What Remains to be Seen

Art & Political Conflict:
Views from Britain, Israel, Palestine & Northern Ireland

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Edited by Gordon Hon

A Multi Exposure Publication 2004

What Remains to be Seen. Art & Political Conflict: Views from Britain, Israel, Palestine and Northern Ireland was organised and devised by Sandra Jacobs and Gordon Hon.

Cover photographs by Miki Kratsman

Publication designed by Neil Carding, Autograph Advertising Limited and printed by Gemini Press Limited.

Texts © the authors 2004
Images © the artists 2004

Edited by Gordon Hon

ISBN 0 9546641 0 8

Published by Multi Exposure
PO Box 2935
London NW1 8LF

Registered Charity No: 1011628

The publishers would like to acknowledge the generous support from:

THE LONDON
INSTITUTE **CENTRAL SAINT MARTINS**
COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN CAMBERWELL
COLLEGE OF ARTS CHELSEA COLLEGE OF
ART AND DESIGN LONDON COLLEGE OF FASHION
LONDON COLLEGE OF PRINTING

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Multi Exposure is an independent charitable foundation established in 1993 by artists for artists. Our aim is to initiate and encourage exchange and communication among British Palestinian and Israeli artists. The scheme develops opportunities for artists to expand their horizons not only by working in each others communities, but also by having the opportunity to exhibit discuss and publish their work together.

So far thirty artists have received bursaries from Multi Exposure to work in each others countries and communities.

During the tragic and seemingly unchanging political situation in the Middle East, the project continues. I still believe in the value of building a human network between artists and in encouraging cultural and personal connections across the communities involved.

This book presents the work of three artists, Aissa Deebi [Palestine] Miki Kratsman [Israel] Susan Trangmar [Britain] The artists were commissioned by Multi Exposure to make a body of work which reflects their personal reactions to the Middle East conflict. Multi Exposure also commissioned writers, academics, and curators from Britain, Israel, Palestine and Northern Ireland to contribute articles on the relationship between the visual arts and political conflict.

SANDRA JACOBS, MULTI EXPOSURE 2004

WHAT REMAINS TO BE SEEN

In 1992 after six years of research Walid Khalidi published 'All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948'[1]. Apart from detailed historical descriptions of the villages it contains hundreds of photographs. Most of these images were not taken by artists or professional photographers and are included simply as a form of documentation; some are no more than a blurred image of something that looks like rubble in a field. In many cases even the rubble has since disappeared and therefore all that remains of these villages is Khalidi's documentary evidence. This was, of course, one of his reasons for compiling the book, along with other clear, political and historical rationales. The fact that the book exists for posterity indicates that there is some kind of future in mind. Yet it is far from an optimistic experience to be forced to confront the scale of what has been lost.

1. Walid Khalidi (ed) All That Remains: The Palestinian Villages Occupied and Depopulated by Israel in 1948, (Institute for Palestine Studies; 1992) Available from www.palestine-studies.org

Miki Kratsman's photographs of the concrete barrier built to separate Israeli settlements from Palestinian villages shows to what extent it also effectively separates them from the land. This has been made explicit by the Israelis who have painted the idealised, banal mural of the view on the surface of very thing that has destroyed it. There are many layers of irony in these pictures, not least of which is the fact that these idealised views of the promised land could be painted on any wall anywhere in the world, thereby symbolically cancelling the most important act of occupation; the act of being there. The murals in their own way are an effort to faithfully represent the lost view, a kind of nostalgia for what can no longer be seen but also for a land that has never existed, one without people and therefore without conflict.

Perhaps the desultory images of rubble in Khalidi's book and the bland mural on the concrete wall in Kratsman's photograph are the true artistic expressions of conflict. Neither makes a claim to be art but both are visual representations arising from the conflict that are also being fed back into it. However, something more constructive is going on too. Khalidi is using the images as a tool in an essential historical document that could be used for reparation in the future and Kratsman, by recording the mural in its context, helps us to see many things, including the fact that one of the functions of art may be to prevent us from seeing.

Shuka Glotman's article suggests that the same may be said of the Academies. He gives us the startling image of academics and students earnestly discussing Terror And Art as a response to September 11th while below them, if they had looked, they would have seen the IDF demolishing the homes of Palestinians. By describing this concurrence of events and the obliviousness of the participants, Glotman may be warning us that our efforts to understand (to see) what is happening around us can prevent us from looking and perhaps from acting. On the other hand, in Kamal Boullata's account of the exhibitions in Ramallah he points out that the Palestinian artists have abandoned their usual art practices in which they made things, in order

to present found objects as physical evidence of Israeli aggression. This is evidence in its legalistic sense, that is, the presentation of that which can be seen in order to make a case. For these artists working with what remains to be seen has become a moral and political imperative.

Aissa Deebi does not attempt to represent the visual evidence of the conflict. His work has consistently inhabited a world of make-believe, a world created between children and toy manufacturers. This world, ruled by the arbitrary power of infantile sadistic impulses, is just as frightening as the adult reality it reflects. In this work, war and oppression are mingled with murderous sibling rivalry and we are therefore given the bleak message that it may do no good, in fact quite the reverse, to call one another brother and sister. Being a Palestinian born and raised in Israel and as a Christian Arab, Deebi has an inherent understanding of the complexities of being simultaneously on the inside and the outside. It is, perhaps not surprising that he has turned his attention to internal sources of conflict.

Whereas Deebi has to deal with the problem of being both inside the conflict and carrying the conflict inside himself, Susan Trangmar has had to deal with being a complete outsider. She has addressed this in her approach, by walking apparently aimlessly on the peripheries of the conflict, soliciting the help of strangers as guides. These people have directed her both in terms of where she goes and what she photographs. From this she has constructed a sequence of images and text in which she is part of the narrative apparatus rather than the storyteller. In this way she has avoided using the journalistic narrative templates we involuntarily carry around with us, as well as acknowledging the fact that our gaze is always, to some extent directed by another.

Ian Jeffrey makes a similar claim for artists' video as a way of resisting the tyranny of the ready-made narrative structure imposed by the conventions of TV news. The relentless urgency of television can only be watched, for nothing remains in front of us long enough to be seen. Perhaps this is a function of television and if so this would suggest a function for visual art: to return to us the burden of seeing. It is not only a matter of things remaining in order to be seen but of us remaining in order to see.

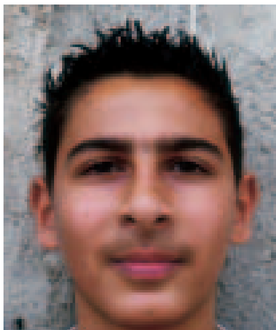
GORDON HON, 2004

The following images and text are extracts from the work A Question Of Distance made between 2001 and 2002 within the State of Israel. The core of the work takes the form of a projection/performance installation which was toured to a number of Arab and Jewish cultural centres in 2003. The installation creates a layered space of shifting territories and identifications in which the artist uses her physical presence as screen and her voice as vocal trace to explore the porous space between self and other, memory and fantasy, identification and denial.

The work asks the questions: what identifications are we able or willing to make, in facing one another, in facing difference? How far are we able to recognize the other as that which is already inside ourselves?

SUSAN TRANGMAR

How did I come to be here? Where did it all begin? Further back than I can remember, although it is the letter that starts things off in my mind. At first I do not want to respond; I know nothing of you, it feels too much. Your history goes back before my time; I am reluctant to be positioned by the events preceding me. But something draws me on; something I can not ignore. I decide to take a risk, uncertain of the outcome…



…I think at first I can ask you to lend me your eyes, provide me with some kind of perspective through which I could establish a correct distance. I learn quickly that you cannot give me that. I learn that there is no correct distance, that if I ask you to lend me your eyes, your response is 'yes of course, but what would you like me to see?' Above all, the way you show me something has little to do with seeing.

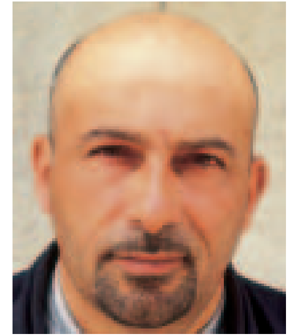
…You don't mind meeting. Why not? Maybe something will become clearer. You ask me if I am afraid to come to your home at this time. How could my fear match yours? Your movements are restricted; you are often afraid to go out, you lack a horizon of hope, that one day things will be better. It's not so easy for you to come and go as you please. You tell me that you would like to come to London sometime. You say that you would be willing to go anywhere there is work and you can build a home without restrictions, where you can travel freely, speak freely. You have the qualifications you tell me, but there is no work for you here. Others are always taken on first. You don't have the right contacts, speak good enough English. You don't care about the situation, you want to be able to have fun, to be seen with a girl on the street, go to a bar, have some private space. You are fed up with the anxiety, the stress and boredom of a

place in which events enfold you in an unending cycle of repetition…

You tell me that one way to get to know the town is to drive around it. Everything starts from here. Feel how the town unravels like thoughts, spreads and compresses, stops and starts. Drive up and down the steep hills, around rough sharp corners crowded with vehicles, people. Unexpected things get in the way. Drive around the congested streets with no traffic lights, where every manoevre is a question of a personal conversation with strangers, where everyone watches everything, where the question of getting in and out is no straightforward matter.

I have trouble getting through to you. I try several times and eventually you respond, but it is too late, this time. I come back again, and again it seems a bad time for you. Eventually I get to visit and you say you feel very bad. You cry for a long time. You say you have spent all your life trying to build bridges and now they have all collapsed, yet again. You say you are broken inside. You tell me you are going away. I sit next to you feeling dumb and stupid. I am thinking to myself: the wound appears to heal on the surface, but the body holds the memory deep within – folds itself around the nugget of pain. You tell me of the telephone call from your friend, a big man you say, a teacher. He is whispering to you, afraid. 'They are in the house now. I cannot speak with you.' Everything turned over for you inside. For some days, you have heard nothing.

…We talk about the small things of daily life, you say they are important because they are all you have. Other times, you talk about the bigger picture in an effort to control



something that is too terrifying. But often I can find no evident connection between these little things and the rational global analysis. It is as if a vital component of the senses – certain nerve endings have been severed. Sometimes I sit with you in front of the television, a prisoner held in thrall by the spectacle unfolding, as if we were somehow apart from it. A routine rhythm is created which is technological, clinical, anaesthetised. I hear a phrase repeated, 'we are cleaning the camps of terror'. No one says anything. Total Closure. There are no connections.

Elsewhere, with you I don't watch the television, because the volume control is broken. You don't talk on the landline; there was a problem with the phone bill and the company cut your line off. You talk locally, on the cell phone, in each others' houses, in the street, all the time. A young person, just 20, in the terminal stages of an illness has just been taken from the village to the hospital. Your face sets tight, you look at the floor. From the inside, you are under pressure to normalise the situation for yourself. From the outside, I have the freedom of a commanding interest…

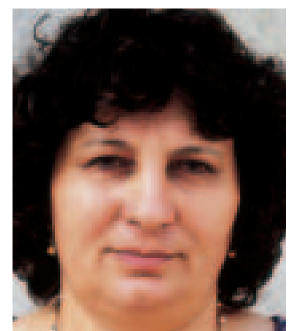
…I accompany you to a place which is only a name to me, to collect some photographs. We drive late at night to a city, silent and deserted. Terraces of incomplete buildings stand in uncompromising row upon row, their facades gleaming like monuments in the bright moonlight. Windows gape at us. We ring the buzzer at a house, and a man lets us in. The house is almost completely unfurnished apart from a pile of presents wrapped in childish wrapping paper sitting on the table in the middle of the room. I ask to use the bathroom and am asked, 'which one?' There are four, but only one occupant of the

house. We collect the photographs and leave the haunted city.

