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## Into the desert

Artist Orit Ishay explores [Arad](#) through Amos Oz's books

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# Into the desert

*Israeli multi-disciplinary artist Orit Ishay explores Arad through the texts of Amos Oz for her film 'OZ21'*

A SCENE from Orit Ishay's film 'OZ21.' (Orit Ishay)



• By ORI J. LENKINSKI

As the saying goes, sometimes you need to travel halfway around the world to come full circle. For Israeli multi-disciplinary artist Orit Ishay, receiving a residency in Austria began a journey that would end back in the desert, a 45-minute drive from where she started.

"I came to the city of Arad as part of an Artist in Residency program together with a German artist whom I had met during a residency in Vienna about a year before," says Ishay. "For two months, she and I lived and worked in studios side by side in the museum quarter of Vienna. It was there that we planned a project to sketch and map the city of Arad. We called it 'Arad Mapping the Map.' The project began with research and interviews with residents, photography and sketches. The project dealt with urbanism that blossomed as part of a utopic and modernist approach that was present in the establishment of the city in the 1960s. The map was given as a gift to the mayor of Arad. On the way there, in the quiet of the desert, I already knew that I wanted to do another project, one of my own, but I didn't yet know what it was."

The result of Ishay's ruminations that day, *OZ21*, is currently on display at the Arad Con-

temporary Art Center and will remain there until the closing of the exhibition next week. Ishay was chosen to participate in the opening of the Arad Contemporary Art Center, a welcome addition to the cultural landscape of southern Israel.

"On my first night in the city, and the following day," Ishay says of her first moments as a guest of the Arad Art Architecture Residency Program, "I read *Don't Call It Night*, which was written by Amos Oz 21 years prior to my arrival, during the years that he lived in the city. After two sleepless nights and days wandering the city by foot and reading, everything came together. I recognized in the texts and contexts a possibility to expand and I felt a great need to respond with my personal interpretation of this city and to the city's story. I wrote down ideas for the film *OZ21*."

In her film, Ishay presents young female dancers atop a concrete structure in the middle of the city.

"As I read the book, I immediately knew that I wanted to work with a choreographer, dancers and local musicians. I consulted with Oran Amit from the Arad Community Center and with Hadas Keidar, director of the residency program, and got a list of local choreographers and poets. I got in touch with Shani Senior Shiloah, a young local choreographer, professional and utterly

generous, who volunteered to participate in the project. Shani found all the girls who had taken her after-school classes, all between 16 and 18. Together, we chose six dancers."

The women, dressed in simple uniforms, read out different segments of Oz's text as they move. Later, these same women are seen in nude bodysuits, masked in fog and sand, perched next to a similar concrete slab against the backdrop of the desert. Here, the song "On the Way to the Light" plays optimistically in the background.

"*OZ21* takes place in two locations, the first urban and the second at the edges of the city, near the desert. From the minute I arrived in the city, I wandered from street to street, neighborhood to neighborhood. I observed as a tourist does, looking for the most special point in the city in order to film it and keep it for myself as a memento. I looked for a place that was hidden from most. And I found it. I found one after the other," says Ishay.

The two locations that made it into the film were the ones that resonated most strongly with Ishay. Their juxtaposition with the beautiful young dancers and soundtrack is haunting and provides a wholly new impression of the city.

*OZ21* is on display at the [Arad Contemporary Art Center](#) through December 12.