

The inconceivable simply is

Lihie Talmor

Intimacy, parallel lives. Fear is part of responsibility.

L.T.

The experience that gave birth to the series *The inconceivable simply is* was a trip I took in 2003 to the concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau, and to Poland more broadly, as part of a group of Jewish Israelis, Muslim Palestinians, and Christian Palestinians. The etchings are based on images from my personal travel memoir, photographic testimonies and recordings, photographs of historical sites, and personal memories of other times.

In trying to establish the concept of the work, I needed distance from the experience. I got it through various tactics that mediated between the horror of Auschwitz and the final lithographs. I attacked the topic from unexpected angles, sudden swerves in meaning: instead of using images taken at the time or place “represented,” I used images alien to the lived experience: some authored by me (but in other moments), others “borrowed,” taken by others, about other lives. Nevertheless, several prints of the series do represent moments or scenes of the “real” of Auschwitz, as it was seen and lived by myself and my trip mates. The function of these images is to embody—to call the attention to—the ordinary, the indifferent, the amoral, that always surrounds horror.

For example, “*House in movement on the way to the ramp*” was a home whose inhabitants regularly watched the people who arrived at the camp after their excruciating journeys. Those houses are still there. I saw them sixty years later. My knowledge of their past makes images, and then these same images modify the original feelings, thoughts, ideas which made them.

In her catalog essay *"In quest of place: memories of a nomad"*, curator Maria Elena Ramos quotes the Columbian researcher Jaime Cerón: "For many contemporary producers, the artistic act takes on the nature of a wound that marks a particular place, a sign of loss. In this way, the work relocates this absence in a physical dimension, visible and exterior."¹

Ramos goes on: "In these works of Talmor's, this *labor* often exposes memory to be a flaying, a trauma." She quotes the Chilean philosopher Pablo Oyarzún: "Trauma signifies wound, infringement. ... In an immediate temporal sense, trauma is that past which keeps happening. But at the same time, it is that which never stops belonging to the past."²

"Nor does trauma belong exclusively to the present," Ramos states, "for it sustains itself precisely in the intermediate ambience of the sequel, that other structure of feeling that discharges, and keeps discharging, the past in the actual."

I chose to name each print individually. Some of the titles are literal descriptions of places we saw along the way. Others allude to the source of the image: a person, a non-place. In their totality, the images make up the invented itinerary of a voyage, a passage, a peregrination.³

According to Marianne Hirsch, author of *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust*:

"Postmemory" describes the relationship that the "generation after" bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.⁴

This is the best way I can explain the problem, and the process,
that produced this series.

¹ María Elena Ramos. In quest of place: memories of a nomad. Catalog of the exhibition MAKOM, Lihie Talmor, Centro de arte Los Galpones, Caracas, Venezuela, 2012, P.9. (translated to the English by Ruti Talmor). Jaime Cerón. Contrabando y piratería en la construcción de identidades. In: *Una teoría del arte desde América Latina*. Turner Publishing and Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, MEIAC, Badajoz-Madrid. 2011. P. 66.

² Pablo Oyarzún. La cifra de lo estético: historia y categorías en el arte latinoamericano. In: *Una teoría del arte desde América Latina*. Turner Publishing and Museo Extremeño e Iberoamericano de Arte Contemporáneo, MEIAC, Badajoz-Madrid. 2011. P.1.

³ See the appended list: titles and annotations.

⁴ Interview with Marianne Hirsch. *Columbia University Press Blog*, October 10, 2012.