

A Date Palm Against the Re-Deportation of Parables, or Europe's Palestine Monument

Robert Yerachmiel Sniderman

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Joanna Rajkowska's *Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue* (2002) is a fifteen metre palm tree in the centre of Warsaw. In the first substantial piece of writing on the work, Robert Yerachmiel Sniderman uses deftly crafted prose and citation to weave together its multiple genealogies and lives. Written from the context of Israel's ongoing genocidal war, Yerachmiel Sniderman recasts *Greetings* as Europe's monument to Palestine.

For Nelly. For Gaza's children. For Rosa.

*Me, a palm tree? I'm the steel that wounds it, and the terrifying moon that
sacrifices it. I can't bear my exile any longer.*

– Zakaria Mohammed¹

1. Zakaria Mohammed, 'January 2' (trans. Lena Khalaf Tuffaha), *Poetry Foundation*, 11 June 2024, poetryfoundation.org.

*What I'm saying at this moment is not being said by me
But is dug from the ground like grains of petrified wheat.*

– Osip Mandelstam²

2. Ralph Dutli, *Osip Mandelstam: A Biography* (trans. Ben Fowles), London: Verso Books, 2023.

*To our European friends, I never ever want to hear you lecture us on human
rights or international law again. And I mean that.*

– Reverend Dr. Munther Isaac³

3. Munther Isaac, 'Munther Isaac Sermon in the Liturgy of Lament: Chirst in the Rubble', YouTube, 23 December 2023, youtube.com.

The confusion is monumental. The confusion is the monument.

– Dot Devota⁴

4. Dot Devota, 'Race Riot at

East St. Louis July 2, 1917',
Poetry Foundation, 10 June
2024, poetryfoundation.org.

Dear world,

In short, we are the culmination of your deep and brutal grief.

We are your salt lakes.

– Hind Joudah⁵

But it's just my eye.

– Krystyna Budnicka/Hena Kuczer⁶

5. Hind Joudah, 'February 25, 2024', *Arablit Quarterly*, (*Gaza! Gaza! Gaza!*), vol. 6, no. 1, season 1, 2024, p. 79.

6. Joanna Rajkowska, unpublished interview with the author, 23 September 2023.

7. Naomi Klein and David Naimon, 'Between the Covers Naomi Klein Interview – Part Two', Tin House, 11 December 2023, tinhouse.com.

8. 'Genesis 18:27', Sefaria, sefaria.org.

9. Joanna Rajkowska, unpublished interview with the author, 4 May 2024.

10. Rajkowska, unpublished interview, 23 September 2023.

11. Rajkowska, unpublished interview, 4 May 2024.

12. See 'March '68. Historical facts', POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, polin.pl.

13. See Letta Tayler, 'Two Years on, Poland's Abortion Crackdowns and the Rule of

I think when ideas are put down by force as opposed to actually defeated because they fail, when they're just crushed, they can come back. They're seeds.

– Naomi Klein⁷

Avraham spoke up, saying, Here I venture to speak to my Sovereign, I who am but dust and ashes:

– Genesis 18:27⁸

But Robert, the palm tree is projected into the future.

– Joanna Rajkowska⁹

1. seeds

X

I will tell this story or tell it again.

Because I was asked to write, definitively, if subjectively, at this hour, on what was, after it, and became swiftly, *anything but art*,¹⁰ and was called, as I have heard, not named, *Warsaw's palm* or *the palm* or *the palm tree*: an artwork, more often understood, if not in language, to be, in feeling, an *anti-monument*, still, a woman-tree, *and* a *Holocaust monument*, as my cousins' cousin, without knowing much about art or political violence, responded to me at a seder, but unlike *any other we* know, I should have told him, anywhere, somehow; *or*, if not, and *definitely never*, at least, rooted there-in, genuinely so, *and* a central gathering place and *major prop*¹¹ for decades of what we could well call a spectrum of anti-fascist gestures, nests, disguises, in a city Nazism all but entirely razed, incinerated, incarcerated, and displaced; and since which, regimes have tried, at times furiously, to order, in ethnosectarian demolitions, as in 1968,¹² in femicidal lawfare, as in 2020,¹³

and not without resistance, you see, *the palm*, and yesterday, in Białowieża Forest;¹⁴ a destruction myth in the city, a foundation; *the palm*, humus in the unrested.

The oak forest is arrhythmia.



Jerusalem Avenue, 2001. Photo Joanna Rajkowska

X

At this hour, I hear myself talking to someone. When will our rapid whispering end?

