

**NEZAKET EKICI & SHAHAR MARCUS**



***TBQ (2017/18)***

**Video trilogy, designed to be shown as a 3-channel video Installation, exceptionally shown here in a single-channel screening format.**

- 1. Geniza (2017) 8:42 min. Filmed in Tel Aviv Forest**
- 2. La Scala (2017) 5:09 min. Filmed in Rome.**
- 3. Sea of Life (2018) 10:56 min. Filmed in Istanbul**

We live in a time of ever increasing uncertainty and crisis on a global scale. Trust is as scarce a resource as the many other dwindling resources our planet needs to survive. Its lack has fueled the innumerable conflicts throughout human history. And at the root cause of so many of these conflicts, both then and now, is the difficult topic of religion. In their trilogy of video performances, *TBQ*, Nezaket Ekici & Shahar Marcus tackle the topic of the three Abrahamic religions by addressing their similarities through rituals and holy books. Ekici & Marcus themselves encompass the three religions: Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. They each have their own independent artistic practice, yet since 2012 they have been producing collective performances under the title 'In Relation'. This collaborative practice is itself predicated on trust. In works that are often a test of physical endurance, these two artists transcend their differences of gender, religion, culture and language, to show us an ideal realisation of trust. If only more people could follow their example...

#### **ARTIST STATEMENT**

The trilogy *TBQ* (Tora, Bible, Quran) is a research project, trying to find out, how the different cultures and religions deal with holy books. The Abrahamic religions have many things in common, but are different as well. According to Jewish and Islamic belief, God and Archangel Gabriel directly disclosed the Word of God to Abraham, Moses and Mohammad. Therefore the Holy Scripture is indistinguishable from God, and cannot be harmed or disposed of in any way. Whereas in

Christian belief, Jesus, as son of God on earth, disclosed the Word. In consequence the Holy Bible is only the vehicle for the Word of God, but not by itself holy.

The overall question is: Can a holy book lose its holiness? All great religions relating to Abraham (Jewish, Christian and Islamic) adhere to the belief that a holy book will remain holy for all eternity. Thus, a holy book cannot and should not be discarded but rather requires special handling.

The artists focus mainly on the emotional involvement of all believers and the way, people dedicate themselves to their belief and to holy books. Therefore the artists want to give back to each outdated holy book a part of the deserved respect, applicable not only for one religion but for all three Abrahamic religions. Hence, the artists strive to restore the divinity to the unrightfully cast-off holy books and return them to their rightful place. In this light, the artists want to respect the specific ways religions developed in handling outdated holy books.

In the trilogy *TBQ* the artists show “performance-rituals”, using outdated holy books to revive their holy meaning and to free them from their unearned silence. The inner core of performance art is the ritual act itself, which shows similarities with the religious practice by means of repetition.

- Nezaket Ekici & Shahar Marcus

***Geniza (2017), video, 8:42 min***

Performers: Shahar Marcus, Nezaket Ekici

Video Photographer: Eyal Sibi

Stills Photographer: Maya Sharabani

Editor: Eyal Sibi

Sound Editor: Janja Loncar

Art: Caroline Atone

Assistants: Noga Rozman, Maya van Soest, Shiran Friedland.

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According to Jewish law, outdated and unreadable holy books have to be stored in a place, called “Geniza” (persian „ginzakh“ = “treasury”), which was usually a room attached to a synagogue or a hole in the ground to hide away unreadable holy books. Can a holy book lose its holiness? All great religions relating to Abraham (Jewish, Christian, Islamic) give the same answer to this question: A holy book will be holy for eternity. Therefore holy books cannot easily be thrown away but need special treatment.

‘Geniza’, was produced in December 2016, in a forest near Tel Aviv and addresses the Jewish religion through the ancient custom of Geniza. The work deals with the ritual wherein books that were thrown in pirate caves under the pretext of Geniza undergo a process of restoration, so that at the end they are returned to their original purpose and their glory is restored, forming a shrine under the stars.

***La Scala (2017), video, 5:30 min***

Performers: Nezaket Ekici, Shahar Marcus

Video Photographer: Andrea Benedetti

Still Photographer: Fabio Bernardo

Editor: Andrea Benedetti

Sound Editor: Janja Loncar

Assistants: Gao Chang, Li Zirui

Thanks to: British School at Rome, Christopher John Smith, Deutsche Akademie Rom Villa Massimo, Dr. Joachim Blüher, Deutsche Botschaft beim Heiligen Stuhl, Msgr. Oliver Lahl

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La Scala was produced in May 2017 in Rome. The artists use elements of the Catholic religion in the video work: they walk on their knees on steps as pilgrims do at the Santa Scala in Rome in order to get closer to Jesus; they mount mirrors on their backs as done in ancient times to reflect the image of Maria into the sky; they use bibles on a red carpet and incense to bless outdated bibles.

