

Elisheva Frankfort-Smith | Nature Permits

Curator: Yair Barak



A Still-Slumber Land

What does a photograph tell? Seemingly, whatever can be seen in it: the lines, the surfaces, matter, and light. It knows how to list its contents, its internal ontology. Elisheva Frankfort-Smith's images, however, challenge our expectations of photography by presenting an inventory with missing pieces and visual fragments.

In 1948, immediately after Israel declared its independence, nearly 500 Arab localities were abandoned. Some were left because of lack of choice; others were emptied of their inhabitants and demolished. Elisheva Frankfort-Smith photographed some of the places where Arab villages had existed before the war. She does not retell the past; instead, she weaves an image of what exists today. The photos are enveloped in a sense of silence and absence, a slender allusion to a historical tragedy. Some convey information that may shed light on things that one sees in the mirrors of the past, the ruins of an old house, a sheikh's tomb, a fence built of stones. In most of the images in this exhibition, the scene signifies a Mediterranean topography, atop of which one realizes that things do not recount themselves.

In 2019, Frankfort-Smith exhibited Slumber Land, which consisted of photographs of nine demolished Palestinian villages, at the joint gallery of Kibbutz Cabri. For the current exhibition, Frankfort-Smith set out to the Ramot Menashe countryside and the slopes of the Carmel range in search of traces of villages in the near vicinity of Wadi 'Ara.

People appear in three photographs in the exhibition. They are residents of the area. Faisal Mahjaneh, Suleiman Fahmawi, and Amin abu Hamza, second generation people, were her guides. Their families had been forced to leave their homes and they are familiar with the history of these areas. In the portrait photos, they come across as organically present. They belong to this place; they are part of its color, its temperature.

Other photos in the exhibition reveal bits of landscape that contain latent testimonies of another life. Under the green lawns one sees a curbstone, a step in front of a school. Another picture captures an old olive grove with a large mass of prickly pear cacti in its forefront. Pines and cypress trees have been planted around them. The botanical undergrowth of the Palestinian orchard, compromised by the conifers of a Zionist plantation. In yet another photo, we observe an old cemetery. Nobody has been buried there since it was abandoned. Members of a family enclosed the area in barbed wire. Several years ago, an old man, one of those who had been displaced from Umm al-Zinat, asked in his will to be buried in this place "if not to live there, then at least to die." His funeral procession ended in a confrontation with dozens of members of Israeli security forces, who were waiting nearby to make sure the deceased would not return to his village.

Repeatedly the eye wants to connect the dots and set the story on its foundations, but it fails in view of the ruptured topography that the photos show. From this standpoint, Nature Permits doesn't show historical events but the possibility of freeing oneself of the blindness that keeps us from seeing these events.

Special gratitudes: Faisal Mahajna, Suleiman Fahmawi, Amin abu Amza and Kais Fahmawi.

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