

Night Pharmacy

The exhibition 'Night Pharmacy' is the second chapter to an ongoing project focusing on the link between the medical chart and the portfolio; this chapter draws inspiration from the world of experience based medicine- the alchemy.

Rooted in the ancient world, Alchemy still exists today in various cultures around the world such as Brazil, China, and the African continent. It sanctifies the sensual, faith-oriented, visual truth, and doesn't necessarily rely on scientific and statistical facts. In its core, the Alchemy keys on the relationship between the therapist (caretaker), the patient and the community, out of the belief that the symptoms and illness of the individual reflect and make evident of the hereditary conflicts of a society. Some wrongs are transferred for generations without correction. Therefore the shamanistic, alchemical rituals are mostly conducted by a group or in a public fashion. The Presence of a crowd is conceived as promoting and essential to the success of the healing process.

Michal Roth and Elinor Sahm feed off this doctrine when building their Night Pharmacy in Curitiba, Brazil. The offsprings of Maria the Jewess, mother of alchemy from the Hellenistic period in Alexandria, the duo mix potions and elixirs originating from the communication with the audience of viewer-patients at night time, a time thought to reveal the inner elements causing pain.

The ethnographic research, where Alchemy and Shamanism are studied, thinks of symptoms and illness as symbols to the culture in which they grew¹. Therefore, the pharmacy's patients are invited to choose from an array of images displayed to them. Based on their choice, these artistic-pharmacists affiliate the participants with one of the four vices named humors defined by the father of medicine, Heraklitus: black, yellow, white and red. Each of these is influenced by the weather and has an impact on the patient's internal organs and mood².

In the shaman medicine, the psyche, an inner spirit, has a deep hold over the body. An injured and hurt soul exposes the body to disease. Hence therapists have to convince the soul for the healing to prevail. The option of healing depends according to this doctrine, on the level of faith the patient has in his caregiver. Relies on the amount of confidence a sufferer sees in the actions and tools of the Alchemist-shaman. This cognitive effect is known as "Placebo" and is also recognized by conventional medicine and essential for its progress³.

¹ Thomas A. DuBois, *Shamans, clients and healing*, inside An Introduction to Shamanism, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009, pp. 133-150

² The Four Humours, episode in the BBC podcast "In Our Time"

³ Thomas A. DuBois, p. 133

Michal Roth and Elinor Sahm offer the viewers a chance to experience Placebo through the artistic object created in the process of an emotional and physical classification. The artists recognize four types of patients within the range of emotions: Melancholic, Sanguine, Choleric and Phlegmatic. To each, different needs. In Front of the individual patient and suffering community, Michal Roth and Elinor Sahm translate the image choice into a unique and diverse mix of healing elements. Organic and inorganic substances are used in creating these Elixirs. Amongst them are local ingredients to Curitiba like the Piñon, fruit of the city's common pine tree as well as universal-industrial ingredients like synthetic grass used to create miniature architectural models. The produced Elixir resembles a snowglobe, an item usually found in souvenir shops, used in the past as a surgical tool.

The Jewish and Israeli identity of Elinor Sahm and Michal Roth is relevant to the Pharmacy not only because of it being part of the Sabra festival dedicated to Israeli art. Their role as healers is marked by the culture from which they came, a culture completely different from their patients. A religious culture associated with the Alchemy.⁴ The healing method itself takes from sources of the 'Kabala' and the Hebrew language. And so, as a final stage of communicating with the sufferer, the artist will sing Hebrew nursery rhymes, sang to them in their childhood. These Songs tell of pain, sickness, difficulty; they ask to mediate a physical state through the use of Narativ.

The treatment given in the Night Pharmacy is a meeting point between languages, peoples, cultures, geographical and emotional locations. It refers to a temporary pain. Its products function as a time capsule. The accumulated jars on the shelf, are samples of this encounter in which a shape is given to communal pain shared by the citizens of Curitiba. A pain that might summon for one another that might also be shared with the pharmacists now.

⁴ Raphael Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists: A History and Source Book*, Princeton University Press, 1994, pp 4-17.