

# LandEscape

A R T R E V I E W

Anniversary Edition



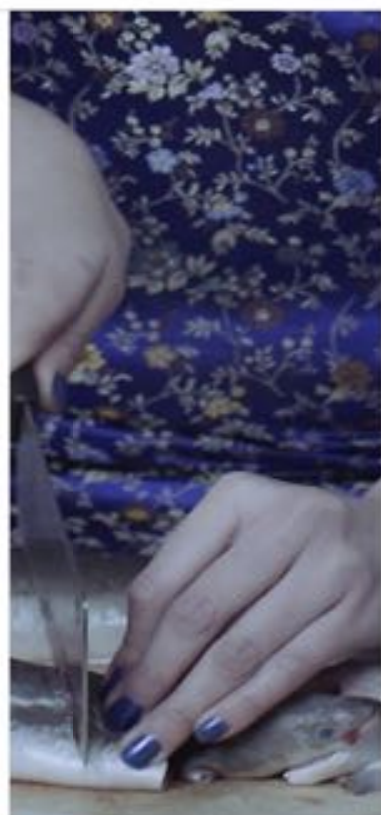
**MILANA YALIR**  
**MEHDI FARAJPOUR**  
**SAPIR KESEM LEARY**  
**ARIANE LITTMAN**  
**CLAIRE WILLIAMS**  
**MAX EPSTEIN**  
**TAL AMITAI LAVI**  
**JULIA SIX**  
**STEFY MCKNIGHT**

*AFTER ALL 2016, performed at Sala HIROSHIMA of Barcelona*

*A work by Mehdi Farajpour*

**ART**  
Contemporary Art Press





# CONTEMPORARY ART REVIEW



**Milana Yalir**

Israel

Within the years Milana created projects in the fields of dance, choreography, video art and visual arts was commissioned by museums in Europe created films for local media channels and directed workshops in various art fields. Milana has participated in productions of the Dutch National Opera as a dancer, acrobat and actress she received the support of the technical department of the National Opera and Ballet Theatre House in Amsterdam for her video art works. Milana's art pieces and productions are multimedia based with integration of dance she redesigns the space in real time. Milana is working with interactive elements and collaborates with various artists from different art fields as well as with composers and musicians from the classical and electronic world.



**Tal Amitai Lavi**

Israel

Amitai-Lavi's work is straddling on the boundary between two-dimensional and three-dimensional. It is characterized by love of craftsmanship, sensitivity to details and an exploration of unusual materials. In her recent works Tal Amitai-Lavi shows images that mark out elusive spaces of emptiness and fullness. Through a variety of methods and different materials she creates worlds whose foundations are fragile and disintegrating. These worlds seemingly materialize from concrete images yet they create a disturbing mental atmosphere. Her unique work succeed to transcend the private case and addresses universal values with which any viewer may identify.



**Mehdi Farajpour**

France

To me, creating comes from an inner need like the hunger. It's a wild feeling and it need to be responded immediately. One can't learn how to become creative unless s/he feels that need. Then s/he will find his/her way to make it. No need to pass through Academic education although the professional network of art (nowadays) requires it. Recently I read a phrase from Oscar Wilde that makes sense to me: "Education is an admirable thing. But it is well to remember from time to time that nothing that is worth knowing can be taught". Concerning my Persian roots and my background in theatre, I should say that both are permanently present in my thoughts as well as in my works. But to be more precise, to me my Persian roots does not mean anything except Persian Poetry which is a real treasure.



**Sapir Kesem Leary**

Israel

In my work I try to share my life with the viewer as if they were my close friend, as if we are companions to great discoveries. From loneliness, to love, to boredom to friendship. I connect to radical feminism art theories that suggest - the personal is political. Trying to intertwine daily feminine life - prosaic moments and distressed moments. My main attractions is exploring body limitation in a spiritual manner. Trying to connect to elements outside myself - people, plants, moods. The inner body and the outer world try to be symbiotic. Spending time out in the world has greater value to me than spending days on days in the Atelier. Hoping to meet new people and experiences that will inspire me. Capturing moments and re-enacting them through painting and video. My presence in the work is rather constant. From intimate moments with nature to private lonely moments at home.



**Ariane Littman**

Israel

Because life in Israel is an existential reality where choices about what to look at and what to ignore are made almost on a daily basis, creating art therefore cannot be devoid of a certain subjective political gaze even when excluded from the artworks. The need to merge the aesthetic with the politic and to connect myself to a specific reality of 'time and place' was a slow process that started during and developed after my undergraduate studies, while I dwelt upon the meaning of being an artist. Very early on, working with the concept of 'earth' (אדמה) involved confronting the dialectic of 'the' land whether it be 'The Holy' or 'The Mother' Land.



**Julia Six**

USA

I am interested in the blurry area the in-between, the space that holds the tension of the real and imagined, the outside and inside, the natural and man-made. It is in the blurry-area that I explore, seeking to make sense of the world. Through material investigations, repetitive processes, and precarious placement, I build installations and sculptures reminiscent of a landscape, yet somewhere between the real and perceived. Most recently, I have drawn inspiration from the American backyard, a pseudo natural space manicured to fit the boundaries of home, yet outside the private domestic space. The homeowner defines this public space this is the in verses out.