Two meanings – call them, here, in Warsaw, at the crossing of Nowy Świat (New World) and Aleje Jerozolimskie (Jerusalem Avenue), *resistances to* and *forces* – of the word *draft*, in the only language I write, soothe my deepest fears, my small form, and metaphysical nosebleed.

I am smaller than my five-year-old daughter, one of the million children to whom I dedicate this text, not because she is unafraid and not because she is less corrupted, so to speak, by the assassination of the Earth's land and environmental defenders in Atlanta, in Columbia, in India, in The Philippines;¹⁵ daily school massacres in kindergartens, elementary schools, and high schools across the State, the planet's arsenal, in which we live;¹⁶ the seventy thousand tons of bombs that have destroyed Gaza;¹⁷ the floods, forest fires, deportations, droughts, which ferment with enclosure, I think I am beginning to understand, as we age alongside others, and calcify, amputate, slice the tongue of the trajectories and genealogies of love. I am smaller than Nelly because she lives with visceral hope. Its language is her existence. As it is Hind Rajab's existence *z"l*, one of the million children to whom I dedicate this text, who was twenty-three months older than Nelly when she was murdered last January, fleeing, trapped with five relatives' bodies, alive with her cousin, in a car, north from Gaza City, stilled, within an enclosure, on the phone with the Palestinian Red Crescent within an enclosure within an enclosure, not unlike two million others, there, in a macro- or micro-cosmic sense, recording their destruction, in real time, in letters to us, since what was to me, and many, the blinding flash of the 7 October attack and massacres, and before.¹⁸

Law', Human Rights Watch, 22 October 2022, [hrw.org](https://www.hrw.org).

14. See, for example, Brenda Chávez and Hanna Jarzabek, 'Refugees on the Belarus-Poland Migration Route Come up Against a Steel Wall and the Wilds of the Białowieża Forest', Equal Times, 19 May 2023, [equaltimes.org](https://www.equaltimes.org).

15. 'Global Witness Annual Defenders Report 2023/2024: Missing Voices: The violent erasure of land and environmental defenders', Global Witness, 10 September 2024, [globalwitness.org](https://www.globalwitness.org).

16. See, for example, David Riedman, 'How Many School Shootings? All Incidents From 1966–Present', K-12 School Shooting Database, 2025, [k12ssdb.org](https://www.k12ssdb.org).

17. Alia Chughtai, 'One Year of Israel's War on Gaza – by the numbers', Al Jazeera, 8 October 2024, [aljazeera.com](https://www.aljazeera.com).

18. Forensic Architecture et al., 'The Killing of Hind Rajab', Forensic Architecture, 21 June



Joanna Rajkowska, *Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue* (2002), 9 February 2015, 2:30pm

How long before? How many centuries? How many hours? And from each direction?
How many days? Who is asking, because I don't see the end, because I am small,
because I see the beginning?

And the immeasurable courage of medics en route to Hind's immeasurable courage,
stilled, also, near her, also, murdered. The language of hope, its viscosity, if I can
say, from deep up here, from far out and behind, and from way in down there, is
Hind's existence, the theft of which, among at least sixteen thousand others, and
many more, buried in ruins, emits the truth of the Gaza genocide. If I have anything,
I have my place in this viscosity, every moment another word, another act, unto my
child, who gets raging, who gets tearful, who gets hungry, who gets sleepy, who
gets wise, who gets thirsty, who gets empathetic, who gets laughing fits, who gets
returned, who gets greed, who gets remembering, who gets distrusted, who gets
confused, who gets calling me in the night for water.

I remember, over the phone, several years ago, Joanna Rajkowska, the artist who
created and emplaced the palm, spoke of interacting with a new generation of
politicized artists in Poland, those perhaps near my age and tendencies, at a time
when the democratic institutions of the State had been sabotaged by judicial
coups,¹⁹ Polish fascists marched in great numbers through Warsaw,²⁰ abortion in
almost all cases had been banned, research implicating ethnic Poles in crimes of the
Holocaust was criminalized,²¹ and European Union asylum laws were chronically
violated, exploiting the primeval Białowieża Forest on the Belarusian border to
murder asylum seekers by attrition. Supporting their intensity and commitment,
Joanna fretted over a constraint in their approach, where the anxious focus on an
exact materialization of a politics elides the *primal ignorance and helplessness*
*that makes it possible to become an artist.*²²

19. See, for example, Christian Davies and Jennifer Rankin, "“Declaration of war”: Polish row over judicial independence escalates", *The Guardian*, 28 January 2020, theguardian.com.

20. See, for example, Vanessa Gera, 'Police Criticized for Role at Nationalist March in Warsaw', AP News, 12 November 2022, apnews.com.

