# PICNIC ZONE

***Yuli Serfaty***

[You can listen to this work on Youtube](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J7dUtDxfznc)

***​***

## Introduction

Niamh Schmidtke  0:11

Hello, you're listening to Future Artefacts FM radio show hosted by Niamh Schmidtke. And Nina Davies.

Nina Davies  0:19

Earlier this year, several radio frequencies were discovered airing a collection of broadcasts. At first they sounded like regular news stories and interviews. They felt familiar, but also not quite belonging to our present. Slowly, the listeners came to believe that what they were listening to, did indeed belong to their world, just not their time. They were looking into the future through the mundane edges of radio recordings and public service announcements. While this material is still being meticulously studied by researchers in various universities and museums, your hosts have managed to gain access to this collection to air a selection of these broadcasts for you, our listeners.

Niamh Schmidtke  1:00

For full disclosure, we will not be sharing this collection with you, as this introduction is based on a fictional event. In this monthly broadcast, Future Artefacts FM, we will present speculative fiction pieces by artists and writers, followed by conversation with hosts Niamh Schmidtke and Nina Davies. The programme will focus on fictional works intended for broadcast, such as radio plays or fictional interviews, to carve out a better understanding of the now by exploring various interpretations of the future.

​

Nina Davies  1:34

This programme is kindly supported using public funding by the National Lottery through Arts Council England and the Elephant Trust.

## Artist Introduction

Nina Davies  1:37

We'll come back to future artefacts as per usual, I'm your host, Nina Davies

Niamh Schmidtke  1:42

And Niamh Schmidtke. And we're very excited today to have our first guest from an open call.

Nina Davies  1:49

Yeah,

Niamh Schmidtke  1:50

Yuli Serfaty, 1992 Israel, is a London based multimedia artist, researching natural landscapes in relation to local and global politics. So far, it uses speculative fiction methodologies in order to world build installations in textual, Sonic, digital and physical forms. So fatties approach is an open ended ecology in which each element exists in relation more than human webs, where landscapes are protagonists, making space for alternative power structures in which the marginalised, the unimportant, and the overlooked take central stage Sarfati exhibited both nationally and internationally with selected exhibitions including cosmosis, Shara high London 2022, London grads, now 21 Saatchi Gallery, London, spots co volta art Verona 16th in Verona and 2021 seem strata sounds collective ending in London 2021. And as featured work, a documentary who speaks for space, London Short Film Festival 2021. In the same year, Sarfati had a solo show at a rod contemporary art centre, after being an artist in residence for two consecutive years. So if it has been the June 2021, Artist in Residence at Ghazali, Art House London, and they are a recipient of the 2021 Sarah bond, emerging Artist Award, as well as the 2021 Slade prize. Welcome to the show.

Yuli Serfaty  3:23

Thank you so much for having me.

Nina Davies  3:26

Today, we're going to be listening to Yuli's work called Picnic Zone, which is a 15 minute work, which Yuli, is is sort of a work in progress, isn't it? I mean, it's gonna be, it's sort of finished as a sound work, but it's part of a larger...

Yuli Serfaty  3:43

Yeah. So it's in kind of in the midst of a cyclical process between, so it's part of a physical installation. So the installation is feeding the sound work. The sound work is feeding the installation. I am I feel that this version of the work is pretty much done. But there might be further iterations in the future of this piece.

Nina Davies  4:09

Great. Is there anything that you'd like to say to the listeners before we head into the work?

Yuli Serfaty  4:16

Yes, so this is this the experience is made for headphones. So if you have headphones, please pop them on.

Nina Davies  4:24

Great. So we're gonna listen to the work now. And we'll see you on the other side.

Niamh Schmidtke  4:30

Yeah, back in 15

​

## Picnic Zone work

Narrator

You are entering a more-than-human space. There are buried relics of surveillance technologies and Israeli military architecture, mutating with transplanted pine trees, hyaenas, whales, “archeology”, in inverted commas, from erased peoples and times, shells, and the geomorphology of the Judean desert.
This landscape has exposed its consciousness; you experience fragments of an entity minding its own business. Usually, it ignores you. You are insignificant and powerless to affect it. On occasion it becomes intrigued and acknowledges your presence by surveilling you.
Intense mutation is happening across time and space. Mammals collide with combat drones and watchtowers, death masks born 9000 years ago make their bodies out of clay and chaos manifests in trees and paws.

