

SHAHAR MARCUS



Shahar Marcus, *Seeds* (2012), HD video, 16:9, color, sound, 3'19"

Courtesy: MOMENTUM Collection

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Shahar Marcus's *Seeds* (2012) unfolds in a stark desert landscape - earth, wind, horizon, body - where a mine clearance team methodically combs the landscape for buried mines. The precision of their gestures and the slow, almost ritualistic pace evoke a choreography of danger and control. The tension of the scene - between destruction and regeneration, violence and care - is palpable. Each careful movement carries the threat of detonation, the unseen residue of conflict embedded in the earth. As the soldiers advance, they mark the ground with trails of red tape, carving the desert into linear rows that evoke both the logic of agriculture and the boundaries of occupied land. The red tape unfurled across the terrain both secures and scars it, transforming the land into a grid of demarcation, surveillance, and containment.

Into this militarized geometry steps a solitary figure - the artist himself - dressed in the clothing of a pioneer or early settler. In a direct citation of Jean-François Millet's *The Sower* (1850), he walks the cleared furrows, casting seeds into the earth. This simple, archaic gesture of sowing resonates

here as both a literal and symbolic act of healing. The land, once seeded with death, is replanted with the possibility of life.

This act of sowing becomes a symbolic counterpoint to the violence that precedes it. Yet in Marcus's work, the gesture is not naïvely redemptive. The seeds are scattered across a land that has been mined, mapped, and militarized—a territory whose fertility has been co-opted by geopolitics. *Seeds* thus becomes a meditation on the cyclical perversions of human enterprise: the same hands that sow destruction seek to replant the seeds of renewal, only for the cycle to repeat again and again throughout human history. Seen from today's perspective, amid the renewed escalation of war across the Middle East and an alarming normalization of violence worldwide, *Seeds* acquires a haunting immediacy. The film becomes a parable of cyclical conflict and fragile hope, questioning how we cultivate peace on ground perpetually re-mined—physically, politically, and ideologically.

Within the conceptual framework of *Art from Elsewhere: DEEP THROAT*, Marcus's work resonates with the exhibition's interrogation of how power manipulates both vision and desire. The clearing of landmines mirrors the sanitization of history - acts of erasure and control disguised as care. The artist's quiet intervention exposes the perversions of geopolitics into a global theater of war, where destruction is aestheticized, crisis commodified, and truth weaponized. In a contemporary moment where images of conflict are circulated, monetized, and absorbed as global entertainment, *Seeds* stands as a subtle critique of the political machinery that turns suffering into currency. The work's restrained beauty and meditative rhythm contrast with the grotesque excess of real-world destruction—inviting the viewer to reflect on how easily empathy can be replaced by consumption.

Presented in Malta—a place historically layered with conquest, siege, and survival—the work gains additional resonance. Malta's landscapes bear their own buried histories: fortifications, bomb shelters, and sacred groves that have witnessed both violence and rebirth. In this context, Marcus's act of sowing reads as an echo of Malta's own cycles of devastation and renewal, a gesture that acknowledges the scars of war while insisting on the possibility of life to grow again from the mined ground.

In *Seeds*, hope is not innocent—it is an act of resistance. Marcus's gesture bridges the personal and the geopolitical, transforming the act of sowing into a spiritual counterpoint to warfare—a quiet insistence on life amid the machinery of death. Against the backdrop of ongoing conflicts in the Middle East and beyond, Marcus transforms a wound in the earth into a site of quiet defiance. The work embodies the fragile insistence that creation, however precarious, remains possible even amid the perverse economies of destruction that define our time.

“The work Seeds explores the phenomenon of the buried mines that exist in Israel and the world over, exposing how these areas still carry the consequence of the war within their soil while supporting the new populations who must inhabit the conflict area. It examines the power of the present moment in these places where efforts are beginning to shift these death zones into places that consciously affirm life, embracing continuity in the very place where it once was blocked.”

– Shahar Marcus

ARTIST BIO: www.shaharmarcus.com

SHAHAR MARCUS (born 1971 in Petach Tikva, Israel. Lives and works in Tel Aviv, Israel.)

***Seeds* (2012) is part of the Collection of the Israel Museum.**

Shahar Marcus is an interdisciplinary artist whose practice spans performance, video, and installation, using his own body as a central medium to explore themes of endurance, ritual, history, and identity. Educated in Linguistics and Art History at Tel Aviv University, Marcus brings a conceptual and semiotic awareness to his visual language, merging performance art traditions with a cinematic sensibility and a wry sense of humor. He has also taught and lectured widely in the fields of performance and video art, influencing a younger generation of artists in Israel and abroad.

In his early works, Marcus used perishable materials such as dough, ice, and juice in actions that tested the limits of the body and the transformation of matter. Food—particularly bread—became a recurring motif, symbolizing survival, sustenance, and the cyclical nature of life. By juxtaposing bread and military symbols, Marcus playfully critiques the intersection of nourishment and nationalism, the sacred and the mundane. His body, often presented as a site of experimentation or ritual, is alternately a vessel, a battlefield, and a stage.

Over time, Marcus's focus expanded from intimate bodily performances to conceptual reflections on collective identity and national mythologies. His recurring character, *The Man in the Suit*, a clean-cut everyman reminiscent of Magritte's bourgeois archetypes, allows him to perform authority while subverting it—embodying the absurd duality of the artist as both director and subject, insider and outsider, laborer and elite. Through this figure, Marcus examines the performance of power and the construction of identity in contemporary society. His works are influenced by the visual language of cinematography along with familiar themes and tributes to art – history and artists, such as Ives Klein, Paul McCarthy, Peter Greenway and Jackson pollock.

Marcus's recent works address political and cultural tensions within Israel, re-staging iconic national symbols and sites with a blend of irony and poignancy. Works such as *Seeds* (2012) and *The Menorah Project* (2016) reimagine geopolitical trauma through gestures of absurdity and renewal, turning landscapes of conflict into allegories of transformation. His cinematic compositions reference both religious iconography and the visual codes of news media, locating his art in the uneasy territory between faith and propaganda, truth and performance.

Marcus has exhibited extensively at major museums, biennales, and art institutions worldwide, including: Tate Modern (London, UK); The Israel Museum (Jerusalem); Tel Aviv Museum of Art; Petach Tikva Museum of Art; Kunsthal Charlottenborg (Copenhagen, Denmark); Moscow Museum of Modern Art; The Hermitage Museum (St. Petersburg, Russia); Poznań Biennale (Poland); Moscow Biennale (Russia); Museum of Contemporary Art (Tbilisi, Georgia); Torrance Art Museum (Los Angeles, USA); and Kumu Art Museum (Tallinn, Estonia), among many others in Germany, Italy, Japan, Turkey, and the United States.

His works are held in numerous public and private collections, including The Israel Museum, Jerusalem; Tel Aviv Museum of Art; Petach Tikva Museum of Art; Haifa Museum of Art; as well as institutional collections in Poland, Italy, and the United States.

Marcus has been recognized with multiple grants and awards for his contributions to contemporary performance and video art. His work continues to challenge the boundaries between ritual and spectacle, myth and modernity—revealing the absurdities of political and cultural systems through gestures that are at once poetic, satirical, and profoundly human.