

Aya Ben Ron

A VOYAGE TO CYTHERA

The Berlin Museum for the History of Medicine at the Charité

• Guide •



A Voyage to Cythera

- 4 **Floor 1**
Reception

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From the Anatomical Theatre to the Modern Clinic | Specimen Collection

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Charles Baudelaire



Hear



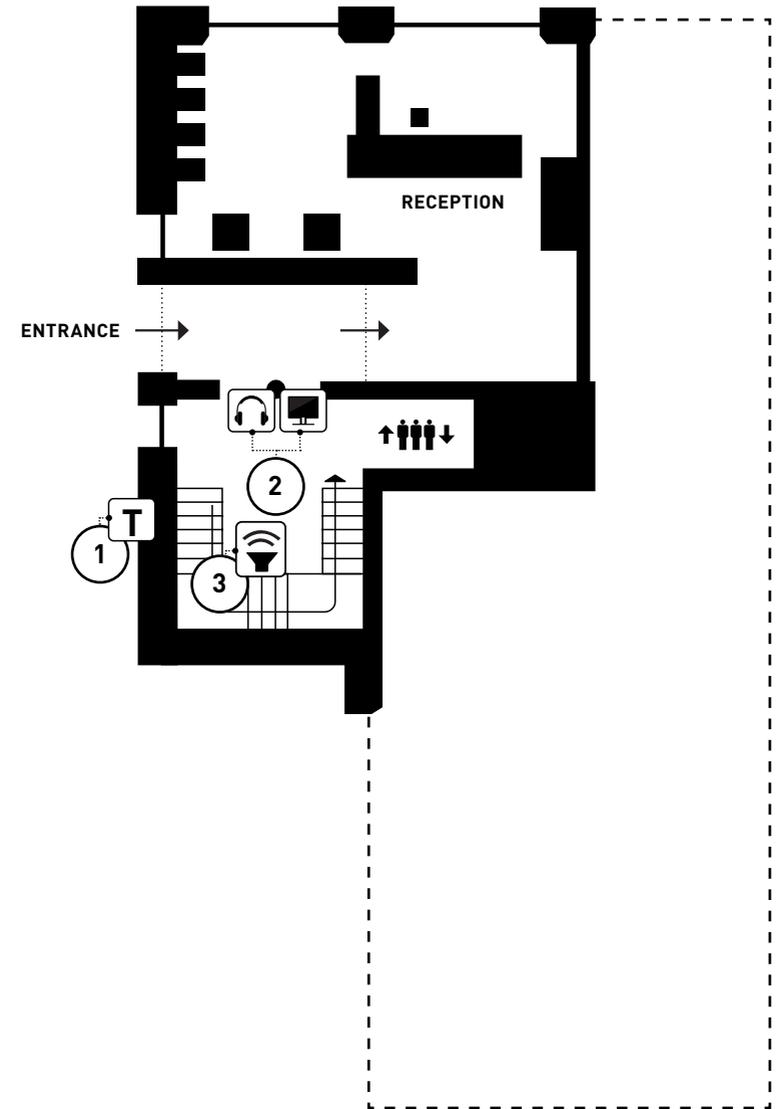
Read



Watch & Listen

Floor 1

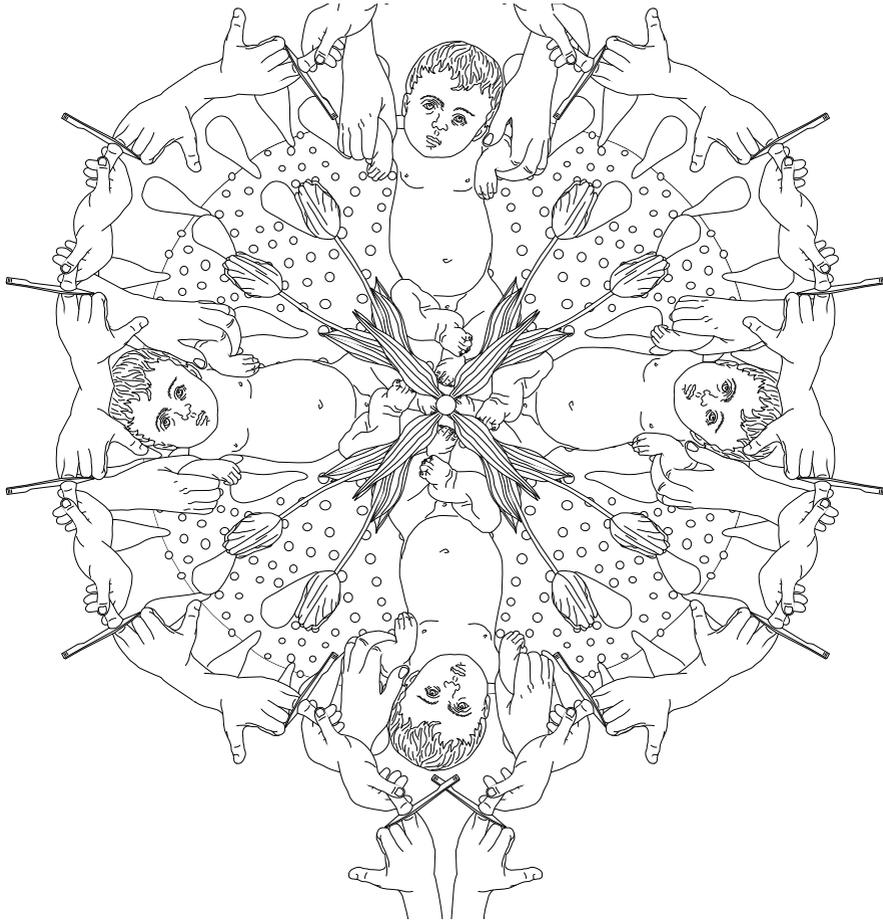
- 1** **Hanging (2001–2012)**
Print on PVC | 900 x 1050 cm
- 2** **A Voyage To Cythera – Introduction (2012)**
HD video with animation | Duration: 2:40 min
- 3** **Sound-Track (2012)**
Site-specific sound installation | Various speakers scattered along the Voyage To Cythera route in the museum deliver the voices and sounds of the journey.



