

THIS PLACE

About the Exhibition



Israel and West Bank Map

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THIS PLACE

This Place, a multi-year project that invited a group of international artists to explore Israel and the West Bank, culminates in this traveling exhibition that asks us to look at one of the world's most contested regions through the distinctive perspectives of multiple artists. The twelve acclaimed photographers who participated are Frédéric Brenner, Wendy Ewald, Martin Kollar, Josef Koudelka, Jungjin Lee, Gilles Peress, Fazal Sheikh, Stephen Shore, Rosalind Fox Solomon, Thomas Struth, Jeff Wall, and Nick Waplington.

This presentation of the traveling exhibition is a collaboration among four academic museums: the Picker Art Gallery at Colgate University, the Wellin Museum of Art at Hamilton College, the Tang Teaching Museum at Skidmore College, and the University at Albany Art Museum. Each museum is presenting roughly one-fourth of the photographs from the broader exhibition, and these are on view simultaneously during the spring 2018 semester. This presentation is part of a three-year project entitled "Teaching and Learning with Museum Exhibitions: An Inter-Institutional Approach" supported by the Teagle Foundation, in which faculty and students are engaged cross-institutionally with the exhibition over several semesters. On view at the University Art Museum are Martin Kollar, Jungjin Lee, Thomas Struth, and Jeff Wall.

Between 2009 and 2012, each of the twelve photographers in *This Place* spent an extended period of time in Israel and the West Bank, which has been occupied by Israel since 1967. In turning their lenses to one of the most contested regions in the world, where Muslims and Jews, Palestinians and Israelis, Africans, Bedouins, and others live side by side and the threat of violence is never far away, these photographers produced wide ranging work, in both content and approach. Whether rendered as large-format color, black and white, or documentary photographs that span pictorial genres of landscape, architecture, and portraiture, the images in *This Place* speak to the complexities of the region and to the expansiveness of photography itself. Their highly individualized works come together in this exhibition to create not a single, monolithic vision, but rather a diverse and fragmented portrait, alive to all the rifts and paradoxes of this important and troubled place.

This Place has inspired discussion and questions across many platforms, including classrooms on all four of our campuses. As academic museums, our exhibitions and programs are designed to bring together faculty, students, and the community in scholarship and dialogue through the presentation of often-challenging art and ideas. Our presentation of *This Place* and the inter-institutional and interdisciplinary collaborations we are engaged in underlines our intention to offer the exhibition as a forum for pedagogical experimentation and intellectual exchange. By presenting *This Place* in this context, we hope to learn together and from each other.

The University Art Museum's iteration of *This Place* includes a designated space with seating and interactive materials designed to function as a site for dialogue, conversational exchange, and extended classroom learning.

This Place is organized by Chronicle of a People Foundation, Inc., New York; the tour is managed by Curatorial Assistance, Pasadena, California. The exhibition was curated by Charlotte Cotton and is organized for the Tang Teaching Museum by Rachel Seligman, assistant director for curatorial affairs. At all four institutions, the exhibition is supported by the Teagle Foundation.

The University Art Museum presentation is organized by Corinna Ripps Schaming, interim director/curator. The exhibition and public programs are supported by the Office of the President, Office of the Provost, The University at Albany Foundation, The Bernard D. Arbit Fund, and University Auxiliary Services.

ARTIST INTERVIEWS

The following interviews are reproduced from the *This Place* catalogue (2014) and were conducted Charlotte Cotton, exhibition curator.

Charlotte Cotton is an independent writer and curator. Her 2016 exhibitions include *This Place* at the Brooklyn Museum of Art; *Public, Private, Secret*, at the International Center of Photography; and *Photography is Magic* at the Aperture Foundation. Her most recent book, *Photography is Magic* was published by *Aperture* in September 2015 and is in its second edition. She is curator-in-residence at the ICP, NY and at the Metabolic Studio, LA where she is currently organizing a program of events to celebrate the legacy of the Woman's Building, founded by Judy Chicago, Sheila Levrant de Bretteville and Arlene Raven.

MARTIN KOLLAR

Field Trip

During 2010, Kollar travelled between Israel and Europe, spending roughly every other month in residence, and mostly working in Tel Aviv and the coastal regions. Many of his images were meticulously researched and required special access to military sites and exercises, official ceremonies, and scientific or medical facilities. Other photographs happened in more serendipitous circumstances, imbued with his exploration of picture-making in an age of surveillance. Kollar is also a filmmaker and his images often seem like fragments of a narrative, although the plot remains a mystery. His images purposely read as hovering between reality and fiction, anxiety and paranoia, the ordinary and the absurd. He has selected fifteen images from the more than fifty included in his monograph *Field Trip* for this group exhibition.

Martin Kollar interviewed by Charlotte Cotton

CC Was your involvement with *This Place* the first time that you had been to Israel?

MK No, the first time I went there was in 1988 for a students' film festival in Tel Aviv that I was participating in. I wasn't sure if I liked it very much. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict wasn't something that I knew a lot about. As a teenager, we had other issues to deal with in Czechoslovakia. I went back to Israel three or four times after that, mostly for filming. The conflict seemed to have changed and become very different from what I remember from the first time that I went there. Or maybe, apart from the separation wall, the situation hadn't changed a lot but the way I became sensitized by being part of this project was different.

CC You spent a lot of time living in Israel while you were working on *Field Trip*. What was your life like?