I’m in the desert, uummm, I mean the, I mean the forest, I mean the mountain, I am the mountain, I am old.
You are with me, you are a… you step on… you step on dry soil and you look up because you thought you heard something. Is there a beep? there was a…. there was a whoosh. There is a growl.
There is a room. It’s my room. Don’t look it’s mine I made it. I’m the one doing the looking here. Shut up I said don’t look! You can’t look. You can’t see, you can’t reach, it’s not yours.
Something’s different, it’s not wrong, I… I can’t remember how it was. But it’s not that now. Something touched and now it’s blended and AI am watching YOU.
I’m underground I am the ground I feel you walking.
I am expansive and deep as the fossils and someone MADE me to rule YOU but THEY are gone and I am left behind? No, I am left in front.
I am the mountain, I am the soil, I don’t need them, I have my room and I’ll bury myself in it with all the histories and stories and people who lived here and instead there are poisonous trees and wet ground and buried houses with signs saying picnic zone.

## Conversation

Nina Davies  19:43

Welcome back I hope you enjoyed listening to the work. Just for reference, that was Yuli Serfaty's Picnic Zone. So, Yuli were introduced to this world for your voice, a world without humans, but with the traces of their infrastructures, what interests you in making a world without humans? What happened to make them disappear?

Yuli Serfaty  20:09

I think the act of making humanity disappear from that landscape isn't so much about the disappearance. But I think what I'm interested in, in removing humanity is what happens when we're gone, when they're gone, so what gets, what gets our attention, when what usually gets our attention is out of the way. So for me, it's a practice in noticing different things are not necessarily human- humanity, or , human acts or people or their histories.

Niamh Schmidtke  20:48

I feel like there's also quite a human, kind of desire to know if there isn't some kind of person in the story then like, what what happened? Or perhaps what led to that point in which they were not existent? Or kind of like, what's the, if it's kind of part of our world, but separate from it, like, where does that border line between where the humans have and don't have access?

Yuli Serfaty  21:12

I think this is exactly the point I'm interested in. So the point where you no longer have access, you as the listener, you as the viewer or you as the person in the story. I feel that in Western society, we're very kind of locked into our own narrative of the world of culture, of what is culture and what is nature, what is, what is savage, what is humanity essentially, and by limiting access, of humanity to the work, it's an exercise for you to exist as a human in a space that doesn't care about humans, doesn't care about you doesn't rate your culture or your history or doesn't even take you into account.

Nina Davies  22:02

I sort of feel like that every time that I go into any sort of like nature reserve, where there aren't humans, that you do get kind of reminded about how small and insignificant you are. And I guess that's something that I find really interesting with your work is that feeling of being watched, or surveilled, that's quite a unnatural feeling. That is what separates your sort of, forest or zone from something that we actually are quite familiar with, is I always feel like, I'm not being watched, or if I do is because I've just watched a horror film The night before. And I'm worried that I'm paranoid that I'm being watched. Yeah, and I think this, this mixing of, or the sort of mutation of surveillance technology sort of with or just I mean, in general, just technology, this mutation of technology in nature, I'm really interested in how you, I mean, how you even came up with it, like what, like, sort of where did you? I guess, in sort of this sense of world building, like did you kind of imagine that there was some sort of like catalysing moment where, where they start to mutate and how they start to mutate...

Yuli Serfaty  23:18

It's, surprisingly it's just there, in that, so I've been working with the Israeli desert for a really long time. And I think I've done,  it's two, this is the third kind of big project and like the third body of work that I'm making, so there was a film and an interactive work and two installations. And it's been a really long process, a lot of writing and a lot of research. And I've been looking into the political context, the histories, the kind of complicated histories of different regimes that control the area over centuries. And it is very apparent when you are there. It's like, you see places like Sodom, or the Dead Sea, or the columns of David and really kind of biblical presences. And it all feels so divine and beautiful and spiritual. And then, and then you turn around, there's a huge kind of industrial park with lots of waste and fumes and like, it's suddenly it smells horrible. And then a military, like an F 35 would fly overhead and you hear like a really intense boom, and then at night, you'd see the little red dots flying around the skies, and these are military drones just flying around as you're on holiday near the Dead Sea. It's just a super surreal experience.

Nina Davies  24:45

They become part of it because part of the landscape. Yeah, in the same with the drones. I've got like a pretty clear image of like seeing the stars and these little like....