1
STATION

Hanging

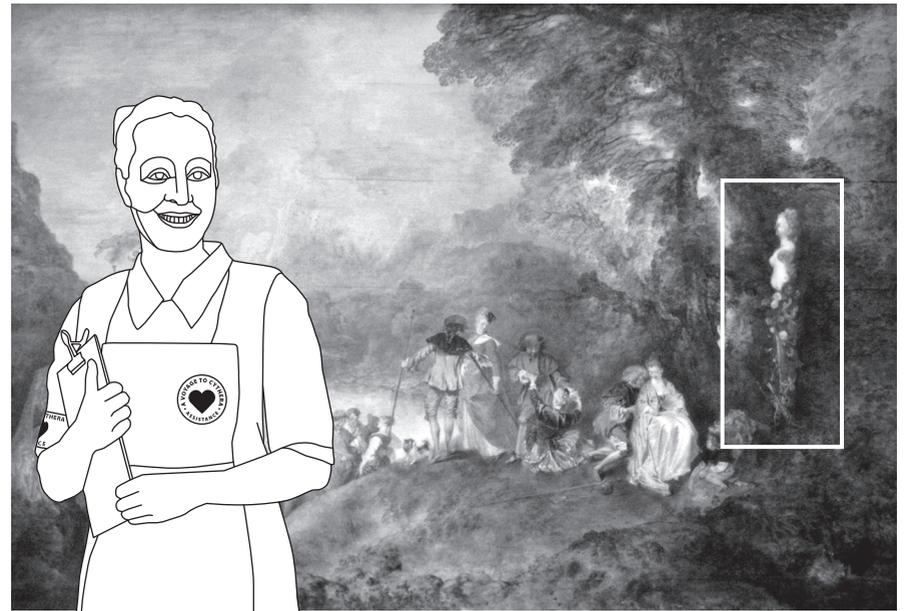
T



Hanging between heaven and earth
 You are the one who tortures himself
 You are the wound, you are the knife
 Cannot smile, doomed to laugh.

2
STATION

Introduction



Jean-Antoine Watteau, The Embarkation for Cythera, 1717



Venus

Venus was born in Cythera. Watteau painted her as an ancient Greek sculpture with an amputated arm. She is the symbol of love.

Assistance

The nurse will take care of you. She will offer you support and provide you with the facts and explanations, necessary for your journey. She speaks in rhymes.



A Voyage To Cythera – Introduction

The voyage to Cythera has several stations
At each one I'll tell you a story that has a physical relation.
I'll deliver aid and some reliable facts
To you who are anxious and afraid of death
And in general I'll say right from the start
The voyage begins with spirit, but its end might tear you apart.

Between the stations some gaps will appear
And if you get lost, keep going without fear
Take comfort in the fact that the path is ruled by discipline
You'll know exactly when it has ended and where to begin.

I have to explicitly warn you of one danger or risk
That pertains to any indifference or not caring that may exist.
On this journey uncomfortable feelings may arise
Especially inside hearts that are easily broken and
In those who carry weak eyes.

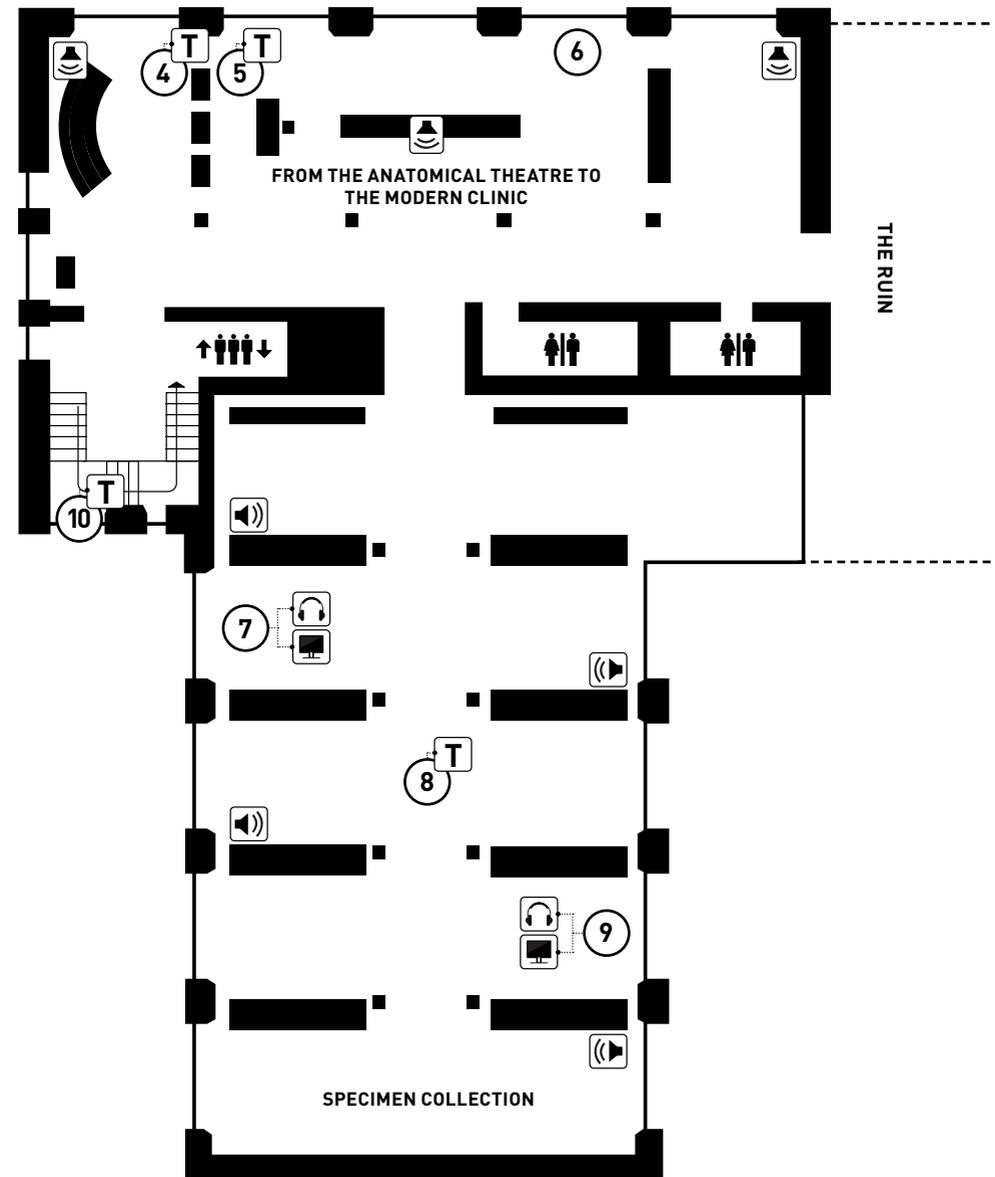
As a professional nurse I can officially declare
Apathy can be malignant and infectious to those who don't care
The great fear of each patient who suffers from that
Is emotional exposure to what he cannot expect.

