

These Faces have Names: Illustrating to Remember, Grieve, and Memorialize



The logo of the Names and Faces Project on Instagram (@namesandfaces.il)

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On Friday, October 27th, I was in Tel Aviv, having just finished volunteering. It had been a busy morning and afternoon; we had arrived to help a group of volunteers running activities for children with special needs, and I had quickly been enlisted to assist with painting and drawing. As we stood at the crosswalk on the way home (for the second time, as the first time we had tried to cross there had been a rocket alert siren and we had had to run to the nearest shelter), I spotted a billboard advertising an illustration project. The advertisement showed a group of drawings and was simply titled *Names and Faces*. As an artist, I was of course interested, and I made a note to check out the project when I returned home.

Launched on October 14th, 2023, the *Names and Faces* project seeks to provide a digital space on Instagram for Israeli illustrators and residents to raise their voices against the “heart-wrenching massacre that has shaken our society since October 7, 2023.” The illustrators state that they are committed to giving a name and face to every individual impacted by the events of October 7th, including neighbors, families, soldiers, hostages, and the killed and injured. Each artwork submitted to the page is published with a trilingual caption in Hebrew, English, and Arabic. The captions often read as tiny testimonies or diary entries; sometimes they are short descriptions of the image, and sometimes they are long dedications to the faces featured in the work. The result is a rich body of works spanning mediums and messages and ranging from the deeply personal to broader expressions of public feelings and experiences. In this article, I have featured a small number of pieces, but I urge readers to explore the page for themselves and to personally engage with this ever-expanding online exhibition.



Forgive us that you were taken at a time when you only wanted to do good., Rotem Codish. 2023.

The nature of the catastrophe in Israel means that every day the number of individuals murdered and injured is changing and updating. The harsh reality of this affects the *Names and Faces* project in real

time. Artist Rotem Codish, speaking about his work *Forgive us that you were taken at a time when you only wanted to do good*, writes, "In memory of Lior Haddad Atias. When I started illustrating her, she was still listed as missing. While I was drawing, I learned that her body had been found at the nature party." Codish writes more about Lior; he describes her volunteer work with the organization "Good People" and shares that she had come to the nature party in order to assist and support people. He tells us that she is survived by her six-year-old daughter and her husband. These details are reflected in Codish's work, in his detailing of Lior's smiling face, in her shirt which reads "Good Woman" in Hebrew, and in the peace sign that she is flashing. The text in Hebrew above her head reads, "Forever you will remain the best woman." Only the large red blood stain in the background suggests the cruel end to her life. The circumstances surrounding the image of Lior transform Codish's text to read as a eulogy and elevate his portrait to the status of a memorial image.



There was a family - Now no more, Kinneret Markovich Baruchi. 2023.

Although the stated purpose of the project is to give names and faces to individuals affected, it is not lost on the viewer that there are quite a few pieces *without* names or faces. An example of this is

Kinneret Markovich Baruchi's work *There was a family – Now no more*. Baruchi's piece, an illustration of several uprooted *kalaniot* – the *kalanit* is an iconic Israeli flower – speaks to the experience of families who were destroyed entirely. For these families, who suffered a multi-generational massacre, nothing remains; metaphorically speaking, even their familial roots have been torn up and obliterated.

Another piece which works with non-portrait imagery is Ronelle Rokach's illustration *To the children of the kibbutzim in the Gaza envelope who have lost their innocence (and also for me)*. The work, created with what appears to be a mixture of collage and traditional media, illustrates a scene from a kibbutz on October 7th. A tractor is surrounded by missiles, fire, and drops of blood. The use of collage and simple imagery suggests a reference to children and children's innocence, as articulated by Rokach in the caption. The work highlights not only the trauma experienced by children from the kibbutzim, but also the trauma inflicted on the environment itself as a result of the massacres. It brings to mind the images we all saw of the aftermath of October 7th, images of burned homes and destroyed property in what is left of the Gaza Envelope communities.



To the children of the kibbutzim in the Gaza envelope who have lost their innocence (and also for me),
Ronelle Rokach. 2023.

Many of the pieces feature images of the hostages and the trauma of their families waiting in Israel for their safe return from Hamas captivity. One such piece is Nurit Gross's *Dedicated to a friend who is waiting for her parents to come back from Gaza*. The work, appearing to have been created digitally or with inks, shows two people sitting in a dark room. The expressions on their faces are pained and sad. A single window is illustrated as an illuminated rectangle in the upper centre of the piece, filled with a wash of orange, red, and yellow. The colours suggest fire, or a world engulfed in flames beyond the window. Although obviously referencing the hostage crisis in Israel and the families affected, Gross's work also pays mind to the phenomenon in Israel of everyone knowing someone; that is, everyone knows someone who has been affected directly by the events of October 7th, even if they are several circles removed from their own friend group or family. Everyone knows someone, and if they do not know someone, they know someone who knows someone. The grief is collective, societal, and unavoidable.



Dedicated to a friend who is waiting for her parents to come back from Gaza, Nurit Gross. 2023.

This is not to say that all the works in the exhibition deal with such overwhelming themes and images. Take for example Maya Levy's piece, *Dedicated to Ido Levi, my little brother who volunteered for reserve duty, and to all the little and big brothers and sisters who need to protect each other now*. This is one of my favourite works from the exhibition so far, because while Levy does acknowledge the darkness of the days we are in currently, she also offers viewers a ray of optimism for the future. Two children, gripping each other in a dark forest, shine their flashlight and to reveal a dove carrying an olive branch. Drawn in crayons or pastels in a style very reminiscent of children's books and illustrations, the work speaks to the ongoing belief in and striving for peace in Israel. The fact that the artist dedicates the work to her younger brother who volunteered for reserve duty only reinforces this message for me; all those who volunteered for reserve duty not only go to protect Israel now, but also to protect Israel's future.



Dedicated to Ido Levi, my little brother who volunteered for reserve duty, and to all the little and big brothers and sisters who need to protect each other now., Maya Levy. 2023.

Currently the *Names and Faces* project has over 70 images on their page, and even as I write this article two more images have been added. It is critical to carve out a space in the online art world for artists dealing with the Israeli experience of October 7th and the war more broadly – especially given the art world's overwhelming rejection, dismissal and minimalization of these experiences and traumas. The

project's combining of multiple artists from a variety of disciplines and backgrounds allows the exhibition to fully capture the impact of the events of October 7th and the days after.

As highlighted by the works touched upon here, for both the artist and the viewer illustration is a powerful and essential tool for processing and sharing the recent collective trauma suffered by Israelis. The act of illustrating itself is a process which provides an outlet enabling us to remember, grieve, and memorialize. To articulate a face or object – especially one which no longer exists – allows the artist a unique opportunity to simultaneously say goodbye to and to immortalize their subject. As both an artist and someone living in Israel, I can say personally that I feel a great sense of relief at seeing artists work to make sense of events which, for so many, seem beyond the realm of comprehension. There *is* truth to the idea that a picture is worth a thousand words, and the *Names and Faces* project illustrates this and so much more.

Readers can view the Names and Faces project here: <https://www.instagram.com/namesandfaces.il/>