

Ohad Matalon's photographs do not include human characters, and he takes the viewers on a journey of illusion and doubt.

Ohad Matalon's solo exhibition, North-True South-Bright, is impressive both because of the work on display and because of the intellectual intention behind it. Matalon, who has been exhibiting frequently for the past decade, demonstrates in this exhibition exactly what makes him exceptional within the world of Israeli photography.

Matalon's work, portrayed solely in black and white, has a well-measured dramatic tone. In his images, Matalon relates to an unforgettable spectrum of esthetical and theoretical precedents – reaching from the great images created by the German couple Bernd and Hilla Becher all the way to the American landscape images of Robert Frank and Man Ray's rayography of the 1920s and 1930s. The way in which Matalon examines his medium, photography as matter, causes the reference to Ray to be the first and most substantial to come to mind. In this exhibition his work is comprised of still images that are projected on screens of different sizes. His method of presentation, in a darkened gallery lit with the faint flickering of a projector, reminds the viewer of a cinema and creates a tension by implying that something is about to move, change, and become an action in time – but instead remains frozen.

The heart of this exhibition, which has seen multiple editions, is clearly in the photos that were taken in various countries, especially Germany, Austria, Taiwan, Jordan and Israel. All of these places are now unified, losing their unique identity and local language (the few words that can be seen are in English). This can be seen as a utopia or dystopia of globalization and a fusion of history. In these photographs we can see a stylistic encounter of the Mauthausen internment camps with the palace of King Hussein, of a school and a landscape titled "Emanuel". In a way, Matalon's photographs are as picturesque as they can possibly be.

It is evident that Matalon has thoroughly examined the technique he has created and has fallen in love with it. Some pieces, such as "An Unseen Land" or "it is all gone in reality" constitute a multilayered collage of landscape and objects (in this case protruding from the floor) that create a strong sense of disruption. Matalon shuffles images, layering and masking them, and ultimately serves his viewers with images that seem, at first sight, to be a relatively conservative landscape reflected in a water cistern. He demands that his viewers observe the images carefully and not be satisfied with a quick glance, although the method of portrayal through projection is associated with images that are catchy, clear, and whose goal it is to be remembered easily.

Matalon offers an inverse journey and takes his audience to a place of delusion, duality, and mainly of doubt. His piece, "The School", is one of the most beautiful pieces in this exhibition. Matalon multiplies an image of winding stairs of royal and baroque origin that are transformed into a tombstone in the haunted building he has designed. The viewer wonders throughout the work, searching for something to grasp onto, for the core, which is divided into a grid of window frames, a technique that only creates more signs of destruction, collapse and shattering. The quest for optimism in a sea of fractures is bound to fail.

There are no human characters in Matalon's work. Evidence of human existence and remaining traces appear in all of his pieces, but Matalon avoids using the characters themselves. This allows him to create a state of limbo, that "in between" place that characterizes this exhibition. Another beautiful piece is "untitled 3", in which one can see the outlines, the ghost, of an unclear structure (perhaps a bus stop, or a section of an amphitheater) standing in open field, clearly out of place.

Here Matalon utilizes the sensational usages of early solarized photography, used by spirituals at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in order to “prove” the existence of ghosts. A similar feeling is aroused by “8.18 degrees x 22” – an image of wooden planks (the kind that are used for transporting goods and commodities) that Matalon has manipulated into a repetitive layered image, with one image upon the next, and diverted in a way that creates the apparent twist of a screw. This image is reminiscent of a sculpture by Brâncuși, similar to a fragment of an infinite pillar. Matalon seeks possibilities for bringing the physical dimension of existence into his pieces.

Generally speaking, this exhibition constitutes a contemplation about hopes, dreams and the illusions of images, especially in the stage where these have yet to be fully integrated and used simply as one more artistic medium, a stage in which photographs are still broadly perceived as telling the “truth”. Matalon titles one of his works “Pre-seeing” and writes this word within the piece, as if requesting that the viewer be conscious of the stages of seeing. In other works, such as “Not a Clue”, there is a certain indication of what is viewed through the peephole in Marcel Duchamp’s “*Étant donnés*” (1946-1966). And we can see a landscape made of photos and paintings. In this exhibition Matalon examines the medium that he is using by playing with the old-new look of black-and-white and projection, and discusses the magic of photography, the awareness of being subject to the grace of the light, once again. And when the light rises, everything will disappear.

Ohad Matalon, North-True South-Bright.

Contemporary by Golconda gallery, Tel Aviv (Herzl 117).

Opening hours: Sunday 16:00-19:00, Monday-Thursday 11:00-21:00, Friday 10:00-14:00,

Saturday 11:00-14:00. till April 17th