21. See, for example, Masha Gessen. 'The Historians Under Attack for Exploring Poland's Role in the Holocaust', *The New Yorker*, 26 March. 2021, newyorker.com.

22. Joanna Rajkowska, *Where*

She pleaded, *You need to go somewhere, stand there, and feel what is happening in your body.*²³

2. just my eye

X

The first resistance to and force of the word *draft*, in my mind, is the attempt to create, and what this attempt materializes before the created thing is actualized and given up and out (to no one or to others), such as right now, these very thoughts you read, written in the margins of a tan-colored biography on Martin Luther, titled *Luther*, printed in Munich in 1943, at which time, in Warsaw, that April, two armed Jewish fronts — the Leftist Yidishe Kamf Organizatsie of Bundists (anti-Zionist) and Socialist Zionists, and the fascist Revisionist-Zionist Yidishe Militerishe Fareynikung — incarcerated, starving, behind ghetto walls, in an apartheid city, of Aryan and Jew, portending the auto-destruction of Europe, amidst the last deportations to Treblinka concentration camp, began to fight their occupiers and mass murderers. In counter-response, the Nazis burned the entire ghetto *akin to a huge bloodshot eye.*²⁴

I found this book *Luther* beside two other books in a box on the stone windowsill of a Catholic church next to Nelly's kindergarten in Prenzlauer Berg, while we were staying in Berlin, last September, and decided then to take notes in its margins. There were two or three other books on the church's windowsill, and I intuited, upon approaching the cardboard box, that one of them would be written by Martin Luther, someone I had long intended to face, which turned out to be false and near the truth. Within the framework of Luther's revolutionary influence on Christianity, founding Protestantism in what is known as the Reformation, he wrote two persecutory books, one of which endorsed and encouraged the ruthless suppression and mass killing of one hundred thousand revolting German peasants and the other a fundament of the Nazi project and anti-Judaism at large: *Wider die Mordischen und Reubischen Rotten der Bawren* in 1525 (Against the Murderous, Thieving Hordes of Peasants) and *Von den Juden und iren Lügen* in 1543 (On the Jews and Their Lies). The intersection of these works and its afterlife in this present continues to beckon my attention.

Luther is now beginning to crumble and fill with my writing, some of the earliest of which I created during last year's holy days of Teshuva in Warsaw two weeks before 7 October, such as the above-mentioned phrase – *akin to a huge bloodshot eye* – transcribed when standing, mesmerized, some distance from Joanna's light box, *We live day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute* (*The Eye of Krystyna Budnicka/Hena Kuczer*) (2023) in the exhibition, 'Around Us a Sea of Fire. The Fate of Jewish Civilians During the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising'. *We live day by day...* is a 160:1 macro-scale photograph of the eye of Krystyna Budnicka, commissioned by the POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews for the eightieth anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Budnicka, born and incarcerated by the Nazis as Hena Kuczer, is a lifelong Warsaw resident, retired schoolteacher, *and the only known survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising still alive as of this moment.*²⁵

the Beast is Buried, London:
Zero Books, 2013.

23. Joanna Rajkowska, unpublished interview with the author, April 2022.

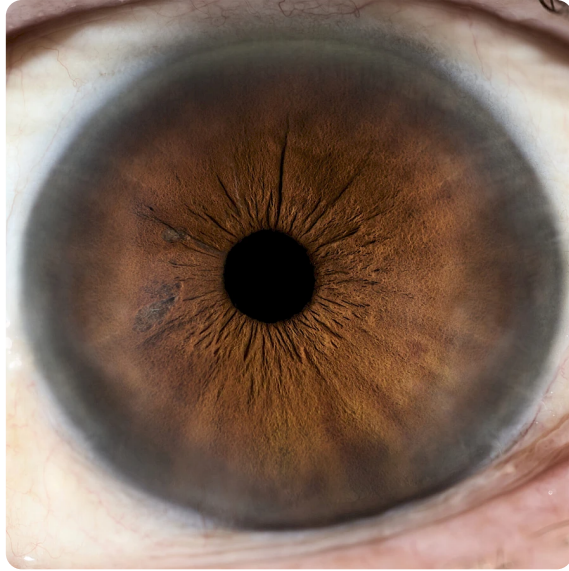
24. 'Around Us a Sea of Fire. The Fate of Jewish Civilians During the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising', POLIN Museum of the History of Polish Jews, Warsaw, 18 April 2023 – 8 January 2024.

