VISIONS
of PLACE

Complex Geographies in Contemporary Israeli Art
Visions of Place: Complex Geographies in Contemporary Israeli Art offers a unique set of lenses with which to view and to better understand Israel, a complicated and fascinating country. Its significance as a modern nation—a focal point for three major religions, a place of geopolitical importance in a turbulent region, a millennia-old mosaic of peoples from many backgrounds, and a microcosm of many of the forces and issues of the 21st century—dramatically outweighs its small size and population. This exhibition opens a window for visitors to engage with aesthetically compelling and conceptually rich inside views of contemporary Israel, as seen through the diverse perspectives of its many artists.

Visions of Place features 50 works, including photographs, videos, installations, paintings, sculptures, and mixed media, by 34 contemporary artists from Israel who explore illuminating—and often competing—views of history, their relationship to and conflicts over place, questions of identity, and secular vs. religious perspectives of Israeli life. Although the majority of artists in this exhibition are Jewish from many different backgrounds, others are Arab artists who are Muslim, Christian, and Druze, reflecting the varied population of Israel. Moreover, half of the artists are women. Visions of Place features some of the most prominent artists in Israel, such as Sigalit Landau, Miki Kratsman, Pavel Wolberg, Asad Azi, and Guy Ben-Ner, all of whom have represented Israel at the Venice Biennale; Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist Oded Balilty; and many other internationally known artists.

Geography—in its physical, personal, religious, political, historical, and economic manifestations—is an inescapable part of Israeli life. Issues of geography are some of the most pressing ones in the contemporary world. Visions of Place divides this complex central theme into five subthemes: The Past in the Present, People in the Land, Contested Geographies, Interventions: From Destruction to Healing, and Diverse Identities.

The Past in the Present addresses seemingly disparate facets of Israeli history—from Biblical times to the present, including the Holocaust, and how our perspectives of the past can shape our views of the present: Israel is a country in which
the residues of history are palpable, and artists can focus on, ignore, transform, or juxtapose different aspects of history or telescope the past and present. Toby Cohen’s Sunrise at Masada is a deliberately staged panoramic photograph of the Israeli landscape that features three Orthodox Jewish men, dressed for morning prayer, ecstatically communing with nature on the stone remnants of the ancient fortress of Masada. My Father’s Suitcase by Haim Maor is an extraordinary object, a suitcase turned lightbox, illuminating the numbers by which the Nazis tried unsuccessfully to erase his father’s humanity and identity. It is a searing reminder of the murder of six million Jewish people. In his photograph Hagar, from the series Biblical Stories, Adi Nes depicts Sarah’s servant, Hagar, in a pose reminiscent of Dorothea Lange’s The Migrant Mother (1936), an iconic image from the Great Depression. The story of Abraham and Sarah’s expulsion of Hagar has been likened by some to the exodus of Palestinians during Israel’s 1948 War of Independence, as well as a representation of the Jewish people, who were driven out of many countries for more than two millennia. Nes’ parents were among the hundreds of thousands of Jewish people who left or were driven out of Iran and other Muslim countries after the establishment of the State of Israel.

In People in the Land works explore the Zionist narrative, the agricultural past and present, and some of the diverse populations and geographies of Israel. Tal Shochat photographs orchards throughout Israel and takes each tree out of context, as evident in Afarsemon (Persimmon). Israel is one of the top producers of persimmons, and the orchards reference the Zionist ideals of cultivating the land, sowing trees, and forestation of desert. By including fallen fruit, the artist reminds us of the fragility of nature and human life. In Dead Sea, multi-media artist Sigalit Landau records herself nude, floating amidst 500 spiraling watermelons in the saturated salt waters, evoking a reverse whirlpool. The spiral gradually becomes a thin green line, alluding to the 1949 Armistice Green Line between Israel and its neighbors. By exposing her naked body to the harshness of the Dead Sea, she expresses the human vulnerability in a difficult environment of shifting boundaries. Previously exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, NY and at the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden in Washington, D.C., Dead Sea is widely regarded as one of Landau’s most striking works.

Contested Geographies presents works that primarily examine two of the most significant sites of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: Gaza and the West Bank. The artists have looked at
these much-discussed places with freshness and intensity from a variety of perspectives, ranging from the documentary to the overtly political. Pulitzer Prize-winning photojournalist Oded Balilty has spent nearly a decade photographing the Separation Barrier between Israel and the West Bank for his extensive series Along the Lines, showing the barrier and its effects, particularly on people from the Palestinian side. His photograph Marginal Notes is a more ambiguous, hazy view of the barrier from the Israeli side, disappearing into the fog. A personal view of the Gaza withdrawal is offered by Natan Dvir in Last Supper, from the Shirat Hayam series. Dvir spent six months photographing residents of a small Jewish settlement in Gaza and was able to photograph the actual departure and removal of settlers from Gaza by the Israeli Defense Forces. Dvir shows the wrenching experience of a family having its “last supper” while members of the IDF wait respectfully at the head of the table to escort them safely from their home and out of Gaza forever.

