

English Translation of Haaretz article on Moti Brecher's show *Painted Floors, Mediterranean View*. Oct. 2016

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The puppet theater that is not afraid to be disturbing

Moti Brecher's latest play, which has also become a book in three languages, describes Israel as not very different from what we know, apart from the fact that the Arab states won the Yom Kippur War and the Palestinians control it. In the interview, Brecher explains why he responds to every military operation with a play and why he insists on puppet theater

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Roy Chicky Arad



Moti Brecher. One man's flow

pic. Moti Milrod

"Painted floors, Mediterranean view" is a play with fascinating opening data. He is not afraid to be political, current and disturbing - in contrast to most of the plays that arise in Israeli theater . Alongside the fact that this is a puppet theater, the play belongs to

another genre that is not common in Israel: the genre of alternative history, that is, "what would have happened if." In this case, what would have happened had Israel been defeated in the Yom Kippur War and as a result the Palestinians are the rulers of the land and the Jews are a persecuted minority. At the center of the plot is an Arab woman and a bohemian Arab couple who lives in a beautiful apartment in Jaffa with painted tiles. During a power outage, they meet in the basement of the house the ghost of a Jewish choreographer who was killed in the Yom Kippur War in 1973. It soon becomes apparent that the Arab youngster is a Jew named Omer, not Omar, and that he is pretending to be an Arab in order to be involved. The play, which will be released next month as a book in Hebrew, Arabic and English, has already been performed at the "Hahanut" ("The Shop") theater in Tel Aviv and at the puppet theater festivals in Jerusalem and Holon.

The man behind the "painted floor" is Moti Brecher, who has been floating for years in the side areas of the Israeli theater, somewhere outside the fringe pool. Brecher is a one-man stream, and unlike other playwrights who perform once every few years, he makes sure to write and present dozens of plays in the "Hahanut" theater, which is actually a tiny space on Ha'aliya Street, which contains several dozen places. Some of the plays were written in response to wars and military operations and were presented in real time. Other plays focus on characters such as Ohad Naharin and Emmanuel Rosen (whose screenplay is called "Wall and Gender"). Brecher's ability to respond to events while they are occurring is unusual in the Israeli art scene, which tends to relate to events decades after they happened. At our meeting he tells me that Operation *Tzuk Eitan* won a play called "A Success Story". But after checking out the posters, he discovers that it was actually Operation *Pillar of Defense* that received the play "A Success Story" and *Tzuk Eitan* won another performance, "Success Story 2".

The plot of "Success Story," in short: Gilad Shalit is linked to Benjamin Netanyahu and sees him as a father, But then he decides to send a letter to the chief of staff of the Hamas movement, Ahmad Ja'abari. Netanyahu, who reveals the letter, gets jealous, and assassinates Ja'abari. Netanyahu's puppet that has been created for this play has been participating since then in a variety of Brecher's plays. "I believe in the saying: When the cannons roar, The muses perform a show in Hahanut", "he says," situations

of war really tempt me to engage in politics, even in the way of black comedy. Use of dolls is very appropriate here. With dolls you can say more. There are texts that actors find hard to say. I tried to direct actresses in the play 'Painted Floor' and it was hard for them. Dolls leave the play at a protected level . After all, it's dolls, toys, it's like a game. "

Brecher relates that the first seeds of the play "Painted Floor" sprouted on a journey to the Istanbul Art Biennale, where he found "the atmosphere of Light-Hipster Islam." But the main influence was his transition with his girlfriend to an apartment in Jaffa three years ago. "When I was looking for an apartment, I met Arab apartment owners, which was a kind of reversal, against the backdrop of the real estate price fever," he says, this led to the birth of characters in the play such as the young Jew who had returned from Berlin and turned from Omer to Omar in order to be socially accepted. There's something romantic in this, hipster in its essence, until things get out of hand because of the ghost", claims Brecher, regarding his scenario, "I think a lot about what it means to live as a Jewish Israeli in Jaffa."

The inversion between Jews and Arabs can be read as a desire to introduce the viewer into the shoes of the Palestinian citizen of Israel and to understand him better. But the mere thought of destroying the State of Israel and becoming a persecuted minority again is hard to digest and not fun for many. "There are people who are having difficulties with this play", Brecher says, "I accept this, even though it is comical and light-hearted, the very idea of reversing reality does something to people ... some people came to me after the performance and said, 'I do not understand why the audience were laughing, it's a tragedy.' Through the usage of Arab characters, I wish to place a mirror in front of Jewish spectators. Some don't find it funny.

Except for reality's reversal in the play , the problems remain as they are: real estate, romance and inter-class conflicts. The play reflects Israel 2016, only that the Jews and Arabs status changes. The real estate piggery occupies an important place : the dead choreographer is dying to fly to the next world, but he remains as a demon in the cellar in order to maintain his hold of the property.



