

## Nira Pereg

(Tel Aviv, Israel, 1969)

Shooting documentary videos in Israel seems to be a mission consecrated to recording how “everything is full:” a fullness of events and narrations, due to the continuous state of emergency that grips the country; a fullness of signs and cultures superimposed by history in an endless stratigraphy, alongside a fullness of the present, made up of two peoples that put pressure on the same territory, to gain control of social, political, economic, and religious spaces. And yet Nira Pereg, through her video works and video installations, shows us an Israel where passages open up, momentary voids in the story and in the occupation of space. These are simultaneously moments of possibility and shutdown.

In one of her most well-known works, *Sabbath*, 2008, she recorded the activity of the most strictly Orthodox communities in Jerusalem on the eve of the Sabbath, when their neighborhoods are closed off with barriers so that not even a car can interrupt the prescribed day of rest. Male children with traditional sidelocks lend a hand to the adults in setting up these barriers, treating it as a game, but these new insurmountable boundaries that are erected ritually every week create empty spaces on the inside and are thronged with cars on the outside. Seeming like a modification of the balance of energy, the barriers herald new frictions and a new nervousness – microcosms of the conflict.

In *Kept Alive*, 2009, the empty spaces that open up are those of the new tombs excavated in Jerusalem’s large Mountain of Rest cemetery, where Arab and Israeli laborers work together, defending a boundary that divides not different ethnic groups and cultures, but, more universally, the living from the dead. Pereg’s work shows the phrases written on the tombs that are reserved for those who are still alive and which, according to ritual belief, are indeed kept alive, beyond the threshold, thanks to the fact that their empty tombs are open to the sky.

*Abraham Abraham*, 2012, like *Sabbath*, records a cyclical event, a specific opening up of frontiers between the two peoples, which takes place in the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, which, after Baruch Goldstein’s massacre of Palestinians in 1994, was divided into two spaces, one for a mosque, the other for a synagogue. Because the site is sacred to both religions, ten times a year, for particular holidays, Jews return the Torah and ritual objects to closed cupboards in the space. A patrol of armed soldiers passes in review of the deserted spaces and opens them to Muslims who, in a matter of minutes, enter and fill the just-formed void, unrolling their carpets on the ground and transforming the synagogue into a mosque for twenty-four hours. Silence – the empty space of possibility – dominates the site for those extremely brief moments that follow the coming and going of soldiers, prior to the arrival of worshipers from the respective two faiths: a respite in an Israel as surreal as a dream. (EV)