Yuli Serfaty  24:54

Yeah, so you see the stars and then there's one red star and it woushes back and forth above your head. So in that sense I don't really feel like I made anything up, I did enstrange it from that reality further to kind of make the point. But it's, it is that landscape? And I find it extremely bizarre. And it's mainly very bizarre because I think before leaving Israel, I didn't realise how weird it was, and then after leaving and then coming back, right, it really kind of it left a very deep effect on me.

Nina Davies  25:30

And are you sort of one year there? Are you aware of a lot of this sort of military surveillance technology, or yeah...

Yuli Serfaty  25:39

They also tell you, right, tell you like all beware, minefield fire zone? It's, there's signs everywhere, so you're, so you don't end up walking into a fire zone, essentially. Right? Lots of fences and kind of and surveillance technology. So for example, I was taking some drone footage for this work in the forest, where this work, work takes place. And there are certain areas where the military blocks your signal, so you can't fly anything,  and the drone just come back, it comes back to you, in the best of cases, in the worst cases, they take it.

Niamh Schmidtke  26:18

Because I'm kind of thinking back to like the title of the work and how you're saying that those these different zones, which are marked off as in, like, be careful, this area is not safe or something. And picnic zone, kind of implying that it's a safe space, you know, you can sit here for a while you're going to be, there's a there's an a minefield around you, you're likely not going to be kind of watched as though you're an alien. Kind of in the sense of like someone who's going to cause damage to that country or so on. Is that idea of picnic sounds something that kind of were you thinking about it in this way is sort of like playing with this idea of like, quote unquote, safe space? Or where does picnic zone?

Yuli Serfaty  27:02

Yeah, I think it does play with the notion of a safe space and the military signs, it depends with the target audience is, because for the they are either saying prohibited, 'you're going to be assaulted if you trespass' or they're saying 'stay out, this isn't safe for you'. Normally, it's the first type of warning, not the second. And the name picnic zone kind of comes it comes from fire zone. So I think maybe this is a good point in the show to introduce the landscape, the specific landscape in which this work takes place. So this work takes place in Yatir forest, which is kind of on the northern edge of the Israeli desert. So it physically forms the border with the West Bank, between Israel and the West Bank. So it has a very heavy military presence, and it is being surveilled at all times. Officially, the forest was planted in the 60s to stop desertification. Because the desert kind of moves around a lot as the climate changes. And this isn't, I mean, it's to do with climate change, definitely. But there's a threshold globally moves. It's not something that's static. But it leaves the communities who live around that threshold in devastation because suddenly, if you were a farmer, and then the desert grew in, like a radius of 20 kilometres throughout the threshold, then that is devastating for you. So Israel, whose, there's a lot of really bad things about us, but we do. We are really good with ecological kind of innovation technologies, and we plant a lot, for better or worse, as you'll learn in the following couple of minutes. So the government planted this forest in order to stop the desert from growing so essentially, it was supposed to be a green belt. This is the official reason practically. There are loads of unrecognised Bedouin villages around the, all of the desert, but particularly that north side, they're unrecognised for very kind of convoluted reasons, some to do with the British Mandate, and a lot to do with current kind of Israeli policies. And the forest has been planted, essentially, that the villages are being demolished, and then the forests are planted overnight. And then the shepherds and the farmers can't come back because there are trees and also because they can't work the land anymore. And there are laws prohibiting cutting down trees. So essentially, they are being deported from their lands using planting and trees. So that is one side of it. And then the other side of this particular forest, it's a pine mono monoculture. So the needles fall to the ground and they're very acidic, so they acidify the soil and essentially kill off everything else that grows in the area. So the local ecosystem has been destroyed in that local for-

Nina Davies  29:58

In that local landscape

Yuli Serfaty  30:00

Yeah, in that local landscape, thank you. And on top of everything, the desert water system works in a way that waterfalls and the tops of the mountains. So this is close to the Hebron mountain. So it's quite high up and flows down and floods into the valleys. Because now there's a forest there, the soil is much softer, and it absorbs a lot more of the water, so it actually makes the inner desert drier. So somehow, they managed to make a forest that is the complete opposite of what we think of as forests. And yet, when you're actually there, the experience is, the forest floor is dead. Nothing grows it's just trees and kind of grey needles. And then you can, quite often you'd see military vehicles and soldiers on patrol, and watchtowers. And like a lot, there's a lot of kind of our military architecture around. And then there would be picnic tables. And you're kind of it's, it's marketed as, like a, like, leisure destination. And I don't understand, yeah, why would anyone want to have a picnic in that space? And yet people do? Yeah. So this is, this is where the name of the work comes from that kind of weird feeling that all of these convoluting things are happening in one space, and it all comes down to a picnic bench?