**Stéfy McKnight**

Canada

My interdisciplinary and experimental work looks at the ways Northeastern Ontario landowners protect and secure their land and property through preemptive and deterrence mechanisms, such as traditional and contemporary surveillance. The mechanisms instituted by Northeastern Ontario municipalities and landowners are influenced by urban centers, characteristics of land, technology, sustainability, psychology, physicality and (in) visibility. My practice looks at the ways that artist productions and cultural objects translate and disseminate information and cultural theory. Most specifically, it examines surveillance mechanisms used by rural landowners to protect their private property, livestock and neighbours.

**Claire Williams**

Belgium

Working at the borders of science, technology, arts and textiles, Claire Williams sees her self as an artist and researcher that tries to work between these fields, finding a common language, creating and amplifying specific interactions between different mediums. Her obsessions lay mostly around data, sound and ancient textiles, trying to materialise digital matter, imperceptible or inaudible informations found in our super saturated techno environment. She likes to work with unstable media, researching ways to create specific tools, usages or techniques to give us a sensitive experience of our daily environment. In her work she mainly uses textile techniques, hacked machines, DIY electronics, open source software and hardware.

**Max Epstein**

Israel

Image comes from thought; thought form learning and experience; the soul from weighing and evaluating; the authored message from the integrity of soul and the values that it encourages. Dialogue in art first exists in the arena of human experience and perception. Second, is the studio. An object maker is author of content and simultaneously fabricator of physical form aligned with the narrative space carrying the implied communication. The dialogue is finalized in the reception and interpretation of the audience, giving the object of art meaning.

**Mehdi Farajpour****4**

lives and works in Paris, France

**Sapir Kesem Leary****32**

lives and works in Bern, Switzerland

**Tal Amitai-Lavi****56**

lives and works in Tel Aviv, Israel

**Claire Williams****78**

lives and works in Brussel, Belgium

**Milana Yalir****100**

lives and works in Tel Aviv, Israel

**Max Epstein****128**

lives and works in Jerusalem, Israel

**Stéfy McKnight****154**

lives and works in Kingston, Ontario, Canada

**Ariane Littman****180**

lives and works in Jerusalem, Israel

**Julia Six****214**

lives and works in Philadelphia, PA, USA

On the cover **AFTER ALL**, a work by Mehdi Farajpour

Special thanks to Haylee Lenkey, Martin Gantman, Krzysztof Kaczmar, Joshua White, Nicolas Vionnet, Genevieve Favre Petroff, Sandra Hunter, MyLoan Dinh, John Moran, Marya Vyrra, Gemma Pepper, Michael Nelson, Hannah Hiaseen and Scarlett Bowman, Yelena York Tonoyan, Haylee Lenkey, Martin Gantman, Krzysztof Kaczmar and Robyn Ellenbogen.



# Ariane Littman

Lives and works in Jerusalem, Israel

*Because life in Israel is an existential reality where choices about what to look at and what to ignore are made almost on a daily basis, creating art therefore cannot be devoid of a certain subjective political gaze even when excluded from the artworks. The need to merge the aesthetic with the politic and to connect myself to a specific reality of 'time and place' was a slow process that started during and developed after my undergraduate studies, while I dwelt upon the meaning of being an artist. Very early on, working with the concept of 'earth' involved confronting the dialectic of 'the' land whether it be 'The Holy' or 'The Mother' Land.*

*A family memorial forest turned into a military censored area confronted me with national myths and personal matters and was transfigured into 'Nature Morte,' a pink greenhouse with real earth, gravel and plants. Following this seminal installation at the Bograshov Gallery in 1992, the meaning of the 'Land' in my work evolved towards an enhanced ironic commodification of Holy Land artifacts, an erasure of cartographic power in 'White Land,' and a gendered highlighting of the womb/tomb Mother Land.*

*In the midst of the Second Intifada I could not avoid the conflict, present in my daily life, to transpire in my art as well. In order to make sense of an existence in the shadow of terror attacks and to better comprehend the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I became a freelance news photographer. Back in the studio, the 'Border Land' artworks recounted my encounters with checkpoints, borders, walls and violence.*

*After the Second Lebanon War (2006) and the Gaza War (Operation Cast Lead Dec-Jan 2008-9) I gave up this direct encounter with the field, performing instead a metaphorical healing of visible and less visible wounds. I had come to realize the intrinsic power of deconstruction as an alternative way to escape and overcome the recurrent reality of violence whilst allowing for a different reconstruction. The very deconstruction of power embodied in the maps brought forth a different cartography of imaginary maps, fictionally healed with Plaster and bandages. Sewing the Wounded Land Maps of Jerusalem in various locations, not merely allow for the deconstruction of the green checkpoints on the original closure maps, but it revives the silent protest of mythical feminine acts of weaving an alternative fate.*

