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Once there was a prince who thought he was a rooster

Shelly Silver

The New York based artist and filmmaker Shelly Silver utilizes a wide range of forms and genres to explore and challenge preconceptions of nation, gender and family. Shelly Silver has realized a new work in the context of the Jewish Festival of the Bern Biennale. Her video installation "ROOSTER" uses as its starting point an 18th century Jewish tale by Rabbi Nachman about a prince who suddenly decides he is a rooster, spending his time sitting naked under the dining room table eating stray corn that falls to the floor. All attempts to cure the prince are in vain, until a wise man appears, suggesting a different logic to him: to function as a rooster who acts like a prince....

As one enters the darkened cellar space of the Stadtgalerie, one is confronted by a larger than life-sized video projection of people from different origins, appearing naked and masked with crowns on their heads. In the backroom a deep soothing feminine voice recounts the tale of the prince. On various monitors, images of animated poultry, humans and everyday objects mingle to restage Rabbi Nachman's strange story. Scenes of magic, optimism and naive beauty mix with those of danger, subliminally alluding to both the thrill of changing into somebody completely different, as well as the destabilization, insanity and loss that such a change might engender. Shelly Silver uses this haunting folktale of a prince caught in an unreal reality to reflect on the fragility and vulnerability of fixed identities.