

# Rona Yefman

DEREK ELLER GALLERY

615 West 27th Street

November 18–January 7

In Rona Yefman's installation *The Mountain*, 2011, the artist features a quote from her subject, Martha Bouke, on a pillar, which reads: "This world is bad. You wish to get to the sky. The question is: How do you get to the sky?" Yefman's artistic practice springs from this idea, her work showcasing individuals who try to reach the "sky," or, in the artist's words, "embody possibilities of freedom," via their gender, sexuality, or assumed personae. Martha is the female alter ego assumed by an eighty-year-old Ukrainian man who immigrated to Palestine after surviving the Holocaust. Now, Martha lives in Tel Aviv. Since 2002, Yefman has followed, filmed, and photographed her. Two videos and a series of photographs that chronicle Martha's nine-year collaboration with Yefman are on display in the artist's first solo show at Derek Eller Gallery.

A two-channel video installation, *Martha Bouke, project #4*, 2011, shows Martha dressing, transforming her figure, and assuming her persona on one screen, and, on the other, posing for the camera in her home and walking the streets of Tel Aviv at night. Yefman's dialogue with Martha about her character, lifestyle, and personal history plays over each channel. Martha's body—hairy legs and lumpy groin—plays off the garish pink lips of her undecorated Venetian carnival mask, which Martha dyed to match her skin tone. The incongruous combination of the mask's pale, hard surface with her sagging neck seems to manifest the futility of Martha's assumed femininity. Though Yefman's portrait celebrates Martha's persona, her photographs and films also fetishize it. That Martha only partially obscures her masculine physique suggests that femaleness is something to be tried on or played at, to perform or hide. In this way, and as she poses for Yefman's camera, Martha objectifies herself.



Rona Yefman, *Martha Bouke and Andy's Flowers, Visit at the Museum*, 2011, color photograph, 40 x 30".