

## Double Life

**Tali Kohen-Garbuz, published in YNET, May 3, 2007.**

**Miri Segal inserts a virtual life into Dvir Gallery.**

One cannot stay indifferent to Miri Segal's new installation at Dvir Gallery. In an elegant and precise way, it pushes the boundary of plastic art to the fourth dimension, and from there it brings up questions which are difficult to measure concerning the Real, such as love.

Segal, a mathematician in the past and a highly appreciated video artist in the present, takes into account the viewer as a subject who should be engrossed in the work, with all the senses and intelligence he or she can come up with.

Second Life, an online multi-participants game exists already for a few years. Participants can create a self image according to their choice and are free to move between spaces. In fact, they are to do anything..., almost. The space is inhabited by familiar participants as well as newcomers, each of which designs his avatar (i.e. His character). A participant can enter a casino, walk in a field of flowers, or join (like Segal) a discussion around a campfire were philosophers meet. One can also create new spaces in Second Life according to his/her imagination; there is a *Second life* currency with a change rate to the USD and the sex and gambling economies.



Segal entered Second Life as a participant in the past August with her own character, along with her assistant Iris Domany. Since then she is there, holding conversations and other kinds of relations with the other Avatars. In addition, Segal created a gallery space planted in the Second Life in which she exhibited her works. Participants can walk into the gallery, but they cannot change things within it.

After many hours of footage, Segal created a thirty-minute documentary film concerning Second Life and its participants.

## **An intelligent feat**

It is, actually, an animation engine that allows a participant a number of vantage points and the option to step in and step out, be "inside" or "outside". The participants exist and are virtual at the same time, and everything that happens within the game supposedly exists in the borderline of fantasy. Segal's mirror-image can jump off a tall building and then get up and run; she can wear an impeccable look and attract whoever she desires. In spite of all this, however, the longer one watches the film, it becomes clearer that people who transport themselves into this unlimited fantasy, take everything with them: their loneliness, existential questions, depressions, random sexual encounters, and disappointments.

Is there a singular 'I', or maybe also a joint 'I'?

"Is there anything beyond the roles, a unifying entity which makes me 'me'?" wonders a participant who took the form of a skeleton when seated among the philosophers.

This work is an intelligent feat, rich in details and well thought out; with a lot of consideration put into the sound, (part of the soundtrack is taken from Robert Wyatt's Rock Bottom). In parallel to the deconstruction and transportation of the supposed intimacy between a single person and his/her computer screen, into a public space, Segal reenact, using new techniques, the modernist act of transporting the trivial and mundane into the art sphere.

Another presentation of the virtual gallery is hung on a different wall, or, to be more accurate, is reflected from a screen projected onto a mirror. The gaze follows the motion of a virtual camera moving in the space of the virtual gallery and looking at it from different angles. In addition, the viewer's face is reflected in the mirror, as if forcing him or her to participate. On another wall is a single image of Segal's "Google Face".

The gallery talks with Segal are packed with a wide ranging audience, who wish to better understand this show. Connoisseurs of her previous works know well how seductive they can be, and are ready for the challenge. Structurally, this work is a meandering in the medium between computer art and cinema, between documentary and fantasy, between naive and ironic, and, at the end, it is deeply affecting.