

# UNDYING CITIES:

## Narratives of Erasure and Liberation

**Lobna Alsana**

### **Sand in my Eyes**

**2023. Embroidery and Video, 120\*70 cm.**

Bir Al-Sabi often feels absent from the broader Palestinian political and social landscape. Yet, when I moved to Jerusalem, my accent constantly reminded people that this region is not just alive, but thriving. The people of Bir Al-Sabi, like all Palestinians, pay the price for their existence on this land. There is a silent but fierce battle in the south—a battle for the right to live on their land without question. The occupation relentlessly erases parts of this continuity and history, day by day.

I grew up in the village of Laqiya, where my grandfather, Amer, shared our family history. In one of Clinton Bailey's recordings, he recounted: "We came from the land of Shammar and have lands in Sharia, near Gaza. These were the first lands occupied during the Nakba of Bir Al-Sabi," a term used by Bedouins to refer to their own Nakba.

As an architect, my work has often been driven by deep fear: the terror of seeing our existence and history erased without notice. This fear spurred me to document every village I visited, in every way possible. Through this process, I came to know all the villages and became the architect for many of the unrecognized ones that still exist today.

Even before October 7th, in what has become a year of genocide, the state of terrorism has not stopped the demolitions of houses in Bedouin villages. Since the war began, entire neighborhoods in seven Bedouin villages—Wadi al-Khalil, Arara, Umm Mitnan, Sa'wa, Umm Batin, Awjan, and Umm al-Badoun—have been destroyed, with more we may not even know of. Surveillance drones hover over homes, marking them for demolition. Some houses have stood for 40 years, others were built with legal approval, yet the punishment remains the same: the colonizer's relentless assault on those who know no other land.

In my work, *Sand in my Eyes*, I use thread and needle to reverse the Western "panopticon" model of surveillance, traditionally symbolizing control by the authorities. Here, we, the Palestinians, become the observers, watching the crimes of the occupier—fearful, yet steadfast in our commitment to the truth. This embroidery was inspired by the recurring image of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, often seen in Palestinian homes as a symbol of our struggle and hope for justice. In my piece, however, the image of Al-Aqsa is replaced by that of a mass prison cell with surveillance towers. I intentionally leave a large empty space within the cell to represent the notion that the observer is, in fact, also being observed.



### **About the Artist**

A Bedouin architect and artist from southern Palestine. Her artistic practice is based on answering social questions using architectural design and various artistic methods, including film, sculpture, maps and curating exhibitions. She holds a BA in Architecture from Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem, where she was awarded the 2022 Azrieli Prize for Architecture. As a founding member of the Sada art movement, a Jerusalem-based initiative that combines art and architecture as tools to address the challenges of life under occupation, Alsana' has curated the movement's exhibitions and is now a key figure in the Regional Council for the UnrecognizeD/undocumented Bedouin Villages in the Naqab, where she leads and develops new approaches to local mapping and proposes new architectural solutions.