25. Joanna Rajkowska, 'We Live Day by Day, Hour by Hour,

When I showed the photograph to the curator and philosopher Almut Shulamit Bruckstein Çoruh, she muttered to herself, *Shahid... the witness. Shahid*, I think I had known, more often from Arabic is translated as *martyr*, but Shulamit clarified that as in Hebrew this meaning is bound to and emerges from *witness*. When I saw Budnicka's eye – *pupil, iris, sclera and eyelids*²⁶ – before then, in the light box, in the exhibition, without yet Shulamit's word, here is what I knew.

jkowska.com.

26. Ibid.



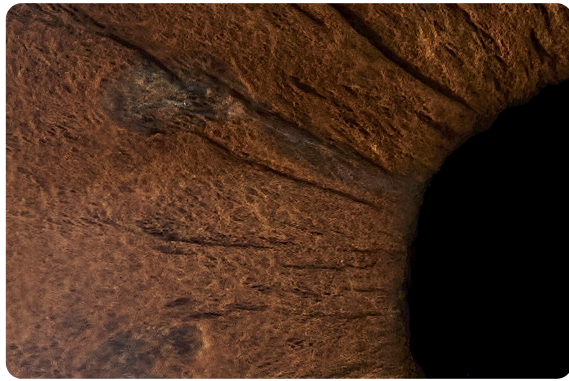
Joanna Rajkowska, *We live day by day, hour by hour; minute by minute (Eye of Krystyna Budnicka/Hena Kuczer)*, 2022. Photo Jędrzej Sokołowski

The scale of the photograph projects the eye as a tremendous primeval surface (yes, think *Białowieża Forest*), such as sometimes we see in another, when staring close in a consensual concentration that exceeds the contractual edges of the imperative *Look into my eyes*. I remember doing so with my first love, as teenagers, and finding something seething with a fragile knowledge, almost like the eye was never there, like the eye is almost not even there. I say *eye*, as it is with the light box, because it was not possible, I remember, to see another's set of eyes this way, and perhaps that is where the act departs from *Look into my eyes*. I saw the eye – my beloved's *and* Budnicka/Hena's – nearly in separation, alone, not in the sense of a disembodied or excised encounter, but rather because I was seeing something that was seeing me and yet unconcerned with my gaze *and* nearly distinct from what I could rationally perceive to be a part of a whole being. At least, and all at once, the eye felt inhabitable, nonhuman, unrepeatable, ephemeral, mirroring, alone, and distant. Perhaps a tension between these poles of nonhuman and unbearably human qualities carries that porous border, that potentiality, in the *Shahid*, between *martyr* and *witness*.

Where the exhibition told the story of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising according to a radical principle – using only the survived and fragmented accounts and material traces of its subjects and witnesses, as opposed to extensive documentation taken

by the Nazis – *We live day by day...* was the only contemporary artifact and artwork. In the first room, where the eye was installed, the light box intensively refracted the trope Gliksman recorded, by way of what Walter Benjamin called *Jetztzeit* (Now-time),²⁷ which in full read: *At night, the burning ghetto – akin to a huge, bloodshot eye – gazes towards the city and awaits rescue in vain.* Other writings and photographs, in this room of the exhibition, continued to circulate that tension of witness and separation between those outside and those incarcerated in the ghetto; the tension, which is to say the sociological fact of encounters under apartheid in the midst of a genocide, as to whether Poles outside the walls would join in arms and expand the uprising to resist the devastating counter-response, which would soon leave nothing in the ghetto standing except for some of whom and some of those which were underground, like Hena in a bunker; the primal imagining of why or what or when those on the other side of a wall touch, see, listen, think.

27. Walter Benjamin, 'On the Concept of History' [1940] (trans. Dennis Redmond, 2005), marxists.org.



Joanna Rajkowska, *We live day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute (Eye of Krystyna Budnicka/Hena Kuczer)*, 2022 (detail). Photo Jędrzej Sokołowski

Joanna created the photograph with her partner Andrew Dixon and the photographer Jędrzej Sokołowski in his studio, setting up a little wooden frame Andrew had built to gently hold still and rest the subject's head. *But it's just my eye*, she told Joanna. *We live day by day...* facilitates the concentrated hyper-proximal gaze, incorporating into a present a *consensual concentration that exceeds the imperative* look into my eyes. For, regardless of what one asks or is asked by a lover, a witness, or someone who claims long ago to have been your neighbor and is now burning your ancient olive trees, or your entire community alive locked in a barn, or your whole family all at once in a collapsing apartment, the eye up-close is mutational, peripatetic, and kairotic, a tiny quarrel in the current. And yet the project text calls this degree of mortal materiality *an ultimate border line – mere survival defined by fragility of human organism.* Just the eye of Krystyna Budnicka/Hena Kuczer, it is written, *is not an abstract eye, it is not symbolic or metaphoric, but part of the body, that was suffering, being confined and sentenced to extermination*, and repeats and reaches for *the play of glances, the ghastly exchange of 1943.*²⁸

