

For *Welcome Home* (2005) Ashery has written a minimal script of forced-sounding dialogue performed under the direction of Gary O'Dwyer and Pierre Coinde, from the Centre of Attention. Taking on a new context with each audience, the performance is an awkward homecoming party for one, an absurd scenario where you feel disoriented in your own domicile. I came out of my bedroom to find a brightly coloured banner of cut-out letters spelling out their greeting taped to the ceiling, some sweet baklava and a meagre bowl of crisps on the table, warm mango juice poured for me, and a CD of house anthems pumping softly from the laptop. ('Your favourite album!' Pierre told me. 'Oh. Of course', I answered uneasily.) We went through the script they handed me. Ashery constructed a scenario in which I had returned from disappearing to a nondescript place, only to find myself confused and alienated in my flat being welcomed by two people I've never met before. 'Is it nice to be back home? Is it different to how you imagined it?' Gary asked me, reciting the script. 'It is nice to be home, it does feel different, it's nice to have you here', I replied, not really meaning the last part.

My lines were scripted by Ashery, who was born in Jerusalem where she's now completing a residency. Known for performances as her most consistent character Marcus Fisher, an Orthodox Jewish man, she coerces audience involvement in order to make her personal politics feel intimate to everyone. The food at my party suggested both Middle Eastern delicacies and greasy British pub snacks. The lines in the script reference, somewhat heavy-handedly, 'Egypt', 'an explosion', and a lack of home. I was disoriented not just by being made to feel like a stranger in my own home, but also by saying words that would sound truer if they were coming from Ashery's mouth instead of mine.

Her work benefits from the awkwardness of forcing the audience to reckon with the acute discomfort that arises from the new context of their once familiar surroundings. It's easy to take a fleeting glance at the work and quickly walk away when you're in the austere surroundings of a gallery. My humble surroundings didn't weaken *Welcome Home*; they became it.

Kim Dhillon



Oreet Ashery
Welcome Home
2005
Performance