

# UNDYING CITIES:

Narratives of Erasure and Liberation

## Raouf Haj Yahia

### At an Arm's Length from the City's Debris

2024. Video, 5 minutes 20 seconds.

Audio: Muqata'a: Album, Dubt Al Ghubar -"Asfal Masloob".

Jerusalem, often understood as a living archive, holds within it architectural relics that bear the weight of its war-torn history. These silent spaces conceal the echoes of past conflicts behind their walls, embodying the city's stark military legacy like an unspoken autobiography. They stand as unforgettable markers, scars etched into the city's weary body, preserving images that survived the flames of war to persist in moments of fleeting peace.

Despite its iconic status, Jerusalem is currently enduring one of its darkest historical periods. As the genocidal war in Gaza rages on, the process of depopulating the Holy City is accelerating, stripping it of its centuries-old identity. This ongoing transformation results in a fragmented urban landscape, where the remnants of political and military failures are stacked like distorted limbs. It creates an illusion of normalcy—where one can be both a Jerusalemite and not a Jerusalemite at the same time, residing on the outskirts of the city, within a maze of residential forests, connected yet disconnected by rigid networks of roads and walls.

This work examines the geography of the newly constructed architectural city and its relationship to historical structures with sovereign significance. It navigates through urban complexities within military frameworks and political boundaries, aiming to expose the slow, daily rituals of displacement. It serves as a journey through the layered legacy of colonialism, dispossession, and the erosion of space and basic rights, recounting the Palestinian experience of death and exile. As Jerusalem's peripheries expand and drift further from its center, the city's reality becomes increasingly enveloped in a dystopian world, where displacement and alienation are felt at every turn.



### About the Artist

Born in Taybeh, Haj Yahia is a visual artist who employs a diverse range of visual media including photography, video and conceptual art. His works often address themes that question patterns of visual representation in the Palestinian context. He contributed significantly to publications discussing the presence and role of photography, as a medium, within the local context. He also participates in a series of lectures on the role of archiving in contemporary Palestinian art. Haj Yahia has worked as a lecturer at Birzeit University, Dar Al-Kalima University, and the Community College of Art - Musrara. Currently, he teaches at the Arab American University. His artistic portfolio includes a variety of projects, such as "A Blur (Ghabash)", "Gaza Express", "Square Meter", "Uncle Dayton's Stories", and "I Will Let the Dust Accumulate".