

Who's this lady?

Niv Malihi at The Lab

The second intervention at The Lab that I would like to present took shape over the past four years. I have been closely following a humorous theatrical figure who is tracking issues of gender, feminism and Yemenite identity. “**Who's this lady?**” examines the definition of “the artist” in the art world, its borders and location in the overall art arena and discourse. For the past few years, **Niv Malihi**, an actor who studied at the Beit Zvi School of the Performing Arts, has created a female character with an extroverted personality, which examines the limits in a socially acceptable discourse. The character is named **Aguila**, an independent young woman, an urbanite, a simple young woman, somewhere between the “freicha” [“bimbo”] character in the late Ofra Haza’s song of that name and Dana International’s eccentric character.

Aguila is disappointed in men, yet still searching for “the one” to set her wounded heart on fire. She is deeply connected to Yemenite heritage and culture to the extent that she is documenting the last generation of those who immigrated from Yemen and settled in her childhood neighborhood of the Alyah neighborhood in Kfar Sava. According to Malihi, she has always been attracted to the “tribal elders,” having been brought up by her grandparents. She considers the elderly women to be colorful and full of life, richly flowing with Yemenite culture through the scents, fabrics, customs, and language.

“Aguila in the Neighborhood” is a video series of 11 episodes engaged in a fascinating journey through Niv Malihi’s childhood neighborhood. But in contrast to Malihi’s daily life as a child, in the neighborhood, this time Malihi has returned to the neighborhood as an eccentric, psychotic woman, always in high gear, in a kind of unexplained existential trance, being hosted by elderly women all born in Yemen, who all immigrated to the same neighborhood project near Kfar Sava. The segments are filmed mostly in kitchens, backyards, living rooms, and the neighborhood daycare and community center, whether simply in a Yemenite dance which always ends with Aguila in a kind of trance, with drumming on the darbouka. Yemenite cuisine and recipes and the music of Yemenite songs are a central component of the series, as a kind of desire to document them before impending death.

Sharon Toval