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## [Inside View: A Q & A with Martin Rosenberg, Co-Curator of Visions of Place Exhibition](#)

By [Tom McLaughlin](#)

The Rutgers–Camden Center for the Arts is currently showcasing the stunning works of 36 contemporary Israeli artists, exploring the theme of geography through its historical, religious, social, cultural, political, and physical dimensions, in an unprecedented exhibition.



Oded Balilty, *A Royal Wedding*, 2013, archival print, 47.25 x 31.5 in (120 x 80 cm). Courtesy of the artist and the Associated Press. Photo credit: Oded Balilty.

The exhibition, “Visions of Place: Complex Geographies in Contemporary Israeli Art,” will run through Dec. 17 in the Stedman Gallery, located in the Fine Arts Complex on the Rutgers University–Camden campus.

We check in with Martin Rosenberg, a professor of art history at Rutgers–Camden, who co-curated the exhibit with J. Susan Isaacs, a professor of art history at Towson University. Rosenberg discusses the inspiration behind the exhibit and explains why the compelling images offer viewers a lens into the complexities of present-day Israel as well as a deeper understanding of what it means to be human.

### **What makes this exhibition such a unique – and extraordinary – experience for visitors?**

The exhibition is filled with visually compelling, powerfully engaging, multilayered works of art that represent a diverse range of perspectives and views, exploring issues of great significance not only in Israel but the contemporary world.

### **What makes Israel such a complex, fascinating country to study contemporary art?**

For many people, Israel’s significance as a country with thousands of years of history, as a focal point for three major religions: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as a geopolitical focus in the 21st century, and as a vibrant, diverse democracy in the midst of the turmoil of the Middle East, far outweighs its tiny size and population. Yet many in the United States know relatively little about Israel beyond what they read in the media. They especially aren’t aware of its vibrant contemporary expressions of art and culture, because relatively little Israeli art makes it to the U.S.



Tal Shochat, Afarsemon (Persimmon), 2011, c-print, 26 x 27.5 in (66 x 70 cm).  
Courtesy of the artist and Rosenfeld Gallery, Tel Aviv. Photo credit: Tal Shochat.

### **What do you and your co-curator, J. Susan Isaacs, hope to offer viewers through this exhibition?**

Through these visually compelling, extraordinarily rich, and powerful works of art from such a diverse group of Israeli artists, we hope to provide viewers a rich artistic experience, as well as a wide range of 36 insiders’ views into the complexities of Israel as seen through the artists’ perspectives.

### **How does the theme of geography explore these complexities?**

The central theme of this exhibition is geography – the relationship to place – in its physical, personal, social, religious, historical, and other manifestations. Geography, conceived in this broad sense, is an inescapable part of Israeli life, its psyche, and art.

Issues related to geography are some of the most pressing in the contemporary world – the weight of history, and how the past shapes the present; competing views of history; relationship to place and disputes over territory; acceptance of difference in a diverse society; tradition versus modernity; issues of identity in all its complexities; and conflict versus peaceful coexistence, among others. For many leading contemporary Israeli artists, these issues are of central importance, so they devote their time, energy, and artistic creativity to them.

### **How are the artists’ different senses of history, identity, culture, and place reflected in their work?**



Michael Halak, Syrian-African Cracked Olives, 2014–15, oil on canvas, 47.25 x 31.5 in (120 x 80 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Noga Gallery of Michael Halak, Syrian-African Cracked Olives, 2014–15, oil on canvas, 47.25 x 31.5 in (120 x 80 cm). Courtesy of the artist and Noga Gallery of Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv. Photo credit: Michael Halak.

Artists, like all people, are affected and shaped by many different factors, such as their personal and artistic backgrounds, their sense of their own identity, the cultures of which they are a part and to which they are exposed, and their sense of history. Artists then choose – considering the creative possibilities and the artistic tools at their disposal in their chosen medium – what they want to express through their work, and how best to do so. These artists, who differ from one another in so many ways, reflect these dimensions of diversity in their works.

### **Ultimately, what lasting impression do you hope that visitors take with them after viewing the exhibition?**

As an art historian, I believe that art – when people take it seriously and are really engaged with it – is one of the most powerful means of understanding what it means to be human, in all its complexities. It can often show us how much we have in common, despite our apparent differences.

Visitors will come to the exhibition with a wide range of knowledge and preconceptions about Israel. It is my hope that the exhibition will engage each viewer in powerful and personal ways, and expand their knowledge and conceptions of Israel, the world, and themselves, through the power of art. Regardless of the viewer's background, I wish for them a powerful, personal experience that has a lasting impact. We also hope to encourage exploration and open dialogue around the significant issues explored in these works.



J. Susan Isaacs and Martin Rosenberg

In addition to regular gallery hours – Monday to Saturday, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and Thursdays until 8 p.m. – the exhibition will be open Sundays throughout October and November, except for the weekend following Thanksgiving.

Coinciding with the exhibition, a series of related engaging, free events, including public tours, lectures, and music and educational programs, will be held at Rutgers–Camden throughout the semester. In addition, the exhibition and related events form the Centerpiece of “A Moveable Feast of Israeli Arts and Culture,” a series of Israel-related programs at many locations in South Jersey, Delaware, Philadelphia and Maryland in fall 2015.

For more information on Visions of Place and related events, and “A Moveable Feast,” visit the exhibition website at [israelivisionsofplace.com](http://israelivisionsofplace.com).

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