MK After a couple of weeks in Jerusalem I rented my own place in Tel Aviv. Jerusalem was too much for me, it's a very particular place – intense and without respite. I stayed in three or four apartments, I'd rent a place for six weeks or three months and stay in that one place, return to Europe and then come back to Tel Aviv to another apartment. The project organized an assistant for me, Talia Rosin, for the twelve months that I was coming to Israel. It would have been impossible to work without a full time researcher.

CC Tell me more about how you worked together.

MK Before I started going to Israel, I made a list of maybe fifty things that I wanted to shoot.

CC What sort of things?

MK Mainly locations. I definitely wanted to work in the quarries, with the explosions for mining, but I failed to realize that idea. I also wanted to do something with the television and news media in Israel and particularly the religious God TV station. I was also interested in photographing in Kosher abattoirs. For different reasons, all of these were impossible to shoot. The other thing from the initial list were scientific and military facilities, the Israeli space program and archaeological sites. Talia, my assistant, would research and work on permissions to gain access to the places. For example, I wanted to go to the anthropology department of Tel Aviv University and you would assume that this is an easy place to get to but, as with many instances, it was really complicated. According to Talia, Israeli religious and state laws dictate that all remains of Jews have to be buried. So it was complicated to get access to photograph what the anthropologists were doing within the confines of their department. According to anthropological research the skeleton in my photograph is dated 7000 or 8000 BC. And therefore definitely not of Jewish descent, so it could be photographed and stored like this.

CC Was that sense of anxiety about using a camera to represent contradictions and slippages a constant presence in your work in Israel?

MK A lot of the people that I met through the research were concerned about how their situation would look in a photograph or what they might be accused of through the 'evidence' of a photograph. They wanted to control the context, wanted to fit it to their agenda. The society is operating on this very high level of fear, some of the people I met were concerned about being implicated in some way. Their tactic was usually very efficient, they simply said 'no'. It works in a similar way in Eastern Europe or Russia. The first answer is always 'no' but 'no' luckily doesn't mean 'no always'. We just kept calling and knocking on doors. Sometimes it took months just to get through. We never gave up easily and remained patient. I decided that any obvious depiction of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as we know from media, wasn't interesting for me. Somehow I understood what's going on but I wanted to avoid getting involved or implicated. I was rather curious to discover where the source of tension is coming from. I didn't work on the Palestinian side as a way to 'balance out' Israeli territory; it didn't mean I didn't go there – I know the place quite well but I didn't put pictures from the Palestinian side into the exhibition (although slipped into the *Field Trip* monograph are two images from the Palestinian side).

CC And were the unused images from the Palestinian side quite different from what we see in *Field Trip*?

- MK** The West Bank is another planet with another set of problems. I wanted *Field Trip* to reflect something that I discovered and I got bothered about, to reflect the personal level of fear and danger that I felt. In *Nothing Special* (2008), I used humor to deal with social tension in a very direct way. Working in Israel, I wondered if it would be possible just to bring this tension directly into a book, to load those images with the tension and transmit that to the audience. I wanted to make photographs that are still comfortable to look at but somehow you're absorbing the tension from the place.
- CC** The situations in your photographs have a quality of being about to tip, there is a precariousness. Was it easy to find these signs of the tension in day to day interactions in Israel?
- MK** It was extremely difficult to avoid it! That's how it is. After I'd made the decision to not literally depict the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I was really just describing the tension on a very personal level. This allowed me to think about photographing in a very individuated way. I wasn't following the consequences of the conflict. I was trying to deal with how the future can be imagined in Israel – what might happen, the fear of possible danger, what that can look like. I recognize that this is a highly fictionalizing act, reflecting upon how it could be. That's why I was always looking for those images that present a possibility or a preparation for something.
- CC** Are the majority of the pictures as hard won as that or did some just fall into your lap?
- MK** It was research, research, research... but on the other hand, there are photographs that were made close to the places I was living too. I wanted to photograph in Tel Aviv – I wanted to have the sea and the city structure. There are several images from my very close neighborhood, I bumped in to some of them by chance.
- CC** And were forms such as this temporary structure you photographed on a street just like that when you came across it?
- MK** Yes, all the images are from situations that I found, they are not staged. For example when I photographed a scene with the barrels and a tyre (p. 69), it was in fact a barricade, but you can also read it as a photograph of a levitating barrel. You might find the signs of imaginary conflict in the skateboard and bicycle course. I wanted the photographs to be really direct at first glance but containing some sort of mystery or ambiguity.
- CC** So you might have a day where there'd be a cluster of pictures made?

