

Artist Philosopher

By Pesach Slabosky

Artists come in different flavors and scents. Hadas Ophrat is a philosopher artist. Now there is the cliché of the philosopher who makes you doubt that you exist. That is not Hadas Ophrat. In fact Ophrat is close to being the opposite of that kind of philosopher. Ophrat posits multiple existences, for himself, and for you and me.

One common phrase of philosophical literature is: "We can imagine worlds in which..." Well, that depends on who you are. When he says that, the philosopher is not usually talking about a world that a scientist can imagine. The scientist, by the time his prospective world contains sentient beings, has a world of things to consider. The philosopher posits a few rules and then rigorously (Rigor, the word most beloved of the philosophic tribe, entails mental work for which a professional philosopher must help you.) he determines the consequences.

Knowing what we know about how a kibbutz functions, and what a person is, can we not imagine in which one person can be a kibbutz? In "The Milky Way", Hadas Ophrat becomes a kibbutz. Although it is not very complicated it does require planning and equipment, even if simple, and the rigorous working out is arduous and uncomfortable

The subject, with Hadas Ophrat is also not Multiple Personality Syndrome. Again, it is the opposite. Ophrat presents us with a consistent character, a single person, but not with a personality. That there may be a personality is not precluded, but its existence, and whatever may be its nature, is speculative.

A man of theater, Ophrat brings the challenge of theater into the field of art. No, Hadas Ophrat did not invent performance art. At this moment I am referring to the way he calls attention to stage makeup. In "The Laughing Man" the application of makeup is part of the performance. In "Troubled Sleep", presented in 2003 at the Reading power station in Tel Aviv, Ophrat drugged himself with sleeping pills in order to give us an actual sleeping man, dressed in a conservative business suit and tie--with stage makeup. The makeup is something the spectator at a play normally does not "see". Its purpose is to give the face "stage presence", at theater distances, taking advantage of stage lighting. So why is this "character" made up--when we can step right up to him and see the smudges of makeup on his shirt collar. And can you be acting when you are asleep? All this while the person, with his personality, lies defenseless before us in real sleep, in absolute trust of our kindness.