Later, I return in the blinding light of afternoon sun. The city stretches on and on, one crowning citadel succeeding another. This feels like an extra-terrestrial pioneering settlement, with no roots – springing up as if by magic overnight. Rows of cars are ranked alongside the white block buildings. Nothing faces outwards, all turns inwards, appears secret, hidden. Twice I am stopped, asked what I am doing here. I feel alone, exposed, out of place, out of time, out of everything. If place is a state of mind, then this grim place feels precisely misplaced. 'A land without people for a people without a land.' In the city, the restaurants are all empty these days.

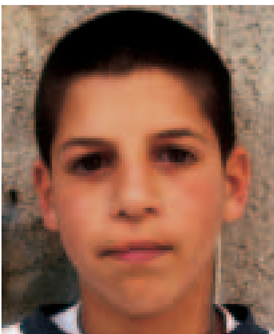
If place is a state of mind, then is it possible to be in several places at once, in several states of mind at once? Am I a single body or several? I cannot constitute a body here, all I find are relations, bits that stick together then fly apart again. I am in transition. The state as a body is a body under threat holding on to its borders, its perimeters. The significance of the border is a way of securing something else which is under threat. And yet, everything is all over the place. You tell me people are getting across, getting through. This is a real danger. The borders are ineffectual and then again, there are the borders which the imagination cannot cross.

On this day, no images, it is impossible for me to raise the camera to my eye and make a separation. But on another day, some kind of positioning becomes possible, a distance becomes necessary. And through this distancing, I begin to see how the landscape is being rewritten, and with it memory.
A bigger, better fence is put up, and with it



come new roads. New connections are made and older ones are cut off. Communities are separated from one another, your fruit rots in the fields. I hear how you are locked indoors while others stroll across your land. The inner and outer landscape is laid to waste.

A woman's voice comes back to me, 'We cannot wait; we will explode.'



'Israel Is A Dream Come True' you translate for me. 'The Dream Goes On' proclaim the posters, stubbornly attached to buildings, railings, bridges, hoardings. A bus is blown up. You exclaim fiercely, 'That's their dream, not mine, their Israel, not mine'. A living dream, is this not a nightmare?..

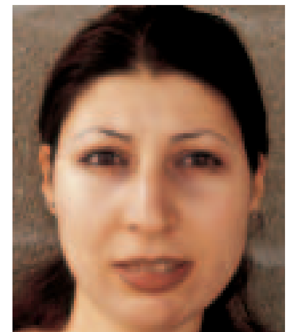
…And still the talk is of fences, both here and there. Then there will be no more need for talk. New fences go up, it is agreed that we need more barriers, more effective controls. In a smart café with large panes of glass looking on to the street, you say, 'Our freedom is a ghetto'…

You introduce me to your friend who leads a double life and you tell me the story. A double life at home can also lead to exile from oneself. You are forced to keep a secret. And then you tell me the story of the young man with a girlfriend from another place. He has met her parents and tells them he is one of them. They do not know he is from another religion, another cultural background. What does this make of him, this fantastic identification?

…I get off the bus at the junction. The express pulls away and I am left staring at a petrol station on one side of the road, and a café on the other. It is a busy, transitional spot with the haphazard architecture of a place which is on route to somewhere else. Groups

of men are sitting outside, waiting in cars, leaning against the wall, crossing over the busy highway. I am an instant focus of attention, I do not belong here. I have not heard from you and wonder if you will arrive, but of course you do. We drive to the top of the hill, past the guarded compound.

We stand and look down over the valley. Behind us, the town stretches over the hills, a patterned cloth undulating and folding over. In front, the land slopes away to a village and cultivated land melting into the haze on the horizon. Somewhere here there is a line, some threshold which marks here from there. Here is not there. I look across the few hundred metres and 'there' may as well be another world away. You say it is a porous border, people flock across it early in the morning and late at night, 'like birds', you say. A tiny bus waits in the distance, the only sign that this might be a place of departure and arrival, a crossing over place. I feel the searing light in my eyes and the wind on my forehead and I think how easy it is for the wind, the seeds, the dust and the sound of the cockerels in the valley to travel to and fro. There is the border across which we cannot go and there is the border across which we will not go. I know we don't see the same things. But we stand and look together nevertheless. I want to ask you what you see. Instead you excuse yourself politely. 'Take your time' you say, 'but for me it is too painful to stand here and look.'..



BACK TO NORMAL

Shuka Glotman

The days I lived with my family in a small village near the Lebanese border were unquiet days, lived to the constant sound of artillery, helicopters, fighter jets. Now and then, we would be ordered into an air raid shelter. The tedium of the wait in the shelter seemed endless; when the announcement came over the loudspeaker that the danger had passed and we could get back to normal, we greeted it with relief, as if we had just heard the weatherman announce the advent of a new spring day. Back then, visits to places far from the border revealed the relative nature of constant anxiety and routine.

Other times, when abroad, I would be asked to describe what it's like to be an artist in Israel. I would respond by telling about the art school I taught at for many years: the Bezalel Academy, established in 1906 as part of the Zionist vision, with the aim of creating a new 'Hebrew' art. I would begin by describing the school's location, which I thought might be familiar to my listeners: 'Bezalel is on Mount Scopus, overlooking the Judean Desert and the Dead Sea'. I would continue by adding that, 'At the base of the mountain lie two Palestinian villages; the army occasionally enters them following demonstrations and other occurrences. Between the villages and the school, halfway up the mountain, is an army intelligence base. Sometimes the soldiers interrupt art students engaged in photographing nearby. The entire campus of the university (within which the art school is situated) is surrounded by a tall fence; armed guards are posted at its gates. Some of the teachers and students also carry arms. Many of them do occasional reserve duty in the military.' By this point, the faces of my listeners would bear an expression of stunned amazement. I, in turn, would be amazed at how very normal all this had come to seem to me.

Several weeks after the outbreak of the current intifada (Palestinian uprising), I conducted my first class of the autumn 2000 semester. I gathered my students on the roof of the art academy, high above the breathtaking, almost biblical, landscape. Pillars of smoke rose from Ramallah, and IDF helicopters hovered above the city. As we gazed out on this drama, I asked what we should do in the extraordinary reality in which we found ourselves. My question hung in the air, unanswered.

Months passed. The day after a bomb blast in a popular café in the centre of town, in which many were killed and injured, we met in the classroom. The question was asked again, this time by the students. "What are we doing here? In Jerusalem? At art school? As artists..?" Anxiety gave rise to still more questions, which remained unanswered. It was one of the most poignant conversations I ever had at that school.

The subsequent school year opened under the pall of September 11th in the United States. Momentarily, it seemed that local events had been placed in an international context. A one-day academic seminar was hastily organized on the relevant topic of Terror And Art. Quite by chance, at the same hour on that very day, the army saw to the demolition of more than ten houses in one of the Palestinian villages at the base of the mountain. Those atop the mountain could easily have followed the events at its base. Though concurrent, the events did not intersect; those involved in each remained oblivious of each other.

The narrowing of consciousness that has taken place in Israeli society, which has resulted in an agitated apprehension together with an indifference toward, and even denial of, the suffering of the "other", has made it nearly impossible for that society to address its own suffering. The question of the role of the artist or of art in society has, thus, now become particularly acute. Given that war and violence force an individual, and a collective, to act to survive, the artist has lost the ability to create a distance between reality and alternative worlds – a distance no less essential to those at whom art is directed than to the artist. Consequently, not only is any distraction immediately welcomed, but nearly the only distraction created is that of light entertainment, game shows, and of art that cultivates escapism.

Even in less violent and dramatic days, I felt that the situation in Israel stretched the role of the artist to the point of paradox. In fact, it seemed to me that censuring the social-political situation in Israel helped to establish its permanence. Even the most subversive artist seemed destined to be a collaborator, to serve as a 'fig leaf'. By helping to create a seemingly normal world, in which there is room for ideological dissent and criticism, the artist reinforced the existing social order. In this way, the artist served as a regulated and supervised channel of drainage for the public's aggression.

On days when this aggression is completely unrestrained, when it seems to have become accepted, mundane, the social 'game' of art can take on a grotesque air. Festive openings for one exhibition or another, in a museum or gallery, occur despite the tension and atmosphere of crisis, under guard, but with the requisite hors d'oeuvres and wine. They almost seem to be part of a national effort, the emblem of a collective goal of maintaining a veneer of civilized normalcy. When life is so cheapened, the continuous, regular practice of art as though 'it's business as usual' is welcomed by heads of state, who may see it as proof of the society's ability to endure Palestinian terror.

The difficult days that have fallen upon us have a positive side, however. Painful, long-repressed truths have come to light, and are now difficult to ignore. Old debates and knee-jerk positions have lost their validity in this harsh reality, which has invaded even the most private of realms. As yet, no new discourse has come to fill the void.

During the 1980s, when it was still illegal to make contact with representatives of the PLO, I participated in exhibitions with Palestinian and Israeli artists. The very fact of our exhibiting together then had social and political value; sometimes, it even elicited a response. However, the continuation of such politically significant artistic efforts, through the usual channels, seems to have been rendered ineffective – perhaps even irrelevant – by the current reality. Nevertheless, these efforts do help bolster those whose conviction has wavered. In order to break the cycle of obtuseness and indifference, given all the white noise, some other type of effort is needed.

Participants in a workshop I led, entitled Art In Situations Of Existential Conflict, sought to explore precedents set by artists who worked in threatening existential situations. We wished to explore what happens when concrete, external conflict awakens a conflict that resonates in the inner life of the artist. We touched on the monumental work of Charlotte Salomon (1917–1943), *Life? Or Theater?*, created during the dark period of the Nazi rise to power, when Salomon was a refugee in southern France. The pervasive anxiety of that time awoke in Charlotte Salomon a more personal distress. With frenetic urgency, she created hundreds of paintings in an attempt to map the story of her life.

We then turned to an installation by the contemporary Tel Aviv artist Michal Spector, who rented office space in an old building in Tel Aviv, where she remained for what were to be among the six most violent months in recent years. Every day, she drew detailed drawings on the walls of the space with a thin pencil. Eventually, the obsessive drawings covered the white walls, from the floor nearly to the ceiling. Unlike Charlotte Salomon, Michal Spector did not attempt to document her life. She knew, consciously and deliberately, that when she had finished filling the walls of the office, she would paint them white again and return the keys to the owner. Her work was intended to be seen for a moment and then vanish, to seem, once it had been erased, deceptive and unreal.