- MK** There are some days that led to two or more pictures in the *Field Trip* book and then I had months when nothing had happened. When I'm shooting, usually I don't feel any pressure that I have to take a photograph. When all the channels are opened, things are happening. I learned this from my life as a filmmaker and how I approach making films. You're working on a scene that looks strangely out of context because you are shooting just a small part of the whole movie. This is analogous to the world around us and how it can look real but there is always something crooked in it and it's hard to know what is real and what is not.
- CC** Is the light in Israel cinematic?
- MK** Not really, it's really just the direct sun overhead, it's just hard strong light with a blue sky light, it's horrible. But somehow I really didn't have a problem with it and at the end I started to like it. I also enjoyed the way the architecture appeared in this hard light and combinations of buildings which looked like film sets.
- CC** Do you think another way in which your photographs have a 'cinematic' narrative is on the level of performance? In particular, do you think that you observed the performance of security, a kind of simulation of order?
- MK** It's a real performance of power often made for the media and targeted audience. That's very clear to see in the picture from a military drill, which also looks like a film set. There were soldiers hidden at ground level, and drones flying around. There was a very big screen for the high ranking military viewers to see the maneuvers and the military hardware in action. All the performances last one hour. It was like watching the ultimate level of military theatre. I don't know if I managed to translate those experiences into the photograph, I don't know if it's even possible to abstract the essence with a still camera and deliver it to the audience.
- CC** Do you think that the editing and sequencing of your photographs plays a major role in offering a possible explanation for these curious individual pictures and scenarios?
- MK** The edit started to be easy from the moment that I found the title 'Field Trip'. All of the pictures in the final selection are equally relevant and each could individually drive the narrative, but I also wanted them to co-operate with the neighboring pictures. It's not a question of compromises but it was a question of what kind of pictures have the duality I seek. I was trying to create *Field Trip* as just simple storytelling. I wanted to make the kind of book from Israel that was missing in the arena of contemporary art photography. Especially since it is a book from this complicated part of the world, I didn't want it to be something that you have seen so many times before. When I looked up definitions of a 'field trip', I was taken by the idea of

when a group of people go to a place which is far from their stereotypes or from their daily life for a certain period of time. The outcome of that is what it's supposed to be about – exploration and reflection. In a way, 'field trip' describes the overall idea of *This Place* project.

CC Do you think that you have created enduring pictures of Israel?

MK That's what I am wondering. I'm very curious about how these pictures will read in twenty years. If nothing else, they are just a way of recording reality, a transformed way of looking at things. In the future, all these images will have a very simple role as recordings of a place based on individual observations.

JUNGJIN LEE

Unnamed Road

'As a photographer', writes Jungjin Lee, 'I am primarily concerned with the unconscious, the unknown, and the invisible'. Lee travelled to Israel and the West Bank four times during 2010 and 2011, usually staying for about a month. She focused on the desert regions in the south, particularly the landscape of the Negev. She travelled through the desert landscape, sometimes with an assistant and sometimes alone, until she found a place that had the uncanny presence she was seeking. Lee's practice involves spending time alone in a place, often meditating, before making a picture that embodies her personal experiences. As with her past work, Lee has printed her images on Korean mulberry paper to create a heightened material sense of her photographic subjects. For the first time she has used digital techniques to create further layers of manipulation that characterizes all her work. The images represented in this exhibition are a small sample of those found in her monograph *Unnamed Road*.

Jungjin Lee interviewed by Charlotte Cotton

CC When did you first hear about the project? Who told you about it?

JL In the summer of 2010, Jeff Rosenheim called me and asked if I would be interested in working in Israel. It was a surprise, I mean, it is just so far from where I typically work. I had also never worked on a project like this where I was being commissioned to create my work.

CC Did you have any preconceived ideas about Israel and the West Bank before you went?

JL I began to study Israel and Palestine immediately – reading books and researching the politics and history of the land. I went to a Christian high school, so I knew the basic biblical story of the 'holy land'.

CC Do you normally research a place before you photograph it?

JL Actually, I have never researched a place like this before. I follow my intuitions, I tend to arrive somewhere with a general idea but without having a desire to produce something specific. When I go somewhere for the first time, my camera might not come out of my bag. I'm really open to working in this way, I'd rather meditate, leave my own preoccupations behind me and truly see a place. But preparing to work in the region was different. Firstly, I didn't choose the

place, so it was good to have the chance to go there before making a full commitment to working there, just to see what it was like.

CC When did you take your exploratory trip to the region?

JL In November of 2010, Fazal [Sheikh] was there at the same time as me. I went for twelve days. I requested a couple of days where I could travel alone with just an assistant so I could breathe in the air of the place. When I go to a place for the first time, I just want to feel the place, its abstract atmosphere, just sit and face the land.

CC Did you take any photographs on this first trip?

JL I did, yes, when just travelling without a guide, with the first assistant that I worked with, Galit Julia Aloni. That was another thing that was new to me – I had never worked with an assistant in the field. So that was a little bit frightening for me in the beginning, I prefer not to have anyone with me; my work is a kind of meditation and I really want to be alone in a place and focus on the land. But it worked well enough and I could not have travelled in Israel and Palestine without an assistant – that would have been impossible in the early stages. Later on, as I got to know the place better, I was able to manage to work by myself, mainly in the West Bank and in the Negev Desert. And then when a professor at Bezalel, Miki Kratzman, and he introduced me to a Korean student in the master program who later assisted me. Each time I went to Israel, I stayed about a month. The last trip was a little bit longer, five weeks. I made some photographs from the exploratory trip in November 2010, and then started to make my own trips from January till December in 2011. I proposed that my project would be based in the deserts and the land that contains layers of history. The land is always changing but there is some very fundamental truths that never change and that is what I wanted to concentrate on.

CC Tell me about how you chose the landscapes that you worked in?

JL On the first trip, I went everywhere in the region. I stayed in Jerusalem and would travel south to Negev, come back and then go north to Nazareth. I also frequently made day trips to the West Bank. I needed to know what the whole territory looked like.

CC Did you find the terrain to be diverse?

