

Artist Profile: Nava Waxman

ArtworxTO Hub West artist Nava Waxman reflects on the three-year process of creating her work *Shared View*.

Where do I belong? I have been questioning my sense of belonging since early childhood, trying to find my place within different cultural systems. I am the second generation of Moroccan Sephardic Jews: my parents were deported from Morocco in the late 1960s, I was born in the Negev desert in Israel, and I immigrated to Canada in my late adulthood.

The experience of diasporic identity not only embraces living in/between two or more cultures simultaneously, it is also linked to a sense of displaced identity, a lost homeland from previous generations. *Shared View* is a performative multimedia installation that explores these notions of identity, liminality, and the poetic crossover between places, bodies, memory, and belonging. The installation incorporates three years of autoethnographic research, during which I have recorded site-specific performances between three geographical locations: Canada, the Sahara Desert where my parents were born, and the Judean Desert where I grew up.

I began my research in 2018 by travelling to Israel to interview my mother. When I arrived, I realised that my childhood town in the Negev desert, as I remembered it, no longer exists. Everything that had been kept alive in my memory had disappeared - except my family home, which looked exactly the same, as if time had stopped. For several days I was haunted by a desperate need to find something familiar in this place, but the only comfort I found was in nature; despite the changes, I could still recognize the trees, hills, and the desert horizon.

In October 2019 I travelled to Morocco for the first time, to search for the villages where my parents lived before they were deported in the early 1960s. The experience of travelling to Morocco affected me tremendously. It was an uncanny feeling: I had never been there before, yet, I knew this place. It looked and felt like my childhood memories of Israel: the people, the language, the markets, the elements of everyday life that were part of the North African culture I grew up with.

When I returned home to Canada I had mixed emotions, an ambiguous feeling of lost places and awakened memories. My journey provoked a rethinking and reevaluation of my identity, and it has had a profound impact on my sense of self. As a transitional being or "liminal persona" we experience endless contradictions and a

confusion of belonging, having departed but not yet arrived, not yet classified:
“neither one thing nor another; or maybe both; or neither here nor there; or maybe even... nowhere.”

Working with performance, choreography, objects, and video allows me to explore these themes through performative gestures and digital media. The video and moving images in *Shared View* are composed of site-specific performances I've staged throughout my travels in Israel and Morocco, along with other performative gestures and dance work created in collaboration with Canadian immigrant artists. By digitally weaving together these disparate pieces of footage, the installation seeks to re-imagine the cartography of self, an imaginary place that is reconfigured to encompass the simultaneous experiences of place that are entangled in our lived experience and identity.

Nava Waxman is a Canadian interdisciplinary artist working with visual and time-based media, including performance, choreography, video, moving-image, drawing and multimedia installation. Her practice engages with notions of identity, memory, liminality, and the body as an archive. Born in Netivot, Israel to Moroccan Jewish immigrants, Nava investigates themes of movement, migration, time, and space while delving into the transitory nature of gestures often embedded within complex artistic, cultural, and personal registers.

Process Work

Nava Waxman explains the different video elements she combined to create *Shared View*.

Image#2

The Judean Desert, Israel, filmed in 2018.

I travelled to my childhood home in the Judean desert to record the first iteration of this project. I chose a location that offered a view across the Dead Sea to the other side of the border, to Jordan. This view is shared on both sides of the Dead Sea. The anchoring pole on the shore prevents boats from drifting into the sea. This pole became a choreographic object that I used throughout the creation of the work, displacing, migrating, and reemerging in the final video.



Image #3

Performing the second iteration of the work in collaboration with Mahsa Alikhami, Cinzia Cavalieri & Maria Kravchenko at York University in 2019

I created this Möbius-shaped textile piece after reading Elizabeth Grosz's book *Volatile Bodies: Towards a Corporeal Feminism*. In the book, Grosz offers the Möbius strip as a metaphor for bodies being historical and cultural products, continuously affected by physical and psychical forces. I became interested in creating choreographic objects to explore notions of the body as an archive of places and memories.

I introduced this textile object to dancers and collaborated with them on a series of improvised performances to enact our experiences of crossing borders. The textile has certain qualities that generate an experience of disorientation and gravity when two dancers are moving within it. This collaborative process shaped the creation of the installation, and the videos of these dance performances are integrated into the final work.



image #4

My Ancestral land, the Sahara Desert in Morocco, filmed in 2019

This is an image from a work I performed in the Sahara Desert in 2019, in which I am wearing a traditional blue Moroccan dress that my mother gave me. This performance was emotional because I had spent the past few days trying to relocate the childhood home of my father in the Sahara desert, but the search was unsuccessful. The desert is enormous, and his village was not listed on any maps. My father passed away ten years ago, and I felt a deep sadness that I didn't have the chance to ask him about his childhood and preserve his memories.

However, I was able to find my mother's village in the Atlas Mountains. I FaceTimed with my mother and we walked together through her childhood home, trying to find traces of memories. The place has changed, but somehow she could still navigate through pathways, olive orchards, hills, and ruins - even through the cell phone screen.



#5

Still from *Shared View* (2021) combining archival materials of the Judean desert, the Sahara desert, the Dead Sea, and the blue figure.



Image#1

Still from *Shared View* (2021)

Performers: Mahsa Alikhami & Cinzia Cavalieri