About a year beforehand, beginning the day her mother died of an illness, Michal Spector filled diaries; she kept at it every day. In the end, she had numerous diaries crammed with drawings, notes, documents, papers collected or found. The diaries inspired the many hundreds of drawings that covered the walls of the office. For her, creating the installation established a protective routine that shut out unpleasant and intrusive reality. Even if it seemed that she was 'climbing the walls', her routine generated a work that was not only the sum total of the graphite smeared on the walls, but also of the time and effort subsumed in the act itself. Perhaps

they gave her a sense of purpose and order, logic and control. To the viewer, the drawings looked like a winding maze reminiscent of the children's game, snakes and ladders. Any attempt to identify continuity, insight, or narrative significance became a trap worthy of a spider's web. After failing in this, the viewer was overwhelmed by Spector's urgent need to fill the space, fill time, fill the void, fill the walls – until it seemed the drawings held the walls up, like scaffolding, lest they collapse.

In the unstable reality in which Spector worked, the usual, concrete artifact, which is meant to exist for an eternity of uncertain duration, has no worth or meaning. Faced with a non-objectified definition of art, the viewer is put on guard, expected to absorb the work of art, internalise and preserve it. This begs a fierce and fearsome question: 'What for?'

A recent explosion in the center of Tel Aviv sent me running to the window. The force of the blast tripped the alarms of parked cars, and set their headlights to flashing in panic. Walking outside, I saw that security and rescue vehicles had filled the adjacent streets. Journalists' flashbulbs and floodlights lit up the place of the blast. At a McDonald's nearby, which had emptied of customers, I could clearly see a couple sitting at a table, deep in conversation, eating as if they were in another world.

SHUKA GLOTMAN, ABIRIM, OCTOBER 2003

Translated from the Hebrew by Marsha Weinstein

BORDER CROSSING AND THE MAKINGS OF PALESTINIAN ART

Kamal Boullata

They may continue to block our roads and deny us passage,
but like the ants of the earth we will open up new roads.

From a conversation with a Palestinian villager from Betunia, 2 October, 2002.

Background

Since the destruction of Palestine's Arab society and its dispersal to make room for the establishment of a Jewish State, Palestinian art was destined to continue its development under different skies[1]. The following paper concerns itself with visual works produced by Palestinian artists who were born and raised within the isolated regions of the homeland, segregated by borders defined by Israeli military forces. All the works considered have been created within the country, and they were first viewed in exhibitions in Ramallah between 2000 and 2002.

1. For a general history of Palestinian art before and after 1948, see Kamal Boullata, "Recouvrer la distance: une etude sur l' art palestinien: 1847-1997", Exhibit catalogue: Artistes palestiniens contemporains, (Paris, Institut de monde arabe, 1997) pp.11-41. Also by the same author, Istihdar al-makan: Dirasat fi al-fan al-tashkili al-filastini al-mu 'aser. (The Recovery of Place: A Study of Contemporary Palestinian Art, (Tunis: ALECSO, 2000) (in Arabic).

Over the two-year period in which these works were created and exhibited, the Palestinian people were undergoing one of the darkest periods in their history. The vast prison confined by security fences, watchtowers and military checkpoints in which people had survived for over three decades was turned into a war zone. All Palestinian demands for an international protection force had been thwarted. In the meantime, Apache helicopters shelled towns and refugee camps by day and by night, ambulances were forbidden to save the injured who were left bleeding to death, nurses rushing to help were shot and often killed, hospitals were raided, medical records and computers destroyed. In Ramallah, cultural institutions were shelled and ransacked including the Sakakini Cultural Centre, the Qasaba Theater, the Cinematheque and the Municiple Library. There, books were torn, records and manuscripts were shredded, furniture broken and computers destroyed. Some homes used by Israeli snipers were occupied by armed men as the residents were locked up together in one room. Other homes were demolished by army bulldozers. On the streets, cars were crushed by tanks and the roads, littered with flattened cars, were themselves destroyed by the tank tracks. For weeks on end, shoot-on-sight curfews were imposed, food supplies became depleted, and water mains, sewers and the electrical infrastructure were wrecked. Political leaders were assassinated in broad daylight, some young stone-throwers were arrested and detained, others were shot and killed or maimed for life. Out in the fields, olive and orange groves were razed. All this was taking place as Israeli courts continued to approve the illegal confiscation of more Palestinian land. The Israeli rationale for inflicting this kind of collective punishment upon an entire population was explained to the

world as retaliation for the death and injuries caused by individual youths, who having had their fill of despair, blew themselves up in Israeli territory[2].

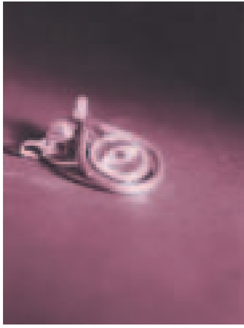
2. For an eyewitness account see Raja Shehadeh, When the Bulbul Stopped Singing: A Diary of Ramallah Under Seige (London: Profile Books Ltd. 2003). Also, Jamil Hilal, 'Diary of an Invasion: Ramallah, April 2002', Holy Land Studies, vol.1, no.2, March 2003, pp.220-236.

To understand how one continues to create art under the threat of sudden death and the unpredictable menace each new day brings, it is important to elucidate some of the questions that must have been haunting every artist participating in those exhibitions. Questions in relation to bearing witness and the interpretation of space are intrinsic components of art production.

How did Palestinian artists articulate their awareness of space while their homeland's physical space was being diminished daily by electronic walls and their own homes could be the subjected to military occupation? With military checkpoints installed to control movement between one place and another, how did visual artists interpret the crossing of borders? In what way does the aesthetic optic change between that of an insider and that of an outsider on the two sides of that divide? When the grief of bereaved families is reduced by the mass news media to an abstraction, transmitted at lightning speed on TV screens, what could a visual artist do to address such a question?

In such desperate times, Palestinian artists creating art shown in these exhibitions, have intuitively known that every attempt at an artistic articulation is itself an expression of resistance against darkness and oppression. Braving the siege and facing the threat of sudden death, they continued to work on their art, undaunted. To understand the madness of how all that is possible, one may only have to look back at those reporters' photographs depicting children, with stones in hand, confronting battle tanks on their own streets. The kind of faith needed for such acts is a product of hope and determination.

By discussing the contents of these Ramallah exhibitions of the past two years, I will attempt to respond to the questions posed above and demonstrate how the dialectics of the situation reflected itself in the production of art. Before that, it is worth noting that, despite the historical and artistic differences serving different ends, the artistic idiom in the exhibitions was borrowed from the anti-aesthetic language invented by Marcel Duchamp following the horrors of the Second World War. Through the 'ready-made', art became a combination of creation and criticism. Just as crossing military checkpoints have become part and parcel of daily life under Israeli military occupation, crossing borders between oral and visual expression and between the different media has become a principle feature of contemporary Palestinian art.



Nabil Khater's Key Ring from
"100 Shaheed-100 Lives", 2001

100 Shaheed – 100 Lives

Conceived by Adila Laidi and curated by Samir Salameh, the exhibition was born in October 2000 following the first round of Israeli attacks in which the death of Palestinian civilians was becoming a daily occurrence. In the streets of Palestinian towns and villages, walls were being covered with posters showing familiar faces and names. Thanks to satellite TV and live reports, heartlessly repeated in living colour, nobody was spared the numbing spectacle of the rising number of victims, a spectacle in which a perpetual present was emptied of any association with personal memory. In the meantime, a paralysing shock galvanised all survivors of Israel's indiscriminate killing. Beyond the immediate circle of family, friends and neighbours, the enormity of the mounting death toll began to render the fallen into faceless and nameless beings. While outsiders claiming objectivity may have reduced the loss of human life to a question of statistics, to the insiders, each one of those killed by Israeli fire, whether they were school kids or bystanders were elevated to the status of shaheed or martyr.

Entitled 100 Shaheed – 100 Lives, the exhibition opened in February 2001 at the Sakakini Cultural Centre in Ramallah[3]. Adhering to the Near Eastern tradition in which, since pagan times, the dead have been mourned through the celebration of life, the exhibition aimed to celebrate the ordinary lives of the first 100 victims. The show featured everyday objects, gathered by a group of field researchers, that were held dear to each of the departed. Through these objects, personal memories and individual lives were reclaimed and the viewer was brought into intimate contact with those who had been reduced to a statistic. The person's name and age, varying between 12 and 68, along with a photograph was all that was needed for a stranger to begin to share the grief of the bereaved families and regain the meaning that was lost in the news reports. Each object, in its small and evocative way, reconstructed and revealed the integrity of an individual life. The objects included an unfinished piece of embroidery, a favourite cup from which a young man used to drink his morning coffee, a candle holder, a wedding photograph, worry beads, an amulet, a schoolbag, a cap, a pen and a sling. Each of these personal objects assumed a role in a chain of narratives that were illuminated by the minimal text appearing in the exhibition's catalogue. There, we learn for example, that the empty handcrafted cage with an open door belonged to a 15-year old boy who had bred birds. Days before his death he had bought a fledgling bird. The morning of the day on which he was killed on a Ramallah street, he released the bird, saying he did not want its mother to miss him.

3. Exhibition catalogue 100 Shaheed - 100 Lives edited by Adila Laidi (Ramallah: K.Sakakini Cultural Centre, Undated). For a review of the exhibition see Penny Johnson, "The Eloquence of Objects: The Hundred Martyrs Exhibit" Jerusalem Quarterly File, no.11-12, 2001, p.90-92. After its inauguration, the exhibition traveled to other Palestinian towns accessible from Ramallah. It has also been shown elsewhere including Jordan, Bahrain and more recently Japan.

While the brevity of an object may sum up a curtailed life, for the surviving visual artist the question remained; how to bear witness to the terror of sudden death when one is simultaneously threatened by it? The Palestinian artist's particular dilemma is echoed in the structure and connotations of the mother tongue. In Arabic, 'bearing witness' is inseparably associated with 'martyrdom'. The verb shahida, meaning 'to see' or 'to bear witness', belongs to

Eyewitness exhibition, 2002

the same root of the noun shahaada meaning 'martyrdom'. Thus, the difference between 'eyewitness' and 'martyr' (shahed and shaheed) is a matter of vowel intonation.

Eyewitness

Unsurprisingly, Eyewitness was the title given to the first major exhibition to take place following the Israeli army's invasion of Palestinian towns and villages in March 2002[4]. Local artists Husni Radwan, Khaled Hourani, Nabil Anani and Taysir Barakat were involved in the exhibition; however, none of their own personal art was included in the show. In this summer exhibition, conceived and mounted by an ad hoc committee of women activists, the role of the artist was confined to that of an eyewitness to the devastation left behind by the Israeli army.

The exhibition consisted of vandalised possessions and equipment from homes, offices and hospitals. The artists' interventions were in the arrangement and choice of objects on display and in the short texts accompanying some of the objects. To contextualize the grim nature of the show, a banner suspended at the exhibition's entrance read: 'Like a phoenix we shall arise from the ashes. The best days are yet to come.'

The viewer walked through two rows of computer screens that had been battered by heavy blows. Beyond them lay damaged medical and sound equipment along with destroyed domestic furniture including a television set that appeared to have been hit with a sledge-hammer, a crippled armchair, broken toilet seats, torn wall hangings and smashed children's toys. A looped video and large photographs documented further destruction including ruins and demolition sites.

