

## Our Best Intentions



*Einat Amir, Our Best Intentions, 2013, Performance and Video Installation, Still Images from Video, Full HD*

One of the shows that received great attention at this year's iteration of the performance art biennale, Performa 13, in New York, was Einat Amir's "Our Best Intentions", an interactive, intimate performance that involved audience participation, and which led the open-script "plot" to unexpected explorations.

Individuals walk into a space divided into four domestic areas — a family lounge, a bedroom, a study, and a dining room. Each participant selects a vest featuring an array of labels, such as "mother," "doubt," "addiction," "lover," and so forth. Under the direction of four moderators, the performance becomes a collaborative session wherein participants are encouraged to use personal stories and memories to confront unresolved issues, form momentary and intimate connections with strangers, and reveal themselves in unexpected ways.

"Our Best Intentions" unfolds with unpredictable series of interactions that seek to combine the individual, internal experience of therapy with the more dramatic devices of performance. *Sleek* spoke to Amir to find out more about the director's hand behind the open affair.

**“Our Best Intentions” is an interactive piece that depends entirely on the viewers as actors. It leaves a lot to chance, and can go very wrong. Is that something you’ve done before?**

I have been working with “audience as material” for a few years now. It evolved gradually, starting with a body of works that contained actors engaging with viewers using improvised dialogues. I hired actors to play roles such as art agent, art interpreter, artwork and an ex-boyfriend. In my performance “Ideal Viewer” for Performa 09, I asked the audience to send me proposals of how they would use my characters in their own homes, creating their own scenes. I selected three proposals and arrived with the actors to these homes to perform the requests. After this rich experience I realised that I don’t need the actors as mediators between the audience and me, so I started literally putting the audience in the limelight.

The first piece I’ve done in this genre is [“Enough About You”](#). It takes place inside of a closed space that has several sound proof units and a glass front. It offers a lab-like situation, where the audience acts as both performers and viewers. I created several smaller experiments that led to the new piece, [“Our Best Intentions”](#), which divides the audience into four groups. Each group has its own guide who leads a workshop. Besides participating in their assigned workshop, members of each group also watch all other groups’ workshops. Each guide comes from a different professional background, so each workshop is different.



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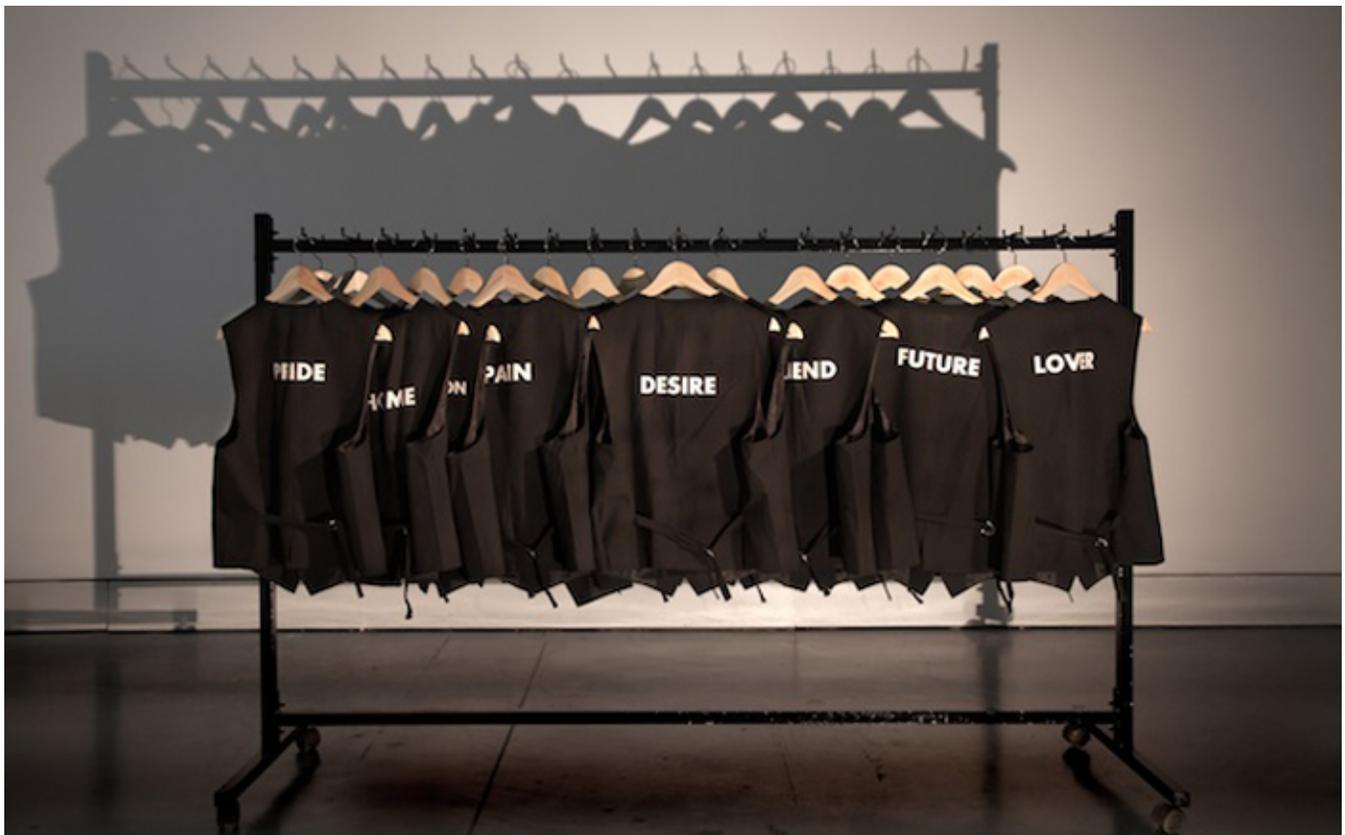
**What was your initial interest in viewer participation?**

