



STERN
-THAL

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The Huleh Project

The Huleh Project is a political picture book composed of disparate symbols and images that I have collected. The images are placed so as to form a visual allegory that critiques prevailing Zionist attitudes towards the environment, human agency, and social justice.

The book is built around an anthropological investigation of the Lake Huleh draining project and its subsequent representations in Israeli visual culture in order to speak more broadly about Zionism today.

The draining of Lake Huleh was initiated by Israel in 1948, and its successful completion in the mid 1950's was celebrated as one of the great wonders of the Zionist experiment in Palestine. The transformation of Lake Huleh into a Valley became an iconic symbol of progress; its achievement materially embodied Zionism's dream of transforming both the Jewish body, and the Israeli/Palestinian landscape.

In the 1950's a fisherman on Lake Huleh named Peter Merom began reactively documenting the regions transformation with black and white photographs. He used his camera as a weapon of resistance at a time when the Arab, Jewish, and Bedouin inhabitants of the Huleh region were otherwise powerless to resist change. Fifty years after Song Of A Dying Lake's publication, the draining project was declared an ecological catastrophe and portions of the valley were re-flooded. In 2005, Merom's photographs were recreated – and deconstructed – by a young artist named Gal Weinstein in his exhibit The Huleh Valley. Weinstein's representation reconceived the lost lake as a site of vanished beauty – subverting a potent cultural memory that freed Merom's testimony from the ideological revisionism that for years had stifled his own critique of the lakes destruction. The shift in understanding – engendered and reflected by the exhibit – reveals within Zionist mythology a dangerous mode of relating to the Israeli landscape and its inhabitants.

The book is inspired by the crisis that has permeated ideas about the future in Israel . It traces the evolution of Zionism's promised future – from its utopian incarnation, to its physical materialization, to its eventual degeneration into dystopian representations of violence, destruction, and calamity. The book departs from a pivotal question that preoccupies many people in the world today: Can Israel survive? Furthermore, how can the enchantment of Israel's early years be revived in the present?



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The Huleh Project

A coffee
table book
about art
and cultural
memory
in Israel