Parked cars had been deliberately crushed beyond recognition when the Israeli tanks had rolled into town. In a nearby parking lot Nabil Anani and Taysir Barakat assembled some of these flattened cars into a human-sized tower. The work looked like a hybrid between Cesar's Compressions and Arman's Accumulations[5]. By spraying the contorted metallic surface with white paint, the two artists prepared an inviting surface for the neighborhood children to express themselves. Someone had painted a bunch of hearts, others drew a face here, a butterfly there, a red, black and green flag, an illegible graffiti and a tank in red and blue.

As minimal as the text was, the role it played in Eyewitness was no less important than that in the previous exhibition. The texts accompanying the irreparably damaged objects in Eyewitness sought to repair a metaphoric meaning from them. Ramifying the announcement that 'the best days are yet to come' the suggestive metaphors of the exhibition's graffiti went beyond the observable object to call the viewer as a witness to what may be imagined. Among the damaged computers that formed the central passage, there was an eye painted on a screen. The line on it read, 'The path is an open eye to see things'. The message on a suspended door read, 'The

4. For a review of the Eyewitness exhibition see Penny Johnson, 'Ramallah Dada: The Reality of the Absurd', Jerusalem Quarterly File no.16 (November 2002) pp.52-56.

5. Over 40 years ago when art critic Pierre Restany wrote that 'the direct appropriation of the real is the law of the present', he was mainly speaking of Cesar's compressions of cars and Arman's stock pilling of objects which also included cars found in junk yards. Anani and Barakat's project may well be reminiscent of works created by these two artists from the New Realism movement in France; but the work of each couple obviously remains the product of an autonomous artistic sensibility. The critiquing of consumerist society is worlds apart from critiquing Israeli oppressive practices. An interesting point worth noting here is the fact that works by the French sculptors, which had sold for millions, are now in the possession of museums from Tokyo to New York. In the case of the Palestinian artists, however, their assemblage was never meant to represent an art form with any commercial value. After all, the smashed cars they assembled belonged to friends and neighbours who could not even collect from their insurance companies any compensation for the irreparable damage inflicted on their cars. Thus, despite the surface resemblance between the work of the Palestinian artists and the French adherents of the Ecole de Nice, the Palestinian artistic purpose finds its more resonant echo in the works of those anonymous Vietnamese artists, who out of the shrapnel of US bombs dropped on their country, sculpted a wide range of doves. In both cases, children were involved in the appropriation and transformational process.

Vera Tamari, "Going for a ride?" installation, 2002

broken door is a wide space'. One particular message attached to a fishbowl stood out. Emptied of its contents, the fishbowl contained a sardine can. The message read, 'don't forget to feed the fish'. This contribution had been left by an Israeli soldier for the family of the Ramallah home where he and his fellow combatants had camped out during the invasion. The message conveyed the soldier's emotional detachment from the atrocities that he and his fellow soldiers were committing, as well as reflecting the sadism in the destruction brought upon the civilian population.

Leaving the Eyewitness exhibition, one cannot help but wonder what makes professional soldiers belonging to one of the mightiest armies in the world be that malicious. After viewing the show, Raja Shehadeh wrote, 'Young men with guns or other implements of destruction walked into people's homes and institutions in broad daylight, breaking, smashing and destroying …whatever they found'. He wondered, 'What could they have been told about us that made them so full of rage and hatred that they were able to perpetrate these crazed raids without protest? They must have fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, wives and perhaps children of their own. How could they go back to them after this[6]?'

6. Ibid., [footnote 2] Shehadeh, p.138.

By retracing memory through the personal possesions of the slain and celebrating the ordinary lives behind every object, the first show brought hope to strangers and the bereaved families. By restoring meaning to ruined objects, the second show threw open new vistas of imagination. With hope and imagination, viewers went home inspired by a deep-reaching sense of steadfastness and a renewed determination to resist.

Going For A Ride?

The hope and imagination encountered in these exhibitions were combined in a single work by Vera Tamari. Installed outdoors in a football field facing her house, Tamari's work was titled with the cheerful question Going For A Ride?. The installation consisted of five cars that were crushed out of shape by Israeli Merkava tanks. Picked up from among the private cars that littered Ramallah's streets following an invasion, Tamari's cars were lined up on a narrow curve of tarmac, freshly laid for the exhibit. The road begins and ends in the grassy field. Though they are going nowhere, the flattened cars give the funny impression that they are bouncing forward to what looks like a leisurely ride. Polished good luck charms dangling from the cracked mirrors and the continuous sound of popular songs punctuated by newscasts from the car radios confirmed that life goes on even though there is nowhere to go.

The opening of Tamari's exhibition taking place on the same summer afternoon as the Eyewitness exhibition, turned into a party that lasted until midnight. Tamari however could never have predicted the transformation that her installation was yet to undergo. At four in the

morning, she woke up at the sound of rumbling tanks screeching to a halt. Looking out of her window she saw two tank commanders discussing what to do with what they saw in the field.

'Then they got back into their tanks and ran over the whole exhibit, over and over again, backwards and forwards, crushing it to pieces. Then, for good measure, they shelled it. Finally they got out again and pissed on the wreckage.' Tamari, who captured the scene on video, was delighted at this development of her work. She explained, 'Before the second incursion I had had to make simulation tracks to mimic the path of the tanks. Now we had real ones. This was the ultimate metamorphosis for my work[7].'

7. Ibid., [footnote 4] Johnson, p.54. See also William Dalrymple, "The Killing of Art in Palestine" The Guardian, 2 October, 2002.

Amidst indiscriminate killing, the re-occupation of Palestinian territories and the terrorization of a whole population under siege, the works in these exhibitions demonstrate the necessity of art to survival. Through it, every dimension of living and every new assault – no matter what cost in life or properties it incurred – was transformed by the visual artist into a creative product that revamped the cultural process. Even though the artist's audience may have been unfamiliar with the artistic language, they were still full participants in this process.

Prior to the period during which the work displayed in the exhibitions was conceived, no artist involved could have predicted the course his or her work would have taken following an Israeli invasion. Palestinian visual art, which has been characterised by hybrid components, proceeded to grow in a fluid space in which border crossings between different forms of expression has become an intrinsic characteristic. As a reaction against the ghetto walls that continue to be raised around Palestinians, the visual artists opened themselves to disparate artistic media. Each in his or her own way, defied all monolithic limitations and interpretations imposed upon their world. Belonging to a society that has chosen to live a pluralist life and whose legacy has been enriched by a history of tolerance, the artists' language did not stop challenging the insulated ideals of fundamentalist thought.

KAMAL BOULLATA, 2003

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF VIDEO

Ian Jeffrey

Art and conflict: how do they inter-relate? On the face of it, scarcely at all, and certainly not in the course of events. Yet almost every day we see quasi-art from conflict zones: short establishment shots of maybe five or six seconds of children carrying polluted water under fire, or of distraught survivors in ruined marketplaces. These extracts, commonplace though they may be, ought to be valued, precisely because they show almost nothing that we can place under the documentary heading.

In photography at least, modes and genres wear out before our eyes, due both to overuse and to changes at some substructural level in society. Documentary is a mode currently in crisis. We believe, as a matter of course, that the more we can see of any situation the better we will understand it; and in still photography this has also been associated with the belief that a representation of the subject carries a lot of meaning. The subject suffering stands as a guarantor. Dismissively, we now call it 'appeals photography' and turn away, not because we are indifferent to suffering but because in this guise it has become clichéd.

We have gradually, over the past three decades or so, come to hope not for something more but for something other from the photographic image and from its cognates in video. In the old days, still lingering on, we assumed that the world with all its detailed phenomena would hold steady for long enough to allow us to form an impression. Old-style documentary was founded on the idea that we could make calculations from the evidence, and thereby achieve empathy. We could come to know in detail what it was like to be a fisherman on the North Sea or a seamstress in Khazakhstan, because we could see the materials as they came to hand and form some kind of impression as to how they might be used. Photography of this kind depended on a theory of 'homo faber'. The modernist world, for that is what it was, abounded in handworkers and in practical specialists who manipulated levers and checked dials. With sufficiently close attention we could enter into their ways of being and feel at one with them. At the same time it also had its interventionist side, for what could be known in detail could also be managed.

None of this is to say that handwork vanished from the face of the earth, for tinsmiths, knife-grinders and cobblers still survive if you know where to look for them; but we are no longer very satisfied to know the practicalities of another's trade. Reality, or the situation in general, has changed. What we still want to know is what it would be like to be that other, but differently apprehended, and in much more imprecise contextual terms. The old scheme was objective: a calculable other and a knowing observer able to take practical action. Under the more recent terms of reference, however, we know that the other lives along a different wavelength, and can

be understood, if at all, in terms of time and space rather than as a fellow labourer in the world's workshop. The old theory was constraining in the sense that it defined us as fulfilled principally by labour. We couldn't easily be imagined to have any other kind of existence.

What happened? Well, at some point in the 1960s – if the visual evidence is to be credited – we entered a metaphysical age. As modernists we had been empirical and discrete units functioning in a larger order of things, in the state and in the nation. Suddenly, in all likelihood in 1968, we began to become responsive to other globalised promptings. In 1914 crowds had been consumed by hysteria, but they were crowds gathered together in one place and swayed by local sentiment. In 1968 the urge to action was widespread and not easily accounted for. It was as if we had all of a sudden become subject to force fields of which we were dimly aware. At about the same time our way of registering history began to take more and more account of aesthetics. Ages began to be characterised in terms of popular music and fashion. This is obvious enough, but it is still hard to account for the rise and fall of these aesthetic currents. What these new metaphysics did was to ingrain in us the sense that we were inscrutable and to some degree sublime. As artisans and citizens under the old dispensation we could be analysed through and through, and steps could be taken to improve our lot, for the evidence told us that our requirements were clear. As these certainties evaporated we were left to speculate. This is the background to the decline in documentary.

None of this means we are less interested in the evidence than we ever were. What it does mean is that we no longer know how to identify and to read this new kind of indeterminate evidence. Hence the current importance of video, for it is an inclusive medium hospitable to material which would never previously have been registered. The topic may lie anywhere, in the configuration of a group conversing or in the speed at which pedestrians negotiate a street. There is nothing definite to be learned from representations of this kind, but they do propose that something may be intuited: a broader sense of what it may be like to be in that other place, subject to that atmosphere, light and noise.

Traditional documentary flatters us, for it implies that we can read the signs and make appropriate responses to, for example, blood stains in the snow. It places us within a system of meanings which we can negotiate almost with our eyes closed. Video, on the other hand, and particularly as it has been used by artists, explores a different epistemology altogether. Artists' videos, as you will remember them, like to linger over the waves lapping on a beach or indeed anything which takes time. Faced by a prolonged video image of a running tap, for example, we have no option but to turn away at some point sooner or later, for the sight of it is unendurable.

We become uneasily aware, in front of almost any contemporary video whatsoever, that we will make an arbitrary decision to move on. In front of old documentary, on the other hand, we always reached closure, for the image was there to be read and understood. We got the point, whereas faced by new art we become only too well aware of our own priorities. We may be charmed and lulled for a time, but eventually the need for clarity and definition interrupts. One of the virtues of video is that it impresses on us some sense of the uncertainties of real time, which is not to be explained away.

