

Tamir Sher – After Mars

By Dr. Ktzia Alon

In the beginning there was light. Darkness was never created.

Tamir Sher's photograph draw, sculpt and mold the primal raw materials of existence, in light and in darkness, moving between coordinates of Creation, Wonder and Exalted, on the one hand, to Terrifying, Secretive, Alienated and Threatening on the other¹.

In the first² series of photographs, the sky air is shuttered in thick gloom, darkness creating a photographic punctum³ of the surface. Bizarre, mysterious, morbid and exalted urbanity, with Jerusalem's El Aksa Mosque reigning as its undisputed king, erupts and arises out of the blackness, appearing suddenly from past and future alike.

“As if the city was nothing but an attempt to trace the lingering radiation of lost stars⁴,” is what was written about the urban representation in Sher's photographs, in a reading that addressed the unique mix that Sher creates between precise human urbanism and transcendental cosmism.

The second series of photographs grants us a measured amount of human comfort: Children wide-eyed with amazement, verdant foliage. Although the two series are intertwined, creating a discernable world of their own, a world where the light flows and drips, like a genuine liquid, out of the bushes, a profound glow bursting forth

¹ As Israeli art critic Galia Yahav rightly stated in her enthusiastic review of the exhibition, Postcards from Mars, in Time Out Magazine.

² Which was exhibited at Galon Gallery in Tel Aviv, under the name Postcards from Mars.

³ According to the term coined by Roland Barth.

⁴ Art critic Oded Walkstein, writing about Sher's photographs

from the branches, a child digging in the sand, in a search for the unknown, and another child, surrounded with an aura of sanctity, covering his eyes.

The name Mars in the title of the exhibition presents the extra-atmospheric space as a metonymy for uncontainable Otherness, in a clear reference to the wide-open spaces of the universe. The manner in which man attempts to learn about himself through contact with aliens and extraterrestrials is generally relegated to the category of Science Fiction. Sher offers delicate and refined visual poetics, amid a highly personal interpretation of this wide-open concept.

What seems for an instant to be glowing flashes of fragmented scenes from Hollywood movies is revealed as sensitive photography that manages to capture an imminent moment of introspection, unaware of being observed, like the subjects of Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer. Amid meticulous choreography, Sher's camera presents a mode of conduct vis-à-vis a "secret" that always remains out of the eye of the camera, out of our view. Our view can but echo that of the child: we observe with riveted eyes, veritably hypnotized. What is really happening here, we ask ourselves, what is propelling this drama of vision? Our question remains unanswered, hovering in the air, depicting a distinct type of hyperventilation in the exhibition space.

"Science fiction has always been based on perceptible and ongoing change; it has related the story of a world that is destined to change significantly throughout the lifetime of a single human being⁵, to paraphrase Scott Bukatman. Sher's photographs manage to simultaneously tell us about a world capable of changing completely (in the first series) and about the moments of wonder in view of the change (in the second series).

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Sher takes scenes from the quintessential childhood – moments of amazement at the world – removes them from their romantic background and gives them an enigmatic and intimidating touch that is both sublime and innocent. With Caravaggioesque intensity light floods these candid shots, presenting each and every child as “one” that humanity depends on, as a potential savior.

Sher’s photographs create a new option of science fiction. His visual offering overturns our perspective: It is no longer a question of how a creature from another world appears in the eyes mankind, but rather how we appear from “there,” from the outside. Sher uses a cosmic perspective in order to observe the private intimate universe, thereby making a distinct, political and critical statement about the conditions and the place where he lives.

Sher’s own statements about his childhood experiences on a kibbutz in Israel, about the almost existential need to try to create a private space in the collective kibbutz, to build internal spaces, to create “niches that are no less real than the defined space,” as he puts it, give his photographs a clearly autobiographical aspect. In her book, *Black Sun*, which is devoted to the study of melancholy and depression, psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva writes: “Where does this black sun come from? Out of what eerie galaxy do its invisible, lethargic rays reach me, pinning me down to the ground?”⁶ Reading Kristeva’s words in view of Sher’s statements will create a new reading of the photographs. The dominant black background changes from “cosmic” black to the black of mourning for lost childhood: *Black Sun* dominates them. The photographs of enchanting children suddenly appear to be monuments of pain as well. Weeping for a simulacrum of a pastoral utopia that never really existed is concealed among their folds. Only profound processes of refinement enable the raw, formless mental

⁶ Kristeva, page 7

material to become molten in order to create great art, hypnotizing photography that expertly binds these disparate and contradictory content worlds together.

“If depression did not have the good fortune to rely on the eroticization of suffering, it cannot serve as a protection from the death instinct,⁷” Kristeva continues with dreadful sensitivity, causing us to see the tremendous wave of Eros cascading from the tangled thicket of trees, the great libidinal passion that is the driving force behind Sher’s camera. A passion for the urban, for nature, for outer space, without which we would all be left in the kingdom of Thanatos, deprived of our most natural rights.

⁷ Kristeva, *Black Sun*, page 21