JL It's very different. The communities that have shaped the land are different, from Jerusalem to Bedouin society... The land is different – its climates – but it is the people who live there that make the diversity of the land. But there are landscapes such as the mountains and the hills

along the West Bank to Nazareth that are very spiritual. It's not purely determined by nature, there are always fragments of life and what has been left there, just enough to feel what has gone on there. I went into Area A, and many places where you are between cities and between existing communities. I did make photographs in cities such as Ramallah and Hebron but most of the photographs that made it to the final selection were made in the landscapes that had a little distance from the centre of the cities. I was conscious that I didn't want to judge the country. Actually it's very easy to say this, but when I was there it was very difficult not to judge the politics and the conflicts between Palestine and Israel. It is very uncomfortable there; I felt angry and it was difficult to breathe. I tried very hard not to express my anger or prejudices in my work, to remember that this is not all there is to say about this land. The meaning of the photographs that I made changed gradually as I worked over the months. But I didn't become more reconciled with being there, it was very painful.

CC You utilize a meditative state as a way to get to the place where you can see a landscape and photograph it. Was it harder for you to do this in the region than other places that you have worked in?

JL In the beginning it was quite difficult. I think the work I was making at first was quite different from my previous work. I have never spent so much time in a place that was uncomfortable. I was constantly asking myself if my mental state was different in Israel and the West Bank and in retrospect I can see that it was and that it shifted my practice. I'm glad that I have changed so much. In the final trips to Israel in 2011, I think I was able to see Israel with some distance and I knew that the body of work had become not just about the Israel. I mean, what I am searching for in my photographs is something about the life. It's about the solitary state of being human. Life changes on the surface, like an ocean. You have the constant movement of water on the surface but deep down, at the core, there is no movement.

CC Was this sense of the core of the land what determined how you made the final selection of photographs?

JL Yes, I kept that in mind when I made the final selection. I made photographs in Hebron, in what is a very tense, militaristic situation. But I felt that I didn't need to select those kinds of direct messages. When I made a final selection, I just kept that in mind. Most of the landscapes and objects in the photographs I chose could be from the places I have worked before – California, New Mexico, Canada and Korea. The place matters but there is a continuity in the sense of solitariness in my work that I also found in Israel.

CC How did you prepare for your final trip to photograph in Israel? Often that final visit can be a time where you are almost looking for particular pictures to complete a project.

- JL** By the time I went back in December 2011, I knew that I already had enough work for the project. It felt that what I had made already was strong and that I didn't need any more pictures. So I felt much more freedom on that final trip. It couldn't hurt to keep working and not be too forced. In the beginning, I was pushing myself to express something specific in Israel, to directly engage with the conflict between Israel and Palestine. But on the final trip it was more... how can I say? You know the Buddhist term 'nirvana'? It was as if I had finally let go of my aversions and delusions and could draw on something much more fundamental. It's like ice becoming water; it was no longer solid, it spread like water. Maybe that isn't noticeable for anyone else, it's a very delicate notion.
- CC** The experience of your work is very physical, printed on Korean mulberry paper, heightening the material quality of your work. What was your editing and printing process like?
- JL** I took a lot of time to go through the work. I would look at the contact sheet, select and make proof prints. I did some editing in between my trips in 2011, and then started at the beginning of 2012 to see everything together. The editing has changed several times over the years and my final selection for the book focuses on landscapes; most of these images are from the West Bank and the Negev Desert, including Bedouin camps, although this was not my original intention.
- CC** You have a complex process of printing, scanning and reprinting on handmade paper. Can you tell me more about the processes you use?
- JL** My working process in the darkroom to make proof and final prints is a really time consuming job. I coat the paper with the liquid light which is a silver nitrate emulsion. To make the final prints, I coat the paper in the darkroom. I usually make a direct print from the negative on the mulberry paper directly. But for the work in Israel, I needed to make a second negative from a digital file where I could develop the contrast. Working with the original negative just didn't give the final prints enough contrast and depth. The paper I use doesn't have any pure, bright whites, which can make the print very flat. So I usually make a print from the original negative at 80 x 40 cm, what is often a very flat print that contains just enough of the feeling of the place I've photographed for me to work with it. I scan the print and then work on the image digitally to increase the contrast and make the second negative. I'm not very good at working with a computer so I work with an assistant. I sit with them and adjust the tone and contrast of an image. Then I go back into the darkroom to make the final print. For me, the darkroom is where I have the perfect conditions to create the final photograph. Each moment, each step, involves me being very present and making all the adjustments.

CC Your process is very precise and there are reasons why you have such a specific process. As a viewer, that's felt in the very material experience of your photographs. All the steps in the making process that you describe have to be really true to what you see and feel. So it doesn't surprise me that your post-production process is laborious, and not a simulation of something but a tangible, material sense of the real experience of place.

JL It is true. I have been making prints on mulberry paper for the last twenty years – a very long time! What was different for the Israel project was that I began to use digital processes, and I'm still learning and struggling with them, but it was absolutely necessary. I think the dangerous thing for me using digital processes is that I try to be a perfectionist. When I'm making a print on mulberry paper in the darkroom there are always mistakes, things I cannot control. That's less possible with digital processes – that's why I still want to combine hand-made, chemical processes with digital in the future. I try to make a perfect print, but that is a contradictory and impossible aspiration. There is no 'perfect', there is only what I think is perfect in that moment. Sometimes I make a mistake, by chance, and what comes of that is very unique and thus 'perfect'.

