Miki Kratsman, two images from *Displaced*, 2010

FOREWORD + ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Miki Kratsman: People I Met is Christian Viveros-Fauné's first exhibition as the USF Contemporary Art Museum's Curator-at-Large. Viveros-Fauné is an acclaimed critic and curator. His arts career includes time as the managing director of two art fairs, VOLTA in New York and NEXT in Chicago; he was the founder of Roebling Hall Gallery in Brooklyn; and as a published critic for *The Village Voice*, *artnet*, *Art Review*, and many other national and international publications. Viveros-Fauné organized the first version of *People I Met* in 2017 at the Quinta Normal Venue of the University of Chile's Museum of Contemporary Art.

Miki Kratsman is a Tel Aviv based photographer who has documented the impact of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict on the daily life of the Palestinian population in the West Bank and Gaza for more than three decades. For Kratsman, the accumulated documentation of the daily difficulties of obstruction, death, memory, hope, anger or acceptance is more important than any specific event.

People I Met at CAM comprises two separate installations. In the Lee and Victor Leavengood Gallery is an installation of approximately 2,000 cropped photographs from Kratsman's archive of more than 9,000 portraits of anonymous Palestinians. The photographs were published on a Facebook page Kratsman created, and are separately accompanied by plaques of identifying commentary. The West Gallery contains selections from Kratsman's *Bedouin Archive* and *Displaced* series, documenting the evacuation of Bedouin villages from the Negev region of Southern Israel. The installation features tables with "panoramas" of "unrecognized" Arab villages slated for demolition. CAM is also showing the 2017 video *70 Meters… White T-shirt* that documents a year of shooting in the Palestinian village of Nabi Salih.

The USF Contemporary Art Museum is pleased to welcome Christian Viveros-Fauné to the CAM team and we look forward to new projects with artists we have not previously shown. The museum continues our commitment to presenting challenging artworks, often with strong political and social content. Several related educational programs throughout the course of *People I Met* will expand upon the themes of the exhibition, serving as a platform for the exchange of ideas and perspectives.

The remarkable staff of CAM, led by Deputy Director Noel Smith, function as a team to ensure that all aspects of this exhibition and related programming meet the highest professional standards

for presenting contemporary art. Curator of the Collection/Exhibitions Manager Shannon Annis coordinated loans and shipping, and worked closely with the artist and curator to facilitate the production of the works. Exhibition Designer Tony Palms also assisted in the production of work while designing the overall installation of the exhibition. Don Fuller provided oversight for printed materials and the banner, and Madeline Baker served as the graphic designer of the materials associated with the exhibition. Leslie Elsasser, Curator of Education, coordinated the related educational programming. Others on the team who worked together to bring about this exhibition and its programs and special events include Amy Allison, Alyssa Cordero, Jessica Barber, Mark Fredricks, Eric Jonas, Vincent Kral, Will Lytch, David Waterman, and Randall West. Students who contributed include members of the CAM Club, as well as Adam Bakst, Krista Darling, Avery Dyen, Faith Gofton, Leya Ibrahim, Ashley Jablonski, Abigail Jensen, Zoe McIlwain, Angel Poulos and Annalieth Garzon.

We are deeply grateful to The Artis Grant Program for their generous support of *Miki Kratsman: People I Met*. Artis is an independent non-profit organization, based in New York, that supports contemporary artists from Israel whose work addresses aesthetic, social and political questions to inspire reflection and debate.

Many others in the community and from across campus have collaborated with various aspects of this exhibition. The Oxford Exchange has very generously presented the conversation with Miki Kratsman and Christian Viveros-Fauné as part of their Artists + Books Series. I thank USF World for their support of the artist/curator conversation inaugurating the exhibition. Participating in related educational events are the CAM Club; Visiting Instructor Matthew Kennedy and students from the School of Music; and Dr. Ulluminair Salim, Dr. Steven C. Roach, Dr. Benjamin Young, Associate Professor Noelle Mason, Associate Professor Wendy Babcox, and Assistant Professor Jason Lazarus.

We are particularly appreciative of the generosity and invaluable assistance of Nira Itzhaki, founder and director of Chelouche Gallery, Tel Aviv.

It is always the quality of the work that makes for a great exhibition. I am most grateful to Miki Kratsman for sharing his important work with our community.

MARGARET MILLER
Director, Institute for Research in Art

ABOVE: Miki Kratsman, still from *70 Meters…White T-Shirt*, 2017.
COVER: Miki Kratsman, *People I Met*, 2010–2018. 35 of 2050 digital prints and 150 brass plaques with text. Courtesy of the artist and Chelouche Gallery, Tel Aviv, Israel

MIKI KRATSMAN: PEOPLE I MET

AUGUST 20 – DECEMBER 8, 2018
USF CONTEMPORARY ART MUSEUM

MIKI KRATSMAN: PEOPLE I MET

*I am an invisible man. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might
even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me.*
RALPH ELLISON - *The Invisible Man*

For three decades, Miki Kratsman has been one of the leading chroniclers of life in the Israeli-occupied territories. His photographs—many of them documentary images taken during a previous life as a press photographer for the Israeli newspapers *Hadashot* and *Haaretz*—uncover personal stories while revealing the violent, often detached nature of Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza.

