> You cannot live 30 years with something in your closet, which you know is there and pretend it is not there without something terrible happening to you. If I know that any one of you has murdered your brother or your mother and the corpse is in this room under the table, and I know it and you know it and you know I know it and we cannot talk about it, it takes no time at all before we cannot talk about anything… before absolute silence descends.
>
> --James Baldwin
> Debate with Malcolm X, September 5, 1963

It has been fifty-four years since Baldwin cautioned us about remaining silent over the stinking corpse of racism. In the intervening time, I was born, as was the artist Naomi Safran-Hon. While conversations around some forms of racism have begun once again to open, this corpse, and this descendent silence, has been generationally inherited. It does not necessarily just contain the overt racism of the Jim Crow era (and beyond), but the unnamed deeply sunken structural and institutionalized racism that is so pervasive it is often unseen.

Since the election of Donald Trump last year, I have noticed a general anxiety around how to speak about difficult topics. Our attention span, our fear of being wrong, our collective quickness to anger, the stress of this particular moment in history (which might *only* be distinct in that we are the ones who are living it) makes our ability to view Safran-Hon's work—to talk about this work—to understand the conflict of what is productive and what is problematic within this work very difficult. As a non-Israeli, non-Palestinian person, I have struggled to find a way to write about an US-based Israeli artist's narrative representation of a conflict and a history that is not my own. As an outsider, it is impossible for me to see the cycles of displacement, of flight, of being forced out, of occupation, much in the same way that those on the inside hope to forget. But, of course, the purpose (at least the non-cynical version) of both making art and viewing art is to communicate the very real stakes, the often-overlooked, and the most complex aspects of our human experience. And racism, war, and inequality are a big part of that for all of us—whether you are the perpetrator or target or stuck somewhere in the middle. Silence doesn't actually erase the problems – it makes the problems worse.

When I approach the paintings in this show, I look at the commonalities of structural oppression; though drawn from many eras and locations, they eerily mirror one other. In his book *Durable Inequality,* social theorist Charles Tilly proposes the term "opportunity hoarding," as the creation and consolidation of "networks that acquire access to a resource that is valuable, renewable, subject to monopoly, supportive of network activities, and enhanced by the network's modus operandi, network members regularly hoard access to resources, creating beliefs and practices that sustain their control. If that network is categorically bounded it thereby contributes to the creation and maintenance of categorical inequality."[1] This is the corpse that Baldwin is trying to wrest

[1] Tilly, Charles. *Durable Inequality*. 1st ed., University of California Press, 1998.

from its secret hiding place. And with the paintings in the WS series, Safran-Hon is attempting to drag Israel's own corpse out into the daylight.

It is easy to assume that the architectural spaces in the paintings have been destroyed by war, but in fact their entropic decay is an act of legalized political war rather than one that is fought with weapons. Wadi-Salib, an historically Palestinian neighborhood in Haifa, through a process of legal seizure, sits abandoned since the mid-twentieth century—not occupied by Israeli citizens, but not available to its historic occupants. The buildings are left to ruin because one community does not want them and the other cannot have them. Potentiality is destroyed simply as an intentional act of deprivation.

The materiality of the work is not insignificant—the concrete, itself, could be a stand-in for state structure, where the boundaries are rigid and land is left squandered (the squandering itself a productive reminder of exactly who has the power). If the cement is a metaphor for the state, then perhaps the artist's hand mechanizes the hoarding. Although she too has inherited the corpse, Safran-Hon acknowledges her privilege while wrestling with how to voice dissent. This is not the work of ally-ship; this is an implication of an inherited complicity that many of us, myself included, live our lives in.

Safran-Hon's construction of these physical spaces through photograph and material mirrors the distortion of their historical narrative, one that both allows these buildings, and the state an innocence, and simultaneously criminalizes and delegitimizes them as homes for an unwanted population. Lace, tablecloths, and curtains through which cement has been forced: each roots us in the domestic, and the act of pressing to move the cement through the lace, likewise, speaks to the extraordinary violence that is perpetrated on policed communities and regulated bodies.

The paintings that don't refer to physical space or cityscapes, act as memorials—serving as their own architecture—claiming their own space, realized within, and as, new construction. Lest the corpse return to the closet, it must be named before it is claimed.

> "The false image is what emerges when a critique of militarised life is predicated on the forgetting of the life that surrounds it."[2]

It is easy to get mixed up in the surface of these paintings—to read them simply as nostalgic, or as aestheticizing trauma or destruction. This is something Safran-Hon will have to contend with, especially as an Israeli, who has used her own mobility to remove herself from Haifa, where Wadi-Salib is located. It is easy to confuse Safran-Hon's intent as an attempt to rid herself of collective guilt, but she leaves us with the questions of: What have we inherited that we can neither tolerate nor erase our status as a beneficiary of? If one chooses not to be a bystander, and one cannot be an ally, what can you do? While we may never know Wadi-Salib ourselves, we can begin to look at Safran-Hon's images and start to think and talk about what happens to those outside of these walls no matter where they exist. – Sarah Workneh

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[2] Moten, Fred & Harney, Stefano. *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study.* Minor Compositions, 2013.