I must ask you to remain patient and calm
So I can lead you surely and avoid any harm
The first stop is the mother of all stations
Where you can clearly see—Venus went through an arm amputation
The goddess of beauty—beauty is god
At the final station—death will no longer seem as odd.



Floor 3

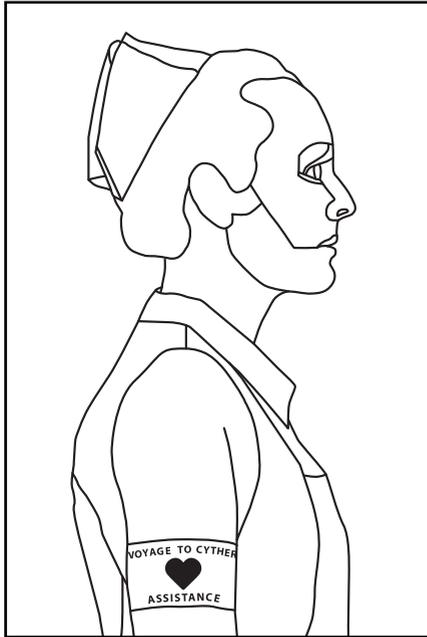
- 4 Human Auricle (made around 1910)
- 5 Woman's Tongue (made between 1790–1810)
- 6 Anatomy Class 1 (2011)
Mild steel, rust | 280 cm x 322 cm x 0.4 cm
- 7 Death Poem (2012)
HD video with animation | Duration: 7.40 min
- 8 Virchow Bust (1901)
- 9 The Cord (2012)
HD video with animation | Duration: 6.45 min
- 10 View to the West



4
STATION

A Human Ear

T

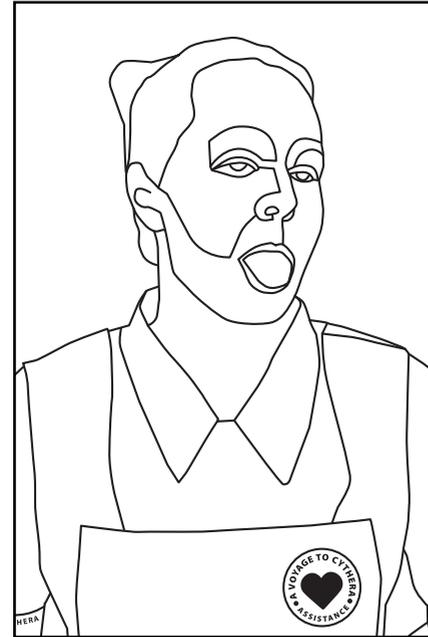


You cannot see your ear but there are two voices you can hear
One is playing the soundtrack of life
The other one keeps telling: death has already arrived.

5
STATION

A Woman's Tongue

T



In your mouth there is a flexible muscle
Its movement can cause a lot of hustle
Sometimes its better to keep it still
It has an exceptional power to kill.

6
STATION

Anatomy Class 1



7
STATION

Death Poem



Death Poem

Before you an enormous intestine
Of a woman who died from suffocation
I'll explain in a delicate way
The facts on which we'll learn to rely
The patient suffered from an obstruction that was fatal
Perhaps functional and perhaps neonatal
In any case the blockage that was concealed
Was manifested as an inability to reveal
A residue that was secretly collected
In a membrane that was especially selected.

Physiologically—it was a chronic constipation
But it also has a psychological interpretation.

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In the previous century but not distant in years,
A girl was born with a deep hole—not diagnosed—I fear
And the hole—was enveloped with a thick layer of skin.
A parent's job is to sense holes in their child
But in this unfortunate case it was an impossible deed.
She was empty inside, didn't know what to do with her hole
She saw that other children were healthy and whole
She persistently demanded again and again
They told her very simply: not everything is yours to gain.
The belt was whipping her, "do this, do that"
She held her mouth very tight
Not to show her fear, her fright
Under the blanket inside her bed
The beating was turning her back red
She stared in the mirror at her backside,
Washing her face, trying to hide.