In Interventions: From Destruction to Healing, the works reveal the impact of conflict on the land and people, as individual artists struggle toward an alternative vision of the future—one of peace and healing. Shai Kremer explores the remnants of military activity that scar the landscape in his Infected Landscape series, which documents and...
highlights the social and environmental impact of a military presence. Following a 2002 attack in Jerusalem that killed 11 civilians and injured 54, Ariane Littman made the growing number of fences and checkpoints around the city the basis of her work by cutting, reshuffling, and dressing “wounded” closure maps, which were then incorporated in installations such as Healing. She wanted to transcend the chaos of the almost daily terror attacks on Israeli civilians; at the same time, her work as a news photographer made her more cognizant of the effects of the conflict on Palestinians as well.

Diverse Identities reveals the extraordinary mosaic of peoples that is Israel, by exploring issues of religion, nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and other aspects of identity, from a variety of perspectives. As a Christian-Arab Israeli, Michael Halak occupies a complex position as a double-minority in Israel, and many of his works, particularly his self-portraits, highlight his multifaceted identity within modern Israel. His hyperrealist still-life painting Syrian-African Cracked Olives can be seen as a metaphor for a minority member of Israeli society. Olives are a universal symbol of the Middle East that crosses geographic boundaries, but here a shattered jar of “Syrian-African” olives underscores the complexity of a divided identity. Rina Castelnuovo’s photographs show images of women from the three Abrahamic religions, each worshiping at places holy to their faiths. A contract photographer for the New York Times in Israel, Castelnuovo unites and integrates in her stunning images the diverse populations of the country, revealing the commonalities across what too often seem to be, contentious gulfs of religion, politics, and geography.

Without exception, the works in the exhibition are both visually and conceptually engaging. They challenge reductive, simplistic views of peoples or nations, and provoke complex, original thought. While focused specifically on Israel, the topics raised have wide interest and applicability across the broader contemporary world. Visions of Place—a remarkably expansive survey centered on the theme of geography—demonstrates the richness, complexity, and diversity of visions in contemporary art from Israel. This exhibition is particularly timely, providing a rich artistic experience while also eliciting a deeper, more open dialogue on the issues of the day.
Visions of Place was curated by Dr. Martin Rosenberg, Professor of Art History at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Campus at Camden, and Dr. J. Susan Isaacs, Professor of Art History, and Curator of the Art + Design Galleries at Towson University. It was organized through the Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts, and the Towson University Department of Art + Design, Art History, Art Education Galleries. The co-curators have authored a 130 page, fully-illustrated scholarly catalogue, exhibition website, and a K-12 Educational Resource Packet.

ABOUT THE CURATORS
Dr. Martin Rosenberg is a Professor of Art History and Contemporary curator at Rutgers University’s Camden Campus, teaching art and architecture from the eighteenth to the twenty-first century, as well as feminist art history; he has organized numerous exhibitions, and has published and lectured widely in these areas, including his books Raphael and France: the Artist as Paradigm and Symbol (Penn State Press, 1995), Gender Matters in Art Education, co-authored with Frances Thurber (Davis, 2007), and numerous exhibition catalogues, articles, and catalogue essays. He has lectured at museums, universities, and other venues throughout the United States and China. He played a major role in the largest art education reform effort in the United States, catalyzed by the J. Paul Getty Trust. Dr. Rosenberg holds a B.S. in Chemistry from M.I.T., and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in Art History from the University of Pennsylvania.

Dr. J. Susan Isaacs is a Professor of Art History at Towson University where she teaches advanced undergraduate and graduate level courses in modern and contemporary art, and is a curator for the Holtzman and Center for the Arts Galleries. She directs the MA in Professional Studies/Art History Concentration and coordinates the undergraduate major in Art History. Dr. Isaacs holds BA, MA, and PhD degrees in Art History from the University of Delaware, a Certificate of Fine Arts from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (painting), and attended the School of Fine Arts, Boston University. She was also the adjunct curator for the Delaware Contemporary (formerly the Delaware Center for the Contemporary Arts) from 2001-2009, and Curator of Special projects there from 2010-2016. She has published articles for Metalsmith, Surface Design Journal, and FiberArts, among others. She has also published many exhibition reviews and essays in exhibition catalogues, as well as book chapters on contemporary art and artists.

EXHIBITION SPECIFICATIONS

NUMBER OF WORKS
50 works, including prints, videos, installations, paintings, sculptures, and mixed media works

ORGANIZED BY
The Rutgers-Camden Center for the Arts and the Towson University Department of Art + Design, Art History, Art Education Galleries

CURATORS
Martin Rosenberg, PhD, Professor of Art History, Rutgers University and J. Susan Isaacs, PhD, Professor of Art History and Curator of the Holtzman and Center for the Arts Galleries, Towson University

REQUIREMENTS
Moderate security; approximately 250-300 linear feet

PARTICIPATION FEE
$15,000

BOOKING PERIOD
12 weeks

SHIPPING
IA&A makes all arrangements; exhibitors pay outgoing shipping costs within the contiguous U.S.

AVAILABILITY
2018-2020

PUBLICATION
Visions of Place: Complex Geographies in Contemporary Israeli Art by Martin Rosenberg and J. Susan Isaacs with essays by Ruth Direktor, Daniel Belasco, and Cyril Reade

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