

MIKVAH GIRLS

March 30, 2025, EMILY HARVEY FOUNDATION

Text and Concept: Marianna Ellenberg

Costumes: Raluca Vlad

Production Assistant: Jay Reinier

Choreography: Stacey Grossfield

Music: Brian Chase

Cast: Hannah Applebaum, Max Cosmo Cramer, Georgia Cohen, Alex Tartarsky, Ella W-S and Ema Zivkovic.

SYNOPSIS

Mikvah Girls' is a multi-media performance, examining the sexual, social and ideological struggles of a small group of yeshiva girls coming of age in the 1990's, based on my own autobiographical experiences. In *Mikvah* Girls, a series of movements and musical suites meditate upon the codes of female Jewish ritual dress, sexuality and coming of age.

Choreographed movement and collaged live analog/electronic sounds are incorporated to evoke the intersection between the confined environment of a modern Orthodox Jewish day school and the Riot Grrrl/DIY subculture that the protagonists embrace. Minna and Andrea (the lead characters) traverse the ups and downs of Yeshiva life, sexual awakening and feminist coming into consciousness in a series of skits and musical numbers. Beyond the confines of a synagogue or institution; an ecstatic, non-denominational meditation emerges.

The performance takes place deep inside the world of an Orthodox Yeshiva. The set will consist of an abstracted Bema and religious day school classroom. The world outside midi dresses, home economics and Mishna appears through collaged sounds and light projections. The girls can only escape their world, through a spiritual loophole and a break in the time-space continuum. The fifth floor bathroom doubles as a cave between the daily world of rules, control and obedience and the downtown subculture, where the girls can remove the garments of the patriarchy and discover their own cosmological framework.

Influences:

In Mikva Girls, I incorporate experimental writing techniques, narrative vignettes and analogue-electronic music to create a humorous multimedia show that is structured around a series of mythological incantations drawn from traditional Jewish liturgy and a collage of pop songs, protest songs and readings from feminist manifestos. Artists such as Robert Ashley and Yvonne Rainer have inspired me in their approach to incorporating repetition, language abstraction and narrative elements within a structural framework. Mikva Girl's script is informed by a history of experimental theater, Brechtian humor and Dadaist word games. The characters and plot points have been developed in conjunction with a two-fold research process; engaging with primary biblical texts and feminist textual analysis alongside interviews with Gen-X women, who grew up within Orthodox communities. It is this unique intersection between Jewish scholarship, avant garde writing and the ecstatic that is at the heart of the performance "Mikva Girls."