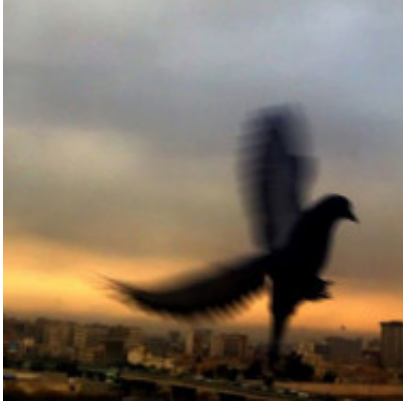


THE ARAB REVIEW

20 SEPTEMBER, 2017 | CREATED USING PDF NEWSPAPER FROM FIVEFILTERS.ORG

Absence



Iraqi-Dutch visual artist Nedim Kufi was forced to leave his hometown of Baghdad in 1990 following the chaos of the First Gulf War. His series 'Absence' explores the notion of exile and of loss, of a home beyond reach and of the people left behind.

I present here two inseparable images, exemplifying one existence, which tell the story of a departing homeland and of my resettlement away from it. The setting of the image was once our home in Kufa during the 1960s. The first image was created by my father, which he took with his dark red-box camera, and the second is of my creation, which I have modified with Photoshop as an unrestrained expression of my feelings of emptiness and banishment. Nearly forty years separate the two images, and by this act of remembrance, I am attempting to recollect that moment in time; emotionally, intellectually and qualitatively.

Whilst the situation in my country, Iraq, which I now watch from a distance, is deteriorating day after a day, there remains a virtual and concurrent existence between the two images, marking that daunting distance. It expresses the disconnection between the home of my childhood and that of my expatriation. Omitting my persona from the first image would, I think, be unique, if taken as a serious visual drama, an expression to help me reach closure by translating my hidden feelings during a lengthy period of loss and despair. I do not, however, think that this portrays my case only; it is the condition of every migrant departing his homeland, either willingly or forcefully, going astray into the unknown.

My suggestion here is of an imaginary space, within which I might be able to acknowledge the plethora of illusions and obsessions which have occupied my mind, and which have brought me forward towards a serious search within this imaginary space. My question throughout the search has been: "Who omits whom?" After such a prolonged absence from my homeland, and after missing finding the way back, "home" became in my view, no more than an image empty of its prima facie content, flimsy as the word "missing," now so commonly circulated in Iraq.

In my longing, I have dreamt up fantastic plans to get out of the isolation I feel, away from my motherland, and to enter it once

more through a loophole that has not been noticed by others. Thus, I have struggled to look through "that inside eye," as in a time machine, and to roam through that time in the past, for which I long.

As for the feeling of emptiness, I am now discovering the truth about it. It is so painful to merge an existing moment with a past one after the passage of more than forty years, even though to do so is suffused with a sense of energy, calmness and a breath of fresh air. The melodious voice of Umm Kulthum coming from that radio on the shelf, and that of the birds, filling the backyard of our house, with their echo thudding deep in my heart, and the shine that glimmers in that image. The purpose in my mind outruns that in my eyes, which is to freeze these two moments as I stand confused in the middle.

Be cautious! My idea here is not necessarily imaginary, and is not a reflection of the anguish of homesickness and nostalgia, which I have overcome with time without any bargains. It is, however, a real and deep awareness which can, through artistic expression and creativity, reach remote islands of happiness and relief within the mind.

My purpose is to find a pure space of value in times long gone, that surpasses the value of the present. A comprehensive look at such questions leads to such an answer as: "Omission, as seems, is the first and last solution."

*Amsterdam
10 May 2010*

All images courtesy of the artist

Nedim Kufi is an exiled Iraqi artist living and working in the Netherlands.
