

Press release

May You Continue to Blossom by Alexandra Dautel

Alexandra Dautel's *May You Continue to Blossom* is a critical investigation into the nature of illusion, told via the story of Neot Semadar – a kibbutz and self-styled utopia in the desert of Southern Israel. Through a feverish, layered constellation of words and images, it walks the line between delusion and belief, visually exploring the texture and terms of ideology, and asking what lies behind the construction of an ideal place.

Placing us at the centre of Neot Semadar, a kibbutz in the Arabah region of Southern Israel, Alexandra Dautel's *May You Continue to Blossom* is a critical investigation into the nature of illusion. Conjuring a sensory and surreal experience, it asks what lies behind the construction of an ideal place.

First established in 1989 by a leader called Yosef Safra, Neot Semadar is a community built on the belief in foregrounding agriculture, learning and equality between all. When it's members speak, they speak of a utopia – even the ones who have long since left – but they also reveal stories of power and violence too. Curious, specific rules permeate its teachings, and talking about the past is forbidden there, as if 'now' is the only tense to exist. Some say it's a cult with aberrations amidst its followers; others, like Dautel, think it's far more complicated than such definitions allow.

Dautel came across Neot Semadar while researching alternatives to the modern way of life, and being Jewish herself, she gravitated towards Israel while questioning her own religion. She wanted to know if it was possible to live a self-sustained life far away from known models of society, and more importantly, if this were possible without hierarchies or leaders or problems too endemic to solve. After visiting the site, spending time with its members, and interviewing those with insight, she found herself more perplexed than ever.

Through a feverish, layered constellation of archives, interview transcripts, plans, documents, collected images, newspaper clippings, old movie stills and the artist's own photographs, *May You Continue to Blossom* walks the line between delusion and belief, visually exploring the texture and terms of ideology, and at times quietly referencing the wider state of Israel too. Creating an open dialogue, part textual and part visual, it brings together an image of an otherworldly place somewhere between attainable and out of reach. In dreamlike sequences punctuated by scenes of the sun's glowing orb, it is split into three almost imperceptible parts. Meanwhile, a strategy of repetition loops the viewer into the narrative, familiarising us with its content, while never quite making us feel at home.

In the end, Dautel's project is purposefully unresolved; asking us instead to spend time with the material and make our minds up for ourselves. Through hazy, illusory images and a cover that feels like the texture of sand, *May You Continue to Blossom* draws us deep into the Negev desert. Alongside the artist, we are invited to piece together fragments of a story told by many voices – a story deeply human, but with no simple or discernible end.

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Alexandra Dautel; *May You Continue to Blossom*;
224pp.; 20x26mm; Offset print; Graphic Design by
Alexandra Dautel and Studio Nüssli+Nuessli;
Published by cpress, Zurich; Distributed by Idea Books,
Amsterdam (World) and cpress, Zurich (Switzerland);
ISBN 978-3-907333-00-6; First Edition: 700 copies;
CC-BY-NC-SA, 2021
38€

Alexandra Dautel (b. 1996, Paris, France) is a visual artist and photographer based in Paris and Lausanne. After obtaining a degree in Graphic Design in France (2017), she gained a degree in Photography at ECAL in Switzerland (2020).