



Tender Mint

نَعْنَعُ غَضِّ

Lynn Alleva Lilley

March 2011
War erupts in Syria

September 2011
Arrival in Jordan

December 2012
First encounter with the zoo

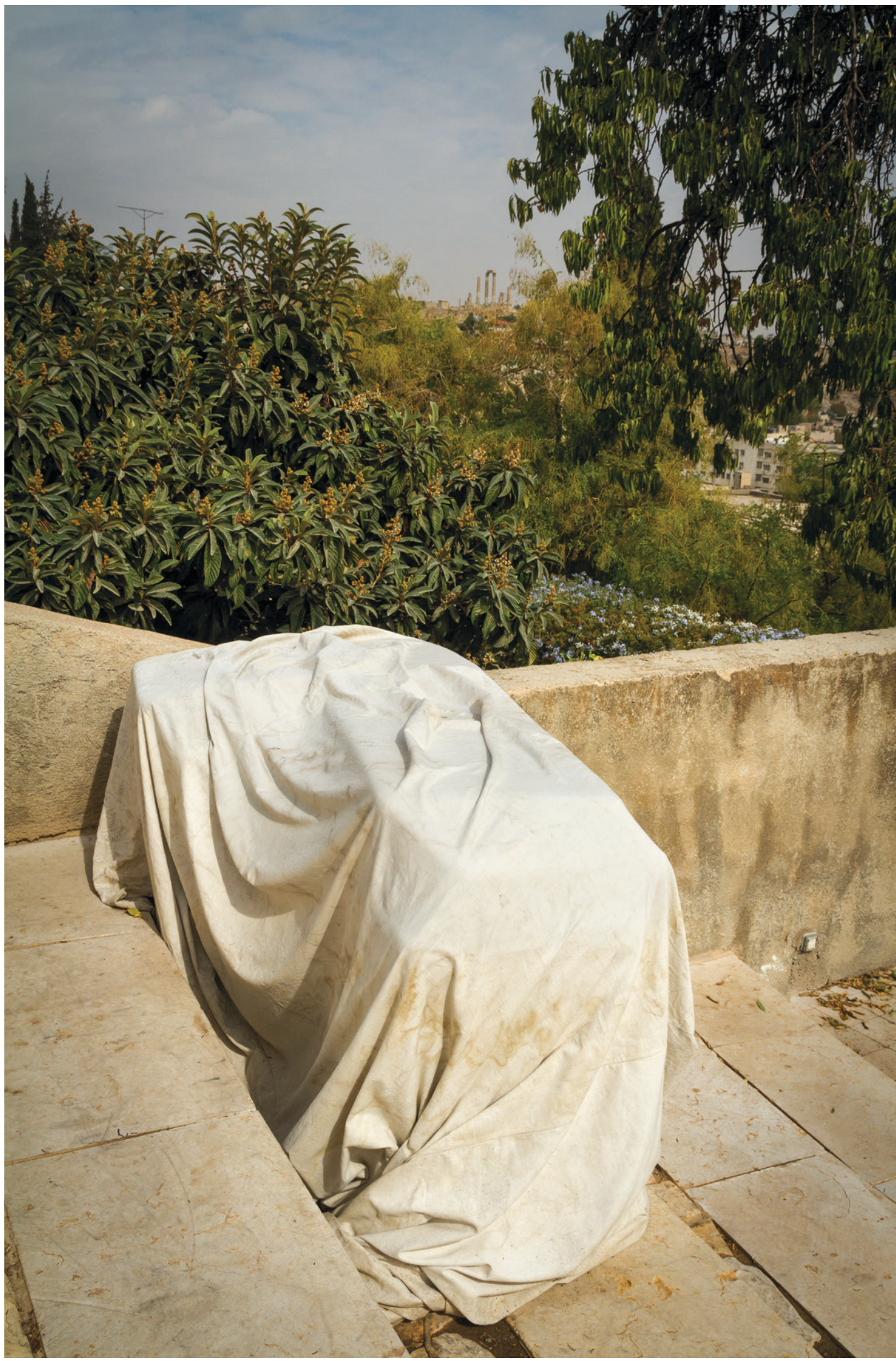
February 2013
Communication with a donkey

April 2013
A Palestine Sunbird flies in my face

July 2013
My father dies

August 2014
Return to the US











At the zoo entrance, Khaled, who sometimes helped me with interpretation, asked if I could photograph the animals. The owners agreed, having been reassured that I was not another journalist intent on publishing an exposé on the animals' plight. As we turned the corner, I met the familiar sense of entrapment, but soon was overcome by light, color, shadow and animals. It felt like a secret epiphany.

A couple of months later, I decided to put the camera aside and just sit with the donkey with whom I felt a special connection. He was usually quietly eating hay and keeping company with the zebra and chickens in the dirt yard. He liked to lie in the sun in winter and in the shade in summer. Putting my head close to his on the other side of the fence, I felt his hot breath blow across my face.

For a few, long minutes I engaged him voicelessly: "How are you coping?" "Where is your home?" As if in response, he threw his head back and neighed wildly while keeping his wide-eyed gaze on me. I felt my heart jump in the emptiness of the zoo. There we were in this imperfect sanctuary with only ourselves as witnesses to this unexpected communication.

















It is the work of feeling
to undo expectation.

A black-faced sheep
looks back at you as you pass
and your heart is startled
as if by the shadow
of someone once loved.

Neither comforted by this
nor made lonely.

Only remembering
that a self in exile is still a self,
as a bell unstruck for years
is still a bell.

Jane Hirshfield





TENDER MINT
Lynn Alleva Lilley

for my parents

note:
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were made in Jordan
between 2011 and 2014.

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Your wing is too small for the wind,
and I don't blame you—
afraid and lovely.
I am the storm.
I was a wing
and floundered within
the storm, for ages,
and now have become the storm!

But there is no light
or shade,
no language that's sufficient.
And now, I admit it: Here
I am, a star
in worlds that are lost,
and I do not blame you.
What has the mint
to do with misfortune?

Samih al-Qasim