

Mapping the Wound: Feminine Gestures of Empathy and Healing

Ariane Littman

As a woman artist and as a mother learning to live in a country with relapse of violence, wars, and temporary truces never to be taken for granted, I often reflected on the meaning of art and wondered if it was a luxury no one really needed except for a few aesthetes. Over the years, yearning for a more compassionate Terra Mater (Motherland), I started to deconstruct maps to heal them anew, cutting and stitching new imaginary borders and dressing them in gauze. Such acts of dressing reminded me of the role of women as nurses in hospitals and on battle fields while my sewing performances reminded me of those mythical women weaving alternative fates.

I was born and raised in Switzerland as a British citizen, speaking both French and English. At a young age I was confronted with antisemitism and had to learn to bear a fractured identity. On my maternal side, I carried the expulsion of the Jewish community from Egypt in 1956, and on my paternal side, I carried the Shoah, which my Polish grandparents escaped by emigrating to the USA in the 1920s. At 18, I left all that I knew for a country at war, where my religion would not be a stain yet where I once more became a “foreigner”, a stranger who did not completely belong. Emigrating alone to Israel in October 1981 to study Middle Eastern Studies and International Relations at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, barely speaking Hebrew, I lived through my first traumatic war, the 1982 Lebanon War. Ten years later, when I graduated from the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in 1991, I faced my two-year old daughter with a gas mask during the Gulf War. Witnessing the recurring violence resulting from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, I started to question in my art this complex and painful reality. During the Second Intifada of the early 2000s, and following a suicide bombing at my brother-in-law's café, which left many dead and wounded, I left my studio, eager to grasp the violence of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Crossing borders back and forth as a freelance news-photographer, bearing witness and documenting checkpoints, barrier walls, and new borders, I created a body of works entitled Border Land.

But it was more specifically following the Second Lebanon War (2006) and Operation Cast Lead in Gaza (2008–2009) that I felt the urge to find my personal way to express the wounds resulting from the “Disasters of War” in this part of the world in the 21st century. Though I had already used plastered bandages on ‘Closure Maps’ of Jerusalem printed by the OCHA Humanitarian Information Centre during a performance in 2004, it was the accident in which my nine-year-old daughter suffered third-degree burns, skin grafts, and daily dressing for a year, that triggered my obsessive use of gauze bandages in my artwork. At home I dressed my daughter's wounds while in the studio I dressed ‘wounded’ cartographic maps of Jerusalem. The map was her body and vice versa: Wounded Land, Grafted Land, and Shredded Land were all

series of maps that both echoed her wounded body and the wounded land around me. In my studio, I felt less helpless as I became the surgeon ‘operating’ and ‘healing’ cartographic maps: cutting, stitching, and dressing in gauze and plaster, erasing and removing borders, checkpoints, and hegemonic power.

In the Grafted Land series of maps started in 2015, disputed areas are detached from the body of the map then covered in gauze and stitched with a green thread, this surgical procedure leaving red stains and scars over the shattered body of the new map. While excising segments from the mother map, I realized that the disputed area designated as Judea and Samaria on Mandatory Maps of Palestine or the West Bank following its occupation by Jordan in 1948 or the Occupied Territories since 1967, bore an uncanny resemblance to a human embryo. The map had become a Motherland who bore in its midst an unborn embryo, desired by two peoples engaged in a deadly fight after the fall of the Ottoman Empire in 1919 but most fiercely following the end of the British Mandate in Palestine in May 1948.

My most ambitious project to date is an ongoing map, Wounded Land, started during the pandemic bearing four overlapping maps: a road map of the Holy Land printed by Freytag and Berndt (2016), the “Traffic Light Map” showing the changing colors of COVID-19 morbidity during the pandemic, the 2020–2021 “Black Flag Protest” map against the government of P.M. Netanyahu, and the National Emergency Portal Map of missiles shot into Israeli territory and riots occurring in mixed Arab and Jewish cities during the Gaza conflict between Hamas and Israel in May 2021.

In alternance with my wounded maps, since 2010, I have been performing and creating short films of dressing wounds with gauze in meaningful historical places across the country. This is a different way of creating a different map, this time through the slow process of mapping liminal spaces—the spaces of sometimes invisible and forgotten wounds that nonetheless remain present in the memory of the landscape, the city, the body, and the psyche.