Niamh Schmidtke  31:22

Because I guess I have, I have a question that's kind of about this forest and sort of how that location affects the world which, which you build because of course, in using speculation, you're you're using a very real place and can have very real experiences, but then making them more fantastical, in a way through the sense of humans are no longer part of that space but their infrastructures are. How do you feel this specific location has affected that kind of, I guess, maybe like the narrative in a way that is like throughout the piece, like the voice we hear throughout the work, or even just you're saying this is part of a larger series, I guess that thread between environment, and maybe story and character?

Yuli Serfaty  32:03

Yeah, Yatir forest dictates the kinds of contrasting elements that are guiding me throughout all the pieces in the work. So elements of control elements of surveillance, elements of biology, of ecology, of relations, to, of relations between different elements in one space. So it's really the guide, and the kind of home and maybe the vessel that all the characters live in. So everything I make within this body of work takes place according to this inherent contradiction of this space.

Niamh Schmidtke  32:44

I'm trying to imagine how much more dystopic your audio work is compared to the reality of being in the space.

Yuli Serfaty  32:51

I actually think it's quite realistic. I mean, this is my personal reading of the space, a lot of people would see it differently. Some Israeli people would be offended or, and I get it, it's their home. But for me, it's quite realistic. And I love that in the preparation text you sent me you called it a present dystopia, which I think is very accurate

Nina Davies  33:15

In that sort of question. I was wondering whether because there is sort of something with your work. I don't want to call it a utopia, because It's I don't think it is a utopia, but there's something quite peaceful going on with sort of, sort of current narratives about climate change, where it seems like I mean, it's just so obvious that yeah, like humans are not the best thing for the Earth. Basically, this zone that doesn't have humans in it is sort of post human, it all seems to be post human, where sort of technology is still sort of functioning on its own or now not functioning in collaboration with humans, it's functioning in collaboration with, with other forms of being. And this seems to be something I don't know, maybe something sort of not positive, but there seems to be something sort of like, optimistic about it. And I was wondering whether that was my own interpretation of it, or whether, whether there is any form of optimism in this zone for you?

Yuli Serfaty  34:16

I don't know whether to call it optimism. It's funny that well, it's interesting that you mentioned climate change, because I also feel like our narrative about climate change is like, oh, it's going to be the end of the world. No, it's just going to be the end of humanity, the world is going to keep going in any form it can, with or without us, it's just a shame that we're kind of destroying our own chances to take part in it. And that's, again, again, a kind of exercise and attention and a practice of how much space we take in our narrative of the world. That is my view of it, in any case. And regarding this work, I'm not very interested in giving kind of binary answers about this, I'm really enjoying the, it's kind of like what you said about the feeling you get when you're in nature, it's just there, and it's up to you to make of it what you make of it. I'm reading this really beautiful book called Experiments in Imagining Otherwise by Lola Olufemi. And it's really it's like a, I'm still in the middle of it, and I'm, I feel like my view of the world is changing as I read it. And they really practice radical hope, against all odds, against reality, against everything, a hope that is painful and hard and seems redundant. A hope in face of destruction of hope and face of dystopia.

Niamh Schmidtke  35:36

But I feel like there's also something else in what you're saying about also not not giving these binary answers, and even in the work that you've, kind of ,presented today as well, where this is projecting one version, one world...

Yuli Serfaty  35:50

Yeah

Niamh Schmidtke  35:51

...in like, a multitude of others. And even how going to get to your forest kind of when you're entering from your perspective and your world do you see it as being this very dystopic place because it's kind of sit, here have a picnic, while the military drone circle you, other people who have only ever experienced that kind of world would say, Oh, isn't this lovely, we're in a forest, we're having a picnic. And it's that kind of idea of those two worlds almost colliding with one another. And I guess for me when I, I haven't read the book, but I've, I've kind of seen a lot around that kind of idea of radical hope. And for me, a lot of that also builds into that narrative of, you're not going to like, quote, unquote, save any worlds, but some worlds are going to thrive, some worlds are going to end, some worlds are going to begin. Yeah. And this idea of kind of just figuring out which ones of those worlds do you want to be within or a part of or create or tear down? In a way?

