individual converge, in order to do battle and devastate the customary lines of demarcation. Sigalit Landau has accustomed us to putting them to the test at the Dead Sea in Israel: this maternal and metaphorical motif in her work is linked to the stream of consciousness, flowing backward and forward, far from stable boundaries, from the fixities of life, from the annoyances of identity. From her exceptional symbolic and political offering for the 2011 Venice Biennale we retain inviolable memories of the implementation of force in her project to construct a bridge made of salt between Israel and Jordan.

Sigalit Landau would have agreed with Virginia Woolf that she was going to wage her "Great War... waged on behalf of things like stones, jars, wreckage at the bottom of the sea..."¹ (1908). "Soil Nursing" establishes a metaphor related to the ground, for it is the solid ground which inspires the artist here. A ground to protect - one that belongs to an olive grove in the Revivim kibbutz. In Hebrew, the process of harvesting olives is called *Masik*; it is the name of one of the three films and the subtitle of her photographs. Sigalit Landau explains that the same word also means to "draw conclusions". It is, indeed, up to us to grasp these works: the fables she shows us are constructed in successive layers, built up over a lifetime.

Masik Her colour photographs depict men engaged in harvesting olives in the olive grove. The young farm workers are wielding sticks and choreograph a curious ritualistic dance around the trees - a hunt, almost a pursuit. The faces, covered to protect them from the dust, cast a menacing air. Nets are spread on the ground to catch the falling olives. The still images could be fragments of a silent narrative. The olive harvest takes a turn that is quite distinct from mere documentary. The nets on the ground transform the olives into prey.

Sigalit Landau superposes speech onto this. All her images make use of polyphonic structures. One might even say that she conceives the image as a symptom; the motifs circulate repeatedly in her work. Yet there appears in the photographs an incredible, divine light that penetrates these olive trees. The rays of sun are woven across all the scenes: "...it was plain enough, this beauty (...) one shape after another of unimaginable beauty..."² (Woolf). Higher up, the openings in the sky are filled with clouds; the luminous cut-outs, the dense clouds beckon us towards the heights of a world of dreamy rapture and delight. We pause in something that partakes of suspense and vehement emotion.

Sigalit Landau transforms these moments of existence into moments of epiphany.

It carries on. Her three videos pursue this same logic; one video is of an olive tree, projected vertically; another is of four trees shot and shown horizontally; and another, very dense and very dynamic, recreates the olive harvest in a full and complex way.

All the videos show us that Performance, as an artistic gesture, captivates Sigalit Landau's video-graphic images. The video *A Tree Standing* shows the harvest in action. She speaks of a sort of "olive intifada", or a "necessary war." The shots pan across the trees shaken by machines and by men, the fruit falling into the nets, the men striking the trees as if they were enemies, but it also captures gestures of the utmost tenderness, such as the image of a boy sorting the remnants of the fruit on the ground, as though praying.

Sigalit Landau "Soil Nursing" is on show at galerie kamel mennour from Tuesday to Saturday, 11am to 7pm.

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The normal links between elements are avoided: some of the men, seen from behind, wear t-shirts with a picture of wings on them. The angels are here. The rhythms vary subtly. All of our perceptions unfold around different logics.

The extraordinary soundtrack lets us hear the noise of the harvesting machines, snatches of the men's chatter, and the chanting of dirges by women whom we never see. Identities are utterly vanquished: angels, workers, laughing adolescents...

Sigalit Landau echoes the surf on the sea by filming the nets rolling the olives in waves, so that the wrack can settle. The wrack is what is left on the beach when the waves flow back out. A dreamy wide-angle shot of these green, black and red olives.

The shaking of the trees continues in the other films in which the men are absent. The framing of the olive trees focuses on the trees, shaken violently by the machines. The sound becomes hysterical, turning the visuals into a crisis. The trees are taken on a traumatic, anthropological, mythical adventure. The viewer is in cahoots with the trees, even merged with them. And then it's all over, the machine and the noise - we feel as if we have experienced a delirium that is close to a revelation. The fable³ negotiates with the timeless myth.

Post-fiction. Pause. Sigalit Landau ties these stunning images together with static objects - seven calm, peaceful sculptures, of various dimensions, in polished marble, in which the tender cultivation of the land becomes something else: the question of sharing, of love, is posed at the heart of the exhibition. Her feel for the sculptural universe of Camille Claudel allows her to come close to the intimate trials of a woman artist in the throes of creation. She turns the "deposit of experience", as Virginia Woolf calls it, into marble. From lovers' bodies, there remains an emblem of maternity, *Madonna and Child*, abstracted to a breastfeeding cushion that takes the form of a dissected Möbius strip. This radical simplicity generates a force of momentum, of possibility, like Brancusi's bird on its plinth. Another crossing of boundaries.

Soil Nursing. Sigalit Landau believes in radiant beauty against death-bearing forces. To people who believe what they see, Sigalit Landau responds with a different fable.

The wrack of the olive trees is a way of drawing close to the "power of grace."⁴

Diane Watteau, May 2012

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¹ V. Woolf, *Œuvres romanesques 1, Traversées*, Paris, Gallimard, coll. «Bibliothèque de la Pléiade», 2012, p. 1312

² V. Woolf, *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), Paris, Gallimard, Folio classique, 1994 (extracts)

³ A. Benmakhlouf, *L'identité une fable philosophique*, Paris, PUF philosophiques, 2011.

⁴ S. Weil, *La pesanteur et la grâce*, Paris, Plon, 2002.

Sigalit Landau was born in Jerusalem. She lives and works in Tel Aviv.

Her work has been the subject of solo exhibitions; the Museum of Modern Art in New York; the Kunst-Werke Institute of Contemporary Art, Berlin; the Tel Aviv Museum of Art; the Witte de With Centre for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam, as well as group shows at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem; the Yokohama Triennale, Japan; the Centre Pompidou, Paris; the Koffler Centre of the Arts, Toronto; the SCAD, Savannah; the Bass Museum of Art, Miami and the Martin-Gropius-Bau, Berlin.

Sigalit Landau's works feature in important public collections: the Museum of Modern Art, New York; the Brooklyn Museum, New York; the Jewish Museum, New York; Magazine 3, Stockholm; Musac - Museo de Arte Contemporáneo de Castilla, León; Museos Archivos y Bibliotecas, Madrid; the Pompidou Centre, Paris; Tel Aviv Museum of Art; and the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

Sigalit Landau represented Israel at the last Venice Biennale.

In the near future, she will be exhibiting at the Solyanka Gallery, Moscow; the LA MEP, Paris; the Frankston Arts Centre, Melbourne; the Negev Museum of Art, Beersheba; the Bass Museum of Art, Miami; the Marseille-Provence 2013 Capitale Européenne De La Culture; the Musée Granet, Aix-en-Provence, as well as the Tromsø Museum, Norway.