From Gaza to al-Majdal

Ten Art Interventions

A collection of ten aerial images from the Bavarian State Archive, marked by the name (Küstenebene-File 10- Gaza-Beerseba “bir es-seba”), were taken between September 1917 and September 1918 during reconnaissance flights by the Bavarian Air Squadron as part of the operations of the German-Turkish Alliance. They systematically document the stretch of land between Gaza and al-Majdal, including the later destroyed villages of ‘Iraq al-Manshiyya, Bayt Jirja, al-Jiyya, Barbara, and al-Majdal.

The aerial reconnaissance photographs that were taken during scout operations served the Germans for tactical and surveillance ends, likewise the successive colonial regimes in Palestine. They have become a tool for the study of the urban landscape and infrastructure of Palestine at the end of the Ottoman period.

For this special issue of the Jerusalem Quarterly, ten artists were invited to work with these images and make an intervention through imagining the process of photographing and capturing these images from the sky. The artists were asked to respond to the following questions while thinking about their artistic intervention: Did the pilot receive orders to capture this image via radio communication? What was the dispatch? What was the pilot thinking at the moment of capturing the image, coming from a European culture and photographing the “holy” landscape of Palestine? What did the pilot see beyond the frame of the photograph? How can we interpret these images beyond their military objectives? Can the artist impersonate the pilot while relating to a more contemporary experience? How does the same image look today via satellite?
Shada Safadi on Gaza City
1799-1918. Plexiglass, collage. 25 x 25 cm, 2019. “I have a strange feeling now as I leave the city, as if I am leaving a closed space ... I will look down for the last time.”
From a pilot’s diary (text by artist)
Jack Persekian on Gaza City
Amer Shomali on ‘Iraq al-Manshiyya
Ala Younis on Dayr Esned

Al-Labbad opens his eyes with astonishment. Here is a drawing of the land on which he imagines a landing, cut through by an aerial image of Dayr Esned repositioned as the windscreen of its shooting pilot.
Khaled Hourani on al-Jiyya

Eyewitness, Video al-Jayyeh, Haj Mohamad al-Sahar.
Mahdi Baraghiti on Bayt Jirja
Graphic collage, 2019.
Text: *Journal Palestine Exploration Quarterly* vol. 21, 4 (1889).
On July 20, 1973, American artist Robert Smithson died during an aviation accident along with the pilot and a photographer when their light plane crashed as they were inspecting one of his earthworks under construction (Amarillo Ramp) in the vicinity of Amarillo, Texas.

Relatively few of Smithson’s major works remain intact, his best-known pieces, and probably the most famous pieces of all earthworks, are the Spiral Jetty, 1970 (1500 ft) protruding into Great Salt Lake in northern Utah, U.S. and Broken Circle/Spiral Hill, 1971 in Emmen, The Netherlands.

Essa Grayeb on Barbara Artist/Photographer/Pilot, 2019. Scanning of manipulated images with text and hand drawings (photo essay in progress).
Noor Abed on al-Majdal

Transcribed Encounters with Three Psychic Picture Readers in Dakar, Senegal, 2019.
Oraib Toukan on al-Jiyya
Dots invisible to the eye
dictate the limits of the sky

Undress the letter
Un-render the script

Shuruq Harb on al-Majdal
Undress the Letter Un-render the Script, 2019.
Participating Artists’ Biographies

Shada Safadi is a visual artist from the Golan who lives and works in the Golan and in Ramallah. Shada is a founding member of Fateh al-Muddaris Center for Arts and Culture in the Golan.

Jack Persekin is founding director of al-Ma’mal Foundation and gallery Anadiel in Jerusalem.

Amer Shomali is a multidisciplinary artist teaching in the Faculty of Art, Music, and Design at Birzeit University, Palestine.

Ala Younis is an artist, curator, and publisher. Her work investigates archives, film remains, and artistic practices. She presented her work at the Venice, Istanbul and Gwangju Biennials, and international and Arab art institutions. She curated Kuwait’s pavilion at the Venice Biennale (2013) and the “Museum of Manufactured Response to Absence.”

Khaled Hourani is a Palestinian artist, curator, and art critic, as well as founder and former director of the International Academy of Art Palestine. Hourani plays a major role in the contemporary art scene in Palestine.

Mahdi Baraghithi is a visual artist who works across a range of media including performance, installation, and collage.

Oraib Toukan is an artist and scholar. She is currently a EUME (Europe in the Middle East) fellow at the Forum Transregional Studien in Berlin.

Essa Grayeb is a visual artist, working across different media such as photography, video, installation, and text.

Noor Abed is an artist and researcher based in Ramallah.

Shuruq Harb is an artist filmmaker, writer, editor, and curator.