

Yael Bartana ... AND
EUROPE WILL BE STUNNED

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"Mostly I hope that people will try to be active in the way they read the news, that's my main position as an artist, to suggest different narratives, different ways to be aware, be active, to search for other narratives than what the media is reporting."

Yael Bartana



About the artist

Yael Bartana was born in 1970 in Moshav Kfar Yehezkel, Israel. She currently lives and works in Tel-Aviv and Amsterdam.

Her artistic practice includes film, photography, video and sound installation. Bartana has had numerous solo exhibitions around the world including New York, Malmö, Tel Aviv, Hamburg, Eindhoven and Kassel. She is the winner of numerous prizes and awards including Artes Mundi (Wales, 2010), Anselm Keifer Prize (2003) and Prix Dazibao (Montreal, 2009).

In her Israeli projects, Bartana dealt with the impact of war and the relationship between ritual and identity in Israeli society. Since 2007, the artist has also been working in Poland, creating projects on the history.

curatorial rational

"This is a very universal story; as in previous works, I have treated Israel as a sort of a social laboratory, always looking at it from the outside. These are mechanisms and situations which can be observed anywhere in the world. My recent works are not just stories about two nations — Poles and Jews. This is a universal presentation of the impossibility of living together"

Yael Bartana

Bartana's work in the exhibition will be her three films *Mary Koszmary* (2007), *Mur i wieża* (2009) and *Zamach* (2011). These works will revolve around the activities of the Jewish Renaissance Movement in Poland (JRMiP) a political group that calls for the return of 3,300,000 Jews to the land of their forefathers. The films traverse a landscape scarred by the histories of competing nationalisms and militarisms, overflowing with the narratives of the Israeli settlement movement, Zionist dreams, anti-Semitism, the Holocaust and the Palestinian right of return. Apart from realising the film trilogy, a new political movement has been established by the artist.

The Polish Cultural Ministry chose Yael Bartana and the JRMiP to represent Poland at the 54th Venice Biennial, 2011. Co-produced by ACCA, the third and final part of her 'Polish' trilogy films *Zamach* (2011) was premiered at the Biennial.

Mary Koszmary

Exploring the complex social and political relationships among Jews, Poles and other Europeans in the 21st century, *Mary Koszmary* (Nightmare) is the first film in the trilogy. Sławomir Sierakowski (founder and chief editor of *Krytyka Polityczna* magazine) portrays a young activist delivering a speech in the abandoned National Stadium in Warsaw, urging three million Jews to return to Poland. Reminiscent of a WWII propaganda film, *Mary Koszmary* addresses contemporary anti-Semitism and xenophobia in Poland, the longing for the Jewish past among liberal Polish intellectuals and the Zionist dream of return to Israel.



Mur i wieża

Mur i wieża (Wall and Tower) was made in the Warsaw district of Muranów, originally a Jewish residential area, then a part of the Warsaw Ghetto during WWII. The film depicts a new kibbutz being erected at actual scale and in the architectural style of the 1930's. The incongruous structure of the kibbutz in a location of such a perverse history weaves together contrary movements such as anti-Semitism, colonialism, Socialism, and Zionism. These movements contributed in different ways to the founding of Israel. Again, using 1930's propaganda aesthetics, the film presents heroic imagery of strong and beautiful men and women who mythically established Israel. Despite the most adverse conditions, these determined pioneers worked collectively to build houses, cultivate the land, study and defend their community against enemy attacks. Bartana resurrects these ideals in the 21st century, in an entirely different political and geographical configuration.



"I quote the past, the time of Socialist utopia, youthfulness and optimism — when there was a project of constructing a modernist idea of a new world."

Yael Bartana

Zamach

The final film of the trilogy is *Zamach* (Assassination), which premiered at the 54th International Art Exhibition in Venice. The film depicts the not too distant a future, where a funeral ceremony is being held for the leader of the JRMiP, who has been assassinated. This symbolic death will become the myth and unification of the new political movement, growing and spreading across Poland, Europe, and the Middle East.