28. Rajkowska, 'We Live Day by Day, Hour by Hour, Minute by Minute'.



Henry N. Cobb, *WARSAW, AUGUST 1947* with
rendering of the palm tree by Joanna Rajkowska,
2022

I think, therefore, there is a very basic power in *We live day by day...*, which decocts what capacities to sow human beings and their art hold and withhold within overwhelming life-destroying systems. For it is not that aforementioned repetition and reaching by themselves that bear and incite this very basic life-giving power, but rather their enfoldment in the force of the eye's aging, which is stored, for us, also, diacritically, in the slash between *Budnicka* and *Hena*, and transmits most intensely – because it is what is real to us, beyond and through reenactment – what the project text above called *fragility*, and I a *primeval seething knowledge*, and Budnicka herself *just*.

3. *from the ground*

X

In the second force of or resistance to the word *draft*, fragments of weather move through an enclosed shelter. Typically, where I have lived and in what I have experienced, in winter, or just when it's cold, such force is unwelcome, an irritant, unknown until felt or evidenced nefariously. When it's hot, this force of the word gives pleasure and relief, so that, even, the word mutates to *breeze* and negates almost all relations with *draft*.

Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue (2002) is an artificial, life-size date palm tree in the city center of Warsaw, created twenty-two years ago by a then young and unknown Polish artist from Bydgoszcz, upon returning from a three-month visit to the State of Israel – her very first of many to historic Palestine – staying near the Damascus Gate during the Second Intifada. Towering, real and unreal, from a mounded island in the Charles de Gaulle roundabout, from where two major avenues, Nowy Świat (New World) and Aleje Jerozolimskie (Jerusalem Avenue), centrifuge, *the work*, in one sense, as I have experienced it, is a threshold, when walking to cross the long bridge over the Vistula River, one's back to the central train station and Stalin's imposing Palace of Culture and Science, passing the National Museum, facing the Praga district and the forests lining that side of the

river, sometimes alight at night with peoples' little fires, south of the bridge, and a bright metal-feeling football stadium on the north. *Warsaw's palm* is taken at face.



Joanna Rajkowska, *Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue* (2002), 15 February 2021, 12:50am. Photo Marek Szczepański

The artist's book *Where the Beast is Buried* (2013) narrates this and future confrontations with the region of postwar European-Jewish refuge, settler-colonialism, and Palestinian expulsion and subjugation. A central thread in the book's chronological array of public projects, Joanna encounters the region's extant catastrophe and moral triangulation with Europe,²⁹ drafting what I have found to be an equal parts rare and ventricular set of monumental whispers, from within her Polish vantage, of its *unprocessed* areas.³⁰ Subsequent (but also precedent) projects, often public works, exert shards or the whole of this triangle, taking the artist physically and conceptually to the interstices of Polish, Palestinian, and Jewish forms, voids, and spaces, either implicitly or explicitly, to manifest a shifting crystallization of potentialities and repercussions within what I have before called, in this case, their inter-isolations: *No Sign of Dying Soon* (1995), *State of Israel* (2001), *Maja Gordon Goes to Chorzów* (2006), *Oxygenator* (2007), *Uhyst Refugee Asylum* (2008), *Camping Jenin* (2008), *Postcards from Switzerland* (2009), *Minaret* (2009–11), *Bund!* (2012), *Born in Berlin* (2012), *Forcing a Miracle* (2012), *Stones and Other Demons* (2019), our film *Night Herons* (2020), *Sorry* (2022), *Birds in Gaza / Greetings from Gaza* (2024), and an ongoing chain of actions staged with the palm, including *Death of the Palm Tree* (2019), *Refugee Flag* (2021), and our performance with Grupa Granica (Border Group) *Do Not Uproot!* (2023).³¹

For Joanna, *Greetings...* initiated decades of unrelenting insomnia, a homemaking in the city her mostly estranged father's mixed Jewish-Slavic family left to its rubble, and a series of what are often considered the most important public artworks in post-Communist Poland. Moreover, and more precisely, *Greetings...* constitutes a groping manifestation of the fear and confusion the artist felt through the Israeli siege of occupied Bethlehem and her subsequent return to a Warsaw she felt was perforated with voids. *It was neither anxiety nor fear of anything specific*, she wrote of her experience in Palestine-Israel, *but a tension that was in the very air itself – in the smell of the sweat, in every bus I entered, between people. Sometimes, I lay down*

29. This concept is influenced by and runs parallel to Sa'ed Atshan and Katharina Galor's unprecedented anthropological study, *The Moral Triangle: Germans, Israelis, Palestinians*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2020.