One day in the kindergarten toilet she left an opened door,
And the teacher saw on her back marks she couldn't ignore
The child knew she had made a terrible mistake
And stopped using the toilet even when she ached
She pressed her legs together, no one ever saw
She locked muscles while swinging on the seesaw
One nursery teacher said to the other:
Look at her face—like sour lemons—don't bother.
She listened to the membrane inside, expanding and shrinking
Expansion was depending on how much she was resisting.
She said to herself in the manner of a child:
Keep it in, keep it inside.

At night ants crawled all over her, covered every inch
One by one her parents pulled them off with a pinch.

+++

She wandered around, alone in a cemetery
Looking straightforward, confronting reality
She had to learn it all on her own
There's no pity, for those who have no home.
In one of those days she saw a very thin man
With a huge hole inside him, with which he lived without pain
He told her: we are hungry, you already know that
She knew that indeed, but a touch was what she wanted
She let him eat her as much as he desired from inside
He let her eat from him only one little bite
They ate each other up, but always wanted more
The bites were continuously gnawing at her former sore.
He saw her from the outside, she saw him from within
He saved himself from her and went a new life to begin.
Laying, walking, sitting, running, and standing
She waited trembling, back and forth swaying
There are things, she understood, that simply can't exist
You cannot eat from within another human being.
She left him in the membrane
Said very clearly, here you will remain.

But at night her teeth fell out of her mouth
Only the front two, both at once
She concealed with her hand
The scary smile that she had.

+++

She held her head up, pretty and proud
Skipping over piles of junk and filth with no regard
She took everything she wanted: explosives, a big shield, and also two little ones
She built herself a floor, walls, ceiling, a door, and windows all at once
She lived off of fruit, vegetables, fish, chicken, pork, and beef.
She said simply: my life can begin
If I want to live I just need to give in.
And the obedient membrane widened from within
Expansion always depending on how much she's resisting.

But deep inside her the wounds were weeping
The bombs and the shields, they were slowly sinking
Breathing was impossible, she felt dizzy and nauseous
She went to all different sorts of doctors
She showed them all of her body disorders:
Her kidneys, her skin and both her eyes
They injected and fumbled, and after numerous tries
Wrote prescriptions and tried to break up kidney stones
Yet she never exposed the blocked membrane and how infectious it was.

At night suitcases she packed
Though a destination she lacked
She held on to her shields and with her bombs she attacked.

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One day while her hands she was washing
She sensed that someone was watching
It was the face of her mother reflecting
The skin on her neck, thin and loose
The corner of her mouth curved down, no longer smooth

She said with the authority of an adult:
It's time to defend the defenders; it's time for results.

A sharp dagger she stuck in her intestine
Jerked from left to right and then up for the last time
Opened a cut, shaped like a sail of a ship
Through which a bright desert light was naturally shed
On the cracked membrane and the buried dead.

She spread her legs and forward she leaned
She saw cliffs and valleys, reefs of coral gleam
A bent tongue of foam dug out gulfs and streams
She thought: strange island of lovers
Not gloomy, not sad, but still no place to recover.

She stitched the membrane with a thick thread
A belt on her belly, on the incisions she tightened
She counted out loud: one, two, three
Raised her head up and free
Went to the dentist to fix her front teeth, not the others
She simply said: I'll be able to smile at my mother.



8
STATION
Virchow Bust

T



The desire to extend your existence
Will reduce your capability of resistance
Can't you just choose to believe
It might be the only way to relieve.

Made from marble by the sculptor Hans Arnold, it was handed down to Rudolf Virchow for his 80th birthday. Virchow was one of the leading exponents of German medicine in the second half of the 19th century.



The Cord



The Cord

More than forty years ago
One nation invaded her neighbors
They said she tried very hard to restrain
And with this excuse we will remain.

After months of waiting
As the war was finally ending
While her man was on the battleground
A lonely woman laid herself down
In her womb a fetus had settled
It wasn't anything too unexpected
But when certainty cannot be reached
It is better to avoid any mistreating
With feelings of guilt, she ran to her mother
Who was a gynaecologist better than any other.

Her mother, a tiny woman, firm and direct
Did the procedure that she knew best
She laid her daughter down, put on a white gown
On the delivery bed, the legs were splayed
And metal instruments on a table were placed.

But when she turned to her daughter left lying on the bed
She saw her swinging her head, almost crying
No! No! Her daughter suddenly insists
This uncertainty was meant to exist.

The procedure had to be changed in one stroke
The metal instruments were replaced with a stethoscope
An amplifier immediately exposed
The sound of the heartbeats just about to be lost
And when it was certain that the baby was all right

The two women left the room, keeping their mouths tight
It was one of the war's unpredictable results
And the husband who came home alive
Didn't suspect anything, didn't realize.

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The fetus didn't know about this hesitation
Her brain hadn't even started its creation
She grew her umbilical cord very fast
And clung to her mother's womb strongly, felt that she must.

In her mother's amniotic fluid she was floating
It was malignant, but she had no way of knowing
With two vessels and one vein, the umbilical cord
Injected atoms that she carefully stored
From which she created beautiful features
That turned her into a magnificent creature.

Inside the baby was spinning
Flailing her limbs all around
Kicking her mother from the inside
So that she will keep her in mind.
In order to be accepted by her parent
She needs to make her existence apparent
Therefore she went wild from dusk till dawn
Even at night she didn't calm down.