History/Glossary/Key Themes

WWII 1939-1945

From 1933-45 the state of Germany was a totalitarian dictatorship ruled by Adolf Hitler and his Nazi Party, known as the Third Reich. The National Socialist (Nazi) ideology was largely centered around virulently nationalistic, anti-democratic, and anti-Semitic beliefs. Hitler sought to establish a large empire in Europe, recovering German territory lost at the peace settlement of WWI, re-unifying to the so-called 'Fatherland', German-speaking minorities within the borders of surrounding countries and securing "living space" for the German "master race" in Eastern Europe. On September 1st 1939, Germany began an invasion of Poland resulting in a declaration of war by France and Britain. WWII was the most widespread war in history, involving many of the world's nations, including all the great powers. Described as the deadliest military conflict in history, there were over 60 million fatalities, including mass death of civilians in events such as the Holocaust (Shoah) and nuclear bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.



The Holocaust

Before 1939 nine million Jews resided in Europe, however under a program of systematic state-sponsored extermination by Nazi Germany throughout Nazi-occupied territory, the genocide of approximately six million European Jews took place during WWII. Anti-Semitic legislation to remove German Jews from civil society was enacted by the Third Reich in the years leading up to WWII. In the early years of the war, Jewish people were sent to concentration camps, established by the Nazis as prison camps for people deemed as socially or politically undesirable in Nazi Germany. Though they were not designed as death camps, over 50% of prisoners died. Used as slave labour, they were worked to death, either by exhaustion or untreated disease. As the Third Reich conquered new territory in Eastern Europe, specialized military units murdered Jews and political opponents in mass shootings. Others were confined in overcrowded ghettos, which were like tightly packed prisons. In 1942, the Nazis had decided to undertake the Final Solution – the plan to eradicate the entire Jewish population in Europe. This led to the creation of extermination camps, mostly in Poland, where Jewish people were sent by freight train from the ghettos. If they survived the journey, they would be systematically killed in gas chambers. Two thirds of the Jewish population perished during the Holocaust.



Poland

The first Jewish people arrived in the territory of modern Poland over a millennium ago. For centuries Poland was home to the largest and most significant Jewish community in the world and was the centre of Jewish culture due to a long period of statutory religious tolerance and social autonomy. However anti-Semitism varied under different rule. In the wake of WWI, Jewish immigration from Soviet Russia and Ukraine rapidly increased and the population of Jewish people in Poland grew to around 3,300,000. The question of the treatment of the Jews became an urgent one for the Nazis after their invasion of the western half of Poland, home to about two million Jews. Ghettos in major Polish cities were created where large concentrations of Polish Jews were herded until they were eventually transported to extermination camps. Established in 1940, the Warsaw ghetto contained around 400,000 people, about 30% of the population in about 2.4% of the city space. From 1940 through 1942, starvation and disease, especially typhoid, killed hundreds of thousands. Over 43,000 residents of the Warsaw ghetto died there in 1941. Six million Polish citizens were killed during WWII, three million of them were Jewish. Today the Polish Jewish community averages at around 20,000, though the actual number of Jewish people not connected to any Jewish community or culture is several times larger.



Jewish Diaspora and Negation of the Diaspora

The Jewish Diaspora is the English term used to describe the 'exile' of the Jews from the region of the Kingdom of Judah and Roman Iudaea and later emigration from wider Eretz Israel. After the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, the term Jewish Diaspora came to refer to all Jews living outside Israel. Zionists believe in the negation of the Diaspora, encouraging the dedication to Zionism's enterprise. They believe that life in the Diaspora would either lead to discrimination and persecution or to assimilation and a loss of Jewish identity. Some Zionists simply felt that the Jewish people needed a "spiritual center" in the Land of Israel.

Zionism

Zionism is a Jewish political movement that has supported the realization of a sovereign Jewish national homeland. The movement was founded in the late 19th century, largely due to growing Anti-Semitism in Europe. Zionists have strived for preservation of the identity of the Jewish People through fostering of Jewish and Hebrew education, and of Jewish spiritual and cultural values. In 1968 the 28th Zionist Congress adopted the five points of the "Jerusalem Program" as the aims of Zionism today. They are: Unity of the Jewish People and the centrality of Israel in Jewish life; Ingathering of the Jewish People in its historic homeland, Eretz Israel; Strengthening of the State of Israel, based on the prophetic vision of justice and peace; Protection of Jewish rights everywhere. The role of the movement has declined since the creation of modern Israel, though different perceptions of Zionism continue to play a role in Israeli and Jewish political discussion.

