Strange Beauty

Stav Meishar

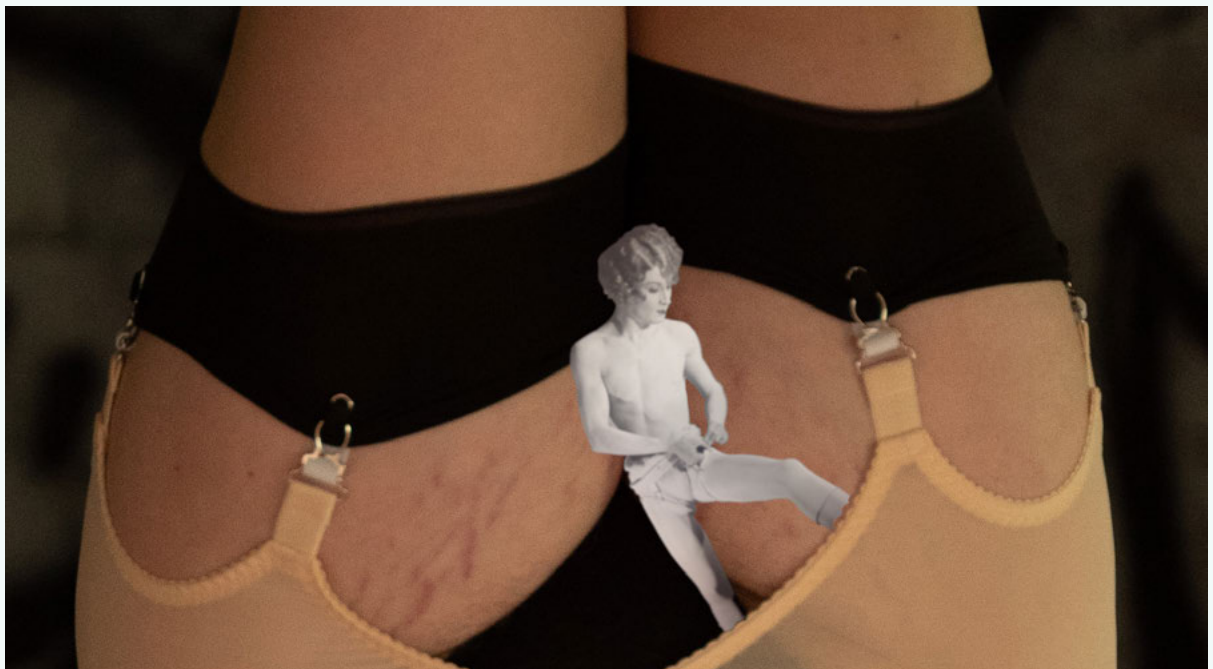*Selected photos from* Strange Beauty
by Stav Meishar. Courtesy of the artist.

Photos from Strange Beauty *by Stav Meishar. Courtesy of the artist.*

Artist Statement

Strange Beauty was inspired by photos of Barbette, a legendary gender-bending trapeze artist, captured by Jewish photographers Man Ray and Madame d'Ora. I created collages of Barbette's historic pictures with photos of my own disabled, queer body. Reducing myself to disembodied bits, I contrast Barbette's perfect, demure femininity—as captured through the lenses of Jewish artists—with my own hairy, veiny, fat, cellulite-ridden body parts, captured through the lens of my Jewish gaze. Layering surrealism, body dysmorphia, patriarchal expectations, and phenomenology, my collages seek to challenge viewers' ideas of Western beauty standards.

When asked why he created his stage act, Barbette replied: "I wanted an act that would be a thing of beauty—of course, it would have to be a strange beauty"; and what is surrealism if not Strange Beauty? Are queer, disabled and neurodivergent bodies an expression of a strange beauty, not quite matching up to society's rigid boxes of what beauty is? Barbette, in her act of undermining gender, fluctuating between masculinity and femininity, wanted to be Strange Beauty incarnate—could I be, too?

STAV MEISHAR *(she / they) is a performance maker, interdisciplinary stage artist, researcher, and educator. Stav's most recent major work,* The Escape Act: A Holocaust Memoir, *is a one-person show blending puppetry, theater, and circus, rooted in a decade of historic research, and based on the true story of Irene Danner, a Jewish acrobat who survived the Holocaust hiding at a German circus.*