

Almacén Gallery
in collaboration
with Fireflies Project

Special thanks to Leah Abir,
Artistic Director
Arad Contemporary Art Center

Mistress of the Desert

**Anna Perach and
Gaston Zvi Ickowicz**

Mistress of the Desert is a joint exhibition of the artists Anna Perach (b. 1985, lives and works in London) and Gaston Zvi Ickowicz (b. 1974, lives and works in Jerusalem). Perach immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union in 1992; Ickowicz immigrated from Argentina in 1980. Both artists grew up in the southern city of Beersheba where their families still live, and the Negev – directly and indirectly – is a meaningful notion in their works.

The concept for the exhibition emerged from the rock petroglyphs that are found in Mount Hanegev, Mount Mihya, Jebel Irqab Isdud, and Ramat Matred. The petroglyphs are paintings that were engraved in limestone over thousands of years. They depict images of animals, hunters and ambiguous ceremonies that date back to the Nabataean period, the Roman period, and the Early Bedouin phase. It is estimated that some 500,000 rock petroglyphs are scattered in several locations in the Negev. The identity of the engravers is unknown, as is their reasons for creating them.

The site of the rock petroglyphs, to which Perach was introduced by Ickowicz, led her to explore the link between personal and local mythology, specifically family history, experiences of immigration, and her adolescence in the desert.

In *Mistress of the Desert*, Perach shows two new wearable sculptures – *The Wandering Pelvis*, and *Warrior* – and a series of watercolors on paper. The sculptures have clear references to femininity and maternity, and indicate a ritualistic order performed by a female tribe. The performance, which will take place after the exhibition opening and will be accompanied by live sound, touches on the dynamics between the personal and the mythological and reenacts an ancient ceremonial rite.

The three watercolors recount the journey of three women through immigration or flight. The journey begins with one of the women giving birth, continues with the three figures hiding in a swamp in the forest, and ends with their arrival in the Negev where they meet the local residents (fighters?). The fantastical journey Perach creates seeks to complete the missing information about the identity of the rock engravers, while creating an invented mythology of a wandering female tribe that documented its story on the rocks.

In her artistic practice, Perach works with sculpture and performance and creates large-scale wearable sculptures using tufting (an ancient carpet making technique). The choice to work in a labor intense handcraft associated with the domestic space, allows her to examine the ways in which elements from the private sphere touch on personal identity and reflect ethnic heritages and gender roles. Many of her sculptures refer to mythic female figures from Slavic or western traditions. In her work, the carpet often becomes a mask – both hiding and revealing parts of the self.

Gaston Zvi Ickowicz displays two never before exhibited photographs from his 2017 series *Rock Petroglyphs*. Ickowicz documents the rock engravings in close-up photographs, with the landscape and geological terrain carrying the same significance as the attempt to decipher these mysterious signs. In his work, Ickowicz attends to the Israel-Palestine landscape and the interaction between humans and nature in a sociopolitical context through works of photography, video, or installations combining the two.

Ickowicz examines the difference between the photographic perception of “landscape” and of “place.” The conceptual difference does not impede the potential of each approach seeping into the other – with a static “landscape” photograph transforming into an image of a “place” full of dynamic elements and qualities; a transformation that manifests the changing identity of the landscape. In the *Rock Petroglyphs* series the static Negev landscape joins a place with archeological remains to become full of energy, concrete, and alive.

Anna Perach earned a BFA in Fine Art from the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem (2008) and an MFA in Fine Art (with distinction) from Goldsmiths University of London (2020). She has mounted solo exhibitions and participated in group exhibitions in Israel and abroad, including Edel Assanti Gallery in London (2022); Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art (2021); and ADA Gallery in Rome (2021).

Gaston Zvi Ickowicz completed his photography studies (with distinction) at Musrara School of Art and Society, Jerusalem (2000) and Advanced Art Studies at Bezalel Academy of Art and Design, Jerusalem (2009). His works have been shown in solo and group exhibitions in Israel and abroad, including Herzliya Museum of Contemporary Art (2018); CCA Tel Aviv (2016); Hezi Cohen Gallery (2015); Tel Aviv Museum of Art (2011); MACRO, Rome (2013); and the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.