Creating Israel

Since the 19th century, Zionists had been striving to create an independent Jewish state. In the 8th century BC, the southern part of the historic Land of Israel was called Judea. Judea lost its independence to the Romans in the 1st century BC becoming a province of the Roman Empire. After the Jewish-Roman wars (66-135 AD), the province was renamed Syria Palaestina and Jerusalem to Aelia Capitolina in an attempt to erase the historical ties of the Jewish people to the region. Since the exile of the Jews from Spain in the 15th century, Jews had been returning to Palestine. The immigration of Jews back to Israel is known as Aliyah. In different waves of Zionist Aliyah, beginning in 1882, Jews immigrated to Palestine. Before WWII, the Nazis considered mass exportation of German (and subsequently the European) Jews from Europe. Former colonial powers such as Britain and France were involved in finding a solution for expelled Jews. Areas considered for possible resettlement included British Palestine, Italian Abyssinia, British Guinea, British Rhodesia, French Madagascar, and Australia. In 1917, during the WWI, Britain defeated the Ottoman Turkish forces and occupied and set up a military administration in Palestine and Syria. In recognition of "the historical connection of the Jewish people with Palestine (Land of Israel)" and "the grounds for reconstituting their national home in that country," the League of Nations, which granted (1922) Great Britain a mandate over the Land, charged it with "placing the country under such political, administrative and economic conditions as will secure the establishment of the Jewish national home." After WWII Britain found they were unable to reconcile mounting Arab opposition to Jews settling the Land, so the issue was turned over to the United Nations. The UN General Assembly voted (29 November 1947) for the establishment of two states in the area: one Jewish and one Arab. The Jews accepted the partition plan; the Arabs rejected it. Upon the termination of the British Mandate (14 May 1948), the Jewish people proclaimed the establishment of the State of Israel. Less than 24 hours later, the armies of five Arab countries invaded the new state, launching what became Israel's War of Independence, fought intermittently for over a year. By July 1949, separate armistice agreements, based on ceasefire lines, had been signed with all the adjacent Arab states.



Fascism, Communism and aesthetics of totalitarianism/dictatorships/political ideologies

Forms of power generate symbols, styles and visual vocabularies. The aesthetic system of totalitarianism is organized around imagery of the leader, political symbols, pageants, ceremonies, anthems, propaganda and uniform. Dictatorships use these aesthetics to create a physical embodiment of their party's ideology, to appeal to the psychology of the masses. The visage of a leader, often displayed in homes and on public buildings in totalitarianism, is described as the 'cult of personality' and used to glorify the leader, presenting them as god-like and infallible. Symbols of the movement are often displayed on flags, banners and uniforms, representing ideologies in a visual language. The communists used the hammer and sickle because they were symbols of the industrial proletariat and the peasantry. Placed together they symbolize the unity between industrial and agricultural workers. Some political parties such as the Nazis used uniforms to visually unify the movement. In massive Nazi rallies, iconography was made all the more powerful by its sheer scale, mixing nationalist and pseudo Christian themes including the Teutonic knights and Wagner's notion of the Crusades. For the masses in drab 20th century Germany, these parades were religious-like experiences, inciting dedication to the Nazi cause and increased devotion to their Führer. In the former Soviet Union, a myriad of tanks and high-tech missiles would file past the Kremlin every May Day, exerting military strength through mass spectacle. Frederic Spotts, author of *Hitler and the Power of Aesthetics* suggests that Hitler's "lack of feeling for humans, even for fanatical party members, was already evident at the Nuremberg rallies and other spectacles when his 'architecturalizing' of the participants and his deployment of them in geometrical patterns reduced them to noctambulant creatures."

Totalitarianism often uses propaganda to further political agenda, presenting facts selectively to encourage emotional responses and as a crucial instrument for acquiring and maintaining power, and for the implementation of policies. The communists used propaganda to proliferate ideas that communism was for peace and cooperation, capitalism for war and exploitation. The Nazis used propaganda to establish feelings of the collective 'self' and other in relation to the Jewish people. All of these aesthetic modes aim to decrease the sense of individuality by creating homogeneity and a common feeling about a common object amongst the masses.

CURRICULUM LINKS

VCE ART

Unit 3 - AREA OF STUDY 1: Interpreting Art

Outcome 1

Use the cultural and contemporary frameworks to analyse, interpret, compare and contrast the Trilogy films of Yael Bartana and Palestinian artist Wafa Hourani. Hourani's Qalandia series, which comprises of models of the Qalandia Camp in the years 2047, 2067, and 2087, commemorating centenaries of the birth of Israel, the Six-Day War, and the first Intifada. The final version Qalandia 2087 depicts a utopian, surrealist city with a newly elected political party 'The Mirror Party' changing the appearance of the city.