30. Rajkowska, *Where the Beast is Buried*.

31. Each of these projects are accessible through often extensive documentation on Rajkowska's website: rajkowska.com.

*in my bunk during the day, closed my eyes and felt myself shaking all over.*³²

32. Rajkowska, *Where the Beast is Buried*.



Joanna Rajkowska, *State of Israel I*, 2001.
Photo Artur Żmijewski

In these, what I think of as *Greetings...* ' contractions, Joanna created a series of situations where she lies face down on the ground: across a sidewalk in long sleeves and long skirt in the Haredi neighborhood of Mea Shearim, and naked against the bottom of an empty private swimming pool in Tiberias. The latter was photographed and titled *State of Israel*. I see her forehead rested on the blue tiles, face submerged in the bit of green water, her free ears listening for what hovers, eyes staring into the ground *where the beast is buried* because the ground is where everything is buried, like five hundred Palestinian villages. My friend Dirar Kalash, a sound artist and musician from Kafr Qari, who like Joanna is both completely deaf in one ear and was definitively politicized in the Second Intifada, tells me that to listen in a destroyed, colonized village one must *refuse to hear with one's ears*.³³

Of the time of the Second Intifada, Fida Jirtis writes, in her book *Stranger in My Own Land* (2022), that while working in a Jewish-majority office in Karmiel, an Israeli city built on the ruins of Deir el-Assad, Bi'neh, and Nahaf, she found herself unable to stand on Yom HaShoah, the day commemorating Jewish victims of the Nazi genocide. Suddenly, a high-pitched sound broke the silence. Everyone rose to their feet. It was the memorial siren. *At that moment, I could not get up... I felt sick. All I saw were flashes of coverage: the blood, the mutilated bodies, the women screaming and tearing their hair; the rubble, the funerals with body after body wrapped in Palestinian flags.* A colleague confronts her decision. *After a few moments, I found my voice. 'They're killing my people as we speak. As they stand to*

33. See Dirar Kalash, Robert Yerachmiel Sniderman et al., بيان الصعود إلى السماء *Flight Manifesto*, social artwork/film, 2019–24.

*remember their dead, they're making more of mine.*³⁴

On the days before her leaving, Joanna wrote, *Though it was not my conflict and not my war; it was my misfortune, for reasons I could not understand.* She continued, recalling, *At the marketplace people often fell silent when they heard us speak Polish. I looked at the unfriendly, bitter faces. I thought, No wonder, if I were a Polish-Jewish woman, nothing could make me return to Poland.*³⁵

The palm grows *from the ground* to connect the underworld and the overworld.

X

When the first and second forces of or resistances to the English word *draft* entangle, they appear in fragments of weather moving through the enclosed thing actualized and given up. In relation, they soothe me. Because of it, I am on time. What's more is that we are not alone in it. So, I am late.

One could say Joanna's *Greetings...* is a tone that crosses and so carries time and territory: a spectral demarcation and *line of flight*,³⁶ nevertheless rooted in a place, an intersection, a river, where territory is rendered, but a member of whole life. *Monuments freeze the memory*, Joanna wrote to me, after I referred to *Greetings...* as a monument in a voice note. Yes, Joanna, I know *this*, and I learned it from you, when I was twenty-nine, before we met, and yet, *Greetings...* freezes *something*, perhaps, something that is not exposure, not the exposure of a wound, a harm, a power either emergent or nostalgic. *Warsaw's palm* freezes a vitality that remains in motion as in a winter that *will* thaw but also *recur*. *What I do*, she wrote me, *lets them* [public projects] *work, evolve and change in an almost biological way. Layer after layer, gaze after gaze ... reenacting everything, what happened, but turning it into a life process.*³⁷



Joanna Rajkowska, *Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue* (2002) with keffiyeh, 2011. Photo: Joanna Rajkowska

On returning to Warsaw from Jerusalem, she recently reflected, *this state of terror; I immediately detected, brought this, this dream, that this never happened ... the Shoah never happened.*³⁸ Many will read and perhaps empathize with her statement as an impossible wish aimed at thwarting what must now definitively name a planetary cycle of genocide, population transfers, and persecution structures that if not stopped will destroy all of us and all our lands and all of our waters. But, I think,

34. Fida Jirtis, 'A homecoming under siege', *+972 Magazine*, 8 December 2022, 972mag.com.

35. Rajkowska, *Where the Beast is Buried*.

36. This phrase used in homage to the work and teachings of Almut Shulamit Bruckstein Çoruh / House of Taswir, meaning more 'escape and auto-concealment' than 'ascent' or 'departure'. See taswir.org.

