

thINKingDANCE

Upping the ante on dance coverage and conversation



Photo credit: Marlene Ramirez-Cancio and Cheyenne Gil

Centering Palestinian Pleasure and Agency

by **Ella-Gabriel Mason**

In *Eat Me Baladi*, Palestinian artists Mette Loulou von Kohl and Leila Delicious take the audience on a sumptuous exploration of ownership, agency, domination, and fantasy. Von Kohl and Delicious fill the stark space of Icebox Project with color and texture, displaying a variety of symbolic fruits (berries, watermelon, olives) and taking over the large back wall with projections that provided additional context about the performers, their families, and Palestine.

The piece opens with a strip tease. As the lights fade up, Delicious slowly strides onto the floor, wrapped in a long, red silk robe. She pauses at stage right and regards the audience framing her face with a delicately raised arm. She smiles. And then in a flash runs her tongue along her wrist. Her smile turns devious. This sets the tone for a tease that will be about her pleasure and delight in surprising us. She eats berries achingly slowly. She offers an audience member a strawberry only to pull it quickly into her snapping teeth. As the work continues Delicious links the agency and self-ownership she experiences in burlesque to her heritage and to her grandmother's rebellious turn as "one of the first in her village to refuse to wear hijab."

Themes of ownership continue through von Kohl's video, featuring layered close-ups of Delicious's body and voice over text: "In all of me there is fragmentation, yet I am not of pieces." As the video concludes von Kohl dramatically shifts the tone. Dressed in a sharp suit she delivers a sales pitch for the Israeli Missile Defense system also known as the Iron Dome. I found myself squirming in my seat. As an anti-Zionist Jew I wanted to shout back and differentiate myself from the position they placed the audience in within the satire. This discomfort made von Kohl's slow transformation into a catsuit-clad, hooded, dominatrix figure incredibly satisfying. In this new garb, she places a jello mold of the Iron Dome on the floor. She hovers over it in a deep squat, licks her pointer finger and then begins to penetrate and fuck the jello mold, splitting it into pieces around her fingers.

Through fantasy, subversion, and surprise, Delicious and von Kohl showcase their expert control as artists and performers. Despite a structure that could have felt fragmented, they instead displayed wholeness.

[Eat Me Baladi](#), Mette Loulou von Kohl & Leila Delicious, Cannonball Festival, Icebox Project Space, September 12-18.

By Ella-Gabriel Mason

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