

## Keren Cytter

(Tel Aviv, Israel, 1977)

Keren Cytter has stated in an interview with Vardit Gross: “I’m trying to break movies and create different ways to perceive images and tell a story. So I am playing with it, and yes, sometimes it ends up being difficult to follow.”

Cytter works above all with video and film and during the editing phase she breaks apart the narrative coherence from the flow of images, and from the unity of sound that, far from giving voice to a possible narrative connecting thread, is transformed into the principal element of alienation, disintegrating into different voices and languages, often with an overlaying of sound and subtitles that is not always logical, pushing the viewer to concentrate on only one of the numerous possible narrations.

*The Hottest Day of the Year*, 2010, challenges the conventions of two traditional linguistic forms: anthropological documentary and historical narration.

The beginning is classic. Black-and-white photos of African populations appear sequentially before the lens, with a male voice in the background that recounts, in English, the story of Anne-Marie Baptist, a fictitious character made real by photographic documents and by a narration by the woman’s grandson, at times interrupted by the female, French voice of Anne-Marie herself. Born in 1917, she moved to South Africa during the First World War to work as a nurse. She fell in love with a doctor, gave birth to a baby girl who she would leave, to go in search of a mythical place: “the place where action no longer has meaning,” a region of Africa where two ancient tribes fought each other until they drenched the earth with their blood. Anne-Marie’s death from malaria in 1950 coincides with the precise day when the State of Israel declares Jerusalem its capital, and the day of her grandson’s birth coincides with Israel’s annexation of the territories to the east.

The video, after the first ten minutes, has a profound gap. The expanses of African landscape give way to the interior of a conscription office in the heart of Israel, where some women impersonate female soldiers, although they are a bit too mature for the role. One of them drags herself along the floor, stricken with a terrible headache that is imputed to the hottest day of the year, already mentioned in the African narration. That day reestablishes the two stories in cyclical time and the malaise seems to refer now to malaria. In the end it seems clear, in the interweaving of the two narrations, how the two fighting African tribes speak in a mythical dimension about the struggle between Israel and Palestine, so that the war between Arabs and Israelis ceases to be daily news and even loses its historical dimension, to acquire one that is mythical and eternal, inherent to every bloody and fratricidal clash. (EV)