As it is, conflicts are reported on under the rubric of hot news, with everything that that entails of assimilation into a pattern pre-ordained and readily apprehended. It is sometimes surprising, under these circumstances, to realise that there are not only survivors but also communities who continue to go about their business. Peasants, for example, continue to sell vegetables on street corners at pre-ordained times, unaware of Armageddon just around the corner. Video, steadfastly used, would help to reinstate some sense of a world keeping time with another soundtrack distinct from the one to which we have grown used. Twenty unwavering minutes from the streets of Baghdad might give an altogether different sense of the place with its politics. It might also point out to us how we find relief in the kind of brisk phantasmagorias of newscasting and of journalism. In actuality we may walk the streets of the city, but in reality we inhabit a mediated dreamworld into which everything is incorporated, crises and conflicts included. Artists' videos, with their bias towards real-time and their disdain for editing, offer themselves as a corrective to the montage vision to which we are all subject. They make us aware too of just how unbearable real-time can be, and of the lengths to which we will go to escape it. In this respect they point out to us our immersion in what used to be called false consciousness.

Thus, if artists are to do anything constructive about conflict at the upper end of the spectrum, in Africa in particular, they might start by bringing back objective records of the kind outlined by reporters looking for establishment pictures. Or a sustained view of a mosque, for instance, might help put in place an idea of a Muslim way of life. Otherwise we are left with edited highlights and low-lights which pander to our sense of spectacle, and to our prejudices too. Mediated culture, which is the one that we are familiar with, hardly allows any way out, and it makes it deliberately difficult to test its assumptions. The kind of art outlined above, undemonstrative and replicating real-time, would take far less for granted, especially regarding the mood and impalpable sense of a place. It would, of course, require judgement, for not every situation would be equally revealing or apposite. It would also take nerve, for it would leave itself open to accusations of dullness from audiences used to edited time and unaware of their dependency on it.

But why video in particular? Because still photography has always assumed arbitrary attention. We turn away from a photograph or a book of photographs when we have seen enough, but

with moving pictures and pictorial continuities the idea of turning away is much more emphasised, for by implication events have not come to a natural end. So any turning away is deliberate, and we are likely to be aware of it as a wilful act. In this respect video is a far more discomforting medium than photography ever was. It is this element of discomfiture which has to be exploited, otherwise we will lapse into the prejudices of the greater media dreamworld precisely at the moment when those prejudices should be resisted.

IAN JEFFREY, 2003

The exact place from which a photograph is taken is more important than the aesthetic of the image. Policing procedures can restrict both the photographer's movement and his view of an event. He has to decide if and to what purpose he will permit his camera to be recruited.

When I first began work on this project MACHSOM, [roadblocks] I positioned myself near a group of soldiers who were checking Palestinian cars at a checkpoint. I suddenly realised that the Palestinians were seeing me as part of the checkpoint procedure, my feelings were reinforced when a Palestinian man called me MOUCHABARAD, MOUCHABARAD [Israeli intelligence!] Traumatised and insulted I folded my equipment and went back home. My colleagues suggested that I return and this time shoot from a car, a situation they said that would enable me to adopt the point of view of a Palestinian being stopped and searched at a roadblock. I rejected that suggestion. I am not a Palestinian and could not simulate their suffering. I am not hurt by the roadblocks that are positioned there by my people. I returned to my original vantage point and continued to photograph.

This series of photographs were taken from the correct position, the place where I can express my point of view as a photographer.

MIKI KRATSMAN

ROUGH GROUND: ART AND POLITICS A NORTHERN IRISH CASE STUDY

Liam Kelly

In a TV documentary Picturing Derry[1] a young woman, a member of a community-based photography club, gave her view that landscape is not necessarily benign since her husband was shot dead in it. Her comment reminds us, if those who lived through conflict need reminding, that we see landscape through the corrective filter of lived experience; that seeing is more deep-rooted and conditional than mere 'regarding'.

1. Picturing Derry, A Faction Films production for the Arts Council in association with Channel 4, 1985

In the North of Ireland over the intensive period of the political troubles (1968–1998 and the first IRA ceasefire) landscape was not something to be celebrated as such but interrogated and petitioned. There is a view in Irish culture that the land holds wisdom, and the answers to our problems : a national repository. If we consider the land to be benign and preservative – 'the ground itself is a kind of black butter'[2] (Seamus Heaney), it is also obdurate, refusing to give up its secrets easily. A range of artists (Victor Sloan, Diarmuid Delargy, Dermot Seymour et al) in the 1980's engaged with what might be termed the cultural mapping of the psychic landscape.

2. Bogland (for T P Flanagan), Opened Ground : Poems 1966-1996, Faber Faber, London 1968

Dermot Seymour and Conor McFeely have dealt with, in different ways, the notion of the poisoned land/contaminated culture. Seymour's Botulism Over Mullaghcreevy (1985), is an intriguingly ambiguous painting, in which it is difficult to tell if a reclining figure is resting or dead. In the mid-1980's there was a drought in Ireland and seagulls, which had contracted the disease botulism from eating off contaminated rubbish tips, would suddenly fall out of the skies. Seymour has incorporated such an image as a metaphor for the persistence of sudden death associated with this notion of the poisoned or wounded land.

More recently (1998) Conor McFeely in his multi-layered installation work Disclaimer[3], while largely dealing with the fine line between legal and illegal drugs, also embraced implicitly a contaminated, underground culture as well as IRA punishment beatings. Everything in Northern Ireland comes down to questions of land and territory (witness, e.g. the annual confrontation of army and Orangemen at Drumcree). The Northern Ireland conflict provoked artists into land-mining exercises, subterranean quests.

3. Disclaimer, Installation work, Orchard Gallery, Derry, 1998

There is the related issue of the dark side of landscape and history. In his essay dealing with public art and locality,[4] Luke Gibbons takes us into what Yeats has called 'the rough ground'. For Gibbons an acknowledgement of this is a necessary condition for a more open, less fixed sense of place and public art projects have the capacity to reframe experience – to draw out the rough ground – the darker side of our historical memory and locality.

4. Jean Fisher, Willie Doherty, Unknown Depths (Ffotogallery, Cardiff, in association with the Orchard Gallery, Derry, and Third Eye Centre), Glasgow, 1990

While landscape had traditionally been the dominant theme in Irish art since the outbreak of the political troubles, the city has emerged as a compelling theme. Many Northern Irish artists have looked upon the city as a written text to be deconstructed. The cities of Belfast and Derry are heavily fortified and defended and as such are where the physical and psychic apparatus of the Troubles can best be experienced. These cities have been marked, segregated and subject to intensive surveillance. Both communities in Northern Ireland mark their respective territories by painting kerbstones with appropriate symbolic colours (those of the Union Jack or Irish Tricolour) and by the flying of bunting and flags. Political murals[6] register their echo and call within and between communities – they give notice as communal bulletins. Temporary barricades between the two rival communities have been erected or dismantled over the years or settled into permanent acceptance as necessary, so-called peace lines. Army and police vehicles and helicopters have daily paraded or surveyed the cities, while army and police stations have become more and more designed for long-term fortification. If the peace line in Belfast is a recent physical expression of difference and division, Derry's ancient walls have been symbolic of political and religious inclusion and exclusions for centuries.

6. The Belfast or Good Friday Agreement, a new arrangement for governance for Northern Ireland, of 1998 was approved by the population of Ireland in a cross-border referendum

The role of the walls of Derry (built in the 1600's) has not changed. As with strategic buildings (e.g. those in the New Lodge area of Belfast) extensive and sophisticated surveillance equipment surveyed 'hot' areas of the city.

A number of artists have dealt with issues of surveillance and intelligence gathering, notably Willie Doherty in his earlier work and Locky Morris. In The Walls (1987) Doherty arranges text to settle over sections of a horizontal panoramic view of the Bogside area of Derry in daylight and the elevated dark inner side of the city walls from which we/the artist the colonised/the coloniser take in the view and take up a position. The Walls lingers with the legacy of the colonised and the coloniser in its absences and presences. From the inner, walled city, captioned 'WITHIN/FOREVER' (in loyalist blue), we survey the outer/other, the Bogside, captioned 'ALWAYS/WITHOUT' (in Republican Green). Jean Fisher points to the fragility of the seeing/being seen relationship in The Walls.

'As we imagine that, with powerful lenses, we could penetrate the interiors of the facing windows, so we also become aware that those eyes may see us. Indeed, were it not for the presence of this gaze of the other, we should not be able to assume the sovereignty of power that this position affords us. The seeing/being seen dyad is a question of both position and

disposition: I see you in the place I am not. However, what The Walls brings into relief is that this narcissistic relation between oneself and one's other beyond the given boundary is inscribed with a profound uneasiness.' The Walls deals with inclusion and exclusion, and Derry, in microcosm, reflects a siege mentality that is culturally endemic in Northern Ireland as a whole.[4]

Many artists have recognised that buildings are not disinterested structures but are encoded with feelings and meanings and are often associated with power interests. The Parliament building at Stormont[5] (on the outskirts of Belfast) is a heavy neo-classical building occupying an elevated position at the end of a long and rising avenue. In acres of landscaped parkland there stands a large and commanding statue of Lord Carson, struck in the pose of defiant power, registering a 'Protestant Parliament for a Protestant people'. He looks down the avenue towards Belfast, set in one of the most empowered landscaped vistas to be found anywhere. It is still surprising and indeed ironical that with the establishment of the new governmental arrangements for Northern Ireland, as enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement[6], the Stormont buildings should be used by both Unionists and Nationalists in a form of shared power.

Where questions of cultural identity arise anywhere they invariably give rise to questions of language. Tom Paulin, in his essay A New Look At The Language Question reminds us 'that the history of a language is often a story of possession and dispossession, territorial struggle and the establishment or imposition of a culture'[7]. A number of Irish artists have deployed and interrogated language both orally and textually as a working strategy for engagement with a political context such as Northern Ireland. These include Willie Doherty, Philip Napier and Shane Cullen.

Cullen's series of tabula-like texts Fragmens Sur Les Institutions Républicaines IV[8] represents secret communication or comms written by Irish Republican hunger strikers, which were smuggled out of the Maze Prison (so called H Blocks) during the highly-charged period of the hunger strike in Northern Ireland in 1981. These hunger strikes, in which ten participants died, were mounted in an effort to establish political status for IRA prisoners.

In Cullen's representations of these comms the emotional and fragile language of the private graphically and in a proclamatory way were introduced into the domain of the polis, that which pervades both the physical and political space.

This work relates to but contrasts with his latest large project The Agreement; commissioned by Beaconsfield Contemporary Art, London (2002)[9]. Here the artist has transcribed the text of the Good Friday Agreement (11,500 words) on to 56 large, heavy duty polyurethane panels. The language of the Good Friday Agreement document is based on purposeful ambiguity – fixity of language doesn't work in developing a working apparatus for joint government. Its language is

4. Jean Fisher, Willie Doherty, Unknown Depths (Ffotogallery, Cardiff, in association with the Orchard Gallery, Derry, and Third Eye Centre), Glasgow, 1990

5. The six north-easterly counties of Ireland were separated from the rest of Ireland in 1921. The new parliament buildings at Stormont were completed in 1932.