Ariane Littman





*Erasure 2006, Performance at the Sciences Museum, Photo: Oded Antman*

## LandEscape meets

# Ariane Liftman

An interview by **Katherine Williams**, curator  
and **Josh Ryder**, curator

[landescape@europe.com](mailto:landescape@europe.com)

*Hello Ariane and welcome to LandEscape: we would start this interview with a couple of questions about your multifaceted background. You have a solid formal training and after your studies in Social Sciences, you earned your M.F.A in Fine Arts, that you received from the prestigious the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design, Jerusalem. You later nurtured your education with a M.A in Art and Aesthetics from the Faculty of Humanities, the Hebrew University of Jerusalem: how do these experience influence the way you currently conceive and produce your works? And in particular, how does your cultural substratum inform the way you relate yourself to the aesthetic problem in general?*

First of all let me thank you for inviting me, I am honored to introduce my art praxis to your readers through this interview.

Regarding your question about my formal education: I believe that my studies at the Hebrew University and the Bezalel Art Academy, nurtured my artwork in ways that suited by personal artistic journey. Whilst studying for my BA at the Hebrew University in Social Sciences (International Relations) and Humanities (The History of the Middle East), I acquired an understanding of the world in general and of the Middle East in particular which broadened my perspectives

and many years later this would also influence the direction my art would take.

Yet though it was fascinating, I was longing to paint and create. Since a young age I drew, paint and wrote, my first vivid memory was, aged 4, running through what seemed then the never-ending galleries of The Louvre. At the age of 25, realizing that life was short following my brother's tragic death, I decided to pursue my passion despite its precariousness. Accepted at the Bezalel Academy I started anew, learning everything about contemporary art. Creating was exhilarating but I felt a need to grasp the wider context of the art discourse and the role of the artist in society, most probably a consequence of my years of studies at University. I always felt that students in Art Academy lacked the intellectual discipline of thorough research while art history students didn't fully comprehend the mystery of creating. Never entirely satisfied, I looked for ways through my studies to fill that gap. As soon as I graduated from Bezalel, while already exhibiting in a well-known art gallery in Tel Aviv, I got a job at the Israel Museum as assistant curator in the Department of Contemporary International Art. This gave me an important insight into the politics of art institutions. Simultaneously while working and creating, I took courses at the Hebrew University in view of an MFA at Bezalel followed later by an MA in aesthetics at the Hebrew University. These years of studies









***The Spring 2013, Performance at the Lifta Spring***

*Photo: Yair Triker*



together with the creative process in the studio helped me find my own language as well as position myself as a women artist living and working in this part of the world.

*You are a versatile artist and your approach encapsulates a wide variety of media, ranging from Performances and Video to Installations and Photography, revealing an incessant search of an organic symbiosis between a variety of viewpoints. The results convey together a coherent sense of unity, that rejects any conventional classification. Before starting to elaborate about your production, we would suggest to our readers to visit <http://ariane-littman.com> in order to get a synoptic view of your multifaceted artistic production: while walking our readers through your process, we would like to ask you if you have ever happened to realize that such multidisciplinary approach is the only way to express and convey the idea you explore.*

I believe that the word itself “versatile” meaning: variable/inconstant has a negative connotation to it, but I think otherwise and indeed my approach to art is fluid. I see art itself as a kind of ping-pong between the outside world and the inner world resulting in a fascinating subjective alchemy. Art is a multifaceted way of seeing the world. Sometime you can see it (better) through writing, sometime through painting and sculpting, sometime through dancing or performing, or though the medium of photography and film making. Each medium offers a different way of relating to the world.

As a young girl brought up in Switzerland, art was the classical paintings and sculptures I saw in European museums together with poetry, dance and music. Later in art school I discovered contemporary art and marveled over Minimalism, Land Art and Happenings. If I had entered art Academy as a painter aficionado, in my second-year I had already discovered the freeing liberty of creating spatial installations. Over the years I realized that I didn't want to be

locked into conventional classifications. This actually rendered the understanding of my work more difficult since in general art-gallerists, critics and viewers prefer a reductive classification of the artist's work.

All of my “versatile” forms of expressions grew organically as I wandered through my artistic journey. Creation should not be a set of tools one applies to ones ideas. True if you know how to use well the tools you've gain through your studies or your work in the studio you can do a good job but that is not enough. Creation comes from somewhere else where nothing is sure or safe. It's a little like walking along a cliff on a foggy day. There might be a sense of danger to the unknown when leaving one's comfort-zone, yet if you follow a path you know too well, how can you re-invent it or astonish yourself?

And to answer your question: yes, retroactively a multidisciplinary approach was the only way to explore what I was trying to express while creating, even if I did not formally study performance, video or photography. It just happened to be the right medium for the circumstances. Each medium taught me something new about the world, about art and about myself. It was extraordinary learning experiences.