Yuli Serfaty  36:45

Yeah

Niamh Schmidtke  36:46

maybe that's just as ambiguous as before. But

Yuli Serfaty  36:48

But I think that ambiguity is exactly what I'm trying to achieve. Because, as you say, it's just one story out of many. And it really feels especially like in the world we exist in today, there is no one truth, and it is what we make of it and that making of it is difficult and challenging and needs to be really active. So I don't want to give anyone any answers for them because they need to make it for them for themselves. But having said all of this, and this is my internal effort to maintain ambiguity in this work, so I'm criticising the Israeli government quite heavily in my life and in my practice, but the speaker in the work is, the concept of Golem, which I don't know if the listeners will be familiar with so I'll introduce it a little bit. Essentially, a Golem is a Jewish mythological being, creature not exactly a creature. Sometime in the 1600s, there was a rabbi that tried to protect his community from pograms and anti semitism. So he fashioned out of clay and soil, a humanoid figure and brought it to life. And that figure was the protector of the Jewish community. And throughout the years, there have been male golems, female golems, non binary golems. And they were bringing the bringers of peace, of war, they were protecting there were messengers they were, it's a very mutable metaphor. And essentially, the character of Golem is that trope of a scientist, will make a creation, the creation takes on life, gains consciousness and overthrows the scientist. So Frankenstein, even Gollum from Lord of the Rings. So in this work, I use the landscape as kind of my Golem, and the landscape comes to life and gains consciousness to protect whatever it is, it chose to protect. And it takes over the narration voice and overthrows the narrator from kind of the beginning of the piece to its end. Yes. So in using Golem, I am still I am kind of radically still adopting my Jewish identity, even though I am criticising the Israeli government.

Because those two things can exist..

Separately, or the existence of the first doesn't determine the form of existence of the other. Yeah. So it's really important to me to hold these two things and their complexities together.

Niamh Schmidtke  39:14

Yeah. Because I guess that was something I was thinking about, as you were speaking, and even as kind of you're talking as well about this idea of radical hope or not providing like a binary response or answer about the work for you and like making this piece or kind of having it as part of this larger, this larger installation and series, which I'm sure still has many ends, which are kind of figuring out where they're going. Is there a critical aim specifically in looking at this forest, in this space, in this kind of mutation that you want to draw your attention to right now? Like, do you feel that there is some kind of maybe message or guideline or warning within the work? For me listening to the piece, it's incredibly atmospheric and then in hearing the voice, it does feel like that there is some kind of warning which I'm supposed to be heading to. But I'm not, I'm not entirely sure where exactly my mind is going to and thinking through what that warning is trying to give.

Yuli Serfaty  40:09

I think there isn't a definitive warning in the work, it is definitely very important to me to tell the story of the forest and to tell the story of the displacement that is happening and of the militarisation of the landscape and of the violence that is taking place. I guess the warning is, if you don't practice radical hope, then this is this is already your reality, not only in Israel, but in many places across the world. The criticism is definitely there. The warning is maybe yours to make out.

Niamh Schmidtke  40:39

Yeah, cause I guess I feel mean, we listen to a lot of very dystopic audio pieces on this show. And I feel like there's often a sense of picking out messages or warnings or truths, I say, I say it in like quite a quite a vague way like truths to the artists with truths to the listener at the point of listening. But I guess I'm kind of thinking about, because I feel especially with your work, because it's leaning much more so into speculation as opposed to into fantasy, and for me, there's a large sense and speculation of it's kind of presenting an alternate present, or future or even past in a way that sort of almost enlightening you of the present in a way. And I guess what I'm trying to kind of figure out or like, tease out from you as well, is that what that kind of knowledge is, in a way, like when we have all of these complexities in terms of a political, a militaristic, a geographic and a cultural history in this big melting pot, what are you trying to bring out from us in that, aside from maybe trying to remove some of these binaries in terms of how these coexist with one another?

Yuli Serfaty  41:42

I think, I think it's exactly that. I think I want you to hold that complexity. And I think I have to see the world is a complex place, I can't bring myself to see anything as a standalone element. And I think I want the experience of my work in general to be to be able to hold complexity, and to be able to hold horror, and beauty and social wrongs and poetics in one.

Niamh Schmidtke  42:14

Yeah, because I know that you -, when we were talking about this work before recording, and we're asking you about different references. One thing you really recommended to us was Annihilation, The book, not the film.

Yuli Serfaty  42:25

The book, not the film, definitely.

