

Faces from Erased Places

Photographs by John Halaka

Al Hoash Gallery, Jerusalem
May 10 – June 28, 2018

Presenting the exhibition *Faces from Erased Places*, as part of the 70th commemoration of the *Nakba*, is a complicated emotional experience. The commemoration of the *Nakba* is a mournful remembrance of the beginning of the great catastrophe that displaced the Palestinians in great numbers from their ancestral lands, undermined their relationships to their cultural histories and traditions, and devastated the complex and carefully interlaced fabric of family, clan, and religious affiliations that shaped Palestine's once-thriving, diverse, and ancient culture. However, the 70th commemoration of



is the belief that preserving the stories of indigenous Palestinians puts a human face, a living name, and unique sets of experiences on their ongoing occupation and refugee crisis. My artwork is created with the conviction that personal narratives can serve as a powerful catalyst for social and political transformation.

The work in the exhibition offers viewers a poetic space to contemplate their personal and collective relationships and responsibilities to the realities of displaced individuals, communities, and populations. The images are constructed of connected pictorial stanzas, conveying incomplete visual narratives that reflect on the fragmented lives and disjointed realities of Palestinians. The portraits individualize Palestinian narratives of displacement, survival, and resistance, making them tangible and irrefutable, and attempt to personalize the abstract notion of the displaced masses, making the individual experiences of Palestinians more real and comprehensible for the viewer.

Recording the personal stories of Palestinian survival and resistance helps to ensure that the histories and traditions of Palestinian culture are preserved, and that current and future generations are well informed. Creatively presenting the narratives of an indigenous population facing the threat of cultural annihilation helps to resurrect buried histories, making the unseen seen, and the unheard heard, so that no one can ever say, "I didn't know."



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the *Nakba* must also be seen as a celebration of the survival of the Palestinians, who have repeatedly proven that they are an indigenous people who refuse to be erased from history and who are not willing to be swept away by an ongoing ethnic cleansing campaign that started over 70 years ago.

The artwork in the exhibition honors the memories, experiences, and cultural survival of four generations of Palestinian men and women who have been geographically divided as a people but psychologically united in their political and national struggle. My overriding objectives in developing this project have been to record, preserve, and present rarely heard personal narratives and life-forming experiences of four generations of Palestinians who are undergoing the agonies of exile and the horrors of occupation. Fueling my motivation to develop this project