— Ariane Littman

Born in Switzerland, **Ariane Littman** is an interdisciplinary artist working in Jerusalem, holding an MFA in Fine Arts from the Bezalel Academy of Arts and Design and an MA in Art and Aesthetics from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Between 1991 and 1994, she was assistant curator at the Department of International Contemporary Art at the Israel Museum, and she has been teaching since 1998 in the DAN department of Creative Human Design at Hadassah College in Jerusalem. Inspired by maps for over twenty years, her interest in borders was enhanced while covering major national events after she started working as a freelance news photographer between the years 2002 and 2008. Littman's work has been featured in academic conferences, workshops, film festivals, and art exhibitions in Israel and beyond.

For further information:
<http://ariane-littman.com>





Wounded Map (2020-2021) (with details)

Map, gauze bandages, fabric, plaster, ink, thread, and fabric. 340 x 170 cm.
Based on the Holy Land "Road Map of Israel-Palestine 1:150,000" printed by Freytag & Berndt (2016), the Corona "Traffic Light Map" of the National Emergency Portal (2020-21), "The Black Flag Protest Map" (2020-21), and the "National Emergency Portal" during the Israel-Hamas conflict (2021).
Photos: Udi Katzman.



Grafted Land (2016-2017)

Fragments of map, gauze bandages, plaster, fabric, red pigments, and green thread. 165 x 135 cm.
Based on Map of the Holy Land: Palestine & Israel, printed by the Palestine Mapping Center in Bethlehem (2010).
Photo: Avi Hai.



Red Embryo (2023)
Map, gauze bandages, fabric, plaster, red ink, and thread. 140 x 99 cm.
Photo: Michael Amar.



Erasure (2006)
Performance at the Bloomfield Science Museum, Jerusalem, with projected map of Jerusalem from 1947.
Photos: Oded Antman.



Virgin of Israel (2023)
Installation: Red Embryo and Gauze Dress (dress in collaboration with Design Studio Lemberg).
Photo: Michael Amar.



The Artist and Her Muse (2020)
Wet Plate Collodion. 80 x 70 cm.
Photo: Edward Kaprov.



Operating on an OCHA closure map of Jerusalem (2004)
Still from the film *DADA-JERUSALEM* (2014).
Photo: David Atzmi.



Shredded Land (2010)
Paper mache, series of 12 maps.
55 x 64 cm.
Photos: Udi Katzman.



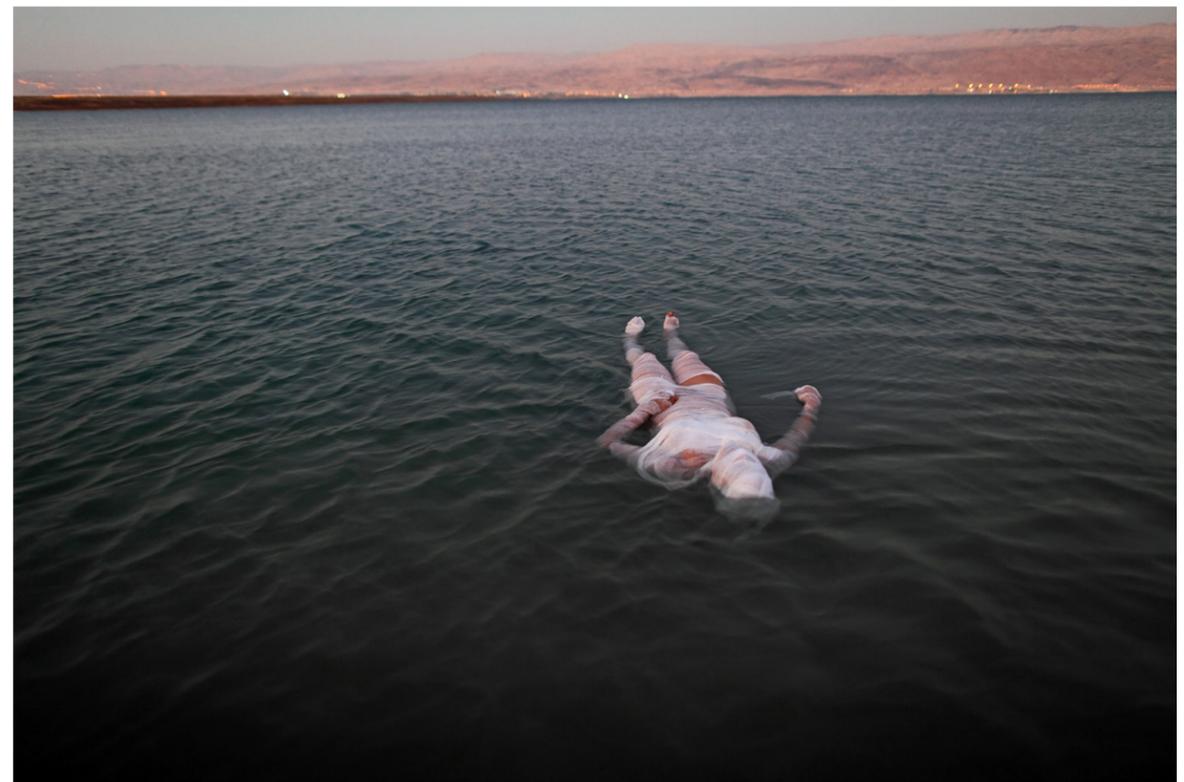
Shredded Land, Index (2010).
Paper mache.
Photo: Udi Katzman.



