

## 1998 exhibition in The Jewish Museum's Contemporary Artist

### AYA & GAL MIDDLE EAST

Naturalize/100m is the second exhibition in The Jewish Museum's Contemporary Artist Project series in which a commissioned work is on view simultaneously in the actual space of the museum and in the virtual space of our Web site ([www.the.jewishmuseum.org](http://www.the.jewishmuseum.org)).

The Israeli artist team AYA & GAL have added the indicator "Middle East" to their names to constitute a political label for their artistic activities. "Middle East" also serves as a type of logo identifying their geographical location, as in CNN Europe. AYA & GAL, a female and a male artist, live and work in Jerusalem where, for five years, they have been collaborating on interactive works, creating videos, web sites, and CD-ROMs. Naturalize/100m is a new work in their ongoing series Naturalize, in which friends and family are recruited to join a self-generated and idealized alternative to contemporary society. The induction or "Naturalization" occurs when people don different latex masks, or "skins," and are filmed while engaging in an everyday activity, such as brushing their teeth, planting a tree, or taking a picture. By conducting this ritual of the mundane, AYA & GAL democratize the project, and affirm their conviction that anyone can participate. In Naturalization, the participant must metaphorically surrender ties to citizenship and authority to then gain access to a place where territorial borders are absent and conflicting identities peacefully coexist. Naturalization consists of navigating and separating. As the latex suit is opaque, individual characteristics are obscured and differences between peoples are diminished. The artists allude to the similar physical appearance of the diverse group of people living in the Middle East. Differences of ideology and need that appear overwhelming, could be bridged, they posit, if commonalities, physical and otherwise, were a greater focus of attention.



The Naturalized figures visually resemble a Golem, a figure in ancient Jewish myth who is an artificial being created by man to protect Jews from evil. The Golem has come to represent survival, redemption, deliverance, even messianism. By referencing the Golem, AYA & GAL are offering a virtual model for the sustenance of the state of Israel.

The work by AYA & GAL Middle East can be located in the ongoing history of performance, body, and endurance art, as well as video art. Many artists turn to video to express something they are unable to achieve in another media, such as capturing an action in motion or a non-tactile observation of the body. Artists are able to control their image in video by turning the

camera apparatus upon themselves and viewing the image on a monitor in real time during shooting. Video has emerged as the "personal" medium since camera work, recording, and editing effects are controlled by the video-maker. Video also offers a direct and open form of communication between artist and spectator. The simulated representation of the body convinces the viewer that he/she is communicating directly with the artist.

Naturalize/100m is an Internet-based component of the Naturalize series. In the life-size video projection, a naturalized person emerges from the sea, runs onto the beach, and marks off a distance of 100 meters by placing ten flags at 10-meter intervals. The figure raises his arms victoriously after the last flag is planted. He continues running past the camera as if the victorious moment is one part of an ongoing process. The intensity of the movements evokes a sense of the many challenges -- physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological -- in conquering new territory. The video was shot using two cameras. The views change in the work from an open seascape to a peopled cityscape. The shift infers differing perspectives on the assignment of territory.



The computer terminal displays a related World Wide Web site designed by the artists. The Web site is 100 meters long. Viewers can physically move through virtual space and determine their location by scrolling along a ruler marked at 1-centimeter intervals. This journey will provide the discovery of stills from the video located at 10-meter junctures. When clicked on, the photographs will animate for several frames. The artists are claiming territory in virtual space, which is actually non-existent, self-created, and not previously conceived of, or desired by, anyone else. Thus, AYA & GAL are posing provocative questions about ownership of land pertinent to Israel's current quandary.

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