

# UNDYING CITIES:

Narratives of Erasure and Liberation

**Benji Boyadgian**

## Fire

**2010-2014. paintings and drawings installation, different sizes.**  
**2024. Video, 8 minutes 50 seconds.**

For over a decade, I have been working on 'The Temporary Ruin', in which I have been documenting Wadi el-Shami before it vanishes, a sort of preemptive act of surface archaeology. Situated between Jerusalem and Bethlehem on the hillsides of Jabal Abu Ghneim, this valley is squeezed between the 1948 Armistice line and the Israeli separation wall, in territory illegally occupied in 1967 by Israel under international law. In 1996, the deforestation of Jabal Abu Ghneim started and paved the way for the construction of the southeastern Jerusalem settlement of Homat Shmuel. Since its foundations were poured at the turn of the 21st century, the settlement has not stopped expanding into a potpourri of real estate, urban sprawl, and occupation. In the last decades, the occupation has emptied the valley of its legal owners through land-grab policies of this extractivist system. Furthermore, a surge of settler pyromaniac activity has set the valley ablaze several times. The first fire in the valley occurred a decade ago, and over the last years the blazes have multiplied, leaving hundreds of olive trees charred as a consequence.

The work presents a video of one of the fires that took place in the valley in May 2021. A still-long shot of the burning valley brings forth the temporality of the event for the totality of the duration of the video. Postmortem footage of the ravaged landscape appears and disappears like ghostly figures in the smoke of the blaze. The event and its aftermath converge, suggesting a play of temporalities. In addition to the video are a series of water-based paintings and drawings of the valley that I produced between 2010 and 2014. These paintings offer a glimpse of the landscape prior to this pyromaniac act, furthering the proposition of this multimedia installation to conceptualize time.



## About the Artist

Born in Jerusalem in 1983, he studied architecture at the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture in Paris-La Villette, specialising in urban sociology in post-conflict areas. Through his research-based projects, Boyadgian explores themes around perception, heritage, territory, architecture, and landscape, and uses multimedia, employing drawing and painting as primary tools. He has held numerous solo exhibitions and participated in a number of group exhibitions, including: "The Jerusalem Show IX: Jerusalem - Actual and Possible", "Intersections", "Aqua: Contemporary Artists and Water Issues", the 13th Sharjah Biennial. Outdoor exhibitions: "Shifting Ground", "Stand Art", "Around the Circle", "Discord", "The Jerusalem Show VIII: Before and After Origins", "They Promised Us a School, They Promised Us a Swimming Pool", and many others.