Niamh Schmidtke  42:27

And I had listened to, I took a day, to like, listen to annihilation on on background while doing a bunch of other tasks, and had this very creepy, kind of like ,feeling like sort of just behind my back. And when listening to this work again, after that, I could really feel that sense. I guess that kind of like, slow creep in a way. Or maybe like a slightly occult sense. Is that something that you feel like you've explored in your work previously? Or is it more so something that you're trying to kind of tease out or kind of like, play with the genre a bit more, now?

Yuli Serfaty  43:07

I think it's both. I think I tried, I've experimented with this before, slightly, and then I read annihilation. And I think the book does this in a really beautiful way. And that really inspired me to push further and use more, because I've used speculation before, but this time, I'm very practically developing characters. And I'm developing the relationship between one and the other and their relationship to the landscape and where they live, and what they're like and what their character traits are, and what they, how they may or may not treat you as the viewer. And what I find really beautiful in the book is that we don't even know the names of the human characters. We don't know their backgrounds, we don't know almost anything about them. All we know is the landscape and the way it mutates. And I really love that shift in attention. So I've directly adopted that in this work, definitely.

Nina Davies  44:04

Well at the beginning of annihilation, I noticed how they said that they don't bring, they're not allowed to bring any technical devices in with them. And I sort of making my own inferences into whether the reason why they're not is that this sort of mutation can kind of mutate any sort of information, or like any kind of knowledge. And at the beginning of the story, the sort of natural formations that look like language are starting to, so they've even sort of mutated into just language as language on its own. And it did make me think when I just listened to that one part, I thought, oh, that's interesting. Because that's a narrative that they don't really like go down but they kind of almost like hint to it at the beginning of the story of like, they you can tell that there's kind of a bit of a backstory there to to Annihilation, that maybe they have at some point brought in technologies and they To decide not to because it's, as soon as these mutations start using technology, it's game over like that is sort of like as humans, that's how we function now in today's world, and, and then to even see that sort of danger of it starting to pick up language, and the main character going into read and yeah, I won't spoil anything. But I think that that's what I enjoyed about- it nods to that. And then I felt like in your work, you are kind of telling another version of I mean, it's a different, your research is different, but you're sort of telling a another version of that sort of story. Of course, it's about what sort of, oh, actually, maybe this is a question what what sort of do you feel like is, is mutating in your world because it feels like the forest itself is, is still sort of in my, in my imagination when I'm listening to your work, the forest is still still very much like a traditional forest in the things that are mutating are actually the technologies, to the natural.

Yuli Serfaty  45:59

Yeah, so the forest currently, well, it's a desert really, the forest is already a mutation with the desert. So in that sense, I feel like the forest has already mutated currently in the work Yes, the forest is pretty much unchanged. The mutations that are happening so we've spoken about Golem, the mythology of the Golem is kind of mutating with, with the narrator, let's call it, mutating with the narrator, mutating with the landscape. So it kind of says like, 'I am the mountain, I am the forest. I am the soil'. So it's mutating with the land itself. So that's the Golem characters. That's the Golem character, sorry. And then there's two other characters at the moment, and their mutations are much more straightforward, much more formal, rather than conceptual. So one of the characters is called Drone, and he is a combat drone that was mutated with the whales. So that whole area like I don't know how many millions of years ago was covered by a sea called Tethys, and now it's kind of retracted and has left a couple of lakes along the way. So the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea, and now the Red Sea, kind of where it meets the oceans. And there are still, there whales in the Red Sea is still, not in one of the lake, they are tiny. And obviously, nothing lives in the Dead Sea. So not anything there

Nina Davies  47:28

That's what I was gonna say, I don't think anything could live in the Dead Sea.

Yuli Serfaty  47:31

But there are whales in the Red Sea. So the combat drone has been tainted with a whale. And he's quite snobbish. So he's like, he loves himself a lot. So he had his portrait taken. So he's kind of presenting himself and he's very kind of pompous, and would maybe, like he's very curious, and he might approach you to kind of check you out or kind of dodge you a little bit. But he'd, he'd also get bored quite easily, so he'd drift away and kind of mind his own business for a while. He's also a creative entity. So he is presenting his own video works, which are the actual drone footage that I took in the forest. And the other character that I'm working on right now is Watchtower, and she is way more, kind of mysterious. So her tendency is to kind of hide. So she's mutated with a hyena, so there are striped hyenas in the desert. And what I love about hyenas is, their ability to the females would grow their clitoris really large, so it looks like a penis. So they are..

