

Link to full video

<https://vimeo.com/166896676>

password: Tashken

Text outside the dark room

Ira Eduardovna: On Foreign-Made Soles

Six women, each in her turn, knock on the door of an apartment and ask for permission to step in. Six times the director calls "cut!" just as the woman is about to cross the threshold...

In this video work, the artist returns to her hometown, Tashkent, for the first time since immigrating to Israel from Uzbekistan at the age of ten. On the way to realizing her dream and revisiting her childhood home, she enlists the assistance of local theater actresses, living the dream through them. In the first stage she directs an actress who asks to enter the apartment. In the second stage she directs the same actress portraying the artist herself directing another actress about to step into the apartment – and so on and so forth. At each stage a new screen lights up, showing the artist in different roles. As with a Matryoshka, the artist opens one doll after another, revealing to us and to herself her own motives, fears, and feelings regarding her date with the past.

Text inside the dark room

The deep-set longing of immigrants to revisit the landscape of their childhood is at the heart of Ira Eduardovna's video. Her works address the themes of immigration – leaving a familiar place to settle in a new one – and the generational, cultural, and social gaps that result from immigration. In this piece she also relates indirectly to those who were left behind, "abandoned" in the country of their birth.

Born in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, in 1980, Eduardovna immigrated to Israel with her family in 1990, as part of the great wave of immigration that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union. In 2015 she returned to her hometown for the first time. Instead of going straight to her old home, however, she enlisted actresses from the local theater to translate her feelings and apprehensions towards the much-anticipated reunion into a work of art. She chose six actresses of different ages and appearances to portray her – the Jewish child who left and now wishes to see her old home again, hoping that nothing has changed. Eduardovna's work as a director is total and encompasses every single detail: she directs her actresses as to how to voice the request to enter the flat, what expression to wear on their face, how to move – all in utter contrast with her own lack of control over what is about to happen in real life. Another contrast stems from the reversal of roles between her and the actresses: now they are the foreigners who knock on the door of the apartment, while she is the one who is "at home" and in control, directing and guiding their every movement. Their first question – "Do you speak Russian?" – is well posed, since after Uzbekistan gained independence in 1991, its official language changed from Russian to Uzbek. Eduardovna invites the actresses to put themselves in her shoes as someone who feels like a foreigner on familiar land. Yet there is also another side to this coin: the massive emigration of the Jews in the 1990s was interpreted by many of the local residents as a rejection and betrayal.

The title of the work is taken from Nabokov's *The Gift*, the last novel he wrote in Russian, after having left Saint Petersburg for the West, in which he imagines returning to the streets of his childhood "on foreign-made soles."

*Perhaps one day, on foreign-made soles with heels long since worn down, feeling myself a ghost despite the idiotic substantiality of the insulators, I shall again come out of that station and without visible companions walk along the footpath that accompanies the highway the ten or so versts to Leshino. One after another the telegraph poles will hum at my approach. A crow will settle on a boulder - settle and straighten a wing that was folded wrong. The day will probably be on the grayish side. Changes in the appearance of the surrounding landscape that I cannot imagine, as well as some of the oldest landmarks that somehow I have forgotten, will greet me alternately, even mingling from time to time. I think that as I walk I shall utter something like a moan, in tune with the poles. When I reach the sites where I grew up and see this and that - or else, because of fires, rebuilding, lumbering operations or negligence of nature, see neither this nor that (but still make out something infinitely and unwaveringly faithful to me, if only because my eyes are, in the long run, made of the same stuff as the grayness, the clarity, the dampness of those sites), then, after all the excitement, I shall experience a certain satiation of suffering - perhaps on the mountain pass to a kind of happiness which it is too early for me to know (I know only that when I reach it, it will be with a pen in hand.)**

*Vladimir Nabokov – *The gift*, 1952 – Translated to English by Dmitri Nabokov, Michael Scammell, Vladimir Nabokov

Text credit: Shua Ben Ari, The Israel Museum, Jerusalem