*For this special edition of LandEscape we have selected the Wounded Land Trilogy, an extremely interesting video that reflect the multifaceted nature of our relationship to nature and that our readers have already started to get to know in the introductory pages of this article. What has at once caught our attention of your effective inquiry into the power of deconstruction is the way you have been capable of creating a concrete aesthetics from direct experience: when walking our readers through the genesis of the Wounded Land Trilogy would you tell us something about your usual process and set up? In particular, the Wounded Land Trilogy is centered on the consequences of the Second Lebanon War and the Gaza War: we have highly appreciated the way your approach goes beyond a merely interpretative*



*aspect of the contexts you refer to. The Wounded Land Trilogy shows unconventional aesthetics in the way it deconstructs perceptual images in order to assemble them in a collective imagery, urging the viewers to a process of self-reflection. Would you shed a light about the role of metaphors in your process?*

My creative process is organic and develops as a result of external and internal factors.

**The Wounded Land Trilogy** (2010-2015) is thus a part of a larger on-going project entitled **Wounded Land** started after the Second Lebanon War (2006) and succeeding to **Border Land**, a body of work created during the Second Intifada (2000-2005).

**Wounded Land** originated in the liminal space of a symbolic and metaphoric healing of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which had become in my eyes a monstrous Sartrean existential "huis clos". This healing took place by the deconstruction and the dressing of **Closure Maps** of Jerusalem, themselves a metaphor of a sick 'patient' suffering from an incurable chronic disease. Later, in the **Trilogy**, I undertook to heal the visible and less visible wounds inscribed in the geography of the landscape, the city and the body.

But it is not possible to fully grasp the genesis of **Wounded Land** detached from **Border Land** and therefore I will introduced succinctly the latter.

Since the beginning of the Second Intifada I had been struggling in my studio with the dilemma of the following dialectics: formalist art versus the *Here and Now*. March 2002 was a turning point after the suicide-bomb attack at the popular *Café Moment* that took the lives of 11 Israeli civilians and injured tens of civilians who had just attended a rally for Peace near the Prime Minister residence. Standing on the ruins of what was once a café belonging to a relative and where I use to go regularly, I left

the comfort-zone of my studio in order to better understand the conflict. I started to walk the borderline, documenting the new reality of fences and checkpoints rising around the city of Jerusalem. To easily cross borders back and forth from Israel into the Palestinian territories and follow events in the territories as well as the Disengagement from the Gaza Strip, I became a news-photographer. This simultaneously aroused my consciousness to the plight of the Palestinians, as new walls, protective for the Israeli civilians, had tough consequences on their daily lives. And though being in places I would have avoided at any cost beforehand, paradoxically this helped me overcome my fears and transcend the existential chaos prompted by almost daily terror attacks throughout the country. From then on for several years, the field became my studio and news photography, often from a different perspective than that of a professional news-photographer, became an inseparable part of my art praxis. As a free-lancer during the years 2000-04, I joined various NGO groups and in 2005 during the Disengagement from the Gaza Strip I often accompanied Rina Castelnuevo, the New York Times photographer. Following the Second Lebanon War I covered several stories with the Middle East correspondent from the Swiss Newspaper *Tages Anzeiger*.

If maps of all kinds had shaped my artistic creativity for over two decades, during the Second Intifada they became a tool that triggered my perambulatory voyages to the borders.

Strangely and quite unexpectedly during my perambulations as a news-photographer, other boundaries of sorts related to phenomenology, conflict and landscape collapsed and performance became a new medium to explore. This taught me to follow an





*The Spring 2013, Performance at the Lifta Spring*



inner creative urge that has no rules and no boundaries.

In 2004, in a vain and absurd effort to cure the city from its pathology of chronic violence, I performed a *Surgical Operation* on the checkpoints, barriers and road networks of *Closure Maps*, which data is collected by OCHA and then distributed by the UN offices in East Jerusalem. Actually following my travels to the borders, it was these same maps that had arose my awareness to cartographic inherent elusiveness and to the tangible geographical, political and cultural spaces they suppress.

#### **Wounded Land and the Wounded Maps of Jerusalem.**

Between 2003-2007, while closely monitoring the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as a photojournalist, I had often wondered if it was still possible to ethically relate to the landscape in a romantic way. The Second Lebanon War broke out at the beginning of July 2006. I drove up North a few days before the cease fire, tanks and artillery were still deployed along the border. Walking between smoking burned trees and parts of missiles, I stopped in front of an olive tree ripped apart. A few days later, I left on a field trip to the forests of Biriya organized for the Foreign Press. The earth was covered with thick grey ash and the smell of smoke was still very strong. All around me stood endless rows of thin dark skeletons as dark as their shadows. Even though the sunset was still breathtaking, like before the war, the forest was now a sea of black trees: a wound in the landscape.

In the following years I worked in a more metaphorical way creating installations, using photographs and making performances, alone or together with other artists. Joint multi-media projects such as "Smoking Utopia" created with my colleague Reuven Zahavi were based







*Moonlight in Gaza 2006, Symbolic lightjet print on photographic paper, 90 x 120 cm, photo: Ariane Littman*





**Wounded Map** 2012, Closure Maps, fabric, plaster and green thread, 77 x 92 cm, photo: Udi Katzman





on my photographic expeditions to the borders.

By 2008 saturated by the sporadic cycles of violence, I stopped working as a news photographer and returned to the studio.

