

impact the piece had on the many visitors - how it drew them in and then captivated them!

This potency of Yael Bartana's art - its potential to probe nuances and highlight ambiguities - facilitates the recognition of links between specific histories and a diversity of cultural contexts. I am delighted that *Yael Bartana - Redemption Now* is the first temporary exhibition of my directorship - and I wish her, and us, a lively dialogue with our visitors!

We would like to thank the Friends of the Jewish Museum Berlin for making the *Malka Germania* video installation possible. And we would also like to extend our gratitude to the Capital Cultural Fund (Hauptstadtkulturfonds) for financing the exhibition.

INTRODUCTION

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The people's call for redemption has been a major component of national and other collective identities. It reverberates throughout history and insinuates a demand for social change, hopes for a better future, a chance to face the demons of the past and to discard the hardships of the present.

The Book of Malka Germania accompanies Yael Bartana's solo exhibition *Redemption Now* at the Jewish Museum Berlin. *Malka Germania*, the title of the central work of the exhibition, newly commissioned by the Jewish Museum Berlin, shows a figure of the same name to appear in Berlin. The portrayed saviour may not bring redemption as desired, but instead flushes the city's fears, dreams, repressed traumata and memories unto the surface. "Malka Germania" is Hebrew (and Aramaic) for "Queen Germany," referencing the Hebrew female or Aramaic male version of the title of the Messiah "Malka Meshicha" in combination with the Hebrew name for Germany that is, in turn, identical to the title of the megalomaniac Nazi vision of the city of Berlin as "Germania". Bartana's work merges a polyphony of redemption fantasies, spanning from atonement to revenge, proposing the re-enchantment of the public space.

The eschatological idea and the millenarian expectation of deliverance have had many religious as well as political historical cycles - without the promise of salvation ever coming true. The bizarre and otherworldly

experience of the Covid-19 pandemic, the US-presidential elections, and the Black Lives Matter protests are the unexpected backdrop of writing this introduction. Preparations for the exhibition began when only very few prophetic sages had envisioned the threat of a worldwide viral scare. Preceded by global warming, #MeToo, Extinction Rebellion, Fridays for Future, vast Australian bushfires, Brexit, antisemitic and racist attacks in Germany, the current *Zeitgeist* is described by many as apocalyptic, anxious and uncertain. Concurrently composing a book on Yael Bartana's imagined arrival of a Messiah in Berlin, has its fair share of the bizarre. It is challenging to keep up with the times, especially when it seems like the Corona crisis has situated us at the crossroads of potential change. The exhibition picks up on the perpetual and popular demand for social change, joins in the chorus, while simultaneously witnessing, exploring and fabricating it and by that transforming it into art.

Yael Bartana has irritated the viewers' grasp of reality, voiced nuance, and explored collective identities for over twenty years. In her video works she challenges our emotional and intellectual ability to respond to our political surroundings. She employs art as a scalpel inside the mechanisms of power structures and navigates the fine and crackled line between the political and the imagination. Over the past twenty years, she has brought the dark dreams of the collective unconscious

to light, dissected group identities and (an-)aesthetic means of persuasion. As one of the leading video artists of our time, she has built a profound archive of investigative art, offering an inquiry into the dismal relationship between the national and the visual.

The exhibition centers structurally and thematically around the commissioned work *Malka Germania*. The dramaturgy follows the path of a messianic arrival, as represented in its central work, and the scepticism ensuing its deconstruction. Following Bartana's lead in the study, dissection and reordering of collective rituals and memories, the exhibition looks at fantasies of collective redemption. The show retells the eschatological spectacle, narrated by religious and political leaders since the beginning of mankind. It builds tension through works addressing the feeling of a world turned upside down, the everyday nature of the need to prepare for the coming of a catastrophe and the presentation of a cyclical return of messianic expectation. In a study room the visitors are given the opportunity to reflect on their own roles in society, including their gender and political orientation. This leads up to an eschatological point of no return = *Malka Germania*. The experience however leaves the visitors unredeemed but confronted with the fears and hopes of the collective unconscious. The exhibition continues to deconstruct the phenomena of ideological deliverance by addressing the invention of traditions, the selectivity of memorial culture and the possibility of creating alternative histories and futures through the power of imagination.

The Book of Malka Germania

The Book of Malka Germania functions as a resource of reflection on central topics raised by Yael Bartana's video work. Situated at the center of the exhibition, the mixed-media video installation *Malka Germania* portrays the arrival of an androgynous, yet female messianic figure in Berlin. Dressed in long cream-colored robes and riding a donkey, befitting the presaged arrival of the saviour, Malka Germania makes her presence known in the city. She passes landmarks of historic and political significance, such as the Brandenburg Gate, the Berlin Victory Column, Wannsee, and the Tempelhofer Airfield. She appears in a mythical German forest, at a village ruined by war, and she provokes the city up to the point of the emergence of Albert Speer's model of Germania out of the Wannsee Lake and the release of the German national symbol, the Eagle. Malka is accompanied by apparitions of soldiers, athletes and dancers, shadows of the IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) and of a celebration of a body cult (*Körperkultur*), shared by various kinds of nationalisms from the 1930s. Seemingly convulsing in the birth pangs of the messianic epiphany, Berlin's collective subconscious erupts in a series of changes around the city: the past and the future collapse into a "pre-trospective" present, historical visions come to life, the contemporary Berlinians try to cleanse their homes of the past, and some leave the city

on a march into or out of exile, becoming a new sort of "Wandering Germans," in reference to the antisemitic stereotype of the "Eternal Jew." Jews and Israelis develop a hyper-presence in the city with street signs being exchanged into Hebrew. The German capital with all its memorial layers unfolds in the video work into a real-life laboratory of mislead messianic ideas that went politically amok up to the ultimate catastrophe of war and genocide.

