

The Dead Sea: Mirror of Time

1992-2002

Original Color Prints are 15" x 15" and 19" x 19"

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In the late nineteen-eighties, I began photographing at the Dead Sea and in the Judean Desert. In 1993, I spent a sabbatical semester photographing infirmed bathers in this salty sea and recording the surrounding terrain—parched, war-torn, and environmentally endangered. During the next two decades, as funding permitted, I returned to the Dead Sea region on numerous occasions and this series, *The Dead Sea: Mirror of Time*, evolved.

In *Bomb's Eye View from the Lyddo Bathhouse*, the viewer witnesses the after-math of the region's conflicts, during the wars of '48, '67, and '73. In the center of the architectural structure there is a perfect porthole to a blue sky. In the distance are the abandoned buildings of a pre-1948 Arab-Jewish enterprise to mine the Dead Sea. Framing this circular opening is a contemporary Israeli artist's wall painting duplicating a famous Crusader's map to the Holy Land. The thin blue line, which runs horizontally across the painting, represents the Jordan River. This Biblical "stream" once emptied directly into the sea behind the Lyddo Bathhouse. Painted after the bathhouse fell into Israeli hands in '67, the map was punctured by a Jordanian bomb during the '73 war.

In the twenty-first century the very existence of the Dead Sea is threatened by rapid industrial and population growth in the region. Diversion of the Jordan River water upstream has curtailed a large part of the historic inflow of fresh water to the Dead Sea. In order for water to flow to the southern basin of the sea, man-made canals had to be constructed to channel water through the dried up mid-section of the sea. Despite the environmental issues, a burgeoning health industry is swelling on the sea's shores capitalizing on the lake's reputation as a natural medicine for scores of diseases. At Ein Bokek, Israel these opposing forces merge, as bathers now sit in these man-made industrial evaporation ponds where the salt sea has dried up.

From a photographer's standpoint, this milieu ironically serves as a backdrop for compositions like *Julie*, a portrait of a psoriasis sufferer. Talmudic sages prescribed the Sea of Sodom for people with "scabs" on their head and today physicians interpret "scabs" to be a reference to psoriasis. Gazing into the lake Julie contemplates her prognosis in this mirror of time.

So many irrefutable truths contributed to the artistic birth of my medicinal bathing figures: Jewish arms tattooed by Hitler's numbers; young, German hands marred by the lines of a degenerative nervous disease; bony, pink fingers crippled by arthritis; the red speckles of a psoriasis sufferer stained bronze by the prescriptive sun. In the second half of the twentieth century the Dead Sea has come to life again as a healer. Now its salty shimmer, so magical to centuries of travelers, is gradually extinguishing. Like the oily, diseased hands in *Pleading for Hope*, the Dead Sea begs for a renewed life.

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