A few months later my daughter aged 8, was injured in an accident suffering third degree burns. The personal and the national wound intertwined. I went back to the OCHA 's Closure Maps of 2004 and began cutting, dressing and plastering them. I further deconstructed the hierarchy of cartographic power by sewing as a decorative stitch the green letter "X", indicating the 'Barrier Gates' on the original Closure Maps in a gallery in 2009. Evoking feminine mythic weavers across continents, the seamstress became for me a character carrying symbolic healing faculties, and more such sewing performances where held in "wounded" sites. Wearing a white skirt made of Closure Maps and gauzes, I sewed Wounded Maps in the 3 religious quarters of The Old City of Jerusalem in 2011 and two years later by the spring of Lifta, an abandoned Palestinian village where women were notorious for their famous bridal dresses and artistic embroidering needle-works.

The act of dressing using gauzes also took place at The Dead Sea (Sea of Death, 2010), at the Hizma checkpoint (The Olive Tree, 2011) and at the historical Hansen Hospital for Lepers in Jerusalem (Compassion, 2014), each performance being enacted as Sisyphean yet symbolic acts of healing.

***The Wounded Land Trilogy also inquires into the interstitial space between personal and public spheres, providing the spectatorship with an immersive experience that forces such a contamination the inner and the outside: how do you see the relationship between public sphere and the role of art in public space?***

Regarding your question as to the relationship between personal and public spheres I would say that in general the performances begin with some kind of feeling and a general vision of what I seek to express. I can never know if it will succeed as there



is no prior in situ rehearsal. But beforehand I try to connect to the place and to the object within the landscape where I choose to perform. I need to feel the place's invisible and visible wounds and get a sense of the memory it evokes. I shall visit it several times and at different hours because I want it to be connected to the higher circle of time: sunrise, sunset, full moon. I think that eventually, the performance is the result of all these enigmatic interactions between subjective and objective realities preferably without 'a priori' rules. The places in which I performed took place in a very different geographical location and entailed different complications. Whether at a checkpoint, in the Old City of Jerusalem, at the Dead Sea or in an abandoned village at night, you need to be prepared for any scenario especially when you do weird things that are incomprehensible to the general public. I do not invite the public when I performed in open spaces unrelated to art galleries or museums. Usually people that encounter my work are not art minded, sometime though I do get unexpected feedbacks from passer-by. But frankly, I do not think that it enters the rubric of what is called art in public space. I don't think that what I do in the public space has an importance beyond the present moment of the performance. Whether located in public space or deserted areas my works are ephemeral.

I shall now proceed with the description of the performances of ***The Wounded Land Trilogy***.

### 1. *Sea of Death* (2010)

Featuring the relation between human finitude and ecological death, I held my performance, *Sea of Death* at sunset in July 2010 on the Northern shore of the Dead Sea, close to Qumran. Known since Biblical times, life, death and healing already coexisted there in Ancient Egypt. Providing special balms used for Egyptian mummification, the Dead Sea was a popular health resort during the Herodian







*Sewing a **Wounded Map** at The Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem 2011, photo: Yair Tsriker*





*Sea of Death* 2010, performance at the Dead Sea, photo: Jim Hollander



period. It is still a highly popular health resort yet today the Dead Sea is dying due to enhanced industrial extraction of its minerals, sinkholes and its resulting drop of water level.

During the performance I was wrapped in gauzes and gradually immobilized, eventually disconnected from my environment. It was a challenging situation both physically and psychologically when mummified I was carried into the sea by two Palestinian men working in the premises. In this state of intense vulnerability, as I drifted away in the sea, I recall thinking of wars and mothers, pain and wounds, death and useless hopes.

Six month later I had the vision of dressing a dead olive tree, the symbol of peace. There was such an olive tree standing in a roundabout in proximity of a checkpoint on the North- Eastern Israeli defined Jerusalem municipal boundaries. A new challenge arose: how perform and film near a military checkpoint. This is part of the unexpected when you perform in a public space and you might be confronted to how far you are willing to take your art seriously. I performed there in July 2011.

## 2. *The Olive Tree* (2011)

The performance took place at the Hizma's checkpoint, where an olive tree emblematic of this land and of a long awaited peace, had been uprooted and replanted years ago. The tree had not survived the bleak environment of the walled landscape. Dead yet majestic in its bareness, it personified a silent casualty in the midst of this contested space, an impassible witness to the flow of Palestinian and Israeli cars driving around it in some mysterious dance devoid of violence. We filmed the tree at dawn and I started to dress the dead olive tree at noon. The sun was burning and the tree was high and big. Curious onlookers stopped to exchange a few words with the cameraman. But I quietly carried on the dressing embracing the tree, detached from the surrounding reality whilst trying to connect to the tree,



speculating about its earlier life and mourning its present death. As I walked around the tree to wrap the trunk, thorns entered my bare feet and instinctively, I bandaged them in an act of identification. The dressing ended at sunset, I held my breath as I stepped back; the tree looked magnificent in the reddish light of dusk. Dressed in white like a bride, it seemed to resurrect, its loose straps of bandages dancing in the wind reaching towards the moon and the kites flying above the village of Hizma. As we drove away, I turned round to catch a last glimpse; the fleeting image of this ghostly tree dancing against the darkness of night will remain with me forever. The next morning once more the olive tree stood naked under the burning sun. Who could have ripped apart the bandages, I wondered?