I strongly believe in the concept of engagement. I think that in order to have a meaningful experience, one should take part in the occurrence rather than be an observer. Also, in terms of performance, I think it is much more ethical to have everyone present perform rather than having separation of performers and audience.

Visual art is almost an unnecessary element in today's culture, and it's urgent for artists to find new ways to justify their practice. One way I can think of is to see art as a space that enables reflection, where a person is able to enter and have an experience that will allow them to think about who they are and how they should be. I hope my works are creating this kind of mental space.

**Most people prefer to remain passive when watching a performance but here, the instructors do an excellent job at guiding everyone into participation. How did you find them and how did you conceive of the piece with them?**

With the help of [Artis](#), which produced this project for Performa 13, we published several different open calls that targeted guides from four different professional fields, ranging from psychotherapy to theatre. We held interviews and in some cases, auditions. When I located four guides that I thought were confident, charismatic and flexible enough to perform these difficult parts, I had several brainstorm sessions with each of them individually, in order to form a workshop that combines their professional experience with the structure of this project. The workshops we created together are held in the same way every night, but the performance is never the same. The participants' reactions and the stories they share are always different.



*Einat Amir's Our Best Intentions. Photo by Dan Haimovich*

**The performance divides the stage into four quarters with four workshops. What are the methods you wanted to explore?**

One of the inspirations for this performance is Psychodrama – a method of group therapy, in which clients use spontaneous dramatization, role-playing and dramatic self-presentation to investigate and gain insight into their lives. I think there is an interesting correlation between psychodrama and performance art. For this structure of the four groups in OBI, I used a spectrum of professional methods, ranging from therapy sessions to performative sessions, and some that are more in between.

**Some people reacted to the different methods very intensely, really like a form of therapy, and shared a great deal about themselves, while others chose to don a stage persona. It was fascinating to watch, but it also placed the performance somewhere close to a self-exploration seminar, or other kinds of therapeutic methods working with the body. Did you anticipate this?**

The sessions definitely aim to encourage people to open up and share something that's significant to them. Something truly personal in the sense that it is something that influences who they are, in their lives but also in the moment. I don't see much difference between a chosen stage persona or simply being yourself – because "Yourself" is also a stage persona that you have chosen. "Yourself" contains many different things and in

society we always choose to perform only some of them. A successful performance for me is when it is apparent that the occurrences are meaningful to the person who participates in them. Then it becomes significant to everyone in the room. And only then does it become a good work of art.

**You will take the performance elsewhere, too. Do you think the show will change drastically when done in different countries, different cultures?**

This project is currently on display at the Petach Tikva Museum of Art, Israel, and will hopefully travel to other places. I am recruiting and working with local guides there, who created their own workshops. So even the format is a little different, and unique to each location. I also find the general atmosphere different – in New York people open up easily and are not so embarrassed by the situation. In Israel people are generally more hesitant to speak up, but when they do, it is more likely that they would share something deeply personal.

Einat Amir, *Our Best Intentions* runs until Saturday, January 4, 2014 in [Petach Tikva Museum](#), Israel.



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