

Press release

Dor Guez | *Lilies of the field*

25 January – 7 March 2020

Opening: Friday, 24 January, 2020, 6-9pm

carlier | gebauer is pleased to announce *Lilies of the Field*, a solo exhibition of new works by Dor Guez. This will be his fourth exhibition with the gallery.

Mapping connections between historical archives, contemporary photography, and performance, Dor Guez's exhibition *Lilies of the Field* mines the rich historical and mythological dimensions of Jerusalem as a site of religious and political projection. Guez's photographic series *Lilies of the Field* is comprised of luminous, mysterious prints of pressed floral and plant arrangements that the artist discovered in his research of the American Colony archives. Formed in the aftermath of the Great Chicago Fire in 1871, the American Colony was a mission of Christian Americans who left Chicago for Jerusalem in 1881, where they became active in charitable work to help the local community, establishing orphanages, soup kitchens, and medical resources for locals who suffered before and during the World Wars. The American Colony's work was not conceived to benefit any one religion, promoting interfaith dialog to such an extent that their communal residence is now known as the American Colony Hotel, where the peace talks that led to the Oslo Peace Accord were held.

The flowers that Guez's project highlights represent a diversity of flora indigenous to the holy land, and the areas surrounding the Old City. As popular souvenirs for tourists and missionaries making religious pilgrimages, the pressed flowers in themselves document different forms of devotional labor, from the work of the artisans who pressed the flowers, to those who made the journey and acquired the flower arrangements as souvenirs.

Selected by Guez from the American Colony archive, these plant-based objects are embedded with contradictions implied by a discrete piece of nature – the flower – preserved in resin, frozen like taxidermized game captured by a hunter. Equally contradictory is his use of color which belies the natural conditions of the landscape from which the plants emerged. Guez's process involves tracing the remnants of this yellow pigment, and photographing the front side of each flora arrangement, and then of the other side of its overlaying sheet, which, over the course of a century, had absorbed most of carotenoid pigment. By aligning the two images – that of the flowers, with that of the pigmented protective layer – he re-conceptualizes the images to reflect the time that has passed since they were made.

This process produced two photographic series, both photographic negatives. Describing the method of production, Guez writes, "The first, based on the flowers themselves, simulates a photogram of the flowers on a scale of 1:1, while the second, by converting the yellow to its complementary shade on the color spectrum, simulates large-scale cyanotypes. In the latter, blank areas indicate the anthocyanin-pigmented flowers of the original arrangement, which appear to fade under the residue of yellow pigment. With attention given predominantly to the pigment shed by the flowers rather than to the flowers themselves, I undermine the hierarchy between what is perceived as authentic, as opposed to fabricated."

Building on his work with the flowers, Guez has recently staged several performative lectures within the archive of the American Colony where he presented his research findings, drawing on the histories of Zionism, the Armenian quarter in Jerusalem, the American Colony itself, and Guez's Christian Palestinian Archive. Initiated in 2006 when Guez found a suitcase full of family photographs under his grandparents' bed, the Christian Palestinian Archive is a platform he established to document a minority within a minority, the Christian-Palestinian diaspora, collecting thousands of images submitted by professional and amateur photographers, material that is both historical and aesthetic, intended for use and circulation well beyond

consumption by the art world. Unique to Guez's approach is that the archive is made up of scanned images, rather than the actual photographs; once scanned the originals are returned to those who submitted them, so that the Christian Palestinian visual culture remains with its rightful owners.

Within the suitcase was collection of personal ephemera, in which Guez discovered several photographs, two of which are on view in the exhibition. Perhaps the effect of these two figurative photographs is to humanize the scientific nature of *Lilies of the Field*. One photograph features the artist's Palestinian grandmother on the street in Lod on her wedding day in 1949. The other is of his Palestinian grandfather in a composition staged in 1942 that merges the American west into a German landscape. On horseback, Guez's grandfather performs the dissonance of Palestinian culture within what will become the Zionist nation state, creating a backdrop for a false hybrid in which disparate cultural signifiers are stitched together: a cowboy poses with a shotgun on horseback in front of a painted background that was made in Germany, imported to Palestine. In contrast, the image of Guez's grandmother is only partially visible, like the faded parts of the yellowed *Lilies of the Field*. A section of the photo is peeled away, a metaphor for – and perhaps an effect of – the subsequent placeless-ness that followed 1948. As an archive – like the Christian Palestinian Archive – Guez's intention is to fill in gaps, but as art, his work leaves more open to speculation.*

Dor Guez (b. Jerusalem), lives and works in Jaffa. Dor Guez's photography, video, mixed media, performances, and essays explore the relationship between art, narrative, and memory. Interrogating personal and official accounts of the past, Guez raises questions about contemporary art's role in narrating unwritten histories and re-contextualizing visual and written documents. Since 2006, his ongoing research focuses on archival materials of the region. Guez was born into a Palestinian and Tunisian- Jewish family in Jerusalem, and now lives and works in Jaffa.

To date, eight catalogues have been published internationally about Guez's practice. Publishers include Distanz, New England Press, and A.M Qattan Foundation. Guez's work has been displayed in over thirty solo exhibitions worldwide; MAN Museum, Nuoro (2018); DEPO, Istanbul (2017); the Museum for Islamic Art, Jerusalem (2017); the Museum of Contemporary Art, Detroit (2016); the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London (2015); the Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv (2015); the Rose Art Museum, Brandeis University, Massachusetts (2013); Artpace, San Antonio (2013); the Mosaic Rooms, Centre for Contemporary Arab Culture & Art, London (2013); the KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2010); and Petach Tikva Museum of Art, (2009). He has participated in numerous group exhibitions, including shows at the Buenos Aires Museum of Modern Art (2016); the North Coast Art Triennial, Denmark (2016); Weatherspoon Art Museum, Greensboro, North Carolina (2015); the 17th, 18th, and 19th International Contemporary Art Festival Videobrasil, São Paulo (2011, 2013, 2015); the 8th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art (2014); Cleveland Institute of Art (2014); Triennale Museum, Milan (2014); Centre of Contemporary Art, Torun (2014); Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography (2014); Maxxi Museum, Rome (2013); Palais de Tokyo, Paris (2012); the 12th Istanbul Biennial (2011); and the Museum of Modern Art, Ljubljana (2010).