A few months after **The Olive Tree**, I took my wounded maps and performed in the Old City of Jerusalem, it was not that simple and I was as I was bluntly told to leave the Western Wall and the Holy Sepulchre's esplanade, my sewing "dishonoring" these sacred spaces.

The vision for the last performance for the **Trilogy** came to me as I was biking and saw in the horizon ruins near an old spring along the 49 Armistice borderlines not far from Malha. Eventually I performed in July 2013 in a different yet significant location, as I shall describe below. The Spring is a closure. If in Sea of Death the mummy disappears carried away into the Sea, here it reappears as the memory of the place and is reborn.

### ***The Spring* (2013)**

The performance *The Spring* was held in Lifta. Known in the Bible as Nephtoah, the village of Lifta was a border between the Israelite tribes of Judah and Benjamin. Populated by various people throughout ancient times, the village had been repeatedly invaded by armies on their way to Jerusalem. A prosperous village under the British Mandate, one





*The Olive Tree 2011, performance at the Hizma checkpoint, photo: Rina Castelnuevo*





*The Spring 2013, performance at the Lifta Spring, photo: Yair Triker*



tenth of the land was owned and inhabited by Jews and the rest by Arabs. Yet, Lifta was not spared in the wake of the Arab-Jewish hostilities of 1947- 48 when the Jewish paramilitary organization of the *Haganah* fought the villagers during the Siege of Jerusalem while securing the western exit of the city. The Arab villagers fled, never to return and Lifta was eventually demolished except for a few houses. Since, squeezed between two highways, the uninhabited village, like countless vestiges of past civilizations in Jerusalem, stands as a silent wound in the landscape.

During the performance, the seamstress emerges at full moon from the entrance of the narrow heart of the spring carrying a *Wounded Map*. She sits and stitches by the pool, evoking mythic weavers and the Arab seamstresses of Lifta. The very act of sewing to the sound of a magic flute brings to life the mummified spirit of the place that metamorphoses at dawn into a young maid. Entering the cold water of the spring to purify herself, she then received from the seamstress the white dress of the future weaver of life.

**Your exploration of the intrinsic power of deconstruction accomplishes an effective investigation about the relationship between perception, memory and personal imagination, to challenge the viewers' parameters. What is the role of memory in your work? We are particularly interested in how you consider memory and its evokative role in showing an alternative way to escape and overcome the recurrent reality.**

Decostruction and memory have always been important themes in my work in general and my performance in particular but also the mediums of photography and film are intrinsically linked to deconstruction, reconstruction and memory.

As I said previously, I need to connect to the place where I choose to perform so I make researches. For instance when I was invited in 2014 to do a work at the Hansen Lepers House in Jerusalem, now a



contemporary art space, I read a lot about it and visited several times to get a sense beyond what was present. After seeing bandages among the original *momento mori* kept in a few rooms, and after reading "Nursing the Lepers in Jerusalem," published in the *British Journal of Nursing*, I decided to perform a ceremonial feet-washing to anyone entering through the courtyard gate. The performance together with three other women lasted 7 hours involving a non-stopping flow of viewers. **Compassion** not only symbolically evoked the history of 'Jesus Hilfe,' a place where Moravian nurses carried out daily actions of clemency towards the Lepers of Jerusalem since 1887 but it also offered a symbolic reenactment of their hard work. The performance suggested in an universal way, the feeling of empathy vis-à-vis disease, difference and alienation, creating a sense of care and humility in a site which still silently bore the secret of its ancient wound.

Whether the films bring forth the memory of ephemeral performances reenacted time and again or a memory of an olive tree uprooted a few years later, it is always a wound of a sort.

The films I produce based on my performance are not documentaries of those actions. They are new creation that can take several months or years to produce. It's a long and fascinating process that involves many other aspects of creativity, like sound for instance. So whilst working on the olive tree, I felt I needed two female voices. When Ruth Wieder Magan, an extraordinary performer and singer, and Salam Abu Amneh from a village not far from Nazareth agreed to be part of that project **The Olive Tree** became a tribute to mothers on both sides of the wall.

#### A Dadaist Deconstruction

As I explained previously the **Wounded Maps** are a deconstruction of cartographic power and so were the series of maps titled **Shredded Land**, created in 2010. Feeling powerless in face of the non-ending cycle of violence, I shredded and molded Closure Maps at the Bezalel Academy paper workshop, creating a







*Compassion 2014, performance at the Hansen House in Jerusalem, photo: Udi Katzman*





*Shredded Land* 2010, papier maché of Closure Maps, 55 x 64 cm, photo: Udi Katzman





series of 13 maps offering each time a different reality. In the very act of shredding, these new maps re-invented themselves out of what was once the hegemonic power of closure. Discarding all mapping conventions, incising and reshuffling borders, I create maps in the same way that Tristan Tzara had randomly used cut-out words from a daily newspaper to create his first Dadaist poem in 1917. And whilst reinventing in the studio these new symbolic “borderscapes”, I felt I could overcome the paralyzing effect of uncontrollable violence experienced by civilians.