The expectation of salvation (*Heilserwartung*) in the hope for social renewal and the conduct of perceived ruptures in society accompanies political processes everywhere. Often the nomination of a Messiah has political and historical contexts, such as, for instance, the resistance to Roman rule led by Bar Kokhba. Judaism, having accumulated its teachings, commentaries and sources over thousands of years, does not offer a concise and clear messianic expectation. Two main possibilities of Messiahs have evolved in Jewish tradition, whereby both expect the arrival of a person who will reverse the Galuth, the exile of the Jewish people: an earthly leader in the legacy of King David, restoring the place of the Jewish people among the nations or a more divine appearance, initiating the end of history. The archetypal deliverance from exile is the liberation of the Jews from Egyptian slavery, but the notion of exile and return has had various interpretations and where Zionists, for example, believe in the Kibbutz HaGaluyoth, the ingathering of exiles in Israel, some sections of the ultra-orthodox Jews refrain from an active return to the Holy Land without the arrival of an actual Messiah. Also, the "birth pangs of the Messiah," the signs leading up to redemption, and the involvement of the people in bringing about the end of times, have been predicted differently by various Jewish schools of thought. Gershon Scholem, foremost scholar of Jewish messianism, has concisely defined "the notion of the content of redemption as a public occurrence, which takes place at the end of history or even beyond it, affecting the collectivity and not the individual."¹ The suspension of individual social responsibility by the transfer of power on one redeeming saviour or even ideology can have very dangerous and even catastrophic outcomes. It enables an individual's "authoritarian character," paving the road to populism, illiberal democracies and authoritarian power structures.

Yael Bartana offers a variant of messianic apparition. She questions the meaning of the themes of "exile," "liberation," "redemption," and the "end of history" and translates them to past hopes and contemporary expectations. The work *Malka Germania* addresses the impossible question of collective deliverance to the city of Berlin. In a psychotherapeutic approach, Bartana brings the city's traumata out of their shadows of the collective subconscious quite literally into the light of the video screen. The wish for redemption also translates to the longing for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, a specifically German term for overcoming the past, or

a desire to be recognized in one's collective atonement. While employing German-Jewish history as a source, *Malka Germania* examines social responsibility also on a universal scale: What responsibility does society have towards the individual and vice versa? How does outsourcing one's responsibility to an imagined saviour function and play through? Instead of supplying answers and leaving us in a passive state of perpetuating identity constructs, we as curators together with Yael Bartana propose to engage with art utilizing the dialectic and polyphonic methodology of Talmudic tradition, to ask questions instead of waiting for answers, and to follow in art's lead of creating nuance, ambiguities, alternatives and complexities.

This book adopts the multi-layered methodology of the Jewish Talmud - a compilation of the central oral teachings of Rabbinic Judaism and source of Jewish learning. The printed Talmud is designed in a way that allows a whole conversation between different generations of Rabbis to take place on the same page - voicing different interpretations and thoughts on the central texts of Jewish law and heritage, the Midrash. As a compilation of Rabbinic thought over hundreds of years, often the teachings are unclear, ambiguous with different kinds of memories, editing and opinions. Jewish students embrace the ambiguity by debating certain commentaries. This reflects the Socratic method in which Jewish students learn together communally through querying and discussions. The aim of this book is not to copy the Talmud in content or meaning. Nor do we wish to romanticize the Talmud. However, we do admire the polyphony and argumentative network established by different generations of interpretations and commentaries coming together on the same page. We hope to convey, through the book's structure, nuance and complexity as an antidote to the simple solutions often associated with the coming of a redeemer, be it political or religious.

The book centers on *Malka Germania* as an allegorical figure. Bartana identifies Malka's, and for that matter any redeemer's, potential followers in the visitors of the exhibition. The chapter titles imagine the vox populi, the crowds, who form and perform the collective subconscious, cheering and booing: "She is Hope," "She is the Leader," "She is the Messiah," "She is History," "She is Fake." These exclamations address the reader as the voice of the people, the masses, who await redemption or react to the arrival of a Messiah. They form the chorus and core of each chapter, representing a loud voice, maybe the loudest, which is being taken apart by associative commentaries of authors invited to reflect on the topic at hand, mimicking a typical Talmud page. Additionally, as in the Talmud, there are short quotes of "sages," as textual or pictorial references, placed on the margins of the pages, offering the possibility of an intersectional and inter-chronic reading. The book closes with a conversation of the curators with Yael Bartana, giving insights into her work process and

background. We invite you, dear reader, to partake in this discussion, to interconnect, associate and find that everything, in the end, is interrelated.

