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TEXT BY
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“The future is the metabolized past, with the unexpected generating an adaptability to the present,” says artist Alisa Baremboym.

Some artists deal directly with the future; Baremboym works with transformations.

She embarked upon her ongoing exploration into the nature of enabling objects when she was a child, as an autobiographical need and concern.

Objects originated as enabling things since the dawn of humanity, man made objects were created to help man-kind. One could be reminded of George Kubler's¹ understanding of things and their necessary instrumentality: a utilitarian approach that sees objects and images as providers of solutions to evolving problems. However, Baremboym's oeuvre is more in the vein of Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing's reading of crutches² as objects that take part in a process of betterment, counter learning, counter contamination and mutual transformation. The metabolic process they offer includes the changing body in reciprocity with the enabling object. For Baremboym, the body is not prioritized over other forms of 'shelter,' yet it is another macro “eco-common-system” which could serve in understanding cell-based metabolic processes, as well as illuminating assimilation within the context of immigration. Immigrating from one country to another from behind the iron curtain at an impressionable young age imprinted upon her a sense of body as place, as a home. Baremboym recounts “having grown up with the feeling you get when walking by a Stalinist-era wide, tall, symmetrical, grey building—built to cower you beneath the strong hand of state control.”

In a three-month long immigration process through different countries and living arrange-

ments, the shelter her family sought in America was found blindly through friends of friends, and was followed by periodic moving to a new place, new town, new state, new slang, new style, new climate, new air and dust, new cultural codex and so on.

Sometime between all these moves, she concluded that architecture is temporary. Precedent and similar understanding is shared by the deceased Jewish architect Yona Friedman, who had to escape Europe during the holocaust, and conceived the idea of Mobile Architecture, to be based on three constitutive elements:

1. Touch the ground over a minimum area
2. Be capable of being dismantled and moved
3. Be alterable as required by the individual occupant

Baremboym's 'enabling objects' adhere to these foundations, but actually expand the notion of the body as a shelter and as the architecture to shelter the self, which she sees as infinite and malleable. Any shape of that 'shelter' can contort to our own psychological proclivities, and our physical circumstances. Her work does not take ontological precedence but rather a process that takes place compatibly and affects the shelter as well it's the occupant.

Terra Nullius as a state

Immigration borders and microorganism boundaries act as regulators of our physical bodies, just as endocrine processes and the transmutation of cultures are actions of a metabolic exchange. These actions all mimic similar biological procedures happening in altering *eco-common-systems*.

As a child, Baremboym left Moscow on October 18, 1989, and fled through Odessa,



UNIT 2: Thyroid: Growth & Development, 2018. Photo: Roman März (p. 247) Courtesy: the artist, 47 Canal, New York, and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Düsseldorf/Berlin





Between States: Membrane Perception (installation view), 2018 Photo: Roman März (pp. 248-249) Courtesy: the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Düsseldorf/Berlin



Chromosome Absorption, 2018 (p. 250 top) UNIT 4: Pineal Gland: Cyclical Cognition, 2018 (p. 250 bottom) Photo: Roman März Courtesy: the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Düsseldorf/Berlin



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Ukraine; Bratislava, Slovakia; Vienna, Austria; Santa Marinella, Italy; Philadelphia, PA; Bettendorf, IA; Chicago, IL; and eventually to NYC, where she is currently based. Sharing her experiences, she detailed that as a refugee, the physical body moves between state bodies/borders. In the process you assimilate, and transmute your identity with the host country, and in turn shift a part of the identity of the host country. This still applies to many governed bodies and over time the development of civilizations. It is a kind of metabolic movement of bodies, if we consider that bodies are living cells.

Transformative earthly surrealism
or perhaps feminine futurism

For years, Baremboym has been working with clay, a medium that starts out as an amorphous mud, and transforms through a change of climate. Her enabling objects hold a strong surreal trait, they mutate, become, evolve and alter in relation to other matter, organs and ideas. They involve gels, plastics, vinyl, silicone appendages, oils and candle lights. She rendered objects that represent the endocrine glands—ductless glands of the endocrine system that secrete their products—hormones directly into the blood. These objects cull influences from major glands like the pineal gland, pancreas, ovaries, testes, thyroid gland, parathyroid gland, as well as areas of the brain like hypothalamus and the brain's somatosensory cortex.

Recently, she started working with watercolors, another medium that is an amorphous fluid much like clay. The watercolors are singular perspectives of sculptural objects lit with natural light and casting shadows. The shadows delineate the weight of the empty spaces of those objects blocking the sunlight, and in turn outlining the biorhythm of the planet's rotation. Other watercolors render an extension of reproductive organs like Sertoli cells and breast pumps. These are different forms of shelters within different cell activities, coming from diverse organisms. These 'shelters' are engaged in a recursive process of constituting and de-constituting. They absorb new frontiers as they become. Sertoli cells nourish developing sperm in the coiled seminiferous tubules—they offer them protection by providing a vital blood-testis barrier. These cells form a "protective barrier" for the new cell life and progeny. They act like architecture in the sense that they offer protection and regulation; they protect the sperm cells from a larger system, in this case the immune system, from misidentifying them as invaders.

Other works on paper reveal hybrids between bones, a mouth retainer and a pelvis. The un-familiar feeling of the amalgam object resonates with the idea of assimilation.

A metabolic process is defined as "the sum of chemical reactions that take place in living cells, which provides energy for life processes and the synthesis of cellular material," says the artist. The synthesis of cultures and bodies in the space of a larger regulatory body, such as a geographical boundary, is a way to provide energy to continue being. For Baremboym, this is connected to how we see microorganisms as threatening vs. non-threatening, in the same manner we sort people as Others within our localized societies.

1. George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).
2. As proposed by Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing, in *The Mushroom at the End of the World: On the Possibility of Life in Capitalist Ruins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

Somatosensory cortex (teeth), 2020 Courtesy: the artist (p. 251)

UNIT 1: Hypothalamus: Organ of Influence (detail), 2018 (p. 253) Photo: Roman März
Courtesy: the artist and Konrad Fischer Galerie, Düsseldorf/Berlin

