

## Yael Bartana

(Afula, Israel, 1970)

Yael Bartana has dedicated many works to an almost anthropological study of certain customs, rituals, and practices in Israel, the country where she was born and where she still spends part of the year. Some images refer to ancient traditions, such as the wearing of masks by religious people in observance of Carnival in *Ad De'loYoda*, 2003, while others seem intended to establish a new identity, as in the ATv competition on the desert dunes in *Kings of the Hill*, yet another variation on atavistic machismo. And then others are images of the contemporary, powerful, and perhaps even more striking liturgies of ancient celebrations, such as the sound of a siren on the Day of the Fallen Soldier, when traffic comes to a halt for an entire minute, even on the highways.

*Mary-Koszmaly*, the title of the work acquired for the collection, means nightmare or bad dream in Polish. It alludes to the bitter awakening, perhaps not yet completely over, of a Poland discovering that it is deprived of the vital energies of its Jewish population.

Slawomir Sierakowski, a young Polish intellectual, passes through the dark tunnel that leads into the old Olympic Stadium in Warsaw, and takes a first step toward reawakening the nation, toward the light of day. Images of the hollow formed by the bare steps, covered with untended grass, have the power to evoke, through bitter contrast, the sports epic of the Nazi regime. In response to that triumphalism is the present, bleak but imbued with a desire to recall an earlier past, free of rhetoric, sane and optimistic as the grass that grows despite everything.

The memory of crowds is contrasted by the single voice of the young political figure. The goal is imprinted on his face, magnetized by his resolute countenance, by his steady and heartbroken words. When the frame widens once again, the young man is no longer alone in the stadium. A group of children, dressed in the traditional uniform of patriotic scout troops, has begun to stencil on the green field the words "3,300,000 Jews can change the life of 40,000,000 Poles."

In this work Yael Bartana intends to draw a parallel between Poland and Israel, convinced that both nations are living the trauma of the past and now struggle to seek their own identities and definitions. (EV)