

The Following interview was featured on the PERFORMA09 Arts Blog

Ideal Viewer

By: Rachel Lois Clapham

Einat Amir's Ideal Viewer at Scaramouche uses the artist's alleged own failed romantic relationship with an ex-boyfriend as a score for a series of structured yet improvisatory encounters with gallery visitors. The exhibition includes Ryan Andes as narrator or interpreter of the break-up story, Melia Smith as 'the crying woman' (Einat) and Yoav Levin as 'the handsome Israeli ex-boyfriend'. What results is a troubling story in which notions of authorship, agency, fact and fiction are played with. Rachel Lois Clapham caught up with Yoav Levin in Chelsea to get his side of the story.

**What exactly was your relationship with the Einat Amir, what are the circumstances around the break-up?**

Einat and I used to date a while ago when I was in the Israeli navy. I was an officer and she was my secretary. We dated for 6 months and eventually I broke up with her because she became a little mental for me. I didn't realize at the time but she filmed us having sex, doing things in the heat of the moment in my chambers at the military base. Later on she used that as the card with which to 'out me' to my superiors, like 'this is what I'm going to do with you if you break up with me.' She was a little crazy. She wanted to expose me. If she had done that, I would have been thrown straight in jail and demoted to a lower rank.

**Tell me more about this sex session specifically, what was so controversial about it?**

Well, it was the weekend. Most of the soldiers were home for the weekend. Einat and I went into the kitchen and grabbed a bottle of wine, it was Friday as per the traditional kiddush – a traditional sabbath dinner- so we had the bread and everything. We got a little drunk and – without going into too much detail – we decided it would be fun to switch places, do role play, with Einat as the officer and me as her secretary. But what made it worse was that it was quite a tense time at the base, because of the military scenario in Israel at the time, around 9/11. That was the situation at the base, but at the same time you have to relax every now and again, because living with that fear for a long time; you can't do that.

**How do you feel about the fact Einat was willing to destroy your career by playing that videotape?**

Like all the other times I have been in love, you don't really know what is going on. You have to forgive yourself for stupid things that people do.

**How did you come to be involved in Ideal Viewer?**

Einat called me and asked me to be the human side in the story. I knew that she had become an artist. She said she had got me a plane ticket and hotel accommodation to be involved in this thing if I wanted to be. I felt that accepting her invitation would show good feeling between us. Like if she had taken the trouble to make a work out of this story after all these years, maybe she had grown up a little bit and got over it. Maybe she is on Ritalin – or whatever she is taking right now – and making something that is hopeful. Maybe we can both move on. And I get to enjoy New York city for a while, which is very nice.

**When you first got to Scaramouche what did you think of the work, and your part in it?**

At first I was really taken aback with the whole thing. It was really shocking. Someone showed me the business card in the gallery that listed the 'handsome Israeli ex-boyfriend' as part of the work, and listing the 'private performance' on the 21st that I am supposed to be a part of. I'm being rented out, and people are signing up to hire me! I was very upset. I don't want to say I was nearly in tears but I was like, why am I here, what am I doing to myself? Why am I acting as a whore?

**Do you know what you are supposed to be doing on the 21st?**

Apparently people can request me. Someone told me that one lady came to the gallery had asked for me to be an Israeli mover, a house mover. It's a New York stereotype – Israeli's are into the moving business – they are hardworking, like horses. An older lady in the gallery requested me for the night, she was very excited to tell me that she wanted to hire me, but wouldn't say exactly what for. Technically though, Einat could have called her other previous exes to do this too. I don't know, maybe she has? I am just like 'Mr x' on the business card, my name is not on it, it's just 'handsome Israeli man' in fact, any actor could show up as me on the 21st.

**It's totally unethical, what Einat is doing, putting you through this – coming to New York and not telling you why or how you and your relationship with her might be used in the work?**

I don't think she is concerned with ethics. She feels that she is an artist and can use her life.

**And by implication yours too?**

Yes, because I am part of her life.

**Do you worry that she would have made work out of you, even if you had refused her invitation to come to New York?**

I do worry, she said the show might actually tour to Europe. I don't know if she will use a different boyfriend or invite me again. I'm not sure what will happen. I don't know if I'm the only guy involved in this.

**Wow. OK.... Is there anything you want to ask me about all this?**

What did you think about the show?

**I remember you came up to me in the gallery, really insistent that I listen to you. I worried that you were a crazy person but then you told me you were the ex-boyfriend... I don't really know how I feel about the show, I understand what Einat is trying to do with the work – but I don't know about the ethics of it, or if I would trust her if I met her. I don't think I would go for a long walk in the woods with her, put it that way.**

Credits

Ideal viewer by Einat Amir is curated by David Everitt Howe, selected by Performa09 as part of the 'Lust Weekend'