

Justine Frank

1900 – 1943

A Retrospective

Roe Rosen

Extra City, Center for Contemporary Art, Antwerp

9 January – 8 March 2009

Opening: Thursday 8 January, 19:00

Extra City presents the first European retrospective exhibition of the Jewish-Belgian surrealist Justine Frank, whose work was never shown in Belgium since her death in 1943. Frank was born in Antwerp, lived in Paris and died in Tel-Aviv. The recent inquiries about her life, her ethics and aesthetics continue to yield contradictory responses and dispute. Frank was situated within several crucial junctures of Twentieth century culture, yet at each such juncture she seemed to generate antagonism and confusion by those around her. Frank was a Surrealist during the movement's most radical phase, yet even this daring circle had a problem stomaching Frank's artistic concoction of explicit erotic imagery and Jewish iconography. Furthermore, Frank highlighted her Jewish identity on the event of European Jewry's worst horrors and near-annihilation, yet she depicted Judaism by intentionally employing imagery culled from the entire genealogy of Western Anti-Semitism; she derided Zionism, yet immigrated to Tel Aviv.

Accused of 'blindness,' 'ignorance' and 'forgetting', Frank's fundamental ambivalence and contrary stance can today be experienced as one of multiplicity, imagination and humor. This state of plurality and unresolved inner-tension evoke a gay sense of relief, a form of liberation. Frank's comic shuffling of masculinity and femininity can be read in relation to several historic fathers: the fathers of French transgressive art and smut, the constituting fathers of Zionism, and the authoritative European fathers who forged compelling apparitions of 'the Jew.' In this sense, the renewed interest in this forgotten artist could be understood as an attempt to adopt Frank as an alternative mother to these fathers, a mother whose art and life shed light on what is absent and repressed in their arenas.

The present exhibition contextualizes a large selection of Frank's paintings by including the cinematic portrait "Two Women and a Man" (2005), directed by the artist and writer Roe Rosen. Rosen played a major role in Frank's recent revival from obscurity. The film's protagonist is the scholar Joanna Führer-Ha'Sfari, who discusses not only Frank's work, but also compares it to an earlier work by Rosen that stirred a scandal when shown in Israel. In 1997, Rosen held an exhibition entitled "Live and Die as Eva Braun" at the Israel Museum which aroused public controversy and was aggressively attacked by Israeli politicians. However, it won critical praise for its new approach to Holocaust memory representation, and was exhibited at the Jewish Museum in New York in 2002 and the NGBK in Berlin in 2003.

“Rosen creates complex sets of identity in which specific fixed identities lose their rigid boundaries, and can be described only in terms of becoming, transforming, changing.” Ariella Azoulay.

The exhibition will be accompanied by the release of the English version of Roe Rosen's *Sweet Sweat*, published by Sternberg Press (Berlin, NY) in co-production with Extra City. *Sweet Sweat* is the title of Justine Frank's only book, a scandalous novel now forgotten, originally written in 1931, in French. The heroine of the novel is a Jewish girl named Rachel, born in the South of France, who reveals outstanding talent for debauchery and crime. Frank's book is considered a successor to the novels of Marquis de Sade, and a part of the smut genealogy of the French Avant-garde, alongside texts by authors such as George Bataille, with whom Frank had close relations. This edition of the book also contains a biography of Frank and an extensive commentary on the novel's historical and cultural contexts written by Rosen.

Roe Rosen, artist, writer and lecturer, born in Rehovot, Israel, in 1963. Lives and works in Israel. Received his BFA from the School of Visual Arts and his MFA from Hunter College, both in New York. He now teaches art and art history at Bezalel Academy of Art and at Beit Berl College in Israel. Recent projects include: The installation “Justine Frank: A Retrospective” (2003), a fiction book about an Israeli super-heroine titled “Ziona™” (2007), and the film “The Confessions of Roe Rosen” (2008). In the latter project, the artist disavows a career replete with lies, scandals, and fake identities. ‘The Confessions of Roe Rosen’ won a special mentioning in FidMarseille 2008, and was presented in Manifesta 7 in Trento.

Curator: Hila Peleg

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