



## German and Israeli artists trade places

26 Jan 2011

Continuing a tradition initiated in the 1970s, German and Israeli artists submerge themselves in each other's cultures, sharing their impressions through their work.



Artist Nicole Schuck has carved out a niche for herself creating images of animals and their natural habitats.

By Bernard Dichek

The practice of inviting foreign artists to Israel to create works of art based on their impressions goes at least as far back as 1974 when the Israel Museum hosted legendary American artist Robert Rauschenberg for several weeks. Jerusalem's mayor at the time, Teddy Kollek, who initiated the idea, firmly believed that art could bridge cultural divides.



German painter Miriam Vlaming likes to focus on childhood motifs.

Thirty-six years later the tradition is continuing, this time through the sojourn of three prominent German artists spending a month at the [Herziya Artists' Residence](#). Since their arrival in November, painter Miriam Vlaming, mixed media artist Nicole Schuck and installation and video artist Susanne Weirich, all on their first visit to Israel, have been touring the country, taking notes and photographs, making sketches, and meeting with Israeli artists and the public. All of these experiences will be channeled into creating works of art that will be displayed in Germany and Israel in the coming year.

"The purpose of the program is to use art as a way of connecting between Israelis and Germans in a way that has nothing to do with politics or the past," says Friederike Schwarzer, an organizer of the program and a founder of [Schir](#), a German-Israeli initiative aimed at developing artistic ties between

the two countries.

Schir is also planning a reciprocal visit for the Israeli artists: In the coming year, Ayelet Carmi, Hilla Ben Ari and Maya Attoun, will all visit Germany, and after residing in the country for a month, will create works of art based on their experiences there.

### Tried to convince her not to go

The program has already made its mark on the three German artists, even before they have created their first work. "A number of my colleagues back home tried to convince me not to come," says Miriam Vlaming. "But now that we are here, it has been a very inspiring experience. Talking with our Israeli colleagues I find that we share many of the same ideas. We may have grown up far apart but when it comes to what we think about art we are very close."

The three artists conducted thorough research in advance of their trip, viewing contemporary Israeli films and reading books and articles, yet they were uncertain as to

what type of reception they would receive. Susanne Weirich notes how at the start of her stay she was hesitant about revealing her country of origin to an elderly bus driver, when he asked about her accent.

"But the moment he heard that I was from Germany, he became very enthusiastic," she recalls. "He told me that his son, who is a singer, had competed in Germany during the Eurovision song contest and was very warmly received there."



White Lies, by video artist Susanne Weirich, which features a discordant dinner conversation.

To launch the program, the Herzliya Artists' Residence gallery is presenting an exhibit of the German artists' works known as BETA 1, a name that both encapsulates Berlin Tel Aviv and suggests an experimental stage. The show was curated by Orly Hoffman and Friederike Schwarze in collaboration with the gallery's curator Varda Genossar.

The current show both reflects the artists' individual styles and hints at the direction that their Israel-based creations may take. Miriam Vlaming contributed two brooding pink-hued paintings suggestive of childhood motifs derived from fairy tales. "I like to ask questions about what we give our children," says Vlaming during a gallery discussion about the show.

### German artists will be back

Nicole Schuck, who has carved out a niche for herself creating images depicting animals and their natural habitats, brought to BETA 1 a series of drawings of bats inspired by a trip to Iceland. In Israel, she visited a number of animal sanctuaries and was especially impressed with the [Ein Gedi Nature Reserve](#) where a desert hyrax, a small sociable animal that resembles a guinea pig, caught her attention.

Explaining the importance she attaches to telling stories about nature, she notes that: "I like the idea of giving something back to nature instead of just taking." Pondering the direction that her Israel-based output may take, she mentions interest in a project that enables animals to cross the borders into and out of the country.

Susanne Weirich, presented two video installations, one showing a discordant dinner conversation among women of three generations, the other presenting a waiter carefully laying out a tablecloth until 'the unexpected happens': The tablecloth is pulled out without upsetting the dishes or glasses.

Both works challenge the viewer to look at what appears to be a familiar situation in a very different way. Weirich's habit of closely examining the small details of everyday life, as demonstrated in her previous works, may be expected to play a key part in anything she produces.

Subsequent to its display in Israel, the 'Rauschenberg in Israel' exhibit is to tour leading galleries around the world. The German artists do not yet know how their works will be received, but they are sure of one thing: "We're all eager to come back," says Nicole Schuck.