

EDITORIAL

Past Tense in the Present

Every two years, those of us living in Palestine, or visiting the country at the right time, brace ourselves: another Qalandiya International biennale is about to propel us into a rush of exhibits, talks, and tours. Exhilarating and frustrating at the same time – no one can possibly attend or participate in the entire program – we come to the conclusion of its three weeks hoping to retain some of the insights and experiences.

Among them this past autumn was “Past Tense,” a photographic exhibit by Jack Persekian, who also co-curated Qalandiya International’s Jerusalem Show. Entering the dim hallway of the Goethe-Institut in Ramallah, lighted tables draw us to photos of contemporary Jerusalem. But then, we lift the glass panel and the past is illuminated, revealing a photo of the same place, or can we call it the same? Jerusalem’s built environment, like that of so much of Palestine, has shifted in innumerable ways, some remembered and some forgotten. What has happened, Persekian asks, to the buildings at New Gate, Jaffa Gate or Damascus Gate? We experience some of these photos in a different way at the abandoned Lutheran School in Jerusalem’s Old City, reopened for the biennale’s Jerusalem Show. In a classroom, visitors sit at scarred student desks, leafing through photographs in a folder – the viewer also a curator trying to understand how the city has changed and what it means.

In the next classroom is another layering of time and place, this one of Jerusalem’s garbage. Artist Benji Boyadgian, in his ongoing work *The Temporary Ruin, Chapter 2: The Cabinet of Curiosities*, culls oddities from the layers of garbage in the wadi below Jabal Abu Ghneim, now the site of the illegal Har Homa settlement.

These are carefully presented in a wooden cabinet, along with Boyadgian's own delicate sketches of his finds among the rubble. He writes: "For years I have gathered various curiosities from Wad al-Shami: trash from all periods. Taking a surface-archaeology approach, I create a collection of artifacts from the valley and preserve them from the dumps of oblivion, before the valley gets encroached upon by the urban sprawl."

In "Wandering Through the Flavours," Mirna Bamieh and Suzanne Matar of the Palestine Hosting Society add another dimension of excavation to this remarkable show, this one culinary. Bamieh and Matar led several tours of the Old City, exploring a cavern hosting one of the last remaining tahini mills, a venerable restaurant with a recently-excavated long staircase leading down to the tunnels below al-Aqsa, and shops where secrets of *za'tar* are passed along to sons only on the father's deathbed. Bamieh and Matar also highlight the disappearance of flavors from the Old City, citing the coming ban of any use of wood fires, so essential to the flavor of Armenian *lahmajun*. They remind us that smells and tastes are integral to Jerusalem's history.

At a slant to Jerusalem, historian Nazmi al-Jubei, a longtime contributor to the *Jerusalem Quarterly*, led an archaeological tour of al-Jib, which was once, in the Bronze Age, a more splendid city than neighboring Jerusalem. Named by archeologists as the city "Where the Sun Stood Still" (in reference to the biblical campaigns of Joshua Ben Nun), for many in contemporary Palestine, al-Jib (like Qalandiya) has become synonymous with the Israeli checkpoint erected there. Such efforts resonate with the mission of the *Jerusalem Quarterly*, which for twenty years has sought to recapture both the contemporary realities of Palestine and its histories, however ephemeral or deeply buried, acknowledging the checkpoints while pushing beyond them toward deeper understandings of Jerusalem and, more broadly, Palestine.

"All the cameras have left for another war," writes Polish poet Wisława Szymborska. While this is certainly the case in much of the rapid-fire journalism around Palestine, we are grateful that it is not so for the artists and curators of Qalandiya International – and indeed for *JQ*. In this issue, we hope to share with readers some elements of the Qalandiya International experience that would otherwise vanish, like so much else of the city's past. We do so by presenting, as the issue's central feature, a selection of the photographs from "Past Tense," as well as Persekian's expanded essay on those images. For nearly three decades, Persekian has been a central figure in the Palestinian contemporary arts scene in East Jerusalem (and beyond), founding Anadiel Gallery in the Old City of Jerusalem in 1992 and establishing al-Ma'mal Foundation for Contemporary Art in Jerusalem in 1998.

This first issue of 2019 marks the beginning of *Jerusalem Quarterly*'s twenty-first year of publication. In its first two decades, *JQ* has established itself – in line with the revised mission statement that first appeared in *JQ* 75 – as the leading journal on the past, present, and future of Jerusalem, while pursuing new and rigorous lines of inquiry by emerging scholars on Palestinian society and culture. In recognition of both the foundational scholarship upon which *JQ* rests and the innovative work that heralds its future, we are pleased to publish the winners of the 2019 Ibrahim Dakkak Award for Outstanding Essay on Jerusalem: Haneen Naamneh's "A Municipality Seeking Refuge: The Jerusalem Municipality in 1948," and Nadi Abusaada's "Self-Portrait of a Nation:

The Arab Exhibition in Mandate Jerusalem, 1931–34.” Naamneh uses archival records and press accounts to explore the efforts of Jerusalem municipality employees to maintain the basic functions of the city between May and November 1948, highlighting the depth of the city’s crisis, but also the resolve and resourcefulness of its inhabitants, during this crucial period. Abusaada, meanwhile, examines the organization and staging of the first Arab Exhibition in Jerusalem in 1933, which sought to put on display Arab industrial, artisanal, and artistic acumen, establish connections between different Arab countries, and counter the 1932 Zionist-organized Levant Fair. In its efforts to highlight local work and forge transnational links under colonial conditions, one could even draw parallels between the Arab Exhibition and Qaladiya International.

The celebration of two decades of publication also coincides with important changes in *JQ*’s organization and editorial. *JQ* welcomes Beshara Doumani, professor of history at Brown University, as its co-editor, joining Salim Tamari in that role. At Brown, Doumani has established the New Directions in Palestinian Studies (NDPS) research initiative, and we are excited for *JQ* to work in concert with NDPS – most notably by publishing scholarly papers presented at the annual NDPS workshop – to build an international community of scholars dedicated to decolonizing and globalizing Palestinian studies.

JQ also welcomes four new members of an expanded Editorial Committee: Nazmi al-Jubeh (professor of history and archaeology at Birzeit University), Roberto Mazza (lecturer of history at University of Limerick), Rema Hammami (professor of anthropology at Birzeit), and Rana Barakat (professor of history at Birzeit). All have enriched *JQ* with their contributions over the last decade, and we are now excited for them to help guide it into the future.

Another of the important changes taking place at *JQ* is the introduction of a more systematic double-blind peer review process. We will continue to publish reflections, memoirs, essays, and other non-refereed material – and hope to expand our film and book reviews, as well as the documentary back sections of the *Quarterly* – the distinction between refereed and non-refereed material will be clearly demarcated in order to enhance *JQ*’s scholarly status and help facilitate its service to the academic community. Finally, as you may have noticed if you are holding a physical copy of *JQ* in your hands, we have transitioned to a slightly smaller page size, thereby saving paper in an effort to be more ecologically and financially responsible.