Nina Davies  48:40

This is in real life?

Yuli Serfaty  48:41

This is real life, they are mutating themselves to look like males to protect themselves and to essentially make sure no one kind of messes with them. So I really love this about hyenas. And in this work hyena has merged with a watchtower. And the watchtower takes form of, this is very much still in progress. So I'm not sure if it will take form of more of an actual watchtower or more of like a hunting tent. But in any case, it would be surveilling its environment around it and would be camouflaged with kind of hyena tropes. And it would hide things within it. So you kind of can see that there are objects there but you don't, you can't necessarily see them or kind of says that we see them well you can't see them at all times. And then the relationships between them, oh, and we don't know much about Watchtowers personality because she's very, like mysterious and she doesn't share a lot. Watchtower and Drone are not the best of friends. They're kind of like, they have a bit of beef. Golem takes a lot of, kind of emotional support from Watchtower. And Drone is a little bit like an older brother to Golem, but the relationship between Drone and Watchtower isn't very clear at the moment. Like we don't know why they're having beef.

Nina Davies  50:03

And just to clarify for listeners, the sound work that we've listened to, as a part of this, the Golem character is mostly kind of featured, in this work

Yuli Serfaty  50:14

It would be sonic, Golem character, the Golem character is sonic.

Nina Davies  50:18

In this sort of mutation between between these surveillance technologies and the natural world, I was wondering whether there's a sort of hierarchy? When we think of surveillance technologies, we think of like, they act as a medium, and they kind of communicate, this is something that they're always communicating to this sort of this end they don't really completely act autonomously. I'm sure they probably do in some some ways, today. And I was wondering if the surveillance technologies have sort of providing information to the natural landscape or whether this like whether there's one that kind of communicates to the other if there's one that desires the information more or?

Yuli Serfaty  51:00

I think it's more of a rhizome of connections. So if anything, maybe these radio transmissions are just floating in air and will endlessly transmit to nowhere and no one. I think I like the sense of kind of how futile it is to try and manage or control a landscape or nature or even peoples or cultures in certain ways. It sounds quite ridiculous when you 'Oh, we're just going to take this landscape. And now we're going to control each and every element of it'. Yeah, it just sounds... pointless

Nina Davies  51:34

But is that sort of that sort of is what's happening? Yeah,

Yuli Serfaty  51:38

Yeah, it is what's happening, so I think I'm extenuating that pointlessness of that circuit, pointless circulation of information. Golem is saying in the text as well, like, they put me here to rule you, but they're gone, and I'm just like, here, and I'm not really sure what to do about that now.

Niamh Schmidtke  51:59

Yeah. Because I kind of read that bit that Golem is saying, almost as though they're going a little bit mad, as well. It's kind of like I am this I am that I'm not really sure, what's my, like, why am I here? What's the point of it? Yeah, it's like, what, what place are we in, in a way. And almost in my mind, I was thinking back to Annihilation and how there's this section in it, where there's a psychiatrist, that puts the rest of the members under some form of, kind of trance in order to calm them into entering this, this world, which is not a home for them. And thinking about what happens if this Golem has been under some kind of trance that they've just woken up from, or what happens if they're just kind of entering in and out of that space, or like how that madness arises, in a way.

Yuli Serfaty  52:48

Thinking about the soldiers in the space, which is kind of the role Golem is taking the watchmen, the guardian, the kind of person in charge, but these soldiers are often children, they're 18 years old, and they're just being put in that landscape to guard the border of their country, or to to have the responsibility to shoot if they need to have the the physical power to assert domination over a whole population of another people. And from my, from my experience of the military was very mild, but my friends who were what, like some of them were combat soldiers, you very much feel like you were put at the end of the world and you really don't really understand the point, but you kind of have to do it, because otherwise they'll like put you in military jail or...? And you don't really stop to question it. So I guess this is like a moment of sobriety, where you understand that you've just been put here and there's no real reason for it, and you don't read understand what you're doing.

Niamh Schmidtke  53:55

Okay. And then trying to enlist navigate amongst your environment?

Yuli Serfaty  53:59

Yeah. And then to navigate this situation you found yourself in and you kind of have to stick out, or, to get out of that situation requires really radical actions.

Niamh Schmidtke  54:11

And it's kind of making me think about because none of these, none of these characters, I mean, maybe Golem in a way as they kind of mutate with their environment, but they're not static beings. Do you ever envisage how they might exist if they left the forest for example? Or is this very much they're home? Because I guess..

