

Guggenheim UBS MAP Global Art Initiative
But a Storm Is Blowing from Paradise:
Ori Gersht on his Still Life Series and Art Studio

I've been working in this studio since 2009. It was a dilapidated building. There were no staircases. The whole thing was just a complete wreck. I spread over a few floors here—the top floor, on which I can shoot some films and photographs; the floor below, which is my editing suite; and the floor below that, where the darkroom and all the digital printing facilities are. Although I'm multitasking most of the time, it's a place that I kind of see as my oasis.

My main focus is photography and film—predominantly photography; film came later as an extension to my practice. The relationship between the two is sort of complementary—one medium can compensate for restrictions or limitations of the other. So I see the two working in some sort of symbiotic relationship.

Throughout my work, there is an element that I'm trying to explore, and it is very much to do with the relationship between the camera, the way photography is recording the world, turning moments that are unattainable into tangible experiences, and how they are affecting our relationship with the world, our understanding of truth, our understanding of history, and our perception of reality.

My work is often connected to painting, which is a very visceral medium. The still life series was formally an antithesis to *White Noise*, and some of the earlier landscape work that I produced, although I see them as very closely related. Many of my landscape photographs were taken over a long period of time. So there is this long exposure, where the image seems to somehow melt down and almost disappear. In the still lifes, the images are more concrete, and the exposure is very, very short. But nevertheless, those short exposures are also capturing something happening at one ten-thousandth of a second that is impossible for the naked eye or our brain to process. So these moments are also sort of metaphysical moments, moments that are ephemeral, too, moments that only exist because the technology allows them to turn into visual, tangible moments.

The still lifes are coming very much from art history into the contemporary world that we live in today. The exploding image is emerging from personal experience. When you think about suicide bombers, you think about these kind of very brutal, almost gruesome media that I'm trying to turn into very appealing and seductive moments. I'm coming from a place—I was brought up in Israel, where there are so many conflicting views and so many possible historical narratives that are colliding with one another. Photography is a medium that is very much associated with an evidence, with absolute truth, and yet, with all my work, what we see on the print or on the screen is about moment that truth is being questioned.

I'm very much interested in materiality and abstraction in the way images are being conceived and created. When you move into the digital, everything turns into pure abstraction. I see analogue photography as a go-between—you can understand all the processes, and it all happens on a physical piece of celluloid. I keep my darkroom for color and black-and-white printing, not for sentimental reasons—there are certain things that the digital cannot do. It depends on the work that I'm trying to pursue. I combine, but the digital has become more dominant.

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On my recent trip, I acquired this new medium-format digital camera, and I ended up making a lot of the work with it. The printing makes up a very significant part of any work that I produce. The subtlety of colors and tonality is so crucial that I end up spending months and months. So this is quite intense.

I come to the studio after dropping the kid at school. And after a cup of coffee, after a few hours, I kind of lose my orientation, my sense of time, and everything start to fall into place. During those hours of very intense focus, I find my purpose, and I have to say my inner happiness, too, which is a phenomenal privilege.