

Exhibitions

Scene & Heard 3

Bristol's Arnolfini hosts second live art festival

Unorthodox art gets live airing

By Emma Smith

ARTIST Oreet Ashery left Israel when she was 20 years old, choosing marriage as a way of escaping two years of national service.

One of her male friends was so sickened by the idea of spending three years of his life in the army, followed by one month every year for the rest of his life, he shot himself in the leg to get away.

Oreet was shocked when, after she moved to England in 1987, her longtime, previously secular friend began to turn increasingly to Orthodox Judaism. Gradually he began to slip out of her reach, growing increasingly distant and incomprehensible.

The rituals and mysteries of Orthodox Jews had fascinated Oreet while growing up in Jerusalem, now she found herself compelled to explore their way of life. The result was Marcus Fisher, Oreet's Orthodox male alter ego and the subject of her strange and unnerving contribution to the Arnolfini's second Festival of Live Art and Intrigue.

Under the title Inbetween Time, the four-day festival brings together an astonishing array of live art events, performances, happenings and installations, featuring everything from Kira O'Reilly's wall drawing made out of blood, to Host productions's dancing robot.

'People would be openly aggressive'

But even among all the peculiar and otherworldly incarnations on show in Bristol this weekend, Oreet's stands out. To research her piece, entitled Say Cheese, she spent many days dressed as Marcus: she bound her breasts; shaved her head; glued on a beard and ringlets (called peoths), made out of real human hair; dressed in the traditional black hat and tzitzit shirt, with four strings on each corner, tied in knots to mark the good deeds the wearer is supposed to perform that day.

Then she took to the streets, to see what it would feel like to live life as an Orthodox Jewish man, your faith and difference always on show. Her disguise is so meticulous, few people realised Marcus was an imposter.

Oreet often felt uncomfortable. "People would stare all the time and when I went into Soho, I couldn't get served. It was as if people thought I didn't belong there," says Oreet. "Sometimes people would be openly aggressive."

At Bristol's Arnolfini, between noon and 8pm on Friday February 14, you can spend 10 minutes sitting in Marcus's bedroom. You can interact with 'him' however you choose - some people have chosen to make a confession, another started a pillow fight, some just start a conversation - the only requirement is you must have your photograph taken.

"It is a way of allowing people to interact with an Orthodox Jew, something which many of them will never have done before," explains Oreet, who studied fine art at Sheffield University before completing an MA at St Martin's school of art. "Having your photo taken with Marcus is like having your photo taken alongside a tourist attraction or an animal at the zoo, it captures his otherness."

Also fascinated by society's outsiders, Marissa Carnesky explores the boundaries of time, geography and the body in her piece entitled The Girl From Nowhere.



Appearances can be deceptive: Oreet Ashery as Marcus - her Orthodox male alter ego

Taking inspiration from her conversations with immigrants who have left Eastern Europe to come to the West, she examines ways migration affects a person's sense of self.

Other highlights include Bobby Lazarus, with her bizarre white van installation, containing a recreation of a 1970s sitting room and a wall of speakers for a mind-blowing experience; and Bristol-based Low Brow Trash with their exploration of the fears engendered by dark alleys and solitary spaces.

Constructing a dark corridor and using computer programming, artists Tom Hall and Graham Elstone have created a digital environment which reacts to the participants every move: if you move quickly down the corridor, a figure may appear - projected onto the corridor wall - to fol-

low you. Sometimes figures will approach, sometimes retreat, sometimes feel threatening, other times small and out of reach, their movements always triggered by your own.

"We've tried to recreate the atmosphere and fear of going down an alleyway in the dark, or at twilight," says Tom. "We want the viewers to be able to interact with their environment, it's a very individual experience, a unique experience and something which should make people think."

The Festival of Live Art and Intrigue begins today at 6pm and runs until Sunday at 11pm, there are events both in and outside the Arnolfini gallery on Bristol's harbourside, at the Cube cinema, Wickham Theatre and University of Bristol. For details call 0117 929 9191 or go to www.arnolfini.demon.co.uk/inbetween