Lord Carson was leader of the Ulster Unionists from 1911 to 1921. His bronze statue captures him in fulminating oratorical pose with his right arm raised and faces towards the south

6. The Belfast or Good Friday Agreement, a new arrangement for governance for Northern Ireland, of 1998 was approved by the population of Ireland in a cross-border referendum

7. Tom Paulin, A New Look At The Language Question, Ireland and the English Crisis, Bloodaxe Books, London (1984)

8. See Shane Cullen, Fragmens Sur Les Institutions Républicaines IV, Liam Kelly (ed), Orchard Gallery Derry and Centre d'art contemporain de Vassiviéres en Limonsin, France, 1997

9. Shane Cullen's The Agreement is 67 metres in length comprising 56 panels. To date the work has been exhibited (with related seminars) in Dublin, Derry, Belfast and London

not fixed in stone and in that sense it is not monumental – clever words resist fixity; language is slippery. It contrasts with the previous project, Fragmens, in that the text is etched mechanically on to boards replicating the anonymous public language of a legal document, whereas the text in Fragmens was that of the secretive and personal, handwritten onto panels with the trace of the artist's hand.

The artist sees the work as a celebration of reconciliation and the actual Agreement as aspirational and an example of what can be done elsewhere, as in the Palestine-Israel conflict. It endorses the power of language and its ability to persuade.

The recent political Troubles have been the most significant cultural event in Ireland since partition on the island of Ireland. They challenged artists to reflect on contested spaces such as Irishness, cultural identity and place (location/dislocation) as well, as indirectly at least, on related areas of gender and power. There is no prescribed space for art; it occupies contested spaces and has to remain critical. As we know, public monuments-statues in stone and bronze (fixity again) are often the first structures to come down in periods of conflict. The artist Krzysztof Wodiczko speaking at the College Art Association Congress in Philadelphia, 2002, about the aftermath of September 11th reminded us that if we are not critical of our own monuments, someone else will be.

LIAM KELLY, NOVEMBER 2003

Some of the works of art discussed here as case studies are, along with others, analysed in Thinking Long, Contemporary Art In The North Of Ireland, by Liam Kelly pub by Gandon Editions, Co Cork, Ireland. The book analyses the impact of the political troubles on art practice in Northern Ireland.

THE LONG GAZE BACKWARDS: RECENT ISRAELI CINEMA

Haim Bresheeth

The Israeli cinema seems more prone than most other national cinemas to waves, periods and movements, especially if compared to current European cinema. In her pioneering book, Ella Shohat presents the first four decades of its history as a seesaw between polarities – the social/political, and the personal/individual, reflecting closely, wider social moods and understanding within the society at large. In a more recent book on Israeli cinema, Yosefa Loshitzky is analysing the Israeli cinema through its identity politics, separating out the periods and themes via the prism of the main cinematic others of this cinema: the Holocaust survivor, the Mizrahi Jew, and the Palestinian Arab. It is interesting to examine how the last decade, of post-Oslo developments, combining as it did the great hopes for a 'new Middle East' and the peace process with the grim realities of a deeper, more far-reaching oppression and subjugation of Palestinian society, and the continued presence of armed resistance, including many suicide bombings, has affected this branch of Israeli cultural life. When examining this period and comparing it to similar formative periods, such as the decade following the Israeli incursion into Lebanon during summer 1982, three clear features seem to emerge.

The first is the relative absence of the recent conflict as a topic in Israeli cinema. This is surprising considering the period following the Lebanon incursion saw some interesting attempts to deal with what was a deep identity and social crisis in Israel. The fact that recent Israeli cinema has been more circumspect about the first and second Intifadas is worthy of mention and analysis. The second tendency during this period, though more with some filmmakers than with others, is a return to the socially repressed past, in particular the 1948 and 1973 Wars. The third, and arguably most important, phenomenon affecting recent Israeli cinema and cultural life, is the appearance of a growing group of Palestinian filmmakers, many of whom are citizens of Israel as a result of the 1948 war. These young and innovative filmmakers represent an underprivileged minority of indigenous, colonised people who have been dispossessed of their country by Zionism and are speaking out loudly and clearly, invoking the taboos and repressed realities of their continued subjugation. These recent tendencies are part of the deep undercurrents within the Israeli polis: a society which is fuelled and driven (like so many other societies recently) by two contradictory social processes – that of modernising and globalising, of opening up and of becoming more fundamentalist, more conservative and racist, protective of grand narratives from a time long gone. The post-modern, liberalising drive which has made Israel a vibrant society, is equalled and cancelled out by Manichean, xenophobic and a-historical tendency, combining primeval nationalistic myths with military capabilities of the third millennium. I shall attempt a brief mapping of the three features, or tendencies mentioned, and hope to offer some explanations to those developments.

When thinking about Israeli cinema in the 1980s, the few films which have dealt with the Israeli invasion of Lebanon, and with the conflict, stand out in high relief. During the period 1982-1992, there were almost 200 films made in Israel. Of those, 33 films deal with the conflict in a meaningful way - they have Arab characters in them, use Arab actors, and portray aspects of the Arab-Israeli conflict. At about 16% of all films, this is may not be a large number, but is a meaningful minority. Add to this the fact that this number also includes some of the better (and most widely viewed) films produced in this period and a picture emerges of an openness to the other, which did not exist before. As can easily be seen, this thematic interest is not a passing one, but exists and motivates throughout the period.

Since the start of the Oslo process, the numbers of films dealing with the conflict has dwindled to less than half than in the decade before, and their quality has certainly not improved. Just as the political process was supposed to bring peace to the Middle East, and as more and more repressive measures have hit the Palestinian people, less and less interest has been shown in the topic. It is as if the filmmakers are abandoning their cultural and political mission. This may also signify that most of the filmmakers, like the rest of the Israeli polis, have given up hope of achieving 'peace' on their terms, and hence no longer see working out some cultural and social interface as either necessary or useful. Some of the films produced in this period, such as the urban trilogy by Amos Gitai - Day After Day (1998) Dvarim (1995) and Kadosh (1999) – deal with the conflict at a standstill, faintly in the background. Even filmmakers who have dealt with the conflict in the first period, such as Rafi Bukai, whose film Avanti Popolo remains one of the more moving and courageous documents of the 1980s, have left the conflict behind and deal with far-removed topics, such as in Marco Polo (1996) and his putative visit to Palestine. Dan Wolman, who made Hide And Seek (1980), and My Michael (1975) chose to deal with Israeli racism against blacks in Foreign Sister (2001) and Dan Waxman, who made such films as Hamsin (1982), has gone back to dealing with Jewish mysticism in The Appointed (1990) and again in Song Of The Galilee (1996). Even younger filmmakers such as Raanan Alexandrovich, whose documentary The Inner Journey (2001) dealt with the memories of Palestinians of their lost villages and towns, has chosen racism for his latest film, his first feature, the black comedy, James's Journey To Jerusalem (2003), in which not a single Palestinian is even seen. This growing absence in the feature films of the post-Oslo period is a worrying sign - a sign of the abandonment of a cultural mission evident in earlier Israeli cinema.

The second tendency is the return to the formative past of Zionism and of the early years of Israel. A variety of topics are revisited during this period, more than ever before in the short history of Israel cinema. Orna Ben-Dor, who made a feature-length documentary about the difficulties of Holocaust survivors and their families, Because Of That War (1988) returned to the topic in her first feature New Land (1994). Shmuel Hasfari and Hanna Azulai-Hasfari return to the 1950s in Schur (1994) - to a Mizrachi development town in the Negev, in a searing critique of the destruction meted out by the Askenazi establishment to Mizrahi culture. Amos Gitai returns to two formative moments - the Latrun battle in 1948 in Kedma (2002) and to the 1973 war in the Golan Heights in Kippur (2000). If the first decade, to 1993, was blessed with over 16% of fiction films dealing with the conflict meaningfully, than the second decade, to 2003, has seen less than 8% of films dealing with the conflict, many of those only indirectly. While many of those films are using the past as a vantage point to look at the present, it is of interest to note that their numbers have increased substantially compared to the previous period, while the number of films dealing with the conflict directly has decreased during the same period.

This return of the historically repressed is a significant part of the social discourse through which old traumas may be resolved by allowing reflexivity and the drawing of historical lessons. This process only has therapeutic potential if the social discourse allows for atonement and corrective critiques, both of which have been patently missing in Israel recently. Far from resolution, the very sectors of society that have traditionally supported a more liberal approach towards the Palestinians, the liberal Zionists (mistakenly called the 'left' in Israel) have themselves all but disappeared. This followed the deep public dissatisfaction with the Barak government, a mood which brought about the Sharon regime, the most extreme administration Israel has ever had. The return to the past, in this case, can be seen as an avoidance of the present along with the challenges it represents.

During the same period, one of the more striking features of Israeli and Palestinian cultural life, has been the appearance and maturation of a large (in local terms) group of Palestinian filmmakers, who have been gradually moving from documentary form towards feature production. Wedding In Galilee (1987) was the first Palestinian feature film, made by Michel Khleifi in the same year that the first Intifada started; for many young Palestinians the Intifada has meant getting essential media experience through the use of new, lightweight video cameras which were used to collect evidence of Israeli atrocities. The first Intifada was also the point at which the leadership and focus of the liberation struggle for Palestine moved from the Arab world and its capitals, to Palestine itself. The Oslo agreement, and the moving of the PLO offices to the Occupied Territories, is the result of this indigenous, local process. This liberation by civil action, which included a growing, important role for cultural and social action, rejected the armed struggle as the only option. This meant a larger role for film, literature, drama and poetry, as vehicles of identity construction and narrative building, and as active proponents of a national culture under occupation.

The large number of films made during the post-Oslo years by Palestinians, both within Israel and the Occupied Territories, has also helped to bring the Palestinian people together after the long separation since 1948. More and more, those filmmakers see the whole of the country as their scene of operation, filming across the green line even when Israeli law prohibits crossing into the Occupied Territories. Filmmakers like Elia Suleiman, who made Chronicle Of A Disappearance (1996) and Divine Intervention (2002), or Nizar Hassan, with Ostura (1998) Cut (2000) and Egeteyah (2003), or Mohammad Bakri, with 1948 (1988) and Jenin, Jenin, (2003), are all filming on both sides of the green line, in all areas of Palestine. In their films, and in many others made over the last decade, there is a concentration on the Naqbah, the current situation and the connections between them - this is very clear when examining any of the films mentioned. In some of these films, such as Hassan's and Bakri's films about the Israeli destruction of the refugee camp in Jenin in 2002, some of the people interviewed are actually speaking of a second Naqbah. Jenin is not seen in isolation, but as part of the greater catastrophe, comparable to the Naqbah of 1948. Despite the great difficulties Palestinian filmmakers face while working either within Israel or the Occupied Territories, there has been an impressive growth in film and video making, with a complexity and quality unthinkable even a decade ago. Palestinian society seems to be able to concentrate on the civil and cultural argumentation, seeing those as the crucial vehicles of galvanising the public in both Palestinian and Israeli societies.