His most recent images, which are essentially rephotographed versions of the artist's older pictures, have become profound visual records through an apparently minor shift in focus. Like wartime itself, few things prove trivial in conflict photography. In some cases, Kratsman's images have served as a literal proof of life—or death, in other less fortunate circumstances—for scores of previously unnamed protagonists mired in a struggle that is as global as it is faceless.

Kratsman's exhibition at the University of South Florida Contemporary Art Museum (USFCAM), which he has titled *People I Met*, pushes the limitations of documentary photography as a way to frame reality and construct narratives. Among other things, it repurposes existing visual information to arrive at an archive of unlikely portraits. The archive began, the artist says, as a way to weave together various private and public aspects of his photographic practice. To this end, Kratsman rifled through his store of personal press clippings and frequented Tel Aviv's Beit Ariela library in order to re-photograph many of his own images from newspapers.

What Kratsman retained in the updated versions of his own images turns out to be what many other photographers would have tossed out: for instance, the faces of individual men, women and children who were not the intended subjects of the pictures. What the artist discarded are precisely those elements that made his original images "newsworthy"—the likenesses of certain central protagonists, the pictures' captions, and additional data that identify those depictions as conventional journalism.

"I realized that the point at which I lost control of the image was interesting," Kratsman has said about the process that eventually led him to create the archive of images of stateless people. "What the graphic artist did with the photo, the size in which it was published, the interpretation it received from the offset technician and so on." To date, the Argentine-born, Israeli artist has accumulated more than 9,000 portraits recovered for his particular photographic archive.

Kratsman's own telling of the evolution of his artwork deserves quoting here: "Toward the end of 2011, I was invited to the wedding of a friend that took place in the Jenin refugee camp [located in the northern West Bank]. I asked him if I could bring a group of photographs to show him that I'd taken in the camp four years earlier. The photos were of a parade of more than one thousand Palestinian fighters. Because I thought many of them had probably been killed by the IDF [Israeli Defense Forces], I asked the other guests to use markers to identify those whom they knew had died. Incredibly, when I returned home they had identified more than twenty faces belonging to these victims."

That initial group of twenty portraits led Kratsman to conceive of an idea that is haunting in its simplicity. "Obviously," he has said, "it's impossible to travel around the occupied territories with an archive of printed photographs. That was when I decided to start the Facebook page."

The images that make up the installation *People I Met* (2010-2018), which provides the title for this exhibition, are taken directly from Kratsman's social media page (https://www.facebook.com/kratsman.people.i.met/). To arrive at these portraits, Kratsman simply "cuts" pictures from his expanding photographic archive, and then "pastes" them onto his page. "What has become of them?," he asks about the faces he posts. The answers vary: some of those portrayed are alive and thriving in the Gaza and the West Bank; other have died, the victims of political violence or precision-guided targeted killings. Whatever the case, Kratsman's efforts question certain basic suppositions about the nature of media images and photography itself, while invoking Marcel Duchamp's cardinal rule of creativity: "Art making is making the invisible visible."

Additionally, Kratsman also questions some of the basic premises that animate social media sites like Facebook by posting what is fundamentally an archive of missing persons. What happens exactly when a so-called "Friend" "Likes" the image of a person who has either virtually or physically disappeared? Are there instances when social media commentary can cross over into social activism? And how should we measure the distance between a person's online presence and their life under a regime of violent occupation?

More than 2,000 images from Kratsman's archive are on view in a room-sized installation in USFCAM's Lee and Victor Leavengood Gallery. Also on view in *People I Met* are two complementary photographic series: *Displaced* (2010) and *Bedouin Archive* (2015–2016). The first documents the hardships faced by individual Bedouins in the Negev desert; the second looks to establish a historical record for the Bedouin people, complete with GPS coordinates, as they continue to resist the house demolitions, relocation and land expropriation forced on them by Israeli government. Lastly, the exhibition features the video *70 Meters... White T-shirt* (2017). A moving image summary of the conflict in the Occupied Territories, it condenses a full year of shooting in the Palestinian village of Nabi Salih into eight minutes and forty-two seconds.

With the current exhibition, Kratsman's largest to date in the U.S., the artist pushes the viewer closer to a more complex, committed, narrative view of the potential of conceptual photography, all the while introducing the viewer to an entire population of displaced people. They are, in his formulation, people he's met. To fully see ourselves in them, it is necessary that we meet them, too.

CHRISTIAN VIVEROS-FAUNÉ
Curator

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Miki Kratsman was born in 1959 in Argentina and immigrated to Israel in 1971. From 1993 to 2012 his photographs appeared regularly in the newspaper *Haaretz*. From 2006 to 2014 he served as Director of the Photography Department of Bezalel Academy of Arts, Jerusalem, where he continues to teach and lecture. Kratsman is the fifth recipient of the Robert Gardner Fellowship in Photography, awarded by Harvard University's Peabody Museum of Archeology and Ethnology. He is also the 2011 winner of the Emet Prize for Science, Art and Culture. His work has been exhibited in, among other major international exhibitions, the 2003 Venice Biennale and the 2006 Sao Paulo Biennial. Since 2004, he has been the Chairman of the Board of Breaking the Silence, an organization of veteran Israeli combatants that collects testimonies from soldiers about their service in the occupied territories.

Miki Kratsman, *Al-Baggar*, 2015