

by Jack
Persekian

PAST TENSE

Birzeit University Museum

Open daily except Fridays and Sundays From 9 am to 5 pm

Until February 10, 2020

This project studies a selection of century-old photographs of various historic sites, urbanscapes, and landscapes in the city of Jerusalem in an attempt to understand its present-day reality. Delving into the transformation of the city's architectural and urban build-up, the project reveals layers of its reconfiguration by and for the new occupiers. It also exposes Jerusalem's reconstructed historicity and remodelled image, created to serve a claimed narrative.

Through a process of overlaying present-day photographs, taken from the very spot where historic photographs were shot, Persekian is emulating archaeologists in excavating layers of history, zooming in on specific sites, and following leads through Jerusalem's streets, buildings, walls, and hills.

Persekian's project places the act of photo documenting and archiving at the forefront of historical research and studies. It shifts our perception of old photos of Jerusalem – holy sites, souks, alleyways, and nomads – from mere romantic and nostalgic representations of “glorious” bygone times to documents that are rich with information, facts, and real stories.

The exhibition is structured around 15 areas or locations in Jerusalem, each featuring a central pair of photographs in a (freestanding) light box and contains several other images and wall text that narrate the



history and unveil the process of change that has taken place over the last century. A set of images, reproduced as transparencies in A4 size, work in pairs, representing past and present, to be examined separately and together against a hanging lightbox, just as doctors used to inspect x-rays before the introduction of digital imagery. Through these interactive techniques (the lightboxes and transparencies), the audience is actively engaged in the processes of examining the city's urbanscapes and sites across time and space, discovering and learning about its past, present, and what possibly is envisioned for its future.

In this expansive presentation, Persekian captures the intrigues of colonialism and its aftermath in Jerusalem through photo-overlays, collages, plans, renderings, expert reports, and eye-witness accounts, creating a body of work that is both visually and intellectually engaging.