She is Hope

The first chapter deals with the strong, but ambivalent emotion of "Hope", the expectation of a personified deliverance and the vague notion that change for the better is imminent. The art historian Griselda Pollock develops a kaleidoscope of associations on the topic of hope and messianism, bringing together the disciplines of Jewish studies, contemporary art, and etymology with acute topics of the pandemic and feminist activism. The Culture Studies and Religion scholar Alexander van der Haven concentrates his enquiry on the chronometry of expectation. He makes clear the distinction of apocalyptic and messianic time in hope's often overlooked characteristic of looking back for redemption.

She is the Leader

The second chapter proceeds in asking what constitutes leadership and its followers. It offers two divergent understandings of the role of "Malka Germania." Sami Berdugo, a well-known Israeli novelist, imagines a glimpse into Malka's personality as a narrative of new, egalitarian, open-ended leadership, which may even abolish the idea of leadership altogether. Contrary to that, Cas Mudde, a political scientist focusing on political extremism, the far right and populism, delivers a bleaker version of Malka as the epitome of illiberal leadership and the current outcome of a populism that lives in the mainstream.

She is the Messiah

Next, this leadership undergoes an apotheosis, in which a sacralization takes place in the figure of the redeemer. This chapter offers an insight into the multiplicity of messianic expectation and the complexity of notions on the female side of God. The historian Michael Brenner delves into the secularized messianism amongst German Jews at the turn of the 20th century, offering insight into a wealth of intersections of religious and political fantasies of redemption preceding the arrival of Malka in Berlin. The science-fiction author Lavie Tidhar develops an alternative reality, in which an imaginary exhibition portrays a string of female messianic appearances of certain "Eves." He digs into the endless potential of messianic possibilities and the speculation on authenticity, surrounding each and every redeeming apparition. Jewish Studies scholar Elke Morlok, expert in mysticism, contributes a concise historical overview of the complex notion of "Shechinah," the female side of God, in Jewish tradition. She unravels the question of gendered sanctity and shows how there is no straight answer, but a plurality of ideas that may apply also to Bartana's creation of an androgynous Messiah.

She is History

The eschatological claim to the end of history, when all knowledge is revealed and no memory is needed, becomes especially conflicted in a place like Berlin, with such a burdened relationship with the past. The chapter title ambiguously refers to *Malka Germania* as the possible eschatological harbinger or as a regular person, who will not bring about Armageddon, but instead becomes part of the historical narrative. It also asks how history is constructed and in how far the individual partakes in the power mechanisms of the making and living of history. The cultural historian Christina von Braun's satirical approach paints a large picture of the outpour of history into a current climate of outrage in Berlin. By proposing an imaginary official investigation of Malka and her motives, von Braun touches on the nerve of feminisms, post-colonialisms, antisemitisms, and German domestic politics, while dissolving all measures of justified concern, intellectual discourse, exaggeration and superstition. The lyricist and essayist Max Czollek is a supporter of a radical pluralism in German society and critic of the role of German Jews in what he calls a well-rehearsed "theatre of memory." His lyrical contribution takes us back in time to the famous 16th century kabbalist Isaac Luria and his study of the ever-so current repairing of the world (Hebrew: *Tikkun Olam*). The essay of human rights lawyer, sociologist and anthropologist Yael Berda takes up the complicated and present popular demand of abolishing bureaucratic power structures in light of systemic injustices. Arguing that despite changes in regimes, political systems, and ideologies administrative memories perpetuate bureaucracies, this *cri de cœur* acknowledges the demand for a more imaginative and empathetic solution to administer the people.

She is Fake

And finally, doubt and disappointment in the possibility of redemption and in the person of the Messiah or leader take center stage, while remaining open to scepticism, different kinds of "truths" and ambiguities. Gender and postcolonialism scholar Julia Roth asks in her essay if queering Germania is a viable option for redeeming the homogenous entity of the nation. She deconstructs the notions of verity and falsehood under the auspices of gender theory and appeals to the reader to take action instead of complaining about a disappointed expectation of redemption. Curator, art and cultural historian Shelley Harten asks in how far the allegation of charlatanism connects the figures of the failed Messiah, the artist and the political leader. As an appeal to the potential but also the danger of political imagination, she contextualizes Yael Bartana's myth of *Malka Germania* as a powerful tool to cause much needed nuances.

¹ "Judaism, in all its forms and manifestations, has always maintained a concept of redemption as an event which takes place publicly, on the stage of history and within the community. It is an occurrence which takes place in the visible world and which cannot be conceived apart from such a visible appearance."

Gershom Scholem, "Toward an Understanding of the Messianic Idea in Judaism," in: *The Messianic Idea in Judaism, And Other Essays on Jewish Spirituality*, New York: Schocken Books, 1995 (1971), 1-36, 1.

