

Amira Ziyani: Beyond the Body

The exhibition "Beyond the Body" is another stratum in the path taken by Amira Ziyani, whose photographs reveal hidden layers in her immediate surroundings. Staged photography allows her to control its components and create a secret space of concurrent presence and absence. The sense of illusion evoked by the image is evident in the very first photograph in the exhibition, featuring a transparent figure ostensibly fading toward a closed gate, inviting the viewer to follow in its footsteps into a covert reality.

The series on view addresses the phenomenon of reincarnation, a deep-rooted, widespread belief in the Druze community, to which Ziyani, who lives and works in the village of Yarka, belongs. The Arabic term for transmigration, "*taqmus*," denotes change of clothes, articulating the perception of the human body as a temporary vessel for the soul, which is reborn over and over again.

Ziyani's photographs are based on stories of remembrance, which she culled from members of the Druze community. Most of them had already wanted to meet their family members from previous incarnations from early childhood, and were able to identify them and locate significant personal belongings in a particular place known only to them and their relatives in a former life (the stories are presented alongside the photographs). Using these symbolic objects, which she photographs with slow shutter speed, Ziyani represents this deceptive presence as an echo of memory. In some of the works, a duplicate image or one blurred at the margins bursts forth from a black background, emphasizing its being devoid of place and time. In others, the transparency of the image, its absorption in the background or duplication make the viewer doubt his eyesight. Ziyani thus implies that the visible is only one layer of reality.

In the main photograph in the exhibition, a figure lying on its back fuses with its serene double, which is being assimilated into the earth. In his book *Camera Lucida*, French scholar Roland Barthes discussed the connection between photography and death, maintaining that the act of photography freezes a moment in time, thereby furnishing the image, which no longer exists, with new life, immortalizing it through the viewer's gaze. As opposed to this perception, whereby the presence of an image taken in the past is carried into the future, Ziyani's photographs seem to capture a transient, elusive continuous present. She lets the images dissolve and disappear as she photographs them, thus inviting viewers to expand their gaze beyond the visible form.

Shir Meller-Yamaguchi, curator

--

Amira Ziyani (b. 1977), holds an MFA (with honors) from the Department of Art, University of Haifa (2012). Recipient of the Shpilman Prize for Photography Students (2009) and the Creativity Encouragement Award on behalf of the Ministry of Culture and Sports (2017).