

Snake shall I Become (the Fourth Hour)

Michal Sophia Tobiass

2022

Exhibition at the Collection Gallery

Michal Sophia Tobiass teamed with a snake researcher in the Negev and became acquainted with the venomous Saharan horned viper, which has a pair of horns protruding over its eyes. Given its age-old survival skills and striking manifestations in ancient Egyptian culture, she set out to translate its movement to the human body. Using a movement notation she created especially for the project, Tobiass focused on the connection between its movement and the possible mobility of the arm and hand—a connection whose echoes may also be seen in ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, sculptures, and paintings. On this basis she created a dance for two dancers, projected on two screens in the space next to a series of copper sculptures. The dancers' movement fuses nature with its incarnations in culture and art, whereas the sculptures' calligraphic-drawn quality follows the movement of the viper in nature and the movement of the human arm, tracing ancient Egyptian images of the serpent, as well as biographical symbols pertaining to the artist herself.

Tobiass drew inspiration from ancient Egyptian funerary texts concerned with the afterlife, and specifically from the journey of sun god Ra, whose symbol is the eye, and his figure sports a solar disk over its head with a coiled serpent around it. Every day at sundown, Ra descends by boat to the underworld. At the fourth hour (that gave the installation its title), his left eye is injured, and good snakes treat him and help his eye recover before sunrise. Simultaneously, Tobiass studied the Nehushtan—the biblical copper serpent, which led her to the ancient copper mining site in Timna near Eilat, the site of an Egyptian shrine dedicated to Hathor—the goddess of beauty, love, and fertility, who is also the goddess of mining and miners. Hathor, a wall relief in whose image adorns the Dendera Temple in Egypt, has been incarnated in the figures of Aphrodite and Venus in Greek and Roman mythology.

Together, the work's three modes—documentation, dance, and sculpture—form one shamanistic man-animal array; new, living and pulsating, physical and metaphysical imagery developed into a spell through observation of nature and the study of its manifestations in mythology and human history.

Dr. Irena Gordon

Chief curator Petach Tikva Museum of Art