Brecher and the puppets of "painted floor, sea view". Exotic bird in an esoteric scene in itself
pic. Moti Milrod

When I ask Brecher about the attitude of an Arab audience to the play, he notes the translator of the play to Arabic, Salma Samara, who was happy about the play's " fresh and new perspective." Brecher admits that the writing of Arab figures and entering their shoes was not done without fear. "I did not want to sink into a heavy or righteous place, but I was very worried about the opinion of the Arab observer," he says. "You feel imaginary fingers pointed at you with accusations, I was afraid of the question of how to put myself in the shoes of the victim and speak as a victim, but the Roman Empire came up after the Greek came down, history comes in waves, once you are up, and then you're down, the option of loss is no longer in our lexicon. Because there is a sense of messianism, on the other hand, it is very much in our lexicon. "

Netanyahu talks about life itself. Explains that without him, we will quickly reach annihilation or exile.

"We say it, but we do not see the option ... As Jews in Israel, we feel that we were meant to live in a Jewish state.

Why did you choose the Yom Kippur War and not the War of Independence?

"I chose the Yom Kippur War because then the option of a loss was on the table ... This war is still a kind of scar ... I wanted to describe a situation that was sovereign and lost, that we had something in our hands ... I was born three months before this war broke out and I feel connected to it. My father and his friends served in the war and the image of the ghost is based on a friend of my father who always talked about the battles, a kind of character who lived it. "

A telenovela with Israeli content

Brecher, 43, grew up in Ashkelon and studied acting at Nissan Nativ. But from the very beginning he preferred woolly figures over human's company. "I quickly moved into puppets," he says, but admits that in the puppet world he is also exceptional. "I do not want to get into trouble with the Guild, but I'm an unusual bird in the puppet theater scene, which is relatively esoteric in its own right, I represent everything they do not believe in. they're coming from a very refined European direction. I didn't receive "proper" puppet training and I do wild and "trashy" stuff; I could throw puppets during a show... It took me many years to be admitted to adult puppet theatre festivals. Once an acknowledged puppet theatre persona came to my show. When I first left the stage, she said to me, 'I hope you fail.' "I asked why, and she said, 'No story, your puppets are rags.' I love my puppets very much."

Although Brecher dreams of conquering the periphery with the play, he says that sometimes they try to censor his performances when he emerges from the warm embrace of "Hahnut". According to him, he was supposed to appear with his partner in several plays, Uzi Feinerman, at the Boombamela Festival, with a play called "Safam" (mustache), based on an interpretation of the musical "Hair". In Safam's plot, a gang of anarchists in Dizengoff Square in Tel Aviv try to persuade youth not to enlist and raise a mustache. After one show, they received notice that the second show was canceled

due to the weather. "After all, we arrived at the site and found that they had arranged a different show," Brecher says. "When we turned to the person in charge and asked what had happened, she asked us to censor some of the play, and we told her 'yes yes' and did not censor it.

With Painted floor He was also invited to appear in one of the best-known institutions for bringing secular and religious people together for a home festival. But after sending the content, the organizers admitted to him that the place was too formal for such a play. "As far as the language of the play is concerned, it's like a sitcom or a telenovela, the Middle East as a show to the West, and I feel that the content of the play is very Israeli, about wars, the one who died, Arab-Jews, and the house, even though I grew up on American contents, movies like Beatlejuice and Ghostbusters. That's where I took the combination of horror and humor from. "

To a certain extent, the play is reminiscent of the alternative history book "If Israel Were Lost" (written by Richard Chesnoff, Edward Klein and Robert Little) of 1969, which presents a scenario of Israel's defeat during the Six-Day War. Brecher relates that he encountered this book in his Jaffa apartment, but did not bother to open it.

The best performance of the play, according to Brecher, was at the Jerusalem Puppet Theater Festival ("The audience laughed even when there were no punches"), after which he was invited to the festival of puppet theater near Linz, Austria. The next show in Israel will take place on October 28 in the framework of the Vitrine Festival, and the book will be launched in the independent stores. Afterwards, Brecher plans to run the show once a month at the "hahanut" theater.

As can be assumed, Brecher's rent in Jaffa does not come from the shows. He works in three schools in the center of the country and in Beit Shemesh and plays here and there in television productions, for some reason he's often casted as an observant Jew, for example in "Srugim" and "Shtisel". "It's strange, I'm going into an audition with a tzitzit, and right away they call me a tzaddik, and they accept me without a real audition ... I have a religious Look, maybe the zealous spirit that is trying to strive for truth in ultra-fringe is close to the fervor of ultra-Orthodoxy."

When asked if he is reviewed by theatre critics, Brecher replies that "for some reason, my plays are usually reviewed by art critics, I invited Michael Handalzalts but he did not show up."

Do you have a painted floor?

I do not live in Arabic house, I have regular floor tiles and there is not really a view of the sea, just three dots of sea in between the buildings, that you can see from the window.