When one examines the cumulative effects of these developments in the Israeli and Palestinian cinemas, a number of worrying tendencies can be spotted. The first is the tendency in Israel to retreat from dealing with the conflict on all levels: the inner level, the Israeli-Palestinian level and the Arab-Israeli level, and to deal instead with internal identity questions, of the kind which deny and cover up the existence of the conflict. The simultaneous tendency towards historical reflection in many films seems to have also contributed to a form of social and cultural solipsism, which is even more surprising when one considers that the conflict was never so present as it has been since Oslo.

In brief, there may be two explanations offered for this retreat from reality, and they seem to be complementary. The first one was summed up by one of Israel's leading producers, Marek Rosenbaum, when speaking at the Berlin Film Festival this year. He reminded his audience of the Oslo accord achieved in 1993, saying that at that point, filmmakers felt that their 'responsibility' is at an end: '…the politicians on both sides were taking up working out of a political solution, and we thought: Great! Now we can concentrate on all the issues for which there was no time for until Oslo, but which needed the cinema to look at them. Somebody else is looking after the conflict and its resolution'.

The second explanation may be a more devastating one. Ever since the collapse of the Oslo process and its appendages, and the gradual decline of any semblance of normality, and of any political discourse between the sides, there seems to be less and less public space for representing the conflict and the other in Israeli cinema, as a result of the marked hardening of positions of most of the Israeli public, which brought about a new and brutal stage of the conflict. If after 1993 there was hope that somebody else, more adept, was dealing with a conflict on its way to some resolution, then after the start of the second Intifada, there seems to be a general sense of hopelessness ruling the Israeli public mood. This is accompanied by a growing resignation towards a new and horrifying stage in the conflict, in which what is called for is total and unconditional Palestinian surrender to Israeli demands, or face expulsion,and ultimately, annihilation.

As Israeli cinema (and society) continues to avoid the topic, Palestinian cinema gradually becomes more adept at producing features, all of which have recently dealt with the conflict as their main, or only focus. The two polarities seem to suggest a terrifying prospect – while the Palestinian society has on the whole, like the rest of the Arab world, moved towards accommodation of Israel, and concentrated on the political and cultural arenas for resolving the conflict, Israeli society has migrated back to the military and oppressive machinery of occupation, destruction, erasure and ethnic cleansing, as the preferred modes of dealing with the conflict. Those diametrically opposed movements may mean the conflict is entering a new and decisive phase. Will culture and diplomacy win over the tanks, helicopters and torture cells?

HAIM BRESHEETH, 2003

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ARCHIVES OF WAR

PETER CATTRELL, THOMAS DWORZAK, JOE SACCO, DOMINIC VEILLARD

Val Williams

War produces extraordinary responses in photography. From the documentary records made both by military photographers and bystanders, to the carefully composed narratives of photojournalism through to the precise artworks constructed as a response to war and its legacies, conflict has produced dramatic, controversial and enigmatic responses from artists.

Contemporary conflicts are littered with imagery – the bizarre scratchings and coverings of photographs made by the Taliban in Afghanistan, the endlessly repeated images of the mutilation of portraits of Sadaam Hussein in Iraq, the orange uniforms of the caged inmates of Guantanemo Bay, noseless planes embedded in the towers of the World Trade Centre. It is from photography that we receive information about what war looks like. In the work of artists such as Paul Graham (Troubled Land, 1987), Martha Rosler (Bringing The War Home: House Beautiful 1967-72, 1990) the Magnum photojournalist Gilles Peress (The Silence, 1994), Deborah Bright (Battlefield Panoramas, 1981), Paul Seawright (Sectarian Murder, 1998) and (Hidden, 2002), photography transcends documentary and becomes a reflection on representation, memory and fragmenting histories.

The recent invasion of Afghanistan by American and Allied forces was the catalyst for Paul Seawright's recent landscapes (Hidden 2002), made during his commission as an Official War Artist and also for Thomas Dworzak's collection of studio portraits of the Talibanpublished as Taliban In 2003. While Seawright's landscapes are monumental representations of contested territories, Dworzak's collection, gleaned from the street studios of Kandahar, are a comment on the power of vernacular imagery to expose secrets, tell truths, and reveal the ambiguities of politics.

When Thomas Dworzak visited Afghanistan as a photojournalist in 2001, he witnessed a society in which 'photography was to all intents and purposes banned'. All depictions of living creatures, including animals, were erased from the public eye in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, and photographic portraiture was illegal. It was a society in which the mirror of photography had been covered. When Dworzak, previously confined to the territory controlled by the Northern Alliance (where photography was not proscribed) entered Kandahar (the centre of Taliban power) after the American invasion, he observed the full power and absurdity of the prohibition of photography:

'Road signs that depicted donkeys had the head of the donkey and rider painted over; similarly a bodybuilder advertising a gym had his head replaced by a map of Afghanistan; imported cosmetics ads had the eyes scratched out.'

Near his hotel Dworzak noticed a row of photographer's studios which, after the fall of the Taliban, had re-opened to the public: 'Closed down by an early decree by the Taliban leader Mullah Omar, they had been allowed to work partly when the Taliban realised that they needed some form of photograph for IDs, and very probably, for passports. Now these shops were back in the old pre-Taliban business of portraits, though city views of Kandahar still had gaffer tape over the people in them. There, I found these pictures.'

The Kandahar studio photographers told Dworzak that, as well as producing ID images for the Taliban, they had also been asked to make larger, more elaborate portraits, using the highly decorative and fantastic styles which so typify vernacular photography: 'They explained that when passport photography was again allowed the Taliban would sometimes ask if they could pose for a more flattering portrait, retouched by the photographer, secretly taken in the back room of the studio and decorated as best the photographer could manage.' For the Taliban, who had so rigorously expunged the practice of photography in the territories they controlled, the idea of possessing an image of oneself must have been as desirable as it had been at the invention of photography.

The portraits showed armed men, often heavily made up, posing against brightly coloured studio backdrops - chalets in the mountains, gardens full of flowers. Sometimes they held a vase of flowers in one hand and a gun in the other. Some are no more than children. The photography of war is always most effective when it produces images shot through with irony, a bloodied body in a calm domestic interior, treasured possessions scattered amongst the carnage of war, the homo-erotic gestures of the Taliban.

Peter Cattrell's recent work Terrain is a reflection, through finely composed landscape photography, on the resonance of WW1 battlefields. Cattrell made these photographs: 'in memory of my mother's uncle William Wyatt Bagshaw, who was a landscape artist and studied at Sheffield and the Slade Schools. He did watercolours, printmaking and some very funny cartoons in his sketchbooks. He was taught by William Strang and Alphons Legros, was at boarding school at Framingham College in Suffolk, and I have some letters from there to his parents with drawings of school life.'

Cattrell's landscape photographs of the battlefields of the Somme,Mons and Ypres, are enigmatic testaments to family history. He is fascinated by the soil and the vegetation which covers these sites, forming a protective skin over the lost bodies of soldiers who died in the trenches. During the course of his research, Cattrell discovered a document which describes the death of his uncle, William Wyatt Bagshaw and his comrades in the early days of the Battle of the Somme, an extract from which reads: 'the bodies of those wounded or killed were constantly being buried by soil from shell holes so there is not much chance of the bodies being discovered yet.' Terrrain

is a work informed by research, by letters, texts and memories. The photographs which are the result of this research are also an integral part of it.

Dominic Veillard's recent work (2001-2003) is constructed from flooring vinyl. It investigates and deconstructs the ground plans of WW2 Nazi concentration camps: 'My introduction to working with this material was accidental. I caught myself in flagrante with a camera whilst visiting Sachsenhausen concentration camp near Berlin - framing shots for maximum impact and authenticity, reeling off film as if I were at Disneyland. This became my experience of the camp, perhaps at odds with the prescribed response, but no less authentic. The concentration camp vinyl pieces are an attempt to create an analogy with this experience. The intention being to exaggerate the formal characteristics of the ground plan designs so that they undermine what is represented. I wanted to create something alluring in design and material that became slightly disturbing at the moment of recognition.'

In making these aesthetically beautiful works, Veillard has made an intriguing and challenging contribution to the debate around the question of how contemporary artists work with subject matter already so layered with representation and testimony. His work is fantastical, yet based on fact. It is dynamic and engaging, yet takes as its subject matter the dry technicality of terror. 'I am interested,' he writes, 'in prodding at the tolerance threshold of this type of material, and am as encouraged when the viewer becomes self-conscious in front of my work, as well as when they enjoy it, because it means the work is functioning.' In pieces such as Treblinka in Cherry Red (2002) and Grand Plans 1-Dachau (2002), Veillard constructs wall-hung floor plans in which pattern, colour and shape predominate. Veillard has constructed intriguing and seductive objects from the archives of the Holocaust, interrogating archive and making extraordinary departures.

The cartoonist Joe Sacco has taken an equally challenging position in Palestine, a collection of nine comic books made during the first Palestinian intifada. Like Dominic Veillard, Sacco has used a methodology and aesthetic which challenges the way oppression and conflict has been customarily pictured. The jaunty drawings of Sacco's comic books are deliberately at odds with the subject matter he explores. In Moderate Pressure, Part Two, he tells the story of Ghassan, a middle-class Palestinian resident of East Jerusalem arrested by Israeli military and security personnel. He is interrogated and tortured for many days before finally being released. The scenario which Sacco describes, of a hooded man, sleep deprived, abused, interrogated, subject to hallucinations, is recounted through speech bubbles and simple drawings. Confronted by this childlike world of horribly adult dimensions, the contrast between the dynamic playfulness of the drawings and the violence of the story cause unease.

Accustomed to tales told by the camera or recounted by journalists, measured and mediated, this material is startling and raw. As Edward Said writes in the introduction to Palestine: 'As we also

live in a media-saturated world, in which a huge preponderance of the world's news images are controlled and diffused by a handful of men sitting in places like London and New York, a stream of comic book images and words, assertively etched, at times grotesquely emphatic and distended to match the extreme situations they depict, provide a remarkable antidote. There's no obvious spin, no easily discernible line of doctrine in Joe Sacco's often ironic encounters with Palestinians under occupation, no attempt to smooth out what is for the most part a meagre, anxious existence of uncertainty, collective unhappiness, and deprivation, and, especially in the Gaza comics, a life of aimless wandering within the place's inhospitable confines, wandering and mostly waiting, waiting, waiting.'

By placing himself as reporter, investigator, at the centre of the story, Sacco's work not only explores the situation of the Palestinians, but also speculates on the role of the outside observer, the receptacle of testimony. He is ambivalent and awkward with his position as outsider, often shows impatience and irritation with those who need to tell their stories. Joe Sacco acknowledges that victims are awkward company.

Peter Cattrell, Dominic Veillard, Joe Sacco and Thomas Dworzak are artists who interrogate archives. They use oral history, vernacular photographs, architects blueprints and family testaments to construct a particular view, not only of the histories of conflict, but also of their own positions within them. Their work is questioning not only of history, but of our right to tell it.