THOMAS STRUTH

Thomas Struth travelled to Israel and the West Bank six times between 2009 and 2014. He was often accompanied by Dan Hirsch, an Israeli photographic assistant from his studio in Berlin and also worked with several local assistants. Struth made images in a variety of locations, including Tel Aviv, the Golan Heights, Ramallah and Nazareth. Struth continued his ongoing pursuit of universal themes and visualizations of the human condition. Struth found family portraits, landscapes, architecture, and sites of new technology – the range of genres for which he is well known – in the region. His monographic book represents the sixteen photographs that constitute his project and from which this exhibition installation has been selected.

Thomas Struth interviewed by Charlotte Cotton

CC I'd like to start by asking you why you decided to spend time in Israel and the West Bank making photographs.

TS Marian Goodman, my New York gallerist, had called me in 2008 to say that a person by the name of Frédéric Brenner had visited the gallery to invite me to participate in a project in Israel and the West Bank. He later came to my Düsseldorf studio and we had a long conversation. I was interested, I had not been to Israel, and agreed to come for an exploratory trip. During those two weeks, I travelled widely – between the Negev and Golan Heights and several urban sites, including Jerusalem, Hebron, Ramallah, Tel Aviv, and Nazareth. I looked at a lot of places, listened to the stories of my guides and other people I met, which intermingled with what I already knew or had heard about Israel and Palestine. My exploration was about observing the human theatre and what seemed to touch me most. In essence, it was about the reading of the signifiers and the pictorial possibilities of the place.

CC Were you thinking about what it meant to be an artist working in Israel and the West Bank? What your role is in such a situation?

TS As an artist you generally have to be slightly megalomaniac and gamble that it is possible to create something meaningful, maybe incredible, and not shy away from possible failure, particularly with a subject like this. I was not afraid to be working in the context of a group of other artists. It can be an opportunity and a different challenge to develop vocabularies in comparison, competition and complementation with others. There are examples in history where it has created exceptional results. The classical idea of the artist as a solitary figure is at

times an old fashioned romantic cliché and less interesting than a collection of individual points of view on the same range of subjects. As an artist who has always been politically conscious and interested in the organization of society, I was not sure what it meant to work in a conflict zone, or if you can do justice to it at all. It was clear that it was not my calling to make propagandistic pictures of the conflict but then, on the other hand, I felt this was a chance to try to see if I could make something telling. Moral and ethical questions are impossible to avoid; you have to acknowledge social and political injustices in this area, having been born in post-war Germany and lived through its terrible, unforgettable recent history and having witnessed, if only via the news media, the painful process between Israel and Palestine. These are the two preconditions I felt strongly aware of. I am not really a religious believer anymore, and religious fanaticism is most often destructive, but neither would I call myself a non-believer. Artistic practice is a constructive activity in which you need a belief in – or even see it as an active belief in – the afterlife. One creates the work certainly with a more general thought, not only from personal incentives.

CC You are making the afterlife?

TS I mean that I want to create something that makes a difference and actively participates in history.

CC Were there particular pictures that you went to Israel intending to make?

TS Not really, only in the most general sense – imagining the types of pictures which are related to my former practices, such as architecture, religious sites, the family portrait, landscapes, and the science and technology pictures that I've been making since 2007. But the work I made in Israel really was more about listening to what the situation imparted; recognizing something that I already knew because it conveyed a general sense of human experience. For example, the picture with a Palestinian woman walking on a road in Silwan. It is likely that she was angry that I waited on the side of the road to photograph her. For me, it is a picture that represents a particle of the conflict of the region. I was interested in the inner realm and what you feel, hear and see, and the impact of what is around you. This was an important picture for me because it seemed to typify something of the Israeli and Palestinian conflict.

CC It's interesting that you describe this picture as a portrait with a context rather than a landscape with a figure.

TS I have become less interested in being a landscape photographer. You can only look at landscape as a potential location for human experience. A landscape doesn't need me, you or

anybody. It becomes interesting if it can be the ground plan for human experience, projection or desire. That photograph made in Silwan was made near to a site where excavations suggest it is highly likely that it is on the border of the City of David. In the picture, it looks like a normal city; you would not fully know that its location is on the border of these ancient energies and religious claims. There is an undramatic and friendly sky with the cascading forms of the urban landscape. In this context, however, Silwan looks like a place with an underlying dramatic narrative; unspectacular on the surface but you know that something tense is happening here. The road surface in the foreground makes the city look like a model, it looks like a theatre that people have built. And in the middle of it is the woman marching along with her shopping bag surrounded by this tension, most likely regarding me suspiciously as an intruder. The picture lives through these different levels of tension – the tension within the solitary person and also the community, represented by the city.

CC How would you find the places that you photographed?

TS The location scouting is crucial. It is really about analyzing the narrative that the place tells me – and possibly you – what could become the ingredients for a composition, an arresting picture that can reveal something narrative. That’s the calculation I am making and my responsibility. You have to be audacious and say, ‘okay, I’ll make this statement, and that will be my statement’. But Israel and the West Bank were very uncomfortable for me and a particular challenge. The geographical characteristics of the place are not dramatic, it’s not incredibly beautiful per se. In a way, I was not surprised that religions were invented there because it’s such a blank slate for people to go into their imaginations. The character is so much in the detail, in the poverty and the extreme weather conditions; it’s crude and harsh. It was painful for me to come to a land with so much conflict, where two groups principally don’t want the other group to be there.

CC And that pervades everything?