The deconstruction and sewing of the Wounded Maps at the Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich (2012) together with extracts from 'DADA', a film by Greta Deses awarded the Palme d'Or at Cannes Film Festival in 1967, weaves the thread of **DADA-JERUSALEM** (2014), a film in homage to the artists whom in reaction to the horrors of WWI created the DADA movement. The sound for the movie is a recitation of Dadaist Hugo Ball's first abstract phonetic poem: 'O Gadji Beri Bimba'. His poem 'Elefantenkarawane, first declaimed at the Cabaret Voltaire in June 1916 is re-enacted in Deses 1967's movie.

And while running to bomb shelters during the Gaza War of 2014, DADA-Jerusalem revived a 100 years later the timeless Dadaist spirit as best described by Hans Arp:

"Revolted by the butchery of the 1914 World War, we in Zurich devoted ourselves to the arts. While the guns rumbled in the distance, we sang, painted, made collages and wrote poems with all our might. We were seeking an art based on fundamentals, to cure the madness of the age, and a new order of things that would restore the balance between heaven and hell."

*As you have remarked once, life in Israel is an existential reality where choices about what to look at and what to ignore are made almost on a daily basis: So we would take this occasion to ask you if in your opinion personal experience is an absolutely indispensable part of a creative process... Do you think that a creative process could be disconnected from direct experience?*



I tend to believe that no art can really be disconnected from direct experience. Art being the expression of personal experiences and choices, whether you decide to relate in a more Kantian “disinterestedness” to art or in a more contextual and situational way. I always mention when I lecture abroad about my work that, had I been living in Paris, New York or London, the content and the form of my art would have been different. It was just one of these choices I made up quite early upon finishing art school as I locked myself up in my studio, in search for a personal language whilst reflecting on the meaning of being an artist here and now. I started already back at the beginning of 90’s to work around the notion of The “Holy Land”. That was a crucial decision that would influence all my future artistic language without me knowing it at the time.

*As you have remarked once, the meaning of the ‘Land’ in your work evolved towards an enhanced ironic commodification of Holy Land artifacts, an erasure of cartographic power in ‘White Land,’ and a gendered highlighting of the womb/tomb Mother Land: elements from environment are particularly recurrent in your imagery and they never plays the role of a mere background. Do you see a definite relationship between the notion of land and your work?*

Yes indeed, my work is intrinsically related to the notion of the land and I invite the readers to take a journey through my site, as it would be too long to go in depth into each of them. Each project, whether **Holy Land**, **White Land**, **Mother Land**, **Border Land** and **Wounded Land** are all interrelated facets of that specific notion, a very important issue for someone as rootless as me, the daughter of a refugee from Egypt and with Polish ancestors whose roots were torn off from their land endlessly. But beside a personal biography, I carry within me the collective memory of my People with its painful history of exile spanning over millenniums and that is bound to influence you whether you want or not, especially when the land is a conflictual issue.





still from video **DADA-JERUSALEM** 2014





**Healing** 2015, video installation at The Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts, Wilmington (USA), photo: Carson



Zullinger

*When inquiring into the process of commodification of the words Holy Land you convey an effective socio political criticism concerning our materialistically driven culture that saturate our contemporary age. But while artists from the contemporary scene, as Ai WeiWei or more recently Jennifer Linton, use to express open socio-political criticism in their works, you seem more interested to hint the direction, inviting the viewers to a process of self-reflection that may lead to subvert a variety of usual, almost stereotyped cultural categories. Do you consider that your works could be considered political in a certain sense or did you seek to maintain a more neutral approach? And in particular, what could be in your opinion the role that an artist could play in the contemporary society?*

Indeed all of the artifacts in the **Holy Land Project** tries to generate a tension between the words "Holy Land" on the one hand and political or economic interests on the other, as I began inquiring into the process of commodification of the (unholy) Holy Land. And while taking my inspiration from the "sacred" water, earth, oil and flowers sold in tiny bottles around religious sites, I expanded this holiness to industrial products already sold on the market (honey jars, mineral water bottles, JNF blue boxes) creating new products. Consequently I started collaborating with public and private companies and with several Kibbutzim. Sometimes a new edited text was inserted in their logo or new objects were created incorporating the logo of the company. These rectified items were then signed and numbered and relocated into an artistic context.

Regarding the less open socio-political criticism that you mention in contradiction with the work of Ai Wei Wei and Jennifer Linton, I will say that as my art took on a more political turn with **Border Land**, I sensed the danger of simplistic slogans. I had to find a way to deal with a political reality and yet without falling into the easy cliché that I saw in



the media. That was a real challenge. I became more interested in engaging the viewer in a process of self-reflection vis-a-vis my artwork then in trying to say who is right or wrong. Therefore metaphors are important, as with poetry. I also believe that subtle art, even with a local flavor, can definitely carry a universal message.

Each artist needs to make a choice when he creates but his role is defined by a huge infrastructure that he rarely controls. Sometime he can help to see differently, and this is worthwhile the creative voyage.