VAL WILLIAMS, NOVEMBER 2003

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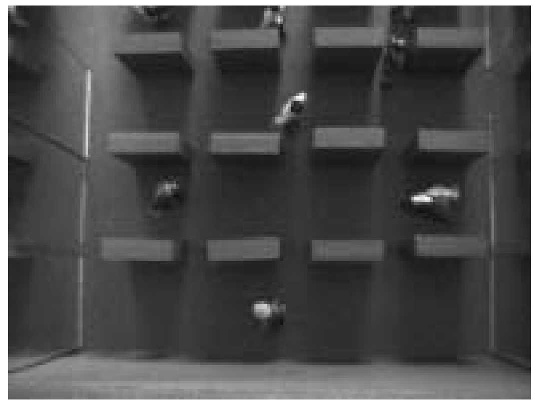
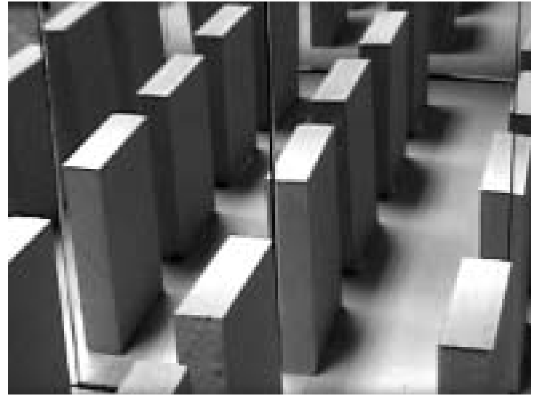
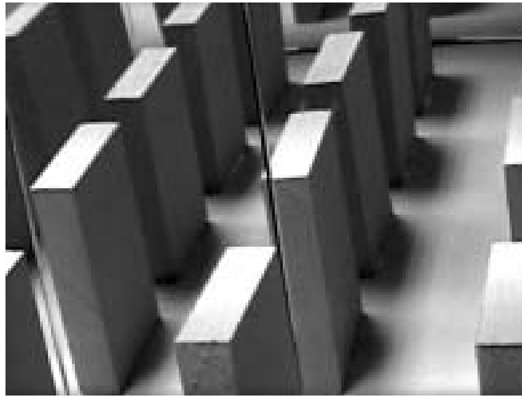
Quotations from Peter Cattrell and Dominic Veillard taken from letters to the author.

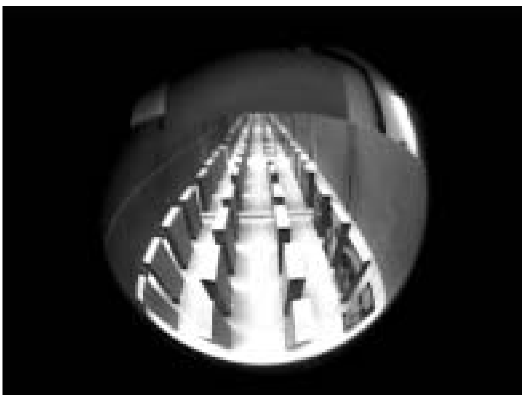
Via Dolorosa, this work has never been made and the installation will never take place.

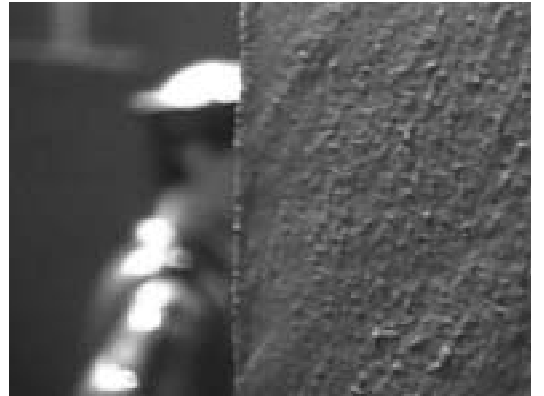
AISSA DEEBI

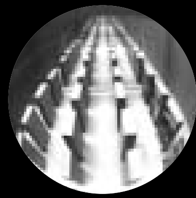












THE POET IN TROUBLE

In tough times the heart
is pinched by the horrors flickering
in front of it day after day
on the screen. The poet sits down and writes:
‘Come here, Arab boy, you can shelter yourself
in the ventricles of my heart.’

No, brother poet,
liar wrapped in poetic license,
your heart's no shelter for a child,
and what good is such a dubious shelter?
The heart that flutters in your chest can barely give
brief metaphorical shelter
to your own kids, the ones you fathered.
And that’s a problem.

In tough times
the poet goes on writing:
‘Under the helmet, soldier, your brain is made of cardboard.’

No, the soldier's head under the helmet
is not made of cardboard.
The brain that quivers in his skull
is made of flesh. Any minute
a bullet could smash it, any minute
he too could write with a shattered heart
And that's a problem.

The pencil in my hand is light, weightless, the keyboard
so sensitive that it responds
to the slightest touch with no resistance.
And that’s a problem.

Meir Wieseltier

Translated from Hebrew by Shirley Kaufman with the author

BIOGRAPHIES

Kamal Boullata is a Palestinian painter who lives in France. His writings on art have appeared in numerous publications including Mundus Artium, Third Text, Michigan Quarterly Review, the Journal of Palestine Studies and the Encyclopedia of the Palestinians. He is the author of a book on Palestinian art (in Arabic).

Haim Bresheeth is the Chair of Media and Cultural Studies at the University of East London. He is the co-editor (with Nira Yuval-Davis) of The Gulf War and the New World Order, published by Zed Books (1991), and co-author (with Stuart Hood) of Introducing the Holocaust, published by Icon Books (1993, 2001). He has made a number of documentary films, notably A State Of Danger (BBC2, 1989) on the Palestinian Intifada. Currently he works on the topic of the other and stranger in European Cinema, and on history and memory in Palestinian Cinema.

Gordon Hon is an artist and writer based in London. His work is mainly in film and video. His most recent work Circles (2003) involved aerial surveillance of a new BAE Systems Electronic Warfare plant in England. He is a lecturer at the University of Luton where he has worked with Prof. Bashir Makhoul in establishing a new Department of Art and Design.

Aissa Deebi is a Palestinian artist born (1969) in Galilee, Israel. He has been based in the UK and the USA for the past eight years, during which time he has worked in photography and video art.
Deebi completed his MFA in theory and practice in 1998 at Liverpool University. He has exhibited his work in Israel and internationally including, The Tel-Aviv Museum Israel, Haifa Museum of Contemporary Arts, University of the Studies of Catania, Italy, Inner Mongolia Museum of Fine Arts, China, Parsons School of Design Paris, France, Chungbuk National University, Korea, The Fort Collins Museum of Contemporary Art, Colorado - USA, The Maine College of Art, Maine, USA and more. Currently, Deebi is Director of Visual Arts at ArteEast and an active art curator working in New York, the Middle East and Europe.

Shuka (Yehoshua/Joshua) Glotman was born in 1953 in Israel, the son of Holocaust survivors who arrived to Israel as refugees on an illegal boat to the country. At the age of nine he started to take photographs. During the 70s he studied photography in Jerusalem and in London at the Polytechnic of Central London. Since 1982 involved as an artist in community art, art education, dialogue group facilitating and curating art shows. In his mixed-media art he has a special interest in the Israeli situation and its inter-cultural phenomena. His works have been exhibited in shows in Israel and abroad. Currently he lectures at the Beer-Sheva University and is living in a small village in the Upper Galilee.

Ian Jeffrey is an art historian with a longstanding interest in photography. He has written several books on the history of the medium: Photography: A Concise History (Thames & Hudson. 1984), *The Photography Book* (Phaidon, 1997), Timeframes (Watson-Guptill, 1998), and *Revisions* (1999, for the National Museum of Photography in Bradford, and for Lund Humphries). In 1993 he organised the exhibition *Bill Brandt: Photographs* for the Barbican in London. He has written monographs on Josef Sudek and on Shomei Tomstsu for the recent Phaidon 55 series. He taught art history to artists at the University of London Goldsmiths College until 1987, thereafter teaching at the Central European University in Prague. He returned in the mid-90s to teach photographers at the Department of Media & Communications in Goldsmiths. In 2003 he published a book of his own photographs, Universal Pictures.

Liam Kelly is a Professor of Irish Visual Culture at the School of Art and Design, University of Ulster, Belfast. He is a writer and broadcaster on contemporary Irish art. He has also curated both solo and thematic exhibitions in Ireland, USA, France, Slovenia and Hong Kong. He took part in L'imaginaire Irlandais, as curator of Language Mapping and Power, exhibited in Paris in 1996. From 1986-1992 he was Director of the Orpheus Gallery, Belfast and from 1996-1999 Director of the Orchard Gallery, Derry. His publications include Thinking Long, Contemporary Art in the North of Ireland, 1996 and The City As Art : Interrogating The Polis, 1994. He is currently a vice-president of the International Association of Art Critics, Paris (AICA). In 1997 he organised their international annual congress, Art and Centres of Conflict – Outer And Inner Realities In Belfast And Derry.

Miki Kratsman Born in 1959 in Buenos Aires, Argentina and migrated to Israel in 1971. Studied photography at Kiryat Ono high school 1974-1977. Served in the army in an infantry unit 1977-1980. For the past nine years he has been working with the journalist Gideon Levy on a weekly piece covering human angle stories in the Occupied Territories. Our project the Twilight Zone appears in Haaretz weekend supplement. Teaches photography at the art department at Haifa University and at the School of Geographic Photography in Tel Aviv.
Awarded the Enrique Kalvin photography prize 1997 and The Minister of Science and Culture prize, 2001.
His photography and video work has been shown in various galleries in Israel, New York and the Biennale in Venice. His major exhibition CONTROL is currently showing at the Israel Museum of Art in Jerusalem.

Susan Trangmar has worked for many years in the field of light and photographic time-based installations. The installations enter into conversation with the location and site in which they are based, exploring through their structure and duration, questions of identification and social practices of architectural space.
She has exhibited extensively in the UK and Europe. She was shortlisted for the European Photography Award for Exposures 1998 and recent projects include Ariadnes Dream and Double Duration, Newlyn Gallery and Impressions Gallery 2000-1 and Transitional Spaces published in Speaking And Making CSM 2002. She is currently Research Fellow at Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design. The performance/projection installation A Question Of Distance toured to the Israel/Palestine region in June 2003 and has been shown in the UK as part of Strangers To Ourselves And The Artist, Photography And The Representation Of Conflict Conference.

Meir Wieseltier, born in Moscow in 1941, arrived in Israel in 1949. Since the early 1960s he has been active on Tel-Aviv's literary scene, edited literary reviews and became the leading figure of the Tel-Aviv Poets of the Sixties.
Wieseltier published 12 volumes of poetry in Hebrew and translated seven plays by Shakespeare. The Flower Of Anarchy, his Selected Poems in English translation, is published by UCP, and a bi-lingual Italian selection by Edizioni San Marco dei Giustiniani, Genova.
He was awarded many literary awards, among them the Israel Prize for a lifetime achievment in literature. He lives in Tel-Aviv and is a professor at the University of Haifa.

Val Williams is a writer and Curator. She is currently Joint Research Fellow at the London College of Fashion and the London College of Printing. Exhibition projects include Warworks at the V and A, The Dead at the National Museum of Photography, Who's Looking At The Family and Martin Parr: Photographic Works at the Barbican. She is the author of the recent survey of Martin Parr's work, published by Phaidon Press and is currently working on survey shows of the work of Anna Fox and Derek Ridgers.

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A Multi Exposure Publication