

Converging Perspectives

ANAMORPHOSIS

By Praneet Soi

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A few pages into Praneet Soi's *Anamorphosis* is a video still of Arab youths enjoying the turquoise waters beyond the old citadel walls of Akka (Acre), at the northern reaches of what is now Haifa Bay in Israel. The image is overlaid with a cut-out of a man preparing to leap off the parapet into the blue below.

Soi captured these moments while traveling across Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories in the summer of 2019, in preparation for an exhibition commissioned by London's Mosaic Rooms about the conditions of Palestinian economic survival. Alongside filmed and illustrated vignettes inspired by the trip, "Anamorphosis" (2019) featured painted papier-mâché tiles (2017) produced with craftsmen in Indian-administered Kashmir—an inclusion prompted by the territory's bifurcation and loss of autonomy as Soi was developing his show.

Just as an anamorphic projection only appears undistorted from a specific vantage point, any representation of a

disputed site is, for Soi, an assertion of positionality, intrinsically political and potentially incomprehensible from competing perspectives. Soi's answer is an exploding of monolithic narratives by cutting and pasting visual and textual material from "criss-crossing viewpoints." If the show was an exercise in this "notational methodology," then the book is a collage of a collage, further fracturing the subject matter in its juxtapositions of handwritten journal entries, silverpoint drawings of olive trees, and magnified ornamental and semi-abstract motifs.

The shifting, contested landscapes translate texturally to the book's pages, which contrast ultra-high-res artwork details and pixelated film stills in alternately matte and glossy stock. Images recur, such as a drawing of the layered slopes and settlements where Palestine, Lebanon, and Syria meet—a copy of the photograph on the next page. Other repeating elements are more obviously distorted, like the cover's blue, anamorphic depiction of a West Bank village, which is excised from its beige linen ground elsewhere in the book to leave a white, scythe-like abstraction. Soi's extracted images are jigsaw pieces that fit various puzzles: one hardly notices that a yellow, fan-shaped, floral design that appears to mirror a chink in the wall of a Palestinian factory is the breast of an abstracted *Kingfisher* in the original painting.

Yet far from eliding the significance of context or the toll of territorial strife, *Anamorphosis* is simultaneously sweeping and granular, breaking up allusive collages with strips of text on the experiences of Palestinians the artist encountered. Soi never omits the particularities of his subjectivity as an outsider, adding personal reflections on the historical linkages between Sebastia and Punjab, where his father was born, and recollections of Kolkata educed by the sights and sounds of the West Bank.

Anamorphosis proposes that it is in the interstices that we begin to sense the realities of a place—say, in the silhouetted rubble painted on a tile, or a shot of young Arabs at one of the few points they can access the sea.

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