



## FIELD HOSPITAL X | AYA BEN RON

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by Avi Lubin

Field Hospital X (FHX) is a new project by artist Aya Ben Ron. It is a mobile, international institution, an organization that is committed to researching the way art can react and act in the face of social ills. Learning from the structure and practice of hospitals, health maintenance organizations and healing resorts, FHX provides a space in which silenced voices can be heard and social injustices can be seen. It launches at the Israeli Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, and from there it will travel to various sites around the world, develop and expand.

Over the years, Ben Ron's work has dealt with ideas about healing, repair and rescue; delving into the essence of medical ethics, and challenging the relations between caregiving and receiving care.

In 2003, Ben Ron created *First Aid*, a concertina book and a black and white booklet, using the instructions from an official Israel Defense Forces handbook, taking them out of context and recombining them. The booklet also contains drawings based on illustrations of evacuations of civilians and soldiers. IDF soldiers have reappeared in her work *Patterns* (2002), which combines drawings of soldiers demonstrating the Fireman's Carry technique together with arabesque tiles, composing a geometric pattern.

Ben Ron's practice includes collaborations with different medical institutions and hospitals in Israel and around the world. *A Voyage to Cythera* (2012), for example, was an intervention in the permanent collection of the Berlin Museum of Medical History at the Charité (curators: Thomas Schnalke and Galit Eilat). Ben Ron created a voyage in the museum collection where visitors pass through 18 stations, telling an alternative story about the lives of patients whose organs are preserved in glass jars and stored on shelves. Another example is *Shift* (2009-2011), a documentary about patients in a persistent vegetative situation (coma), shot at the Head Injury Department of Reuth Medical Center in Tel Aviv. The video follows the daily routine of the patients, their families, and care staff over a period of two years. *Rescue* (2012, The Israel Museum, curator: Aya Miron) includes a suspended steel sculpture and a video in which Ben Ron, dressed as a nurse, is strapped onto a stretcher and hung upside down in mid-air. The rescue procedure was guided by the Head of Patient Safety at Hadassah Medical Center Jerusalem, and the director of Israel's emergency medical services training department.

In 2017, Ben Ron created *No Body*, a video about abuse in the family, that tells her personal story after many years of silence. In this video, Ben Ron shifts the gaze directly to her own childhood trauma. This shift has an important influence on the way we can retroactively understand her body of work as a personal testimony, and read her continuous interest in the power relations between physicians and patients as a metaphor for the relations between parents and children. It also marks an important transition in her artistic practice from working from within the wounded body, from personal post-trauma, to a public option for healing. In this sense, the confrontation with the trauma in *No Body* is what has led to the establishment of Field Hospital X.



It is interesting to note that even though Ben Ron herself appeared in some of her previous works, she always portrayed a character, usually that of a nurse. In *No Body* she appears as herself, and not as a character, yet as an animated figure who is drawn frame by frame (rotoscopy) on filmed scenery. FHX begins a new path where Ben Ron is neither the nurse, nor the protagonist, but rather the director of a hospital that operates as an independent institution, in reality.

When visitors enter Field Hospital X they are patients, recipients of care. They take a queue number and wait in the Reception Area. When their number is called, they go to the reception desk and choose a Risk-Wristband. In the Reception Area, they watch the FHX TV Program, where they are told to "be patient; be a patient." Then, they are invited to enter a Safe-Unit and learn how to produce a Self-Contained Shout. Afterwards, they sit on a Care-Chair, where they can personally view one of the FHX Care-Kits, which presents a short video by an invited artist, confronting a social ill through a personal story.

On the Care-Chair, the visitors are put in a double position: on the one hand they are seated on the Care-Chairs like patients and are receiving care by FHX staff; on the other hand, they become the caretakers, who are invited to truly listen, to form an opinion, and to care.

In the Care-Kit, after the short video, visitors may watch Second-Opinions by FHX experts. Second-Opinions have two different roles. Through them, visitors can open up to a new perspective, get more information and hear a different point of view about what they just saw. In addition, Second-Opinions help to break the speechlessness and the silence that often surround stories about personal trauma, giving words to what is usually unarticulated, and helping the visitors to speak out.

Through Field Hospital X, Ben Ron creates a space that enables people to talk about their traumas, and the social injustice that affected them. It is a space that gives the opportunity to speak without being subordinated to the expectations of the legal system, the media and the public atmosphere. In FHX, art is not abstract and ambiguous, but rather takes a stand. FHX enables people to talk about their own trauma in their own terms, and encourages the visitors to care, to listen and to see what is happening in front of them.