

## Nira Pereg / *67 bows*

Text by Miriam Jung for Kunstmuseum in der Alten Post, Germany

The video entitled *67 bows* has the look of an objective sociological study on the collective behavior of birds in response to sound stimuli. We see a group of flamingos filtering food from the water in an interior compound at a zoo. The peaceful scene is abruptly disturbed by the sounds of a gun being cocked and fired. The birds' reaction, the sudden collective retraction of their heads, is captured from different camera perspectives as the film proceeds. The shots are heard at irregular intervals. During the quiet phases between discharges of the weapon, the birds go about their usual activities. After a while, the flamingos cease to respond to the shots but instead duck their heads as soon as they hear the announcing sound of the gun being cocked - even when no shots follow. The behaviour is predictable, a perfect example of Pavlovian conditioning. A given action produces a calculable reaction.

In their natural habitats, flamingos live in large groups which may consist of as many as a million animals, organized without recognizable leaders. They can survive under even the most extreme environmental conditions and tolerate major temperature fluctuations, for example. The video shows how their advanced adaptive skills are retained even in captivity.

*67 bows* speaks a universal language that allows the viewer to grasp a situation involving a direct existential threat through association. The first shot is a frightening shock which evokes a sense of danger. With intense anticipation, the viewer awaits the next shots, which then come as a frightening surprise nonetheless. Tension and relaxation alternate.

Knowing where the Israeli artist Nira Pereg comes from, one is naturally tempted to interpret her work in the light of the unpredictable attacks of violence that have such a profound effect on life in Israel. Every new attack causes people to shudder in fear. Confined within artificial boundaries, they cannot respond to the natural impulse to flee. By necessity, people go about their daily activities despite the growing, diffuse sense of danger. Global terrorism exploits this pattern of behaviour. The mere threat of violence, on the one hand, is followed by the predictable feeling of intimidation and powerlessness, on the other. And thus alarmist reports without factual basis frequently evoke not only the subjective feeling of exposure to danger but also collective panic and hysteria as well.

*67 bows* purports to offer insights into specific behaviour patterns of flamingos - and into living conditions in a society threatened by terrorism. In fact, however, the viewer is given no additional background information at all and must instead rely solely on his own sense perceptions and customary modes of interpretation. But nothing is as it seems.

Nira Pereg observed and filmed the flamingos for ten days. The birds' behaviour consisted of reactions to the movements of the artist, who communicated with them directly. The sounds of shooting were never heard on the grounds of the zoo, and flamingos are not especially sensitive to noise by nature. It was not until the post-production phase that the artist linked acoustic and visual impulses to evoke the impression of a causal relationship. Given this information, the viewer gains access to a new level of meaning that questions his reflexive thoughts and actions and shifts the focus to the means employed in the construction of reality.

<http://www.cornerhouse.org/books/info.aspx?ID=2413&page=0>