The cord adjusted and developed according to her pace
Elastically grew longer, never staying in one place
But once, as she was spinning, it made a mistake
And wrapped itself six times around her neck.
Surprisingly, there were no indications
The stress could be seen only when pressured by contractions
Then her grandma, well experienced, had to take action.

With self-control and with a steady hand
She tried to separate the twisted cord from the throat

And to slip the head out before the baby choked.
But the cord was strongly tightened from within
Even her small hands couldn't get in.

The baby without oxygen remained
Irreversibly damaged and felt no more pain.
The doctor then had to disconnect
The pulsing cord which strangled the little neck
And when the sleeping baby finally came out
It was without a single beat of the heart.

+++

In the delivery room, the previous uncertainty no longer existed
And as they didn't give up on her before, the two mothers insisted:
If not alive, at least in a jar.
People could see her beauty; she hasn't got a single scar.
They gave affirmation, signed the certificate,
Left her in safe hands, in benign formaldehyde
In the historical medical museum collection
In the same city, in the same nation.

Years past by, there were a couple more wars
The grandmother is not alive anymore,
When the baby was forty-two years old
The disease that was nesting within her mother
Sent metastases, one after the other.
The lost woman who always demanded that life persist
Wanted to produce so that she'll continue to exist
In order to reduce her sorrow
And also to forget the horror
A valuable memento she wanted to give
To her baby whom she had never wanted to leave.

Lying on her bed
Her legs already dead
Her tumors eager to live
Didn't leave room for any relief.

She took yarns of wool and knitting needles
Leaned her back on a pile of pillows
Immersing herself in rows of dense loops
Which trapped the pain
That was drilling holes in her brain.

Falling into deep sleep
Waking up to needles
Unpicking her mistakes
Hallucinations ruled her days.
Between risings and fallings
A scarf had been growing
Six times—at least that's what she thought
It could be wrapped around a baby's throat
In cellophane, she parceled it up
Laid it down next to her husband's lap
She gave it one final caress
Nodding her head, she could finally say "yes."





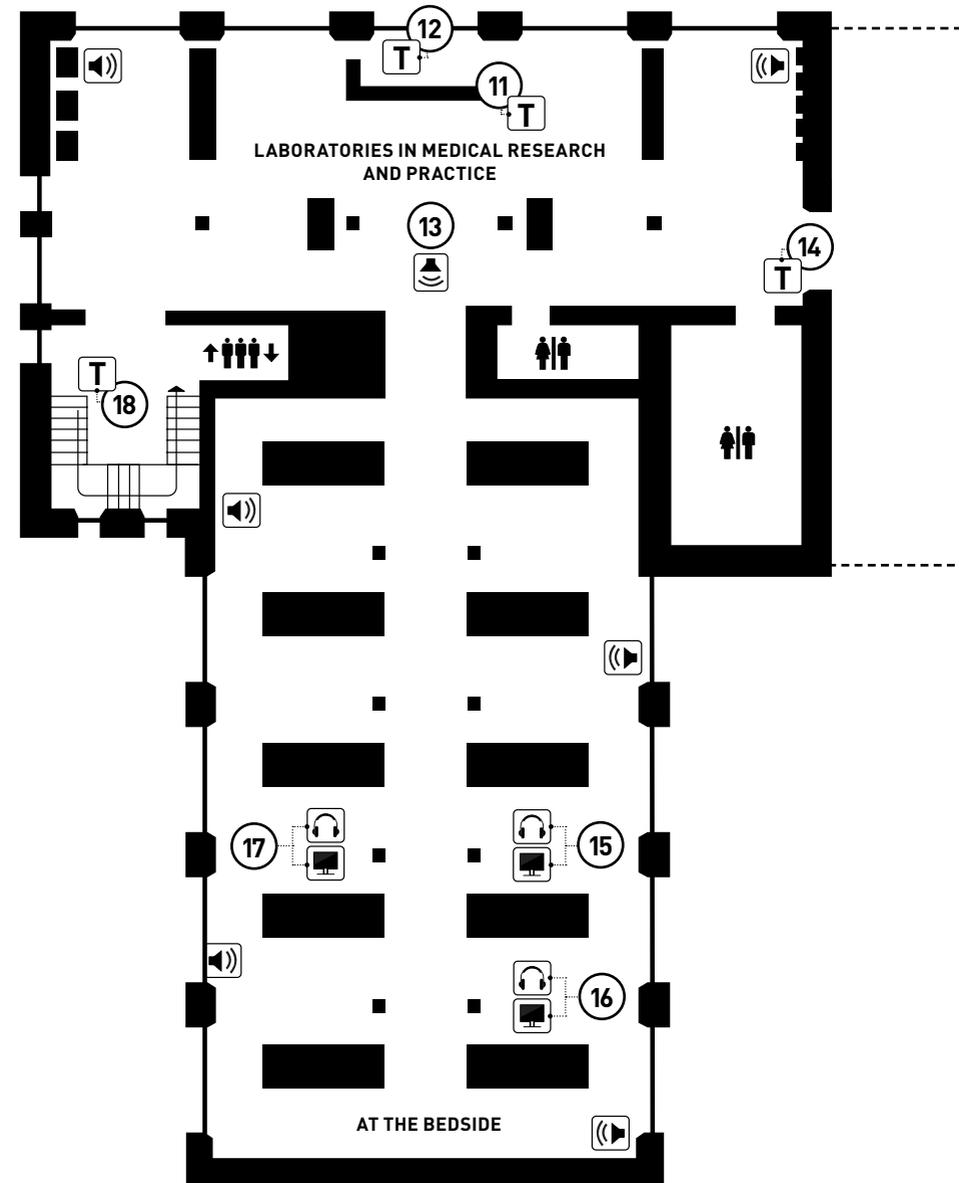
If you look ahead you will see a crowded station
Trains are taking people to their destination
Now, think about the one you love the most
Is s/he with you now, or has s/he been lost?