37. Joanna Rajkowska, unpublished interview with the author, 16 August 2024.

38. Rajkowska, May 2024.

at that time, in her fear, youth, and confusion, the impossible sentiment arose for a reason that is perhaps even more familiar to many of us, that is from a *primal ignorance* and *helpless* means by which to try to make a home, as when Achille Mbembe, in offering an ethics to our *ordeal of extreme vulnerability*, writes, *to inhabit a place ... only by allowing oneself to be inhabited by it*.³⁹

39. Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*, Durham, CA: Duke University Press, 2019.



Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue (2022),
installation of the fronds, 2003. Photo Joanna
Rajkowska

Joanna and her travel partner, the artist Artur Żmijewski, wrote an article to say something on their time in Palestine-Israel during the Second Intifada. In struggling with the form, instead of writing the end, she suggested, they should plant date palms all along the main thoroughfare of Aleje Jerozolimskie. The date palm, cultivated in Palestine for millennia, symbolically powerful and polysemic as the date is a staple food across many cultures, local and diasporic, finds its way into an *untranslatable Polish expression*. *A palm tree hit you signals a moment of loss of control, or logic, or madness, from the point of view of someone who has got both feet on the ground*.⁴⁰ Research in the Warsaw Public Library led Joanna to the inception of the street's name: the 1774 eradication of Nowa Jerozolima (New Jerusalem), a Jewish settlement founded two years before, to which the road's ancestor, Droga Jerozolimska (Jerusalem Road), originally led from the Vistula River. When I've walked toward, to then cross, the Vistula, on Aleje Jerozolimskie, my back has also faced the ruins of Nowa Jerozolima, filtered by *Warsaw's palm*.

40. Rajkowska, *Where the Beast is Buried*.

She slips in, at once, an alien *and* clear chastising local utterance.



Joanna Rajkowska, *Greetings from Jerusalem Avenue* (2022), 17 June 2019, 10:30pm. Photo Marek Szczepański

On a formal level, Joanna's entire attention to the work's construction fixated upon the question of scale. The palm would be real to the eye from a distance. *The map we have in our heads, particularly the map of the city, is a collection of images, she wrote on developing Greetings... . Turning onto a well-known street, we expect to see one of them. If a new element appears to substantially redefine it, we immediately make the effort to assimilate the new image. It involves the work of memory, emotions becoming engaged. I was interested in those few seconds of disbelief.*⁴¹

41. Rajkowska, *Where the Beast is Buried*.

Warsaw's palm is surreal, intimate, refracting, ironic. She is artificial. Her sentience will outlive us. She is not my great-grandmother, nor Joanna's, nor the gravestone of 375,000 genocided Jewish Warsawians, none of whom likely knew much of anything about date palm trees and should not be taken for a fake tree, because their roots in Poland were real and ancient. What is happening in Palestine-Israel is part of a specifically unresolved chain of statecraft. Europe depends upon the State of Israel as restitution. And it was not restitution. It was, and remains, a perpetuation of our persecution, the mere gift of their weapon. *Warsaw's palm* is an exact citation and constructed illusion. She chastises and listens.



Women's Strike under the palm tree, 2020. Photo
Robert Jaworski

Kurdish-Iranian thinker and activist Nastaran Saremy and I have worked on theorizing place as eruptions of particular moments in the land, by way of translocal imaginations and temporal sovereignties. We call such places *imagined land*. Territorial boundaries have nothing to do with these eruptions. Absolute borders do not mark place, but domination. *The palm* is a monument to such an eruption, which is why in the nation-state of Poland it is considered an anti-monument. Nastaran once said, *It lives in imagined land*.⁴²

42. See Nastaran Saremy and Robert Yerachmiel Sniderman, 'Axa Xeyal Kirin Imagined Land', 'خاکی خه‌یالکراو', social memorial, 2023-.



Henry N. Cobb, WARSAW, AUGUST 1947 with
rendering of the palm tree by Joanna Rajkowska,
2022

4. *the terrifying moon*

X

A third resistance to, or force of, the English word *draft* does not soothe me. This third resistance or force troubles me. *Draft* is etymologically related to and meets *draw* in conscription. We draw water from a river to drink. We draft an architectural proposal from study to construct. We draw teenagers from their youth to kill life.