"During the Middle Ages, the pilgrim, once arrived to the site of the holy relic, would take out of his robes a covered mirror. He would then uncover it to reflect the relic, then take it back to his home. When arriving to his land, he would reveal again the mirror, and reflect back the holy vision of the relic he believed was kept within it. The artists return to this ancient tradition and collect the holy books while reflecting their divinity to the sky as they progress on their knees towards the church of Santa La Scala."

***Sea of Life (2018), video, 10:54 min.***

Video Photographer: Baran Sasoglu

Still Photographer: Canberk Hasan Karacay

Editor: Eyal Sibi

Sound Editor: Janja Loncar

Assistants: Guler Asik, Gunes Huseyinkulu, Shay Govhary Saldis

Technician: Malte Yamamoto

Boat drivers: Burhanettin Peksoysal, Oruc Sena

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Istanbul was specifically chosen for three main reasons: the primary one lies in Turkey's geographical location - the Bosphorus as a connection between East and West. From a historical and social standpoint Turkey was ruled by the Byzantine kingdom, one of Christianity's strongholds, only to be later conquered and ruled by Islamic occupation, and to be reborn as modern-day Turkey under Atatürk, who separated state from religion. However, in recent years, Turkey is moving back towards Islamic influence.

Marcus and Ekici perform one final act – they fill buckets with seawater, pouring them onto holy books they have ritually carried through the city. They then fill chalices with this ritual water and sail far out to sea, where they pour the water back into the sea, by which symbolically they pour the spirituality of the books into the sea.

## **BIO**

### **Nezaket Ekici**

International performance artist Nezaket Ekici (b. 1970 in Kirsehir, Turkey) has been living in Germany since 1973. She holds an M.A. in Art Pedagogy, and studied Art History and Sculpture at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University and Fine Arts Academy Munich (1994-2000). From 2001 to 2004 she studied Performance Art under Marina Abramović at the Hochschule der Bildenden Künste Braunschweig. She received a degree in Fine Arts as well as an MFA degree.

Ekici has been presenting her work in national and international exhibitions since 2000: Museum Haus der Kunst in Munich; The Irish Museum of Modern art in Dublin; 25. May Museum Belgrade; PAC Milano; Venice Biennale; P.S.1 New York; Van Gogh Museum Amsterdam; Reina Sophia Museum, Madrid; Museum of Contemporary Art, Istanbul; The Museum of Contemporary Art Taipei/ Taiwan; Poznan Biennale; Curiciba Biennale; Tel Aviv Museum of Art; Istanbul Modern; Marta Herford; Minsheng Art Museum Shanghai; Haus am Waldsee Berlin; KunstWerke Berlin; Oslo Museum; The Contemporary Art Gallery of Georgia, Georgia National Museum, Tbilisi; Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow, Total Museum Seoul, and many others.

In 2013/2014, she was an artist in Residency at the Cultural Academy Tarabya in Istanbul and in 2016/2017, she received the Rome Prize and was an artist in Residence at the German Academy Villa Massimo in Rome. In 2018 she received the Paula Modersohn-Becker Art Award, and in 2020 she was an artist in residency at the International Studio & Curatorial Program (ISCP) in Brooklyn, New York, sponsored by the International Senate Department for Culture and Europe, Berlin. Ekici's work includes mainly performance, video and installation. She presented more than 250 different performances in over 60 countries, more than 170 cities on 4 continents. She lives and works in Berlin, Stuttgart and Istanbul.

### **Shahar Marcus**

Shahar Marcus (b. 1971 in Israel) is an interdisciplinary artist who works primarily in video, performance and installations. Marcus has exhibited at various art- institutions, both in Israel and around the world, including: The Tate Modern; MoCA Hiroshima, Japan; The Hermitage, Russia; The Israel Museum; Tel Aviv Museum of Art; Charlottenburg, Copenhagen- Kunsthalle; Moscow Biennale; Poznan Biennale; Moscow Museum of Modern Art; Paris-Beijing Gallery, France; Haus der Kunst, Munich, Germany; Benaki Museum, Greece; Museum of Contemporary Art in Krakow, Poland; MAXXI, Italy and at other art- venues in Poland, Italy, Germany, Georgia, Japan, the USA and Turkey.

### **Collaboration:**

The two artists Nezaket Ekici and Shahar Marcus work together since 2012 in collaboration, calling their overall project "In Relation". Within that time, several works have been realized and shown in exhibitions worldwide. Amongst other areas of interest, both artists are working as well on religious topics. Shahar grew up with Jewish religion, Nezaket with Muslim religion and is as well connected with the Christian religion by being married to a German catholic.