

Wagenburg

Noga Shtainer

12.9.2013 – 16.10.2013

Noga Shtainer photographs trailer parks in Berlin, she focuses on the inhabitants of these sites – people who have chosen to live in trailers for ideological reasons; to live in the heart of the city but to lead a simple, non-bourgeois life, renouncing the rat race that follows big designer houses. For them, concern for the environment and ecology matters more than materialist aspirations. They design, by themselves, the simple trailers in which they live, according to their personal taste and worldview. The trailer residents live in closed communities, to which candidates are admitted only after going through admission committees and interviews. Each community has its own common denominator: among the sites that Noga frequents are one made up of women and transgendered individuals, a site that admits only members of the gay and lesbian community, and a site which also accepts families with children.

Noga takes pictures of the people in these communities particularly inside their private spaces – their homes. Her decision to photograph them separately contradicts their choosing to live in a group, seeking to overcome the loneliness and alienation typical of the life in big cities. Noga diverts the gaze from the collective areas of the residents' routine lives: they eat in a common dining hall and use public toilets and shower facilities, some of which are roofless or missing a door. She thereby separates this public reality from their private one. She observes them as individuals, from a personal and psychological viewpoint, gradually building up a relationship with them that arouses their curiosity about her no less than their identity arouse her own curiosity. The fact that she's a stranger who doesn't speak their language, and that they view themselves as sort of outsiders, enables both sides to mutually examine each other and draw closer. The process comes to fulfillment in the unique encounter that occurs when a picture is taken. By virtue of the closeness that has been established, the trailer park residents feel comfortable in front of the camera, trust the photographer, reveal their true feelings and allow her, and consequently also allow us, to enter their world and reveal the depths of their souls.

Each photograph discloses something of the photographed subjects' personal and social environment, and all of them together weave their story and expand the narrative

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beyond the private case. On first glance, the photographs bring us closer to the residents in that they reveal the routine of their lives as individuals, including their personal belongings and most intimate spaces (even their beds). However, upon further inspection the photographs somewhat distance us from them, as they are subject to our observation and scrutiny from head to toe, as though they were an artwork with its own symbols, composition, coloring and light.

Noga Shtainer examines in depth the immediate environment of each photographed subject, as if to learn from it about herself. In the spirit of the noted psychoanalyst Dr. Winnicott – "When I look I am seen, so I exist" – she seeks to recognize her own self in their faces, as if it were a reflection. Her photographic action expresses the essence of the perception of the gaze, according to which when I look at you I see you, see myself and see myself through your eyes.

Tamar Setzemsy

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