

Elias Hassos – From Within

When I met Elias Hassos I was impressed by his sensitivity regarding „the other“. Unlike many a juvenile dare-devil he was and is a prudent, respectful young man.

Together we developed a Freespace - Programme for contemporary photography. Soon it became obvious that he was less interested in the organizational part, he prefers to focus on his work which for him also signifies an expansion of his own personality: learning by doing. Thus it came as no surprise when he left the European fallow to travel to Asia. He was so impressed by the experience of a new way of dealing with time that he began to investigate into the source of this very different attitude towards life. Studying the cultural concepts of the Far East and Buddhism seemed the next logical step. These philosophies reflect decisive elements of his own nature: love for small things (microcosm) combined with love for human nature as part of the whole (macrocosm). Elias Hassos started to perceive the world from a different viewpoint – his eyes since serve him as a telescope, so to speak.

The daily floods of pictures showing war, brutality and natural disasters tend to strike dead any sign of compassion. The vast number of images rather make us – the observer – indifferent and we are likely to question the truthfulness of the photos.

Are not all photos productions? One can argue quite rightly if it is at all possible to depict reality. And in how far our perception is trained to seek escape routes enabling us to weaken the emotional impact of the true image. Are we afraid of the real? And does this fear determine the doubts and indifferences mentioned?

Elias Hassos takes photos of fragments of a reality which seems unfamiliar at first. It is not the portrayal itself that makes us suspicious but rather the closeness to the depicted. The photos are not manipulated. They emerge from a view that apparently perceives the world without fear. There is no doubt that what can be seen, is true. However, can we, the observer, bear this closeness? Are not our defense mechanisms automatically activated when confronted with such images? In the case of photos by Elias Hassos, however, a change of perception seems to take place.

As an observer you are first of all fascinated by them.

His portraits for example show people that are not afraid to step in front of the camera just as they are. Similar to the sheep that quite naturally takes the meadow as its scenery portraits by Elias Hassos do not claim to pretend. They do not seduce. His photos – more likely - can be regarded as fragments of a reality moving on the border between reservation and provocation. It is this dualism that creates the power and the effect of his photos.

Elias Hassos' photos do not claim to create a new reality, they are reality. The fact that we experience this reality as truthful and thus again tangible most probably is the reason that no immediate defense is triggered. Here lies in my opinion the most important merit of this young photographer. Moreover the photos of Elias Hassos – unlike those of traditional photographers - refuse to reveal an obvious system. They emerge from spontaneous encounters with contemporaries and their reality. Sometimes the observer is given an understanding of the photos by an extreme focus on its object. Also the rhythm of the presentation is not stringent regarding the motif. Landscapes and portraits are emotionally interwoven.

With his selection of photos Elias Hassos does not claim to tell a story. He rather intends to depict an attitude towards the outer world that does him personal justice. Being a young photographer he pertains to a generation that is confronted with a vast amount of images and information from very different sources. Maybe that is exactly why he - like many others - is searching for a personal point of reference outside enabling him to find a balance, in all modesty and by realizing that you can only change the world within your personal microcosm. Without fearing the past nor what may come. It is to be hoped that the utter sincerity of these photographs by Elias Hassos may get the chance to move even more people in the immediate and remote future.

Erno Vroonen, April 2003