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Confiscation

by Abigail Collins

I took this one in the checkpoint at Qalandia in the West Bank. I joined the line in a narrow concrete passage way with fluorescent lights. I held the camera low, thinking no one would see me shooting, and pressed the camera body against my stomach to keep it from shaking. It didn't work and the image is blurry anyway. All you can make out, on the right side of the frame, is a wall of green tinted bulletproof glass, and a metal slot so your bags can be taken to the Israeli side to be inspected. Behind the glass is a blur of an IDF soldier. This is the last one I took before the images were confiscated.

I must have taken a lot of photos here, but the only one I remember is of Yasser leaning on the fence in front of the olive grove, permit in hand. He was in the middle of telling me that his 93 year old immobile grandfather was the only one in the family that the Israeli military issued a farming permit to after they cut off the groves from his family's village. He was waving the permit around, mid-sentence, when I took the photo. The permit was turned sideways so you see only a white sliver of paper in his hand, his blue eyes looking back at the camera in sharp focus, mouth in motion. The fence is right behind him, then the olive grove out of focus beyond that.

A child's hand on a coarse woven cloth, wrapped around a pillow. Just part of her hand as she held up the pillow to show me, a little blurred with movement. The youngest girls and I played on the couch after dinner, about an hour after Saeed's friends told us about the prison rape of their oldest daughter.

Right before we left the house I took another photo of textiles, two framed needle points hanging on the wall next to the door. Almost identical, with white stitched backgrounds and text in black and red. They say something like "welcome home" in Arabic.

This one is hazy in dusk light. The top half is a purplish mountain across from the one I was standing on, with the sun going down behind it. I had climbed as high as I could to see the Jordan Valley from above, but it took so long to climb that the sun was setting now. My camera barely caught the yellow bulldozer in the valley below finishing the demolition of a Palestinian house. I stumbled down the mountain in the dark, cradling my camera. Back at the house a Jordanian journalist asked where I had gone. I pointed to the mountain, and she pointed to the sign in Arabic and Hebrew in front of it. “Do Not Trespass Israeli Military Property” she translated.

A flash photo of a large rectangular hole in ground. Raed and I were walking to his sister's home just outside of Hebron, when he stopped suddenly and asked me to take a photo. The flash illuminated our path and I saw the hole, about ten feet in front of us. I looked at the photo I had just taken on my camera as he told me about the artifacts that had been dug up and confiscated by Israelis earlier that month. The rocks and grass closest to the camera are blown out from the flash, but the far edges of the hole show the details of the dirt that was freshly dug.

Another flash photo taken a moment later just slightly closer and slightly above the hole. It's almost flat at the bottom, and still wet. Looks about twelve feet deep.

One more flash photo taken in the general direction Raed and I were walking in, to help light our way so we wouldn't fall into the hole. I looked at the photo on my camera the next morning and realized the path we had been walking was marked by two white spray painted lines. I showed it to Raed who said the lines trace a path where Palestinians are allowed to walk to get to their homes on the other side of the Hebron settlements.

An older man wearing white walking away from the camera with two white goats behind him. He's on the right side of the photo, bent over, ducking below an olive tree branch. But in this photo maybe it looks like he's bending with age. We are in the middle of Ni'ilin, and Saeed is standing to my right, out of frame, telling me that his grandfather was a shepherd before his land was occupied by Israeli settlements. He takes these last two goats around with him everywhere. He doesn't hear well.

† Abigail Collins works with still and moving images, language, and sound to reconsider the relationship between political trauma and domestic life, most recently focusing on representations of Palestine. She holds an MFA in Interdisciplinary Art from University of California, Los Angeles and a BFA from Cooper Union in New York. www.abigailcollins.net

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