

Ana Sayfa

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## Practicing Art from Jew to Arab

Arşivime Ekle

Haber Paylaş

by Johannes Hillje

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**İSTANBUL - Oreet Ashery is a London based context-responsive visual artist interested in the intersections between Jewishness, race, gender and the Arab world. She visited Turkey a few days ago to explore the roots of İzmir-born Shabbtai Zvi, a Jew of 17th century who inspired her**

Art in practice is what London-based Oreet Ashery calls it when she is putting herself in the role of characters involved in controversial political, social or religious environments.

Ashery visited Turkey a few days ago to explore the roots of İzmir-born Shabbtai Zvi, a 17th century Jew who converted to Islam and recently inspired Ashery. During her research she presented her work at Istanbul's nonprofit artist initiative, PiST.

Ashery has an ongoing interest in the intersections between "Jewishness," race, gender and the Arab and Muslim world. The project "Welcome Home," which started in 2004, is an investigation into Palestinians' hope to return to their land and other projects within an anti-occupation view. Some of the characters she puts herself in include a rabbi, a black man, a Norwegian postman, a fat farmer and an Arab man, among others. Ashery's most challenging character is called Marcus Fisher, an orthodox Jewish man.

### An outsider

Visiting different places such as Mount Meron in Israel, where she joined the annual commemoration of the death of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai and danced with a few hundred Jewish men to techno and traditional music, Ashery experienced life within the Jewish orthodox community and in places where she appeared as an outsider. Her project "7 acts of love" took place in seven different hotel bedrooms all over the world. Trying to learn what kind of fetishes culture and religion might produce, Ashery put herself in the role of the Jew Marcus Fisher, playing the role as a therapist. As Fisher, Ashery invited participants to her hotel bedroom and talked about the participants' troubles in life. Within 10 minutes, the participants could ask for almost anything. Exploring their fantasies in the presence of an orthodox Jewish therapist, participants talked about intimate issues, asked for sexual actions or just slept next to her, Ashery said.

As part of an art residency program in Khoj, India in 2006, Ashery dressed as a Jewish man and asked a street-portrait artist to draw her. She returned later in the day dressed as an Arab man and asked for the same portrait artist again to draw her. On both occasions the street-artist drew what he saw, resulting in Ashery receiving two portraits of herself as contradicting persons. According to her, this experiment showed that perception is just about how others see yourself and not about your real identity.

Recently Ashery developed a new character based on the controversial 17th century false messiah Shabbtai Zvi. Throughout his life, Shabbtai converted from Judaism to Islam and conducted a series of strange acts such as claiming to have stopped the sun. Following his ideas, Ashery dressed as the Muslim Shabbtai and walked in public with a fish dressed in baby clothes in a pram. She even kissed the fish for a few minutes. The reactions of the British public to the Arab-dressed Ashery were filmed and showed a change from stereotype-driven behavior to a surprising reaction.

Ashery came to Turkey to visit İzmir, where Shabbtai was born. Going back to the origin of her new character is part of a new film project. Ashery said she would also bring up the issue of Turkey's Armenian minority in the movie.

Her work has been shown in international galleries such as the Brooklyn Museum and Pompidou Centre in Paris. Numerous books and magazines in many languages have published her art.

ADnet



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