

Song of Songs
Performance, Direction and Text by Douglas Rosenberg
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*The artist and writer Suzy Gablik's 1991 book, *The Reenchantment of Art*, addresses her growing discomfort with "the compulsive and oppressive consumeristic framework in which we do our work", noting further that "we live in a culture that has little capacity or appreciation for meaningful ritual." For Gablik, it is in ritual that we find peace or heal or give ourselves permission to play, to step out of the rigors of art as a career and remember what art can do for the soul. Most of the time, this is a choice, a product of free will; sometimes it is a necessary step back from the world, and sometimes it is forced upon us by uncontrollable circumstances. At this moment of forced regression, sending many of us back to the beginning, to the kitchen table, computer screen or elsewhere to practice our creativity and to speak to the world in a much smaller voice, perhaps we are being given a prompt; to focus on our faith in art, transformation, and the elevation of the ordinary and to become re-enchanted with art in the meantime.*

The Modernist critic Harold Rosenberg writes about an idea that is clearly present in the Old Testament. He notes that,

"If you inhabit a sacred world you find art rather than make it."

He alludes to a heightened sense in which the observer (or one who is observant perhaps) becomes aware of their surroundings to the extent that,

"It is that in a world of miracles... anything may start to glisten with meaning and become memorable."

This project was created in the months before the crisis we now find ourselves in, a moment in which we are made exquisitely aware of our surroundings and all that is in the landscape and spaces around us. It was made while thinking deeply about male intimacy, identity, age, and faith. The allusion to the Song of Songs is not a literal one, but a prompt to think about its sacred poetic possibilities.

Douglas Rosenberg is an artist working with performance, dance and media. He often explores Jewish identity in his work for screen and installation and as the founding Director of the Conney Project on Jewish Arts, organizing international conferences and scholarship on Jewishness and the arts. His work has been exhibited widely in the US and abroad at venues including, The Contemporary Art Museum in Buenos Aires, Mostra de Vídeo Dansa de Barcelona, Spain, The Video Place, London, at Vdance - International Video Dance of Tel-Aviv at the Tel-Aviv Cinematheque and The Kennedy Center, Washington DC. He is a professor of Art at University of Wisconsin-Madison and a member of the Center for Jewish Studies



*Song of Songs is a
performance without an audience,*

in a quiet empty space,

*a no-space surrounded by
objects that move me,*

*dried and bronze cast sunflowers
from my garden, a small bell,*

tended to with love and affection,

*and excerpts from Song of Songs
printed on fabric that I can
wrap myself in,*

like a tallit,

*imagined on
quiet contemplative walks.*





*To be wrapped in the embrace of the text,
of nature, of love.*

*About biblical poetry and what it might conjure
as a prompt for a personal movement exploration,
a ritual.*

*as a space of contemplation;
why does this text move me,*

*how does it open my heart and
what does that look like?*

*Such inspirations have come to me in schul,
often during Yom Kippur;*

*I thought about how the Passover story
foreshadowed this plague,*

*I think about Yiddish dances,
exuberant and celebratory,*

*always in community,
reverent and connected.*

*Trauma, identity,
longing, the spiritual in art.*

*The performance of life,
the life of performance.*

*Returning ritual to art
to performance; to be enchanted,*

*enveloped, wrapped in loving text and memory,
nature, the sublime,*

*evoking imagined, familiar music,
nusach tefillah (the text of the prayers).*

