



## Shadowless Land

Varda Carmeli

Curator: Nir Harmat

For almost three years, Varda Carmeli has been working on the series "Area C". Time and again she went to Judea and Samaria, territories under military Israeli rule, to comprehend the complexity of the place through her camera. "I went to know and to tell," she says in one of our conversations about this intricate body of work. Carmeli's photography is not only a moment in time, but also a prolongation which captures and encapsulates a view at the ever so permanent reality of what was once considered temporary—the Occupation, life under threat, military or civilian rule, depending on the national affiliation of the residents.

Carmeli is well aware of the ethical dilemma underlying photographic perpetuation of the *other*. She is conscious of the patronizing gaze and the symbolic system within which she inevitably works. She produces a gaze of foreignness, domination, and curiosity at that which is excluded from quotidian consciousness, a gaze at the other.

At first sight, the photographs expose a landscape of silence, a deceptive peaceful-looking scenery. As the series evolves, however, the realization wells up that this is a scarred, violated landscape. The series reveals two types of gazes. One strives to flee

to the sky and the earth; to open landscapes which cover reality with a camouflage net of sorts; to turn to an acute experience which nearly allows the works to evade the saturated baggage of the place, yet cannot avoid the political: every now and then an army post pops up on the margins of the landscape; a flag, a shack. A closer look reveals a gaze at the routine of the Palestinian population living in these territories. Carmeli strives to observe them "from within" and introduce a stratified gaze which presents—in her very body and mode of observation—her *self* as well as the condition and voice of the *other*.

The exhibition looks at the conflicted reality, rife with history and millennia-old archaeological relics. Via representations that elicit questions about the character and nature of the place—archaeological excavations, "old" and "new," steel and stone roadblocks, Stars of David, mosques, poverty, and long empty roads that seem to lead nowhere, Carmeli endeavors to explore the complexity of the space in which she operates. She "exploits" and appropriates that which is documented by her camera, exposing an inkling of the intricacy of the conflict and the price paid by those living there. Highly conscious of its painful reflexivity, the gaze strives to draw away from the complacent realistic convention of direct representation of "facts in reality." The fact forever remains in the eye of the beholder.

Carmeli's photographs depict a state of affairs with measured silence, making one feel as though the picture was taken just a minute before or after the "decisive moment." Carmeli's connotative code involves history and culture, but her eye occasionally shifts to the denotative, to the formalistic, to a long, extending skyline, one which allows critical distance. Carmeli braids the documentary with the artistic, blending them. She indicates

the affinities between the "place" and its history, memory, scars, and the faith in a different reality.