The Green Thread (2011)
Performance at the Damascus Gate in Jerusalem Old City.
Photo: Yair Tsriker.



Wounded Map of Jerusalem (2009)
Fabric, fragments of map, gauze bandages, plaster, and green thread. 73 X 89 cm.
Photo: Udi Katzman.



Top: *The Muse* (2020)
Performance at Metsuke Dragot, Judean Desert.
Photo: Avgar Idan.

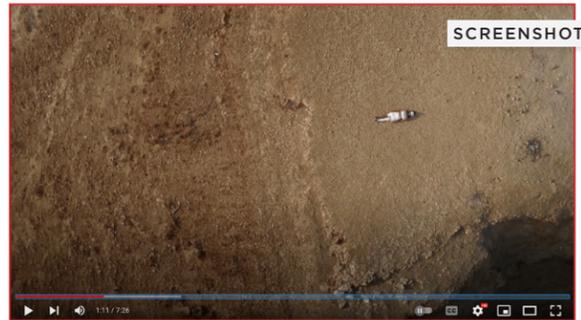
Bottom: *The Olive Tree* (2011)
Performance at the Hizme Checkpoint, Jerusalem.
Photo: Rina Castelnuevo.

Top: *After The Watchman* (2018)
Performance at Alexander Zaïd Monument, Jezreel Valley.
Photo: Gal Mosenson.

Bottom: *Sea of Death* (2010)
Performance at the Dead Sea.
Photo: Jim Hollander.

Artist Videos

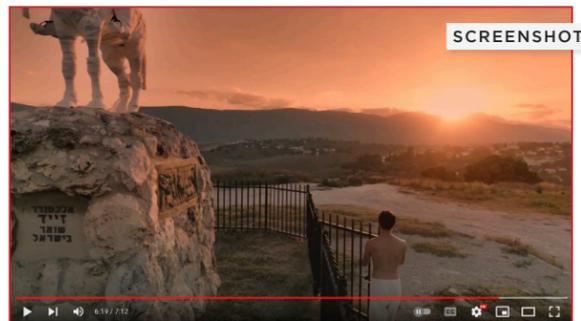
A selection of videos featuring Littman's artwork and performances available on her YouTube channel:



The Muse (2021) (7 min., 27 sec.):
https://youtu.be/Na_8HOIhz1k



The Olive Tree (2012) (12 min., 56 sec.)
https://youtu.be/j_iBjcbuzfs



After the Watchman (2018) (7 min., 37 sec.)
<https://youtu.be/gdi2MKiqUhg>



Border Land - Alternative Ways of Mapping Jerusalem (2012) (29 min., 20 sec.):
<https://youtu.be/IAMujZWIXG4>



DADA-JERUSALEM (2014) (6 min., 11 sec.)
<https://youtu.be/VwahnbyWro>



Sea of Death (2010) (9 min., 19 sec.)
<https://youtu.be/U1axF9NFGLY>