

## Ron Amir's Photography

My attention was drawn towards Ron Amir's exceptional photography quite some time ago, with his work in Jasar A'Zarka. That photography project had an obvious and supreme political awareness and decency. But, if that alone was the "value" of these photographs, I do not believe I would have bothered giving myself to them, pondering them again and again in my mind.

I get the impression that although it was some sort of a personal quest, starting from a moral motivation, which led Ron Amir to Jasar A'Zarka, one of the poorest Arabic villages in Israel today – once there, his project changed completely and got its own unexpected spark of life.

הערת המתרגמת: המבנה של המשפט שלעיל נאמן למקור אך יוצא מסורבל מאוד באנגלית. להלן הצעה לחלופה, המסומנת בירוק. ההמשך של הפסקה, שאינו מסומן, יכול לשמש כהמשך עבור כל אחת מהחלופות.

It was obviously somewhat of a personal quest which started a moral motivation and drove Ron Amir to Jasar A'Zarka, one of the poorest Arabic villages in Israel today. However, I get the impression that despite the initial motivations, once he was there the project changed completely and got its own unexpected spark of life. It became an important experience in observation, an experience in avoiding forms and formulations – and in this avoidance lies its strength. There is nothing special – no message – that one can yield from these photographs, and this is what captured my interest. They confront me with the kind of primordial, perhaps even 'historical' silence and speechlessness of the camera; some lost moment; and perhaps imaginary photography initial calibration scenes, the moment of silence that was; and perhaps it was nothing more than wishful thinking before it turned into an encrypted practice and an accompanying discourse which do not leave a photographic structure, angle, or unmapped lighting harmony, conventional and symbolical. These are just some of the thoughts Ron Amir's photography triggered in me.

But can a photograph be presented in the context of an artistic discussion or even try to stand beyond its heavy, limited, conventional mass? What does it mean to be 'direct', 'exposed', 'real' or 'honest'? At first glance these properties seem to be the ones prominent in Amir's humane examination of humans, their environments and their objects. And these, are they not just a few more worn out conventions of photography – because what's more exhausted than humane photography, from shoulder level, eye to eye.

But something about these photographs escapes this trap well. Is it because or despite their obvious simplicity? I don't have the answer. I did notice that most of them depict quiet, prosaic, centered, slightly-elevated scenes. The illumination of the images is spread equally, with no special effects, and the images have the sharpness granted according to the common professional standards.

And then I thought to myself – they are not simple at all, especially not in the formal level. For this simplicity is measured with great meticulousness, much more demanding than the beholder's passing glance, the materials of reality are aligned and organized over the square formats in such extremity as if

in a painting – like there was something that fixates and locks the aspect ratio of the figure's elements according to a certain order which has nothing to do with the passing moment seen in the image but has, however, everything to do with Art's constant question about the photographic composition and structure and about the meaning of life.

How exactly are the scenes centered, what is the secret of the – quite classic, I should say – festivity of the tiny elevations, what is the dimension of postponement passing through them like a thread, marking the scenes' prosaic element beyond their own time and space? These questions alone show that the pictures **do not** just or specifically focus on the realm of 'humane', 'moral', 'political' photography... No, it seems that the emotion and the gaze – invested by the observer in the image – are focused on different areas of the universe.

Any political or anthropological aspect evaporates from them all so quickly, I thought cheerfully.

And there is something about these photographs, a great variety of relations between the observer and the subject of his or her observation, a variety that cannot be categorized or sorted.

This richness of nuances, in this aspect, should not be taken for granted, in many photography exhibitions, even by the most exquisite photographers, we are used to see typological series as well as a single, certain mood, as if all the pictures were 'the same'. This strong norm exists and sometimes it seems that this is the norm that sets the impression that 'one should capture a statement'.

In Amir's case, I see such grand richness and variety, and this is confusing, different, and 'unfashionable'...

The richness exposed to the eyes of the beholder and the bliss induces at the presence and the details – flooding the eye is the last chance to defeat the political view, the formula and formulation.

Black and White: one might think that the intimacy of photography which occurs between those who quickly became acquaintances and friends, people with whom relationships are multi-layered and have accumulated quite a history – new, private, personal (as Amir testifies) – and from that intimacy we notice a crucial factor in the distance that these photographs offer from any familiar media category, whether it be journalistic photography, historic or tourist-exotic and – at the same time – under the validity of the individual case dissimilarity, they will also effortlessly set the distance from the political, scientific, economic, psychological or anthropologic view. But some of the richness characterizing this intimate project is in the fact that the photographs are most definitely, in a final consideration for their benefit, documentary photographs *and* historic photographs *and* anthropologic photographs *and* economic photographs and so on and so forth. This was also something I have considered with joy – perhaps even greater than the first one.

Balzac and Tolstoy had these capabilities – to give, while still sitting in their chairs, , the historian's point of view...

I think it is true to say that Ron Amir occupies himself in the random, the private and the typical matters all at the same level of intensity.

I thought that Ron Amir's work with a camera can be compared to that of a writer with a pen.

Like a non-fiction author? No, more like Flabber, he whose 'units' of realism are so precisely measured that they nearly fall apart. Ron Amir does not give us small trinkets and souvenirs from the village life; he does give us 'impressionism' or 'expressionism'. We see here an analytic understanding of the constructed transparency of the photographic apparatus, much like Flabber managed to understand that language will forever be 'stuck' in representations and exposed this fact.

Moreover: among the viewpoints open for the interpretation of the storyteller, Ron Amir builds a combined relationship between an all-knowing storyteller – one that is external to the subject and hero of the tale – and an internal storyteller, a witness. Note that despite all his intent to photograph the people of Zarka as one of the family – *i.e.* from the viewpoint of belonging, attributed and especially involved witness but **never** that of a voyeur – and since he has taken on himself to be familiarized with the spatial management and all its customs and rituals, the ones who are not on the 'inside' are not even aware of – Amir does not forget the forced and artificial elements that may exist within its folds. He always knows and is aware of the fact that, even when it is personally reliable, the political situation and the social status differences between the photographer and its subjects cannot be erased, and they are determined and enforced by the public, the political and historical place independent of the situation and the emotional capabilities of both participating sides in producing the photographs themselves. This is perhaps the reason why Amir bothers to actively include his photographed subjects in the photography process and responds to their requests as best he can. And indeed, quite a few writers also tend to let characters in their fictional worlds run the story. Sometimes it is to expose their various shades and interests; sometimes they want to show a viewpoint that is different from that of the storyteller and his subjects.

But the situation is even more delicate and fragile: Amir does not ingratiate; the conscious of the image, the structure of an artistic thought, and shares nothing with the photographed people. These different minds do not meet; they are only capable of perhaps, occasionally meeting. This 'maybe' is the fresh air that fills Amir's photographs and his integrity, which lacks righteousness, and is a rare trait. In this 'maybe' regarding the meeting of minds Amir supports the daily, silent work; he also teaches photography in the same village, *i.e.* – he is an instructor, and educator. Amir is quiet, lonely and private in his art, and private and public in his education.

Ron Amir's internal testimony is therefore the non-idea-oriented, non-ideology-oriented embodiment of coexistence yet is it the actual event of a physical, concrete coexistence which accepts the dissimilarity, any dissimilarity, and especially the artist's dissimilarity. The preciseness and sensitivity of his actions themselves also offer a civic role model on the level of public daily life.

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