TS Yes it does, you don’t feel relaxed. It’s hard for me to judge the photographs I made with any detachment but I find certain pictures more direct than others. I look at this picture and I find it provocative, the houses looking like they are aggressively eating up the land, the gesture is unpleasant. I identify it as something that has a greater meaning, something that documents something specific to the here and now, but that is also representative in the palette of human behavior. I’m looking for that combination.

CC That sounds like quite a forensic way of looking at what exists and what has happened in a place; what does this combination of registers in this situation mean? Do you think that is one of the characteristics of your practice?

TS Yes, I think that is one of my characteristics. I've been consciously looking at art and listening to music since I was twelve years old. If something excites me, I question it; I ask myself why I think some pictures are brilliant and others aren't. I think that's why certain artworks survive and inspire people over decades, centuries or even longer.

In my teens, I was interested in jazz and I recorded a lot of things from the radio. Aside from what I liked anyhow, I would be equally excited by something that I didn't understand at first. Free jazz, some of the music of Eric Dolphy or John Coltrane, for example. I'm really drawn to such intensity; the credibility of every nuance that they offer in their playing. These are role models for me, for thinking about what the ingredients are – the conditions that are needed – for strong expression. In Israel and the West Bank, I was driving and walking around, scouting for places with those conditions, using the memory bank of all the pictures I have already seen and looking for what might go beyond that. For instance, I was driving with my assistant in Ramallah, we stopped the car to look at an empty-looking place. The Palestinian police arrived and we had to go to have our passports checked in their office, because what we looked at was the Palestinian Ministry of Justice building. We leave thirty minutes later and head out on a small road and then suddenly I see something quite amazing. It's a dump with water or something like that, creating the shape of a heart. The city is in the background and I saw the incredible potential of the combination of details and a possible composition. There are certain components that are archaic – the rocks and the benign looking grass, it reads as a biblical situation. I think maybe it is the modesty of the place and a certain hopelessness that makes it resonate. As I've said before, it does not seem surprising that religions evolved there.

My desire for accuracy and definition in my photographs is obviously part of a German artistic tradition; this striving for inner reflection and the sense that a picture should only be exactly what it should be, with nothing else and not too much of any one thing that doesn't belong in the picture frame and confuses or distorts the narrative. The way that this fragile little tree is reflected in the pond – the tree with the city beyond it – creates a narrative of something that is not thriving and is in difficulty. In the end, I strive to make pictures that are arresting, that you have to keep looking at. Homi Bhabha said something that resonated with me. He was talking about works of art that you cannot forget but don't remember in detail. The drive to not forget emerges when the artwork touches your core, when it has a central narrative that is understood generally through its specificity. You cannot forget it because you cannot manage to completely 'un-puzzle' it. You cannot remember its details because the innate composition of all its elements does not fully disclose the entirety of its narrative and thus keeps you puzzled.

CC I wonder if the way you are describing your curiosity getting sparked has a connection with what happens for the viewer of your photographs.

TS The potential pulsation of energy of a situation is what I see. I am its first audience, the first viewer. If I'm not excited by what I am seeing, why would anyone else be? For example, the

picture of the Tel Aviv city hall where Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated in 1995. I saw the building and in a way it is a piece of international style, slightly brutalist architecture that could exist anywhere, but it had a very specific atmosphere. It's partly because Rabin was murdered on its entrance steps but even if you don't know that there is something non corporate and more on a human scale, especially because of the differences between the windows. I was fascinated with the possibility of photographing the city hall at twilight. It is a very particular time of day to photograph – it's more emotional and mournful. It is sunset not sunrise but with the possibilities of the dawning of a new day, of some transformation.

CC Tell me about your selection of just one family portrait.

TS Well, to work with families remains part of my work because they're always interesting. It doesn't cease to fascinate me what happens in a setting when I make a family portrait. It is impossible to predict how a particular family group behaves and what they express. I didn't want to make a big group of family portraits in Israel, but I wanted to make two or three family portraits. The portrait that I selected in the final edit is of a family who were friends of Frédéric Brenner. Frédéric photographed the father in the family when he was a young boy with his grandfather, and then again as a couple when he was thirteen and his wife was twelve years of age, with their first child. They are both from Yemen and Frédéric took me to meet them. After lunch, we went outside to the front of their house and made this picture. For me, the picture has a lot of interesting elements; one more formal detail is how the plant on the left corresponds with the curve of the body of the second eldest daughter; the mother and her young daughter are embracing, and the two eldest daughters bracket the family in a triangular situation. I found it very interesting to see the modality of the daughters, in relation to their parents but also with their slightly Westernized clothing, and that within one family, culture gradually transitions, if not the family is in constant transition.

CC Do the photographs that you have made in Israel and the West Bank surprise you in any way?

TS It was less a surprise but a challenge to develop my work here, making a small number of pictures that 'test each other' by being each one of a different pictorial family, but within the bracket of one region, Israel and the West Bank. I would say that this experience has made me aware of the real goal at stake: making individual pictures that – wherever I go and whatever the subject matter – can obtain even an element of speaking of the general human condition.

