

CATALOG ENTRY 7,567MI→

7,567MI→ explores the physical, spiritual, and cultural connections between Jerusalem and Los Angeles (LA) based members of the Jewish Artists Initiative (JAI). Despite the 7,567 miles that separate our cities, we share a great deal in common. Los Angeles is home to the second largest Jewish population in the United States. California has the second highest number of Israeli-Americans. This creates a unique lens to explore how our modern Jewish experiences are both similar and different. Both cities loom large in the public consciousness—offering cityscapes that are instantly recognizable. Each is, in its own way, a promised land beckoning people to come with the possibility of dreams realized, prayers answered, and opportunities for new beginnings.

The JAI exhibit physically takes place in the two cities, extending the reach of the Biennale2015 exhibit in Jerusalem. Through presenting components of the exhibition in multiple venues, we are able to create dialogues that extend beyond the central exhibition in Jerusalem and lead to a greater exchange of ideas between our two cities. Three LA institutions are the counterpoints to our Israel venue, through which an exchange of information is linked via time lapsed technology. The Los Angeles based exhibition sites include Platt/Borstein Galleries at American Jewish University, Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion, Los Angeles; and the University of Southern California (USC) Hillel. These exhibitions demonstrate that the many miles between our homes is no longer a barrier in today's hyper-connected world.

For this exhibition, the 90 members of JAI were asked the question, “*what does it mean to be Jewish in Los Angeles in the 21st century*” and create new artworks in response. The artworks selected for this exhibition represent the diversity of media and life experiences of the featured artists at all the exhibit sites. In Jerusalem JAI is being represented by more than twenty artists including Ruth Weisberg, Sam Erenberg, Bill Aron, Karen Frimkess-Wolff, Ellen Cantor, Doni Silver Simons, and Gilah Yelin Hirsch.

Artists in JAI often deal directly with Jewish subject matter. However, their artwork extends beyond stylized iconographic or traditional cultural motifs. Rather, they have applied their contemporary interpretations to key Jewish or Israeli historical, political, or social events. Examples include, Ruth Weisberg who has spent over a decade creating a series that recasts familiar immigration narratives. Whether arriving at Ellis Island, The Zionist Aliyah (1882 - present), or asylum seekers refused entrance during WWII (ex. SS St. Louis), her ships are reminders of those whose journeys yielded better life while simultaneously thinking of those for whom passage did not offer salvation. Similarly, Sam Erenberg takes us through seemingly abstracted events in his ongoing series of dates reflecting on historic moments in both California and Israel. Erenberg's works seem to remind us that by analyzing history, we not only better understand our current

situation, but also hope that we will not repeat our worse moments moving forward. Through photographing the sights and sounds of Israel over many decades, Bill Aron captures the familiar sites of the *shuk*, the Old City, unexpected and hidden places in Israel. Aron documents the ebb and flow of Israel over time through his lens.

The artists gathered here offer a glimpse into a Diaspora community situated within one of most liberal areas of the United States. From this vantage point, our membership must work to discover their uniquely authentic relationship with Israel. All of the works presented are very personal narratives. For many their works represent what draws us east. For others, it is an opportunity to explore the deeply effecting issues that Israel holds for the members of JAI.

Georgia Freedman-Harvey & Anne Hromadka
Curators