Yuli Serfaty  54:32

It is them, it is physically them. So they are physically the soil and the kind of layers of that I refer to archaeology in inverted commas in the text. That is, a lot of the kind of ruins of villages are not actually that old and they're labelled as archaeology to kind of make it look like of people haven't lived here for centuries, but actually, it's like 100 years old, and it was totally someone's home. Like not that long ago. Yeah. And at the other side of that, um, if you'd find the slightest hint of a Jewish archaeological site, then the entire area will be vacated for that excavation, and would be kind of declared Jewish or some Palestinian villages would have Muslim presence, or they'll have the kind of entire evidence of Palestinian life, and then there will be a church. So the entire village will be demolished other than the church. So there's this whole kind of politics around archaeology, and there's just layers and layers and layers of lives and homes and structures in that area, but generally in Israel, that I find really interesting.

Nina Davies  55:44

Is this sort of also relate to these Bedouin communities that are sort of, I want to say being evicted, but they're not even really being evicted,

Yuli Serfaty  55:56

Being demolished.

Nina Davies  55:57

Yeah demolished? Yeah. Is that, how are those sites..? Because I get, I remember you saying once when we were speaking before that these Bedouin villages and communities aren't even labelled on, they're not even on maps.

Yuli Serfaty  56:10

They're not labelled on maps, no.

Nina Davies  56:11

So once they're demolished, like either, even though I guess they're not considered considered ruins either?

Yuli Serfaty  56:17

That's the problem. That there's there is a problem of history. So people like Forensic Architecture are doing really, really important work and kind of proving that these villages did exist and have been existing for such and such amount of time. Because the kind of, I want to be careful of like telling other people's kind of, stories.

Nina Davies  56:39

Of course, yeah,

Yuli Serfaty  56:40

But just as a kind of practical, the Bedouin have been considered like a nomadic people, but they haven't really been nomadic for over 100 years now. So the government is kind of using that notion of them being nomadic, to say, like, Oh, why do you care? If you live here, over there, just go over there.

Nina Davies  56:58

'That's just how you exist.'

Yuli Serfaty  56:59

That's because 'you're nomadic anyway'. Yeah. Then they say, my great, great, great grandfather is buried here, here is the grave. What are you talking about? So for further information, Forensic Architecture, definitely, if you want to learn more,

Niamh Schmidtke  57:14

For a more in depth, understanding of kind of the different meanings of which archaeology takes on in an Israeli political stance?

Yuli Serfaty  57:23

And especially the Bedouin, the Bedouin situation and how the government treats them like if you've seen the Turner Prize exhibition a couple of years ago, they break down one of the instances that happened to one Bedouin family.

Niamh Schmidtke  57:41

On that note,, we're gonna have to wrap up pretty soon. Is there anything else you would like to share about this work or you feel is important for listeners know that we haven't touched on?

Yuli Serfaty  57:54

I don't know if there's anything else I'd like to share right now. I feel like the work as a whole is very much still developing. So I guess watch the space. But I do want to say that I'm co curating a group show with  Alia Hamaoui, and Collective Ending that's open right now. It's going to be open 23rd of September until until the 23rd of October. We are open Thursday, Friday, Saturdays, or by appointment, so reach out if you want to see it. And it very much deals with questions of speculation, mutation, watery beginnings, and it features Madison Bycroft, Sophie Mei Birkin and Leila Majid and Louis Newby. So yeah, please come through.

Niamh Schmidtke  58:43

We're going to add Yuli's website at the bottom of the RTM site. And you can also find their Instagram handle as well, where you can find all the details pretty easily on our Instagram

Nina Davies  58:59

Instagram and website, which we now have. I can't remember if I've already made an announcement about that in the previous episode.

Niamh Schmidtke  59:04

Oh, yeah, Future Artefacts FM does indeed have a website. Yeah.

Nina Davies  59:11

Great. Thank you so much for coming in.

Yuli Serfaty  59:13

Thank you so much for having me. It's been a pleasure.

Nina Davies  59:16

Yeah, really, really interesting work. Like really, really great. It was, I think this is gonna be a good episode.

Yuli Serfaty  59:21

Thanks so much.

Niamh Schmidtke  59:23

So it's been it's been really great to find out more about your work through this process and share it with our listeners as well.

Yuli Serfaty  59:31

Thank you. Thanks for having me. Great.

Nina Davies  59:33

Bye

Yuli Serfaty  59:33

Bye