The contractions and construction of *Greetings...* first situated Warsaw's built environment in Palestine, and Palestine's earth in Warsaw by and in sensing, with confusion and fear, the structuring force of apartheid and ethnic cleansing exchanged, preceding and exceeding, too, the uncountable Shoah *and* the uncountable Nakba, if unto each forever distinctly, across both territories. Joanna's organic, reflective acts worked both despite and because of the *all but entirely razed, incinerated, incarcerated, and displaced* legacy of her home, the home of her estranged father's childhood, which the artist *had to*, and incidentally so, approach with her body in *imagined land*.

Greetings... ' contractions and construction claims one fundament of responsibility, on behalf of Polish and European ontology, for both the ethnic cleansing of Palestine and Israeli fear, which, Joanna wrote, in defense of the unrealized *Minaret* project, heaves *the shape of the Israeli state, its practices, its apartheid, its war crimes, and its relationship to its Others*.⁴³ And yet, monumentalization must be for the heterogenous present (*Jetztzeit*), otherwise it sanctifies irrelevance and moral abandon. Monumentalization must freeze and unfreeze, with the recurrence of winters, the rising sap.

43. Rajkowska, *Where the Beast is Buried*.



Joanna Rajkowska, rendering of *Minaret*, public project, 2010

In telling, this, again, I do what I might to be someone who *still* lives in Warsaw, though I do not live in Warsaw, Great-Grandmother Sarah bat Moshe, even if you wouldn't want me there, even if you would want me there, even if it turns out you were never from there. And, in so doing, what I might, I do what *Warsaw's palm* renders, in many of us, that is, quickly, quietly, to make us, all together, tell stories, at once, and distinctly, inside what Haviva Pedaya has called – on Reb Moshe Cordovero's sixteenth-century cosmology, of falling and rising, in Palestine, in exile, from Spain, in Şafad – *gigantic time*.⁴⁴

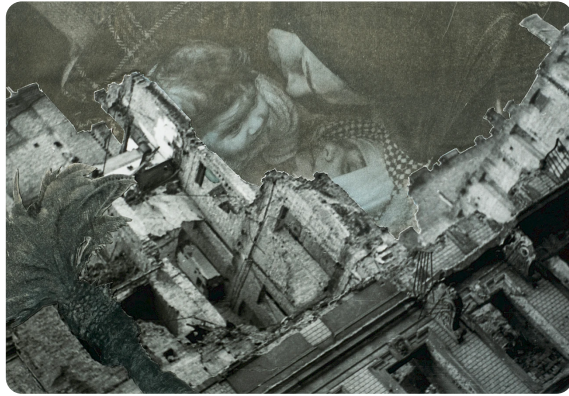
44. Haviva Pedaya, 'Walking, Walking Out, and Walking Through: Transitional Space and Traumatic Time', in Y. Ataria et al (ed.), *Interdisciplinary Handbook of Trauma and*

**Culture, Switzerland: Springer
International Publishing, 2016.**

My telling, which is different from yours, is a parable and a debt. While the palm owes me nothing, I owe her something. At this hour, I owe her transcription, this quest, and refusal.

At this hour, one year into endless aimless collective retribution, a total and ever-expanding war (and not just that), by the State of Israel's unhinged settler-fascist regime on drip-supply of weapons, theocratic consensus, and legal immunity from the United States, my nation, by birth and passport and great-grandparents' refuge.

At this hour, one year into massacre after massacre after massacre after massacre after massacre, every day I bear to read, another massacre, of whole families, internal refugees, multiple times over, in the most vulnerable situations, multiple times over, waiting for food rations in the Flour Massacre, sleeping in the only demarcated safe zone in the Tent Massacres, treating the wounded and sick or being sick and wounded in the destruction of the al-Shifa Hospital Complex, praying in a school in the Al-Tabaeen Massacre.



Joanna Rajkowska, *Greetings from Gaza III*, 2024

One year into the public execution of the names of our ancestors, of the names of our traditions, by a revisionist, anti-democratic regime that will radically overdetermine centuries and centuries to come of planetary anti-Judaism, I am certain, because to be us, those with a most perverse, naive, brief, and mercenary power tell the world, means to endorse, and unconditionally, such destruction

sixteen thousand seven hundred fifty-six children of blessed memory

nine hundred two whole families of blessed memory

ten thousand under rubble of blessed memory

one hundred fifty thousand homes of blessed memory

half of all trees and farms of blessed memory

seven hundred water wells and all desalination plants of blessed memory

one hundred fourteen hospitals and clinics of blessed memory

nine hundred eighty-six medical workers of blessed memory

one hundred twenty-three schools and universities of blessed memory

one hundred seventy-five journalists of blessed memory

thirty-five hostages of blessed memory

in holy Gaza.⁴⁵

45. Chughtai, 2024.

– Iyar 5784 - Tishrei 5785, Berlin (DE) + Bellingham (US)