Midlife Mending

Liat Elbling

Curator: Keren Zaltz

Inside the darkened gallery space, Liat Elbling presents a video installation that marks a new chapter in her practice after years of working exclusively in still photography. Projected simultaneously across three screens, an actual, albeit emptied, dystopian architectural space unfolds: the "Kiryat HaMelacha" complex in Tel Aviv. The conspicuous absence of people creates a sense of tense anticipation for an event about to occur. The camera glides in a systematic, monotonous motion, scanning facades, passages, and exposed rooftops. At dawn, a soft grey light falls upon the harsh, scarred concrete. The direct gaze is blocked by a wall, the field of vision narrows, and the urban environment is experienced as a two-dimensional plane derived from an engineering blueprint, marked by the four navigational directives: right, left, up, down.

"Kiryat HaMelacha" was built in the 1960s in the Brutalist style for light industry. Over the years, it underwent a cultural transformation as galleries and studio spaces began operating alongside traditional crafts. Elbling's studio is located on Ha-Tnufa Street, on the eastern edge of the complex, serving as a geographical and conceptual point of departure for the exhibition. Stripped of human presence and everyday chaos, the space loses its definition as an "industrial zone" and returns to the status of an abstract master plan: an idea constructed from a grid of lines and intervals.

The transition from still photography to video is more than a shift in medium; it allows the artist to stretch the boundaries of time and space, creating a site-specific work for the gallery situated at the heart of "Kiryat HaMelacha".

The space serves as more than a place of display: it absorbs the surrounding environment, with its concrete, light, and muted density. Movement and sound reverberate with the surrounding architecture within the gallery, dissolving the boundary between inside and outside and turning the viewing experience into a direct continuation of the urban environment.

In the central video work, the camera moves parallel to the building facades in a continuous, mechanical, horizontal motion. It maps the structures floor by floor, from foundation to skyline. Through the act of editing, Elbling stitches the buildings together into a single continuous chain that loops endlessly. In the absence of human activity, the repetitive

quality of functional modernist architecture stands out, exposing the passing gaze to the layers of time accumulated on the surface: local repairs, fractures, improvised solutions, abandoned objects, and layers of graffiti gathered over the years. In the transitions between buildings, glimpses of the adjacent older, low-rise neighborhood appear in the background alongside cranes signaling urban shifts and ongoing development, providing moments to catch a breath before the next structure fills the screen.

Another work floats above the roofs, offering an abstract vantage point inaccessible to pedestrians on the street. This elevated view charges the space with a tension reminiscent of a surveillance scene or a search in hostile territory. The roof, which carries remnants and traces left behind over the years, is perceived as the final refuge in a cinematic chase, a place where the only way forward is down. The optical effect of observing a scale model is heightened in the work displayed in the inner room: bird's-eye drone footage simplifies the environment, neutralizing the heavy materiality of the concrete and presenting the structures as small cardboard boxes, while cars and ground-level elements resemble miniature toys on a spatial map. This is an observation of urban anatomy, dissecting structures into their primary components to examine what truly constitutes them beyond the noise and soot.

Alongside the three projections (which are intentionally unsynchronized, meeting each time at a new random point), a sound work fills the space, recorded at dawn in that same location. The soundtrack captures the awakening sounds of the industrial area: the delicate, thin shift between night's silence and the daily din, sounds usually swallowed by urban bustle. Sound itself becomes a "building material," a transparent sonic architecture echoing the unspoken system of the site before it fills with people.

Rather than signaling crisis or collapse, the concept of "Midlife Mending" reflects a sober process of re-evaluation and introspection, wherein accumulated experience and time serve as tools for recalibrating the gaze, like a camera lens attempting to focus on a spot that has gone blind. It is a critical study of the architectural and psychological frameworks of life, and an attempt to transform them into the primary raw material fueling the creative work.