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There Goes The Neighborhood

Barry Frydlender documents the view outside his studio at the border of Tel Aviv and Jaffa, and offers a comment on gentrification.

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'Yaffo-Tel Aviv," the latest exhibit of work by the contemporary Israeli photographer Barry Frydlender, is comprised of only eight photographs taken from only one vantage point — his studio's window.

Despite the small number of prints and the limited vantage, this show is not small at all; it tells the story of urban expansion on the Tel Aviv-Jaffa seam between the years of 1998 and 2014, the length of time the artist spent in the area so far.

Frydlender's window looks out at the point where Jaffa and Tel Aviv were joined as one city, a union that dates back to 1950, just two years after Israel's year of independence. With these photographs, Frydlender takes an almost voyeuristic approach to documenting his neighborhood, capturing the seemingly everyday life outside his studio.

The work is rooted in Frydlender's immediate environs; the same buildings appear again and again. The limited scope of the photographs allows us to see the same space recast in a new light over time, both in terms of time of day and in years gone by. For example, an almost derelict building in "Composite Horizon" and in "Raid," takes on an air of mystery in "Rehearsal," thanks to a glowing red sunset. The same building is later transformed with fresh paint, rooftop shrubbery and brilliant sunlight in "Noach," a print from this year. While we usually accept photography as truth, what we find in Frydlender's large-scale photographs is a deception. And Frydlender, a former photojournalist, is an intentional deceiver. Using digital SLR cameras, he takes hundreds of shots (between 50 and 400 by his estimation), which he digitally stitches together on his computer using Photoshop. Each

individual photograph becomes part of a bigger one. Through careful production work, Frydlender is able to create situations and embellish narratives. Using a medium we instinctually trust to produce a pictorial replica of an actual object or occurrence, he shapes our perception of a static image as reflecting a single moment in time.
It is a more fulfilling gallery visit if you take time with these photographs and look closely. Though many of his constructions are seamless and his hand is not easily visible, Frydlender's technique is especially apparent in three pictures: "Flood," "Raid" and "Composite Horizon."

"Flood" shows the street near his studio deluged. Water accumulates on a low rooftop, in the foreground and people on the sidewalk hold umbrellas and wear raincoats. Looking closely, however, we see repeated figures and notice that at the upper left of the picture, it does not appear to be raining. It is brighter and pigeons rest serenely on a balcony. The difference in weather conditions, which is not immediately evident, gives the photograph a surrealist quality, almost like a Magritte painting.

"Raid" depicts a frenzied scene of police officers wielding guns and about to storm the same apartment building seen in "Flood" and in other photographs in the series. "Raid" too, when observed closely, shows Frydlender's composition technique; the same people are seen over and over again throughout the piece. The effect of this multiplication is at first jarring here; the raid seems quite serious with a swarm of armed forces on the scene. When we realize that some are duplicated, we can question the gravity of the situation.
Tel Aviv's expansion and southern encroachment into Jaffa is seen throughout the photographs. Towers and high-rises crop up in the photographs as the years go by; cranes loom in many of the pictures, signaling more building to come.

"Composite Horizon (180 degrees)" is the oldest photograph in the series, and it shows the skyline as it was in 1998. It is in a long format with jagged edges, its components visibly assembled like patchwork. By the time Frydlender shot "Falling Bricks" in 2013, additional tall buildings had sprung up.

The tone in the exhibition — especially in the catalogue essays — sees the expansion of Tel Aviv into Jaffa critically. As Sharon Rotbart writes in her essay, "Yaffo-Tel Aviv: War and Towers," "Frydlender's photographs tell us a broader tale, a tale of two cities, one a predator the other a prey."

The show's title, "Yaffo-Tel Aviv," "reflects the political situation [of the location]. The historical Jaffa, [what] the Palestinians [call] 'Bride of the Sea,' which its population fled

after 1948, is now completing a second phase of changes, and through modern gentrification process has become Yaffo. The Arab population finds it too expensive for them to live [there]," remarked Frydlender in an email. "I am saddened by the fact that the Jaffa as I knew it has disappeared, turned into a place for the wealthy and for tourists instead of a place where the coexistence of Palestinians and Israelis would be demonstrated. It could be a model for the future," he mused. "All this can be read from the works."

"Yaffo-Tel Aviv" runs through June 21 at the Andrea Meislin Gallery, 534 W. 24th St.andreameislin.com.

(L) Raid, 2003 *(R) Glimmer*, 2004