Rest

After WWII and the division of Berlin, the Charité, situated right on the border between east and west became part of the GDR. The Communist regime made out of the Charité a showcase institution, on the other hand most of the windows turning west in the campus were blackened.

- 11 | **I Accuse (1941 / 2011)**
Print on paper, white plywood board, clip | 32.5 x 28.5 cm
- 12 | **View of the Psychiatric and Neurological Clinic**
- 13 | **Still Life | Model (2009)**
Cardboard, plywood | 90 cm height, 100 cm diameter
- 14 | **View to the Ruin - The Former Lecture Hall**
- 15 | **Shift- Chapter 1**
Video documentary | Duration: 15 min
- 16 | **Shift - Chapter 2**
Video documentary | Duration: 9 min
- 17 | **Shift - Chapter 3**
Video documentary | Duration: 5 min
- 18 | **Rescue**
Mild steel, hook, rope | 271 x 81.5 x 0.6 cm

Floor 4



11
STATION

I Accuse

T



Under the Third Reich regime German physicians and researchers turned 'pure race' concepts, developed since the second half of the 19th century, from ideas into action. The 'healthy German population' ambition was sought through organised murders of the physically disabled and incurably ill as well as massive forced sterilisations. A propaganda movie titled I Accuse (Ich klage an) was produced in 1941 to help make the murder of the ill socially legitimate.

12
STATION

View to the Psychiatric Courtyard

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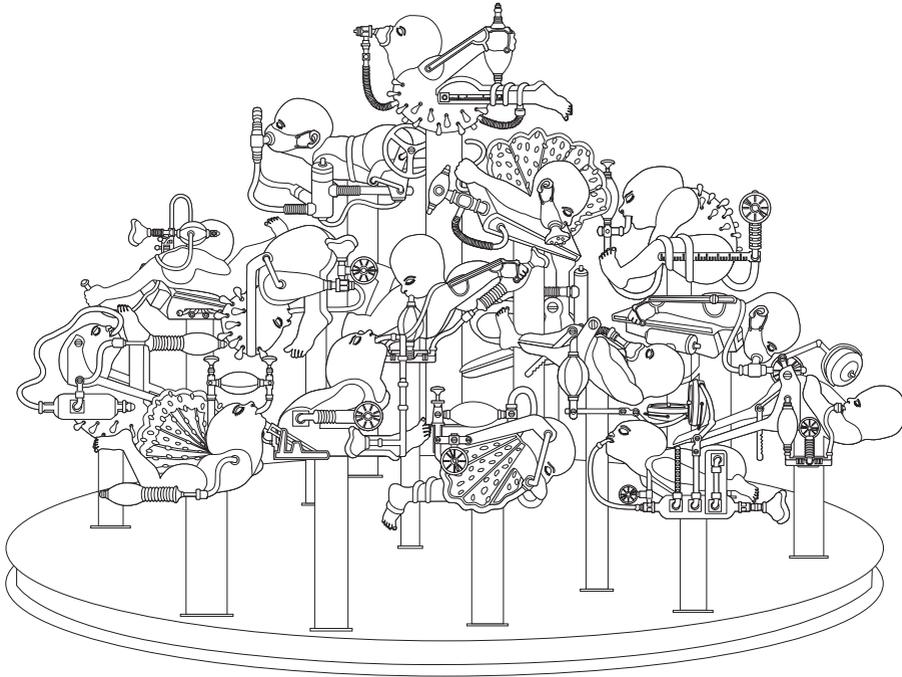


You might lose your mind
At a certain point in your life
It can be inherited
Or it can be specially organised.

The clinic, opened 1905, was considered highly modern for its time, and combined both neurology and psychiatry. During the "Third Reich" some of the clinic's specialists contributed to realising Nazi racial hygiene concepts, with sterilisations of psychiatric patients and organising the Euthanasie Programme - T4. Research on the impact of the Charité, its staff and institutions in the NS-context is still going on.