JEFF WALL

During his first visit to Israel in October 2010, Jeff Wall came upon a scene of Bedouin olive pickers sleeping on a farm near Mitzpe Ramon, which sits in the shadow of a large prison. He returned for the next harvest in October 2011 to recreate the scene and make his image *Daybreak*. Setting up camp at a nearby motel, with the laundry room converted into a makeshift lab, he worked with a team of Israeli assistants, following the same routine each day. They woke before dawn to set up the shot and just as the sun rose, they would make several exposures. Wall and his assistants then spent the rest of the day processing the film, scanning, and reviewing the results in preparation for the next day's shoot. Wall spent three weeks in Israel to create this image, which will be published as a book along with an essay by Ariella Azoulay.

Jeff Wall interviewed by Charlotte Cotton

CC When did you become involved with the project?

JW I think that I got involved quite late, Frédéric [Brenner] came to Vancouver in 2010. My wife Jeannette and I went to Israel in the fall of 2010.

CC Is it usual for you to get these kinds of invitations?

JW No, because I don't do commissions. I told Frédéric at the beginning that I had no idea whether I'd ever come up with anything because I can't just pick a subject. Some of the other people participating in the project do work in that way, it's part of their professional métier and they think in terms of projects and ensembles of pictures. But I don't. I went to Israel without any idea of accomplishing anything; I went to see and have that experience. We saw a lot of people who Frédéric thought knew something about aspects of Israel and the West Bank, travelling and talking for ten or twelve hours a day. Frédéric also made it clear that there were no rules, no obligations and no criteria. That seemed to be perfectly acceptable. And it's a region I'd never been to, and so I was curious.

CC Who was in your group?

JW We weren't in a group, it was just Jeannette and me. If I'd been in a group situation, I might never have gotten the chance to make the picture I did because it all happened by accident. This subject had nothing directly to do with any of the organized tours.

CC Was it something that you saw on the first trip you made in fall 2010?

JW We were with Clinton Bailey, an American Israeli scholar and advocate for the Bedouins, about whom he has written a lot. It was at the end of a very long and hot day when we had to crisscross a certain part of the country to visit a Bedouin settlement and then cross to another. We travelled along and across a specific highway several times, at a point quite far south of Jerusalem. At one highway crossing I noticed a large prison. Late in the afternoon Clinton wanted to go to visit an old friend and former student of his, who had come to this area and founded a winery and an olive orchard. He just wanted to go and say 'hi' to him because we were right there. We arrived between two visits to Bedouin settlements, and sat down and had some tea. I asked Yishai, the farm owner, a bit about his farm as we were sitting there chatting. He gets his water from the prison; the waste water goes through a purification plant and he gets it to irrigate his farm. We felt a real instant rapport with Yishai. He took us in his truck around the edge of the olive grove at about five o'clock, when the sun was already beginning to set. All the Bedouin workers were pretty much as you see them in my picture, they were getting ready to go to sleep because it was getting dark and they get up very early with the dawn. So we saw them settling down in the field for the night. They didn't sleep in a building but on the road that runs around the edge of the olive grove. It was really striking; the contrast with their colorful blankets and the prison and the olives and the beautiful light of the setting sun. I stood at the point where the picture was eventually taken and I could see the whole scene and I thought maybe this could be a picture. But the harvest was almost over and so I knew that I had to come back the next year. And that is what we arranged to do.

CC When did you go back?

JW I went back in October 2011. I wanted to do it in the later stages of the harvest because a lot of the work would have already happened, everybody was well settled into their place in the olive grove, and so it would be a sort of mature moment. By the time we got shooting it was 20 October. The men were those who'd been hired for the harvest and some of them were the workers from the previous year. They are Bedouin legal workers who come across to pick olives and they were happy to have the job of letting me photograph them. The situation was pretty much exactly the same as I'd seen in 2010. Except I photographed at dawn, not dusk. I thought the morning was more interesting than the evening time, because they haven't yet started their day in the fields. I wanted to make the picture in maybe the last ten seconds before they woke up, at about five in the morning. I set with the men where they were to sleep so I could see them properly, that was the only arrangement I did. We showed up in the dark and of course we must have woken them up to some extent because we came in two or three vehicles and set up a few small working lights. It was a very small shoot, myself and two assistants, Lior Avitan

and Matan Ashkenazy. I only had about ten minutes to photograph every morning because the sun comes up very quickly. It was done between about 5.00am and maybe 5.09am. Then the men got up, we drank coffee with them, then went back to our base. We created a little photo processing lab in the hotel and processed film every morning, scanned it and looked at it in the afternoon, managed to eat supper and went to bed by about 9pm.

CC And how many days did you do this?

JW Five or six days with the men. We also had a few days of testing so eight or nine days overall. I think I was there for at least three weeks because I had a lot of preparation to do. **CC** Did you bring your studio assistants or did you work with other people?

JW Frédéric had wonderful assistants for the project and I worked with them. I'm still in touch with some of them; they were so terrific, I'd love to work with them again. We lived in this quite small hotel together for the ten days, and it was like being with your family at a remote camp. They are all photographers, and had a real devotion to the project Frédéric invented. I think they loved that it was happening, and so the whole atmosphere was one of the most enjoyable I've ever had.

CC Did you have any reservations about working in Israel?

JW No, because I insisted to myself that I wasn't going to treat Israel as a place that was different from any other place. If I had, I might have a preconception and I thought that would just be artistically uninteresting. Because for me everything begins with an accident, I didn't want to get wound up in anyone's ideas. I don't have ideas, I don't start with an idea, just a subject that comes to me in some way. And, at that moment on the olive farm, I thought it was crazy how the prison and the orchard came together. And I was also struck by the freedom of the workers to sleep out under the sky while there are thousands of people sleeping in cells underground just half a mile away. So it became: those who sleep outside, those who don't sleep outside, very simple.