As to the role of the artist in society, I am sometime desperate, but I do have some hope. The **Mobile Forests** are just one example of the influence my art actually had on reality.

Following my research into a family memorial forest donated in 1967 through the Jewish National Fund, I discovered to my astonishment that the forest became, at some unknown point, a closed military censored area. I created numerous works related to the Forbidden Forest, culminating in 2001 in **White Land**, a diptychs work composed of 35 military censored aerial photographs. These ready-mades formed a quilt-like map of the Holy Land linked through its white missing pieces. In this work I intertwined personal biography (the Grandfather Forbidden Forest), collective myths (the Jewish National Fund), formal aesthetic concerns (the flat abstractedness of aerial landscapes) and military cartographic production of power. A month before the exhibition at the Artist's House, it made the front page of the local newspaper in Jerusalem following which I was contacted by the Jewish National Fund. Ultimately in November 2003, maybe as a result of my art 'actions', a rededication of the 'Littman Forest Outlook' took place in the British Park of Bet Shemesh in memory of the 'invisible' 20'000 trees planted in the original Forest.





*The Holy Land Project 1994-2002 (detail) photo: Ariane Littman*





**White Land** 2001, 35 censored aerial photographs, 150 x 210 cm, photo: Mike Ganor





Over your two decades long career you have exhibited in numerous museums and galleries. One of the hallmarks of your work is the capability to create a direct involvement with the viewers, who are urged to evolve from a condition of mere spectatorship like in your performance *Compassion* exhibited at The Hansen Hospital in Jerusalem and the solo *Healing*, at the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts curated by J.Susan Isaacs and part of the important Israeli group show exhibition *Visions of Place: Complex Geographies in Contemporary Israeli Art*, co-curated by Dr. Martin Rosenberg and J.Susan Isaacs. So before leaving this conversation we would like to pose a question about the nature of the relationship of your art with your audience. Do you consider the issue of audience reception as being a crucial component of your decision-making process, in terms of what type of language is used in a particular context?

Indeed already in some of my 1990 installation my work engaged the viewers. Sometimes they are inside the performance for instance when I operated on the Closure Maps in *Surgical Operation* produced in the attic of the Anglican School, or in my performance *Erasure* in 2006 where I erased a 1947 map of Jerusalem at the Science Museum in Jerusalem. In *Compassion* as mentioned previously, the public became itself an active subject in the work itself. I consider the issue of the audience to be crucial in the sense that I do hope they engage in what I try to express and in the best of cases I hope it opens in them new ways of seeing but they are never a component of any of my decision-making process. My creative process as I said at the beginning is a never-ending thread I need to follow like Theseus followed Ariadne's thread inside the Labyrinth to kill the Minotaure. But unlike him, I need to get lost in the labyrinth in order to let new works spring from the unknown. I can't make compromise and start to think what will please or displease the audience.

*Thanks a lot for your time and for sharing your*



*thoughts, Ariane. Finally, would you like to tell us readers something about your future projects? How do you see your work evolving?*

I do not have presently future projects besides working in the studio on more maps from the series **Grafted Land**, one of which was exhibited **Visions of Place: Complex Geographies in Contemporary Israeli Art**, a show that is planned to tour the USA. I have in my head several short movies I'd like to produce but I don't have the budget right now, so I just leave them to "cook" in my head.

I usually never work for a future exhibition that might or might not pop up, a prize or a recognition I might or might not get. Had I done that, probably I'd have created half my body of work. I just continue to work,

sometime it is slower and sometime it is more intense. I learned over the years that the void is sometime part of the creative process. I don't question these fluctuations anymore, at time it use to frightened me but now I just let it happen because I've come to realize that it's an organic process related to creativity. I'm starting to teach a new semester at the Hadassah Academic College in Jerusalem where I have been teaching at the Design Department since 1998. I share with my students my love of the arts and enjoy seeing them discover their own creative language. That is in itself an important project.

I would like to thank you again for having offered me the opportunity to share some of my work and thoughts with your readers.

#### **Links:**

*Border Land:* <http://ariane-littman.com/subject-intro-pages/border-land/>

*Wounded Land:* <http://ariane-littman.com/subject-intro-pages/wounded-land/>

*Holy Land:* <http://ariane-littman.com/subject-intro-pages/holy-land/>

*White Land:* <http://ariane-littman.com/2001/05/white-land/?setslidercat=white-land>

*Mother Land:* <http://ariane-littman.com/subject-intro-pages/mother-land/>

*Map Land:* <http://ariane-littman.com/subject-intro-pages/map-land/>

#### **Videos:**

*Sea of Death:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U1axF9NFGly>

*The Olive Tree:* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j\\_iBjcbuzfs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j_iBjcbuzfs)

*The Spring:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUHMA49LREM>

*DADA-JERUSALEM:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VwahnbyWro>

*Border Land Alternative Ways of Mapping Jerusalem (2012):*  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IAMujZWIXG4>





*Sewing the Wounded Map by the Damascus Gate, Jerusalem*

*Photo: Yair Tsriker*