13
STATION

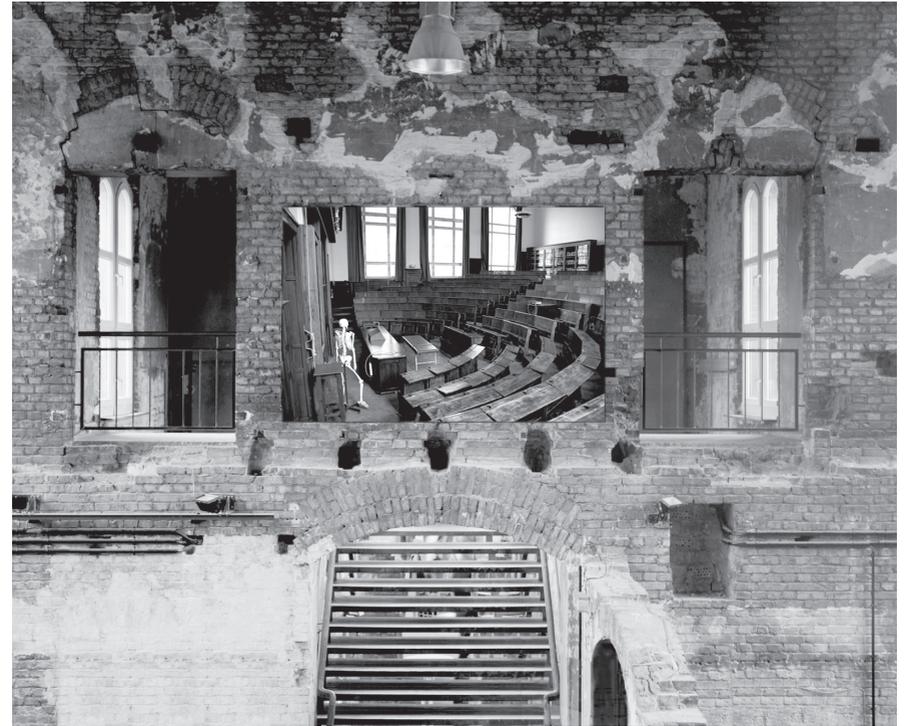
Still-Life



14
STATION

View to the Ruin

T



You have permission to retain a wounded body and soul
Don't redecorate or try to keep yourself whole
Ruins have an eternal power of attraction
As a testimony for loss it deserves your attention.

This lecture hall formed an integral part of the former Pathological Museum. Rudolf Virchow and his successors taught pathology here. After severely damaged in the multiple bombing during the war years of 1944-5 the hall was kept as a ruin, serving as a commemoration of the fatal consequences of the inhuman "Third Reich".

15
STATION

16
STATION

17
STATION

Shift



This video in three chapters focuses on patients living in a persistent vegetative state (PVS). Shift was shot at the Head Injury Department of Reuth Medical Center in Tel Aviv. The video documents the lives of patients, their families, and care staff over a period of two years.

18
STATION

Rescue



The stretcher's stripes will keep you tight
And thus will limit your ability to fight
You're looking straight into my eye:
YOU WILL BE RESCUED TILL YOU DIE.

A gallows where my image hung apart
Was all I found on Venus' isle of sighs.
O God, give me the strength to scrutinise,
Without disgust, my body and my heart!

— Roy Campbell, *Poems of Baudelaire* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1952)

"A Voyage to Cythera", the title chosen by Aya Ben Ron for her exhibition in the Berlin Museum of Medical History of the Charité, is taken from a poem by Charles Baudelaire describing his sea voyage to the Isle of Cythera, the birthplace of Venus. When Baudelaire reaches his destination he sees his body hanging gutted from the gallows. "A Voyage to Cythera" is one of the most disturbing poems included in Baudelaire's book *Les Fleurs du mal* (The Flowers of Evil), published in France in 1857, and subsequently banned until 1949.

Much like Baudelaire's journey, Aya Ben Ron's work takes viewers on a voyage that focuses on representations of the body in Western culture, and more specifically the representation of the internal organs. Ben Ron ties artistic representations of the body to its perception in modern Western medicine. The medical approach views and researches the body as a biological machine, with the brain as its operating system and the heart its processor. Likewise, the gallows (as in the end of Baudelaire's poem) severs the body from the brain, its operating system, thus freeing the spirit from the body. As Baudelaire set forth seeking the path to beauty, and subsequently saw his death, Ben Ron takes us on the reverse route. She starts by selecting several objects – body parts that are actually a series of test cases, enclosed in museum exhibit casings. These are testaments to subjects who lost one or more organs, subsequently being presented to the public for viewing in jars of formaldehyde or preserved using other methods.

Ben Ron then created a viewing trail between the museum exhibits, a path guided by her own image wearing a nurse's uniform. This winding passage

was shaped with great care, using rhymes to tell the history of those exhibits Ben Ron chooses to linger over, the body parts neatly arranged in jars, boxes or frames along shelves, thus returning the memories lost when those organs were separated from their bodies and placed in the museum. This is apparent in a large jar containing a stillborn female baby. Born full term, she died from complications during delivery when the umbilical cord wrapped around her neck and strangled her. Her remains were donated by her mother, a resident of East Berlin. The nurse explains that –

*... "In her mother's amniotic fluid she was floating
It was malignant, but she had no way of knowing.
With two vessels and one vein, the umbilical cord
Injected atoms that she carefully stored
From which she created beautiful features
That turned her into a magnificent creature. . .".*

Another exhibit shows a huge intestine that was not emptied for a very long time, causing the death of the intestine owner, who – according to Ben Ron – suffered emotional blockages that induced physical constipation.

Strangely, unlike most museums of art, archaeology, machinery, etc., this museum disconnects exhibits from all contexts unrelated to medicine. "A Voyage to Cythera" attempts to join and reweave the ties that modern medicine strives to unravel, the binding between the exhibits and their history – how did they come to be in the museum, to whom did these organs or limbs belong? Why did he or she suffer from some disease or affliction?...this journey into the sub-conscious of the museum reconnects the memory of the whole back to the dismembered body part. The Berlin museum stands as a reflection on modern medical thinking in its tendency to isolate and dismantle the body or reality with the purpose of studying it.

This phenomenon can be attributed to modern science in its entirety; the majority of research into the history of science has been dedicated to explaining the nature of science and the way it operates, and whether it may be used to discern long-term patterns and trends. The sociology of science has focused on the methods that scientists employ and the way they "create" or "construct" scientific knowledge. Since the 1960s a shift has occurred in the various

disciplines of the sociological and historical study of history, a new trend that emphasizes the “human element” involved in scientific knowledge, in contrast to an approach that views this scientific knowledge as absolute and clear-cut, free of values and contexts.

The main dialogue created by Ben Ron is the one she creates between the representations of the body in art and the relation to the body in scientific research. One of the starting points for the exhibition is the anatomy class given to medical students, an equivalent course to the anatomy studied by art students. Ben Ron has fashioned a homage to Rembrandt’s famous painting **The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Tulp** (1632). This is a laser sketch etched in iron with the object of study hanging from what appear to be torture machines. In this way the artist linked both realms of knowledge (art and science) as they investigated the secrets of the soul through the deconstruction of the body into its discrete elements.