Consider:

- What relationship does the artwork have to the artists' life and experiences?
- How do the social, political, cultural or religious contexts of the artwork contribute to its meaning?
- How have historical and contemporary events shaped our understanding of the work?

VCE STUDIO ARTS

Unit 1 Area of Study 3: Interpretation of art ideas and use of materials and techniques

Outcome 2

Consider how Bartana has used cultural and historical contexts to comment on contemporary Polish identity; where she has gathered aesthetic inspiration; what media and techniques she has used to realize these ideas.

VCE HISTORY - 20th Century History

Unit 1: Twentieth century history 1900–1945

Area of Study 1: Crisis and Conflict

Outcome 1

Analyse propaganda posters and films made by both the Nazis and Communists; identify the message of the representation and how it seeks to promote the group's political cause. Compare and contrast these films to the Yael Bartana trilogy, considering:

- the literal and symbolic elements in the original propaganda and Bartana's films.
- the historical context in which each film was produced
- the target audience for such material
- what the posters reveal about the conflict at the time.

VCE PHILOSOPHY

Unit 2 Ethics and Philosophical Investigation

Area of Study 2: Other great questions in Philosophy

Outcome 2

After watching the Yael Bartana trilogy, ask students to share questions associated with Zionism, the importance of a spiritual homeland, and cultural and religious identity in relation to Bartana's hypothetical political movement, Vote for a question, then prepare for, and participate in, a formal debate, inviting an audience of students to adjudicate.

PSYCHOLOGY

Unit 1 Area of Study 2: Social relationships

Outcome 2

Watch Bartana's film trilogy, taking note of the group/movement identity. Discuss styles of leadership, the effect of group sizes on individual conformity and how shared feelings of identity form collective identities.

VELS

Level 4 Grade 5 6

The Arts – Art – Creating and making

(students) ...identify how arts works vary according to time and place and apply this historical, cultural and contextual understanding in creating and responding to artworks; communicate ideas through images and metaphors employing elements of design; they may develop artworks through the appropriation of ideas from specific cultures and or times that support their intended communication.

The Humanities – History- Historical knowledge and understanding

(students) ...demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of significant events in Australian history including World War I.

Look at propaganda posters made by the USA, Germany and the Soviet Union during the 20th Century. What are some of the key features in the design of these posters. Explore the following online activity, taking note of the symbolism explained for different imagery.

<http://aspirations.english.cam.ac.uk/converse/movies/propagandaofficer.swf>

Using photocopies of existing propaganda poster imagery, create a collage version of an Australian propaganda poster for WW1.

Level 5

Civics and Citizenship- Civic knowledge and understanding.

(students)... identify and discuss the qualities of leadership through historical and contemporary examples.

The Humanities – History- Historical knowledge and understanding

students)... demonstrate understanding of key concepts such as democracy, governance, the rule of law, justice, religion, liberty, authority, leadership, culture and feudalism.

Discuss the leader figure in Bartana's film trilogy, as well as famous political leaders in 20th Century history. What made them successful? What were their goals as a leader? Divide students into groups and assign each an ideal leader represented by a photograph from a book or magazine. What would you say about a political leader to make him or her seem important, honest, intelligent, practical, brave, on your side? Students must name their leader, and his or her party, and then imagine a campaign theme with ideas, slogans and a representative picture or logo. What does the politician promise and how will he or she accomplish their goals? Next they create two campaign posters: One picturing the leader and campaign slogan, the other presenting his or her ideas. Present the posters to the class and finally, vote for the best 3 leaders.

Level 6

The Humanities – History- Historical knowledge and understanding

(students)...demonstrate understanding of key ideologies and explain their influence on people's lives, national events and international relations.

Explain why significant social and cultural movements have developed and evaluate their influence on societies.

English – Writing

Write sustained and cohesive narratives that experiment with different techniques and show attention to chronology, characterisation, consistent point of view and development of a resolution. Write persuasive texts dealing with complex ideas and issues and control the linguistic structures and features that support the presentation of different perspectives on complex themes and issues.

Create an imaginary political movement, based on your knowledge and understanding of another movement from 20th Century history. Make a time line, plotting a narrative as the group size grows. Are the movement's objectives utopian? Do they continue to stay that way as the group gains momentum? Write a short story.