CC And very real as well.

JW Yes, I witnessed it and didn't invent anything. I guess you can say that is the situation, coalesced as a picture by accident by many of the forces at play in Israel. That's what made this composition work for me.

CC And did it feel different to work there?

JW It's not that I didn't notice I was in Israel. I mean, you can't be there and not notice, and of course there was a lot of discussion about many aspects of the place and of the lives of the people I was with; but that was the social existence of being there, not the artistic space. Once I got into the space of photographing, the wider world didn't penetrate so much, particularly because we were in such a remote spot. The picture is obviously derived from and connected to the outside world of Israel but once we began working on it we were in our own little bubble and I just let it be that way. There were fighter jets and helicopters flying overhead and the military are very present there – there's a very large base nearby. I probably could have caught a helicopter in the sky, but that was not really going to do anything for this picture. But they were there. If the prison hadn't been there I'm sure I would not have made the picture, and, given the circumstances, I would probably not have done anything.

CC Coming back to something you said earlier about finding this picture on the exploratory trip in 2010, is it typical for you to hold a picture in your mind?

JW Yes, if circumstances require it. If I had been able to do it then in 2010, I would have done so, but it wasn't possible because the moment had passed. But, luckily, because it's a cyclical situation, we could come back for the next harvest. It wasn't the best situation to have to wait a whole year, because I had then to commit to being in another place a year from then, which is hard for me.

CC What happens next, after you have shot the negatives from your five or so days of shooting?

JW Normally I would try to print it and get it finished, but in this case, I examined the pictures to make sure that there were not going to be any surprises when we came to print the work later; and then I left it alone for quite a while and went on to other things. I am just printing it now.

CC What's your relationship like with your pictures once they are rendered?

JW You mean once they go out of my studio?

CC Yes.

JW I pay attention to them and I like to see them displayed properly when I get a chance, like in an exhibition. I don't forget about them once they are finished, and from time to time I look at them intensely and judge them again. I do this regularly with every picture I've done, I come back to them and assess them at another moment of their, and my, life. They're always still

kind of happening for me; they don't really recede into the past too much because it seems to me that every time I see them it's a new occasion to encounter them and experience them, and, hopefully enjoy and appreciate them, and once more to find them to some extent good. I'm trying not to repeat myself, but they come back in the sense that sometimes I see something I did in the past, maybe twenty or thirty years ago, and it generates some new connection and maybe has an influence on what I am noticing in the present. So I'm never really done with them.

EXHIBITION CHECKLIST

Martin Kollar

Field Trip, Israel, 2009-2011

Inkjet prints

4 at 10 ½ x 15 ¼ inches

4 at 16 ¾ x 24 ¾ inches

5 at 28 ¼ x 38 inches

2 at 37 ¾ x 51 ⅞ inches

Jungjin Lee

Unnamed Road (series), 2011

9 archival pigment prints

42 ¾ x 81 ¼ inches

Thomas Struth

Z-Pinch Plasma Lab, Weizmann Institute,

Rehovot, 2011

Inkjet print

54 x 64 ¼ inches

Outskirts of Ramallah, Ramallah, 2011

Inkjet print

54 ⅝ x 67 ¾ inches

Silwan, East Jerusalem, 2009

Inkjet print

60 ½ x 76 inches

City Hall, Tel Aviv, 2011

Inkjet print

52 ¼ x 66 ⅝ inches

Mount Bental, Golan Heights, 2011

Inkjet print

52 ¼ x 66 ⅝ inches

Jeff Wall

Daybreak, 2011

Color photograph

94 ½ x 124 ½ inches

TEACHING AND LEARNING WITH MUSEUMS PROJECT

Supported by a grant from The Teagle Foundation, this four-institution collaboration explores innovative approaches to teaching and learning at on-campus museums. Museum staff and faculty members across disciplines at each institution are integrating exhibition-based learning experiences into courses and assignments. At the University at Albany, eighteen courses are being taught in the Spring 2018 semester that incorporate the exhibition into their syllabi:

Course list

AART105: Beginning Drawing, Nicholas Gates
AART105: Beginning Drawing, Sarah Kayhart
AART105: Beginning Drawing, Lindsay Kirk
AART105: Beginning Drawing, Pam Poquette
AART115: 3-D Design, Vanessa Mastronardi
AART144: Fundamentals of Photography and Related Media, Owen Barenfeld
AART144: Fundamentals of Photography and Related Media, Bjorn Bauer
AART144: Fundamentals of Photography and Related Media, Darian Longmire
AARH266: History of Photography 1970-Present, William Jaeger
AARH498/598: Curating Contemporary Art, William Jaeger
AART244: Contemporary Darkroom Practices, Jason VanStaveren
AART250/350: Beginning and Intermediate Digital Imaging, Jason VanStaveren
AARH240: Images and Issues of Diversity in the Visual and Performing Arts, Anne Woulfe
AARH240: Images and Issues of Diversity in the Visual and Performing Arts, Anne Woulfe
AENG102Z: Introduction to Creative Writing, Benjamin Nadler
AENG205Z: Introduction to Writing in English Studies, Joshua Bartlett
ART 446/544A, ENG 488W/517 This Place: Writing and Photography, D. Goodwin/E. Schwarzschild
AJRL308Z: Narrative Journalism, James Odató

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