In contrast to these, Ben Ron presents Jean-Antoine Watteau’s painting **The Embarkation for Cythera** (1717) from the fête galante style representing a somber melancholy, a sense of dissipation and total lack of life meaning that makes him one of the 18th century painters closest in sensitivity to modern artists.

Ben Ron chooses to draw inspiration in particular from three artists that have impacted her work, all of whom lived in Europe during different periods. These include Charles Pierre Baudelaire (19th century), Jean-Antoine Watteau (18th century) and Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn (17th century). There is no evidence to suggest that these artists influenced each other, but a review of their respective biographies reveals that all three were well-known for their wastefulness, their self-indulgent lifestyle and their virtuoso skills in writing and painting. It seems that this choice of artists adds another layer to Ben Ron’s critique of modern society, where the role of artists is imagined to be to serve as a moral compass by which society navigates, a role for which they are rewarded.



A Voyage To Cythera - First Aid Station

AANDO FINE ART
Tucholskystraße 35, 10117 Berlin
Tue - Sat 12 am to 6 pm
www.aandofineart.com | info@aandofineart.com
April 28, 2012 - June 29, 2012

With the kind support of Ferrum Lasercut GmbH



A Voyage to Cythera | Charles Baudelaire

Roy Campbell, Poems of Baudelaire (New York: Pantheon Books, 1952)

My heart, a bird, seemed joyfully to fly
And round the rigging cruised with nimble gyre.
The vessel rolled beneath the cloudless sky
Like a white angel, drunk with solar fire.

What is that sad, black island like a pall?
Why, Cytherea, famed in many a book,
The Eldorado of old-stagers.
Look: It's but a damned poor country after all!

Isle of sweet secrets and heart-feasting fire!
Of antique Venus the majestic ghost
Rolls like a storm of fragrance from your coast
Filling our souls with languor and desire!

Isle of green myrtles, where each flower uncloses,
Adored by nations till the end of time:
Sighs of adoring hearts, like incense, climb.
And pour their perfume over sheaves of roses,

Or groves of turtles in an endless coo!
But no! it was a waste where nothing grows,
Torn only by the raucous cries of crows:
Yet there a curious object rose in view.

This was no temple hid in bosky trees,
Where the young priestess, amorous of flowers,
Whom secretly a loving flame devours,
Walks with her robe half-open to the breeze.

For as we moved inshore to coast the shallows
And our white canvas scared the crows to fly,
Like a tall cypress, blackened on the sky,
We saw it was a gaunt three-forking gallows.
Fierce birds, perched on their meal, began to slash
And rip with rage a rotten corpse that swung.
Each screwed and chiselled with its beak among
The crisp and bleeding crannies of the hash.

His eyes were holes: from open stomach direly
His heavy tripes cascaded to his thighs.
Gorged with such ghastly dainties to the eyes,
His torturers had gelded him entirely.

Beneath, some jealous prowling quadrupeds,
With lifted muzzles, for the leavings scrambled.
The largest seemed, as in the midst he gambolled,
An executioner among his aides.

Native of Cytherea's cloudless clime
In silent suffering you paid the price,
And expiated ancient cults of vice
With generations of forbidden crime.

Ridiculous hanged man! Your griefs I know.
I felt, to see you swing above the heath,
Like nausea slowly rising to my teeth,
The bilious stream of ancient human woe.

Poor devil, dear to memory! before me
I seemed to feel each talon, fang, and beak
Of all the stinking crows and panthers sleek
That in my lifetime ever chewed and tore me.

The sky was charming and the sea unclouded,
But all was black and bloody to my mind.
As in a dismal winding-sheet entwined,
My heart was in this allegory shrouded.

A gallows where my image hung apart
Was all I found on Venus' isle of sighs.
O God, give me the strength to scrutinise,
Without disgust, my body and my heart!

Accompanying Program, April-September 2012

Friday, June 1, 2012, 3-6pm | Workshop "Ethics & Aesthetics"

In collaboration with The Berlin Academy of Sciences



Saturday, June 2, 2012, 5pm | Artist Talk during the "2012 Science Night" with Aya Ben Ron

Wednesday, September 5, 2012, 5pm | Artist Talk with Aya Ben Ron

The events will take place at the:

Berlin Medical Historical Museum, Charitéplatz 1, 10117 Berlin

All events will be in English. In case of questions related to the program, please contact:

Dr. Christina Thesing | cti@schir.net

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A Voyage To Cythera

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Voices: Natascha Freundel, Jürgen Kreller

Video Crew

Director & Editor & Nurse: Aya Ben Ron

Cinematographer & Producer: Oded Kimhi

Sound designer: Binya Reches

Animator: Noam Amir

Costume designer: Lian Bronshtein

avoyagetocythera.com

Catalogue:

Hanging | Aya Ben Ron | Hatje Cantz

Thank You

Wonkyung Byun, Thomas Schnalke, Vered Gadish, Friederike Schir, Christina Thesing, Suhail Malik, Michal Ben-Naftali, Michael Y. Barilan, Sara Barnes, Inga Franke, Helen Dengler, Antje Stahl, Dana Amir, Talia Link, Aya Miron, Eli Gur-Arie, Michael Kesus-Gedalyovich, Batia Kolton, Ido Michaeli, Uri Ben-Ari, Miriam Ziv and Nimrod & Amos.

All works courtesy of the artist and AANDO FINE ART | www.aandofineart.com



AANDO FINE ART

outset.



BOISCHAFT DES STAATES ISRAEL

