

**Access & Closure: stories from in and out of an occupied Palestine**  
Toby Millman

*Diyya invited me to see the men's side of the wedding party, but I wasn't about to follow this teenage heartthrob all alone at night. After failing to answer the question, "lesh" (why) several times over, I finally succumbed and said, "Yallah, let's go." When we got the roof of his home, I got a bird's-eye view of the other half of the wedding. I also met his mother, some sisters, aunts and grandmothers, who kissed me on both cheeks about three times apiece.*

This is one vignette taken from a 64-page letterpress book titled *Access & Closure: stories from in and out of an occupied Palestine* (with an afterword by Palestinian writer Anton Shammas) that I letterpress printed between August and December of 2008 as an artist-in-residence at the Oregon College of Art and Craft. The stories in the book began during the summer of 2006, when I spent ten weeks in Palestine. During much of that time, I was living in a Melkite convent in the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of East Jerusalem, studying Arabic at Al Quds University and traveling to other areas of the West Bank. I recently returned from a longer visit, where I spent about two months in Tel Aviv and another five months in Ramallah. During this second visit, I continued my study of Arabic at Birzeit University while volunteering at a youth club at Jalazone refugee camp, writing for various cultural institutions and grassroots campaigns, and attempting to teach high school, all while collecting information to continue this body of work.

The book began as a series of paper cutouts—drawings traced from photographs and maps—and handwritten textual vignettes. The title, *Access & Closure*, was drawn from maps produced by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs for the occupied Palestinian territories. I chose to title the book (and this entire series of textual, paper-cut and photographic works) after the heading on this map as a way to summarize my experience as an American in Palestine. At its most obvious level, this work chronicles the access that I had as a foreign-passport holder traveling throughout the area. I was able to travel fairly easily compared to most Palestinians, and I was able to visit areas that are closed to many of those who call this land their home. But this work is more so about the access that the people I met allowed me into their lives. Without being welcomed into homes and guided throughout the streets, I never would have been able to create this work. On the other hand, I did not have full access to the land or its people. Aside from the Israeli-imposed closures that the map refers to, I was well aware—especially during my longer visit—that I am an outsider and certain aspects of Palestinian society are still closed to me. My book speaks to this closure in some ways. Whether it's in my naivety as I try to retrieve a stolen cell phone or my inability to communicate clearly in Arabic, there were many instances where I wished that I could be a Palestinian, an insider, to fully experience both the beauty and horrors of this place.

*Access & Closure: stories from in and out of an occupied Palestine* is leporello bound and letterpress printed from polymer plates set in Gill Sans Light on Stonehenge paper. The cover, title page and colophon, however, were handset using Gill Sans. The cover is Magnani Pescia and Anton Shammas' afterword is laser printed in Adobe Caslon Pro on Neenah Classic Laid. All the images were traced from original photographs or maps and the written vignettes are one hundred percent true (with a few names changed to protect the semi-innocent). *Access & Closure* was printed in an edition of 50, five of which are unbound and presented in a clamshell box with a hand-cut map of Palestine on the front.